his treaty and quarrel with the English—drew off swearing that when the time came he would make a final reckoning with the Ajman and with Salim.

He returned to Riad to find confusion. The minute his control over them had weakened the tribes had come out raiding and fighting among themselves and making all the countryside unsafe. But so soon as he returned victorious they crept home. They recognized him as their master and submitted, and he marched through Nejd re-establishing his authority and prestige.

But whereas with the Ajman he had shown no mercy, with all who made submission to him he was generous and conciliatory. He allowed them to appoint their own headmen and as long as they acknowledged him as ruler and sent him a contingent of fighting men when he called for them, he left them to manage their own affairs.

Once more he was supreme in Nejd.

PART VII

CHAPTER XXXVII

For two years Ibn Saud had been struggling for dear life up and down the Hasa and Nejd. He had been submerged in his own troubles, almost swept away and drowned by them and oblivious to all else. Only by immense efforts had he got back to firm ground. But by the end of 1917 he had gained his feet and re-established his position and could look round.

During these two years along the edges of Arabia there had been fierce fighting. A small English army had advanced up the Tigris pushing the Turks in front of it. Before Baghdad it had been beaten back, besieged in the village of Kut and completely captured. A second English army had come from over the seas, organized with more care, advanced and taken Baghdad and was planning a further advance on Mosul.

Out from Egypt another English army had marched northwards, driven the Turks back off the Sinai peninsula, the road into Egypt, and under General Allenby had chased them through Palestine and taken Jerusalem. Allenby was preparing a great offensive against Damascus and beyond that against Aleppo.

Husein of Mecca had declared for the English and was at war with the Turks. At the beginning the English had looked to Ibn Saud, but when he was beaten at Jarrab and all but smashed by the Ajman they realized that for the time being he was of no military value to them. Having made sure that he was ineffectual and having ensured his
neutral alliance they had concentrated on Husein. They had needed Husein as an ally. As Guardian of the Sacred Cities they could use him as a counterpoise to the Turkish Sultan, the Caliph in Constantinople. They could not allow the enemy to control the Hejaz. The Germans were known to have submarines ready to launch in the Red Sea, and from the Hejaz they and the Turks could threaten Egypt, the Suez Canal, and the waterway to India.

The English had determined to get Husein’s co-operation at any cost, and they had increased their promises and given him twenty thousand gold pounds a month as a subsidy, together with arms and munitions. They had flattered the old man’s vanity, promising him his Federation of all Arab Countries with himself as its head, for they had realized that such a fantasy might well catch the imagination of the Arabs and bring them out en masse against the Turks. The war had to be won by any means. Promises as well as bullets and shells were needed to win it.

And Husein had been willing. The Turks had grown suspicious of him. They had caught and hanged some of the leaders of the Revolutionary Committees in Syria with whom he had been working, and he had protested at the executions. Jemal Pasha, known as Jemal the Butcher, the Governor of Syria, had told him bluntly to mind for his own neck, and then concentrated more Turkish troops in Medina itself.

As soon as he was ready Husein had revolted, repudiating his allegiance to the Turks and declaring himself the leader of a revolt for freedom of all Arabia. In the first rush of enthusiasm his sons, Ali, Abdullah, and Feisal with the Hejazi townsmen and bedouin had swept the Turks back and captured Mecca. The Turks had struck back, chased the Hejazi to the seashore and had all but throttled the

revolt. Husein and his Arabs beaten to their knees had called to the English for help. In the nick of time the English had sent ships to the ports of Jedda and Yenbo, arms, rifles, ammunition, some guns, gold pieces by the sackful and a handful of Englishmen, among whom was Captain T. E. Lawrence, to help and encourage them.

With these the Hejazi had recovered their spirit; the guns and ships had given them courage; the Englishmen, and Lawrence, had given them leadership; with the gold Husein had hired fighting men from all the tribes, even the best men from Nejd itself. They had raided up the coast, pinned the Turks down to the railway line, cut the railway between Damascus and Medina, and so isolated the Turks in Medina. Led by Lawrence and Feisal they had captured Akaba and made it into their base and joined up with Allenby’s army which was already prepared for its big offensive northwards on Damascus.

On all fronts the English had driven back the Turks and were massing for a great drive to throw them out of the Arab countries. While the Turks, short of food, arms, and ammunition were completely disorganized and dying by the thousand of disease and neglect.

But away in Europe and the main theatres of war the struggle showed no sign of ending or of victory for the Allies, and to many neutrals it seemed that the Germans would win.

The English needed every ally they could find. Ibn Saud was once more in control of Central Arabia, and he was of value to them. In haste they sent a mission to him to get his alliance—St. John Philby, a political officer from the Civil Commissioners’ staff in Baghdad and with him Lord Belhaven.
CHAPTER XXXVIII

Ibn Saud received the mission with every courtesy. He housed them in his palace in Riad—though the ulema and the people of the town made surly complaints that he talked with Christians and foreigners, unbelievers and infidels. He listened to Belhaven and Philby, but he made no promises, for he had made up his mind that for the present neutrality in alliance with the English was his best policy. He would not be persuaded nor hurried into action, nor would he allow himself to be used by the English or by any foreigners for their own ends.

Neutrality was profitable as well as a wise policy. The English paid him five thousand pounds a month to remain quiet; good gold was pouring into Arabia from all sides; he could sell camels and horses at a high price, and he had a tacit truce with the Rashid to keep the peace so that both might profit by the folly of Europe. The Turks were now far away and little danger to him, and provided they did not come back into the Hasa and Nejd he had little interest in them.

Further, to help the English actively was now to help Husein—and that he would not do. He was not deluded by their talk of an Arab Federation, but even if it was feasible he would not agree to Husein as its head. When he thought of the vast sums the English were paying to Husein and that he was using the money to buy over the tribesmen, even from Nejd itself, he boiled with anger. “You make a mistake”, he said to the English mission. “in supporting Husein. As soon as the money stops you will see how I will deal with him and how all the tribes will come back to me”.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

Belhaven urged him to attack the Rashid in Hail. “Remember”, replied Ibn Saud bluntly, “that my friendship with the English has already neutralized the Rashid. I will, however, attack him on the condition that you finance me as you finance Husein, and that you guarantee that your allies, Salim and Husein, do not attack me in the back as I advance”.

Moreover Ibn Saud needed time and leisure to adjust his own affairs. For close on twenty years he had been continuously on the march or fighting.

“I have not”, he said in apology to a visitor, “had time all these years to put even my palace in order so that I can entertain my guests with the comfort due to them”.

The Ajman revolt had taught him that internal stability was still his most vital need.

He ruled personally. All government and all the administration rested on his shoulders, and he travelled continuously, visiting all parts of the country, saw all for himself, did his work as before, in public before his subjects in direct contact with them.

The tribes accepted him because he was strong. As long as they felt his hand close over them they would be quiet and obedient, but only for so long, for the land was not one homogeneous whole, but a hundred broken pieces loosely held together between his hands. There was no machinery or system of government. All stability and security depended on his personal, individual control. As he conquered more country such personal control became more and more difficult, and he took this opportunity, while he had peace, to create a system.

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In every town he had appointed governors and sheiks over every tribe, to keep order, to collect taxes, and to muster the levy when called on. Usually he appointed them from some local family with a hereditary standing, but if the people were fractious he sent a man from Riyadh with a strong bodyguard to support him, and he chose his representatives with care, tested them himself, assessed their characters and so knew how to deal with each—either with an open palm or a clenched fist, for he was a good judge of character, and he had an instinctive knowledge of men and the motives on which they acted.

When he came to a town he visited not only his governor but all the notables, sat by their hearths with them, drinking their coffee, talking with them intimately so that he learned the local conditions and the personalities round his governors. With the inefficient, dishonest, and disloyal he had no mercy, and he dealt with these without hesitation.

Philby, the English delegate, on one occasion complained that Othman, Governor of Zilfi, was gun-running to the Turks. Ibn Saud had been watching Othman. He knew at once that the complaint was just, and he acted within an hour. He sent an express camel messenger with a letter: "Did I not, O thou enemy of God", he wrote to Othman, "forbid thee on oath (to deal with the Turks). ... and then thou and thy son did purchase food and goods and then didst sit down, thou and he, to profit thereby... This thy evil conspiracy will remain in my memory. Thou art dismissed... Go forth to any country that may be in thy mind except to my countries... or else repent and settle under my eye in Riyadh. If thou delayest, by God! though it be only an hour—verily, I am not the Ruler if there remain a trace of thee and thine left in the land of the living".

And Othman did not hesitate, wait, or argue, for he knew and feared the anger of Ibn Saud. Within the hour he was gone with his family, flying quickly lest a worse thing should come upon him.

Ibn Saud decided to knit all his governors and sheiks into one system under him, and he did this by making each responsible for his neighbours. Thus if a crime was committed in a tribal area the sheik must act and report his action to Ibn Saud. If he failed the sheiks of the neighbouring areas must force him to act and report to Ibn Saud. Only if they failed did Ibn Saud act himself with his Nejdis behind him and then he struck quickly, hard, and without pity, punishing his representatives as well as the criminals so that all feared him.

The system was shrewdly devised. The sheiks and governors had many jealousies and were ready to act as judges and correctors of each other, and Ibn Saud knew how to use jealousies. He had a deep knowledge of his people, their friendships and intermarriages, their blood-feuds and causes of quarrel, so that he could play the one against the other.

He had, moreover, a complete intelligence system ready to his hand. In all villages, towns and tribes were the Elders, the preachers and the religious students. Like all devout Wahabis each considered himself the keeper of his neighbour’s conscience and judge of his actions, and they were only too ready to pass word of any delinquencies back to Riyadh.

Thus Ibn Saud was able to keep a firm hand on all the vast country that he now ruled.