PART X
CHAPTER LIV

BEYOND Hail to the north stretched vast plains reaching to the frontiers of Palestine and Syria, where the Shammar and the Ruwalla tribes wandered as they grazed their flocks of camels and sheep. In the middle of these plains, seven hundred miles to the north of Riad, stood the great oases of Jauf and Skaka. From them a long valley, the Wadi Sirhan, full of villages, ran another two hundred and fifty miles right up into Palestine itself.

Across these plains, where his preachers had already been and converted many of the tribesmen, Ibn Saud sent his men out.

The Ikhwan advanced, flushed and exultant with success. The Ruwalla were unable to resist them. They, too, were without a leader. Nuri Shalan, their sheik, had, in his youth, been a great fighter, but as he grew old he preferred comfort to action, and he had settled in Damascus where he lived at the expense of the French. As the Ikhwan advanced he did not come himself to lead the Ruwalla, but sent a grandson who ran for safety and left only incompetent subordinates to take his place.

Left in the Jurrah, first the Governor of Skaka and then of Jauf declared for Ibn Saud. One by one the villages followed. Farther north, up the Wadi Sirhan, the Ikhwan marched in triumph until they were within striking distance of Palestine itself.

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The English woke to the danger. Jauf was the key to the northern deserts: it was a centre for the bedouin: and it lay across the caravan routes from Egypt to Baghdad and from Syria to the Persian Gulf. Whoever held the Wadi Sirhan could threaten Syria, Palestine and Transjordania. All the Inner Desert seemed on the move and about to burst out as the first Moslems had burst out thirteen hundred years before.

Dawish had raided into Iraq and beaten a force of the English-trained Iraq camel corps near Nasiriya. Some of the Dawasir were raiding into Kuwait and others into the Hejaz.

"Ibn Saud had upset all the balance of power in Arabia," said the English. He had become a menace. At any moment the Desert, at his orders, might explode and overwhelm the rich lands round its edges and destroy all their schemes of an Arab Confederacy. They sent messengers to him to halt his men and meet them in conference.

Ibn Saud might have ignored the English. His advisers were as excited as the Ikhwan over their successes. They urged him to push on: to march north to the Mediterranean, and eastwards to Baghdad: there was nothing to stop him, they said. The English were finished. They were being attacked by the Turks and the Afghans. India was about to revolt. In England itself there were revolts and upheavals.

But Ibn Saud kept cool and steady. He had a broader vision. He knew that the English were not finished. They were still strong. He halted his men. He sent delegates to talk with the English, and as before, he moved with caution testing each step before he took it.

As he negotiated, a body of Ikhwan of the Harb tribe, fifteen hundred strong, marched out of Shaqra at night
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and without his knowledge. Skirting Hail they rode fast northwards a thousand miles in the middle of August under the full violence of the summer sun with only their raiding rations of a bag of curdled camel's milk. They crossed the Transjordania frontier and fifteen miles from Amman its capital, where Abdullah lived and where there was an English garrison, they raided a village of the Beni Shakir tribe, called Turaib. Destroying the village they killed all the men, young and old alike, and such sheep and animals as they could not carry away.

This was a new form of warfare from the desert, for the ancient rules and usages of tribal raiding laid down that only fighting men should be killed, and what could not be lootcd should be left, but the Ikhwan had no respect for tribal customs. They fought for Religion and the Glory of God. The people of Turaib did not conform to the rules of Abdul Wahab: they were heretics and must be wiped out.

As soon as the news was out the Beni Shakir attacked the Ikhwan. From Amman the English rushed out armoured-cars and from Jerusalem aeroplanes. They ripped into the Ikhwan, slaughtered them wholesale, killing men and camels into heaps. Machine-guns and machinery, a torrent of lead, against men with rifles and swords. They chased them back across the plains. A thousand they killed and left their bodies to rot, food for the crows and the vultures, and examples to all raiders. The rest, without water or animals, were killed by the Beni Shakir who gave no quarter after they had seen the destruction of Turaib. Of the Ikhwan who started from Shaqra only eight returned.

CHAPTER LV

ONCE again the caution and judgment of Ibn Saud had been justified. He had recognized the realities. The Ikhwan had been blind to them.

News of the annihilation of the raiders of Turaib went out at once across the desert. For the first time the tribesmen had met modern methods of war, and they had felt the might and the terror of modern man-killing machinery; and they had learnt, too, that the English were strong. No one realized these things better than Ibn Saud himself. The Turaib raiders had acted without his orders, damaged his success, and imperilled his position. In a fury he punished the town of Shaqra and the eight survivors of the raid.

Then, in the late autumn of 1922, he invited Sir Percy Cox to meet him at Ojair.

They were now old friends these two, Cox and Ibn Saud, with a great liking for each other. Both were tall men, sinewy in mind and body, both were slow to decide and quick to acted, both were shrewd and tenacious. Cox had an unlimited capacity for listening. He gave himself freely to those who talked to him, but he never gave himself away. Ibn Saud talked much and eloquently, but when he appeared to be giving most he was in reality giving little. As he talked he concentrated on the man to whom he spoke as if he were his one interest in life. He had a smile, irresistible, all absorbing, which swept his listeners up with him, blinding their judgment so that each one went away satisfied and only later found that he had come away empty-handed; and even then did not resent the fact.

The problem to be decided between these two was a new
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one in Arabia—of fixing definite frontiers between Nejd and the surrounding ring of new states. Under the Turkish Empire frontiers had been unnecessary; a man might then have travelled two thousand miles from Aleppo to Aden and crossed no frontiers. Moreover, the tribes who wandered continually throughout the year in search of grass for their flocks, deciding the direction of their march by news of rain or heavy dew, had rights of drawing water at wells and of grazing over vast areas. They recognized no stiff lines which they might not cross without passports or signatures. By moving from one area to another they did not change their allegiance. They were a community, not a territorial unit. Frontier lines in the wide free desert were unknown.

Here were two diametrically opposed ideas. The idea on the one hand of a territorial state with fixed boundaries and a fixed population, as in Europe, and, on the other hand, that of a loose, moving, undefined, nomad community. Cox wished to establish the fixed frontiers. Ibn Saud, realizing that such frontiers would be unreal and that his tribesmen would never recognize them, endeavored to postpone any final decisions. He had no misconception what it meant for him. He said to one as he waited for Cox on the seashore at Ojair:

"The English are my debtors, but I make no claim. And yet see what they have done to me—to Ibn Saud, their friend and ally. They spin and spin"—making a graphic twirling movement with the fingers of one hand—"they spin nets for me. They have surrounded me with enemies—set up states which they are supporting against me. The grey-haired one Husein in Mecca, his son Abdullah in Transjordania, his son Feisal in Iraq..... Ever since Feisal came to Iraq the frontier troubles have not ceased..... And

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what is Ibn Saud, the friend of the English, in the eye of the grey-haired one and his sons? He is a ruffian, an infidel, a bandit. They have said all that. They have said more than that. They have persuaded the English of these things. They would shut me in".

The theory of the form of states did not interest him, but he realized that if he agreed to the fixed frontiers he agreed to the new states ruled by his enemies, and he would have deliberately shut himself in within these fixed frontiers. He was determined to avoid doing that.

After many days of conference the two came to some agreement. Ibn Saud was recognized as the overlord of Hail, of the Shammar, and in Jauj. He should be paid a monthly subsidy in gold. In return he would recognize the frontier between Nejd and Iraq with the provisos that there should be a neutral zone along it, that the tribes should retain their old rights of grazing and watering both sides of the frontier, and that no forts should be built near the wells or close to the frontier.

CHAPTER LVI

IBN SAUD came away from that conference dissatisfied, for he had gained nothing. He had only strengthened the ring of hostile states round him. They were like a band round his forehead, and his whole spirit passionately desired to burst the band but he had not the strength.

"See", he said to a friend, "when the English want anything they get it. We have to fight for what we need. I will put my seal"—punching the palm of his left hand with the knuckle of his right—"if the English say 'You
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must'. But I will strike when I can. Not in betrayal, God be my witness, but in self-defence. What I cede of my rights under force, I will, by the Grace of God, get back when I have sufficient force”.

His whole instinct was to resist, to refuse to be bound; but he recognized that he was opposed to superior force, that it was useless to kick against the pricks.

“We have to restrain ourselves,” he said, with an angry roar, “and I have to keep my people in check—all the time. Let my enemies at least stop encroaching on me”.

His tribes, especially the Mutair under Dawish, were as dissatisfied as he was. Not only were they to be shut in by frontiers, but they were threatened on every side and were forbidden to strike back. Feisal in Baghdad had armed those of the Shammar who had taken refuge with him and allowed them to raid into Nejd. Abdullah had sent troops into the Waldi Sirhan and seized some of the villages. Husein was threatening the Harb and the Ataiba.

The Ikhwan refused to be kept back any more. They retaliated on the Shammar by raiding in Iraq, pushed northwards again up the Wadi Sirhan towards Transjordania and demanded to be led against Husein. In all directions the tribes were seething with anger, arming, pressing up to and raiding over the frontiers—and the heart of Ibn Saud was with them and not against them. There was big trouble ahead.

Again the English invited Ibn Saud to a conference, but it reached no result and only angered Ibn Saud, for Cox was not there and the English delegates did not know how to handle him. They treated him lightly. They did not realize that he was no longer merely the unimportant amir of the town of Riad but, that he was the Sultan of Nejd and the Lord of all Inner Arabia. They touched his pride

and, like every Arab, once his pride was touched, he became cross-grained and unyielding, unmanageable.

“Yea”, he said in a burst of anger, “I am friends of the English it is true, but I will walk with them only as far as my religion and honour will permit me”—and his religion, honour, and his pride had nearly reached their limit.

Still he kept his self-control, refused to bruise his head against the wall of the impossible, convinced that if he waited time would give him his opportunity.

CHAPTER LVII

HARDLY was the conference over before news came in that Husein had again advanced on Khurma and Turaba and taken both towns, while Abdullah and Feisal, to help their father, had sent bodies of men raiding from Transjordania and from Iraq into Nejd.

This was too much for the self-control of even Ibn Saud. Throughout all Nejd the tribesmen and the Ikhwan, even the townsmen, were up in a frenzy of anger, demanding revenge. Wise or unwise he would wait no more. He would attack Husein and teach him a lesson.

Suddenly he was taken ill with erysipelas in the face. He had from his father and mother inherited a tough constitution. Except for the one bout of rheumatic fever when a boy, he had never been seriously ill, but he had no reserve to fall back on in case of illness, for he lived too hard, with constant work and severe physical and mental effort. He drove himself continuously and always at high pressure without any relaxation, flogging himself on even when tired. He neglected his meals and cut down his sleep so ruthlessly that the indigestion to which he was always prone had
become chronic and a constant drain on his physical and nervous system.

The erysipelas became virulent and spread across his face. His whole system was poisoned. His temperature went up with leaps and bounds. He fought against it, refused to give in to it at first, but it was followed by further blood infections which laid him low for several weeks and reduced him to a skeleton.

He resented being ill. He resented being helpless and forced to lie idle. He would not let go for a little while and rest. He wanted to know all that happened, to keep his grip on everything, and he worried and tormented himself. He was a bad patient, often querulous and irritable. When at last the fever left him and the poison was gone out of him and he had groped his way slowly back to strength, he took little care of himself. He began work before he was strong enough, and worked as hard as ever.

Four months later his left eye began to trouble him. He allowed the local doctors to treat him with quack medicines. The eye grew steadily worse until he could not see out of it. He called in a Syrian doctor who eased the infection but the eye was covered with a film, and as this did not clear, eventually he sent for a specialist from Egypt who operated and partially restored the sight.

CHAPTER LVIII

His illness had, however, stopped Ibn Saud from taking hasty and even unwise action, and while he lay ill events worked in his favour. The people of Turaba and Khurma had risen against Husein and driven his men out of their towns and out of the neighbouring villages.
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and then left them stranded in the naked desert. His profits he hoarded away like a miser or invested in property in Cairo and other cities abroad, and he spent nothing in the Hejaz.

He had become extremely avaricious. Though Guardian of the Sacred Places and responsible, he cared not at all what happened to the pilgrims as long as he grew rich. He neglected all the sanitary and medical arrangements so that great numbers of the pilgrims died of disease and neglect. He could not ensure security, for his tribes raided and looted the pilgrims on all the roads. As soon as the pilgrims arrived they were set on, thieved from and cheated, and even forcibly enlisted into the army. In Mecca itself there were brawls and street fights, and Husein was too weak and inefficient to clear the roads of brigands or keep order in the city.

As a result of these conditions fewer pilgrims came each year and so less money came into the Hejaz. The English had stopped the subsidy they had given Husein in the War. To make up these losses he introduced new taxes both on the pilgrims and on the people of the Hejaz who resisted them. The tribesmen of the Harb and the Ataiba especially resented his impositions. A tax on each burial in Mecca caused a riot, and he was forced to withdraw it.

All the Hejaz groaned under Husein. Even his personal servants and his soldiers spoke bitterly against him for he treated them scurvily, and they recalled the good old days when the Turks were in control; when the pilgrims came in their hundreds of thousands; when money was plentiful; when Medina and Mecca were tax-free and they were all prosperous. Under Husein the pilgrims were driven away and they, the people of the Hejaz, received no benefit, only loss.

Hated at home, Husein had made himself equally disliked abroad. He had isolated himself from all who might have helped him. He had fallen out with the Dutch Government over his treatment of their pilgrims, and quarrelled with the Egyptians because they had dared to criticize him. With the French in Syria he was on ill terms, and also with the Turks and the Moslems of India.

Crazy with megalomania, he was still full of his big ideas. He was "King of the Arab Countries". Believing that he was inspired from Heaven, he began to interpret passages of the Koran, and this became a scandal before all devout Moslems.

Sitting away in his palace in Mecca, surrounded only by flatterers, shut off from the truth, he was convinced that all Moslems looked to him as their head and that all Arabs wished him to rule them. As for Ibn Saud and such like, who would not submit, they were froward and stiff-necked and must be made to submit.

Above all he quarrelled with the English, his only real supporters. He demanded that they should carry out all the promises they had made to him, and recognize him as the ruler of all Arabia; that they should turn the French out of Syria and the foreign Jews out of Palestine. He urged the Arabs in Palestine and Syria to resist and promised them help against the French and the English. The English sent Lawrence to reason with the old man, to persuade him to compromise. They offered, provided he signed the Treaty of Versailles and so agreed to their adjustment of the Arab countries, to make a pact with him guaranteeing him protection against all aggressors—including Ibn Saud.

Lawrence, still misjudging the relative values of Husein and Ibn Saud, undertook the mission and did his best, but Husein would have nothing to do with him or the Treaty.
of Versailles and its arrangement for “mandates” over his Arab countries. The world “mandate” alone made him sputter with rage. He now wanted no promise of protection from the English. “Mandate!” They would be asking for a mandate for the Hejaz itself next, he retorted.

“I would rather”, he said, “that the accursed Ibn Saud ruled Arabia than that it came under the foreign yoke of the English”.

Again, late in 1923, the English tried to come to terms with him, but he was as obstinate as ever, and the English were by now only too glad to wash their hands of him. He had become intolerable in manner and impossible to deal with, for he had lost all sense of reason or judgment.

The English were themselves in grave difficulties. In England the pulsing enthusiasm of war and victory had turned to lassitude and depression. Prosperity was gone and replaced by a slump. With demobilization and lack of money they were reducing their outside commitments. They had many quarrels with the French and were not prepared to add another for Husain. Ireland was in revolt, a cancer eating at the heart of England and paralysing her energies. India was seething with sedition. The Afghans were on the warpath. There was trouble in Egypt, in the Sudan, in Iraq where the Kurds were up and the Turks threatening to attack across the northern frontier and seize Mosul.

In England, too, there was a general feeling that the strategy that had sent armies in the War to fight in the Arab countries had been wrong: that the campaigns in Iraq and Palestine had been a vast waste of men, money, and energy and had had no vital effect on winning the War: and that anyway it was time to cut all losses and get out of these countries and leave them to their own devices.

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In the summer of 1923, seeing that Ibn Saud was preparing to attack Husain, Feisal went from Baghdad to visit his brother Abdullah in Transjordania. They tried to bring their father to reason: to persuade him to come to terms with the English and combine with them in some general scheme of defence, but the old man would not listen to them. They appealed to the English to stop Ibn Saud, but the English were by now weary of Husain and his absurdities.

“Husain and Ibn Saud”, they replied, “are both our allies. They are two independent rulers. If they disagree they must settle their own differences. We will not interfere”.

As soon as he was well again Ibn Saud worked steadily against Husain, aggravating the animosity against him among his own people and isolating him from outside help. He sent his preachers among the disgruntled Harb and Ataiba and into the Hejaz itself stirring up the tribesmen. He kept in touch with the French. He was on friendly terms with the Egyptians and the Indian Moslems. He punished severely any of his men who raided into Iraq or Transjordania so that the English could have no cause of complaint against him, and so he prepared carefully on every side.

And Husain played directly into his hands. Early in 1924 he visited his son Abdullah in Transjordania. He treated that country as part of his own domains and Abdullah as his viceroy, and he showed his resentment at the presence of the English officers supervising the administration.

Suddenly, without warning, on the third of March, the Turks abolished the Caliphate and ejected the Caliph from Constantinople. Three days later Husain had himself proclaimed Caliph of all Islam and informed the world
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of his new title. The news raised a storm of indignation throughout all the Moslem countries and most of all in Arabia itself. The chance for which Ibn Saud had waited for so long and so patiently had at last come, as he had always believed it would come if he waited. He was ready to take it.

CHAPTER LIX

IBN SAUD had always been ambitious. From the days away back when, as a penniless refugee, as a rough, lanky bedouin boy, he had strutted and boasted before his companions in the streets of Kuwait and they had laughed at him—through all the years of fighting, in defeat as well as in success, he had never once lost belief in himself or in his people the Arabs. He believed that one day he would rule all Arabia, as his forefathers had ruled it before him, from sea-coast to sea-coast, from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf and from the Indian Ocean to far in the north. All who had been the subjects of his ancestors would be his subjects.

In his success he never forgot the mission with which, he believed, God had entrusted him. He had created his Ikhwan as instruments to this end. Every success was a step nearer his goal. He was leading the Arabs out of that low state into which they had sunk, uniting them into one people, making them again into a Great Power and the Champions of Islam purified and revived. Already in many countries men looked to him as the creator of a new order and as a new leader against the encroaching Christian Powers of Europe.

His enemies said that he had no deep convictions himself, but used religion for his own aggrandizement; and the

fanaticism of his ignorant Wahabis and Ikhwan for his worldly ambitions. Even the ulema of Riad still suspected him of being too worldly, though they could not accuse him of laxness, for he was stricter even than before in all outward observances—the five daily prayers in the mosque, abstention from wine and tobacco, fasting, alms-giving, and studying the Koran.

In reality Ibn Saud was, by birth, upbringing, and conviction, deeply religious. He had a vivid, living consciousness of the presence of God. The strict training which his father had given him as a boy had fashioned the mould out of which came all his thoughts, and though not a recluse he was as devout as his father.

God was for him a living personality ever behind his shoulder, when he was in public audience before his people or alone in the privacy of his own rooms, when he was in the heave and uproar of battle, or when he was sitting in conference—in the palace, in the open desert, in his tent on the march, beside him always guiding him, directing him in all his judgments and actions. Before he considered any problem or difficulty he always first prayed in silence. As he came to the moment for decision, instinctively and automatically he hesitated for a space, made his mind void and empty, and waited for Divine Guidance.

His worldly ambition and his religion could not clash: they were one and the same. “I am”, he said to one, “a Moslem first and an Arab afterwards, and always I am a Servant of God”. God had called him to rule. All he did was for the Glory of God.

Despite all his enemies might say, Ibn Saud was no hypocrite. At heart he was as zealous and even as fanatical as his own preachers and Ikhwan. He had their supreme
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-conviction in the sanctity of his beliefs and in his duty to spread those beliefs “by persuasion”, he said on one occasion, “and if not by persuasion, then by the sword”. But his zeal and fanaticism were tempered by the practicable. He knew the practical value of fanaticism. “You should realize”, he once said to Philby, speaking of his quarrel with Husein, “that I have but to give the word and a great host would flock to my banner from all parts...... And no one of them but is convinced that death is better than life, not one but lives to die for the great reward, and every one of them convinced that to turn back or hesitate is but to court the certainties of hell-fire”.

He had the same belief and the same object as his Ikhwān, but in the means of reaching that object he was practical while they, blinded by fanaticism, would often rush into follies.

On one occasion Dawish demanded that he should declare a Holy War on the English. Ibn Saud refused; the Prophet, who had been himself the most practical of men, had laid it down that a Holy War, a jehad, was only permissible if it had a reasonable chance of success. Success against the English was at that moment impossible: Dawish had himself seen what had happened to those who had raided Turaiib.

Again the Wahabis in Riad urged him to have nothing to do with foreigners; such contacts were unclean. He refused to listen to them. Foreigners were necessary to his schemes.

In matters of religion he submitted to the decision of the ulema, but when they gave him advice on political or military matters which was bad for the State he sent them back to their books. He would not allow them to advise him to the damage of his kingdom, which he held in trust from God.

He had, however, no illusion as to his mission, and he did not set himself too high. Once there came to him a delegation of Moslems which spoke to him of being Caliph. Since the Turks had deposed their Sultan there had been no Caliph. They begged him to lead them to take up the task of the Mahdi and lead the Moslems in revolt against the Christians.

Ibn Saud heard them out. He was sitting on a high divan in his Audience Chamber in the Palace in Riad. For a while he was silent, his legs curled under him, his hands on his knees, his chin with its short stiff beard thrust forward and his eyes looking far away over the crowds waiting below him in the great hall. Suddenly he flung out a clenched hand and turned angrily on the delegation.

“With Mahdis and suchlike superstitions and sorceries”, he said, “I will have no dealings. As to the Caliph, the question does not arise”.

“I am”, he continued raising his voice and repeating his favourite phrase, “I am a simple preacher. My mission is to spread the Faith, if possible by persuasion and if not by persuasion then by the sword”.

But both his ambition and his religion urged him to attack Husein: his ambition to expand his territory and break the ring of enemies which Husein was the leader and the most virulent of; his religion because Husein was not worthy to be Guardian of the Sacred Cities. Husein had broken all the imaginations of the Koran. He had allowed forbidden practices, smoking of tobacco, unauthorized prayers, prayers for the dead, decorations in the mosques, domes over tombs, luxuries and vices of all sorts inside Mecca itself. He had made the pilgrimage impossible for some and difficult for all by his malpractices.
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Ibn Saud burned with zeal to eject this heretic Husein, to destroy the domes and monuments, to root out the unclean practices and the abominations, to purify the Sacred Land and the Sacred Cities, to make the pilgrimage safe for all and to enforce the precepts of Abdul Wahab who had expounded the Faith as it should be practised.

Beyond that he saw a vision — a vision when all the nations converted to the True Faith would form one great brotherhood, and when Mecca should be the centre of the world to which pilgrims would flock in their millions in eager devotion to do homage for the Glory of God, the One True and Only God.

CHAPTER LX

Now at last Ibn Saud had his chance—the chance for which he had planned and waited—to be finished with his old enemy, Husein, and to conquer the Sacred Land and purify it. But even now he moved slowly. He could not march straight into the Hejaz and conquer it as he had marched into the Hasa and as he had conquered Hail and the Shammar.

The Hejaz was a barren, empty land of rocks and sand, burnt to barrenness by a devastating sun. It was without natural wealth. It had little water, few towns and villages, and the bedouin tribesmen, who formed the bulk of the population, were ignorant and frowsy. Though it had harbours on the Red Sea it had no commerce, nor was it of any great strategical value. But it was the spiritual centre of hundreds of millions of Moslems in all the countries of the world. Millions of these were subjects of foreign powers. It was for them the Sacred Land. In its capital, Mecca, had been born the Prophet Mohamed, and every Moslem hoped, before he died, to do at least once the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Hejaz was not a simple Arab State, but international. All nations were interested in its administration. Whoever ruled the Hejaz would be an international personage. Ibn Saud realized that, though he might take the Hejaz by force of arms, to hold it without the sympathy of all Islam would be useless, and that the Hejaz would then be a burden and not an asset. He must act with the consent of the Moslems of the world.

With his usual quiet, un-Arab persistency, unhurried and relentless, he worked on preparing his way steadily. He publicly warned Husein that he would never accept him as Caliph unless he was duly elected by all Islam. Then he summoned a conference of Wahabi and Ikhwan leaders to Riad, for he needed the full support of his own people.

The conference was held in the covered courtyard of the house of his father, Abdur Rahman, and it was crowded to overflowing with the ulema, the sheiks, and the headmen. In all the procedure Ibn Saud was careful that no one should be able to accuse him of thrusting himself forward unduly, as Husein had done. Abdur Rahman, grown very old but still robust and alert, a simple, dignified old man with shrewd, wise eyes, presided. Beside him sat the ulema, while Ibn Saud himself sat to one side without special position or honour. One and all the sheiks and headmen voted to attack Husein. They spoke against him as the heretic usurper: for two years now no Wahabi had been able to do the Pilgrimage since he had shut Mecca against them. They were eager for action at once, especially the Ikhwan, who, as ever, were thirsting for a fight.
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Ibn Saud took no direct part in the debate. Only when the Conference demanded immediate action did he intervene, to advise that they moved slowly. They would meet with much opposition from foreign countries: before they attacked the Sacred Cities they should obtain the sanction of their brother Moslems.

With his arguments the Wahabis had no sympathy. For them all good Moslems were Wahabis. The rest were mushrekeen, worse than heretics. They, the Wahabis, were the only true Moslems and the only true Arabs. The only sanctions they needed were their own consciences. It required all Ibn Saud's personality and persuasive ability to keep them steady.

At his suggestion a message was sent from the Conference to Moslems in all countries detailing the sins of Husein, his mal-administration of the Holy Places, his impositions, his injustices, and his tyrannies, how he had made the Pilgrimage a scandal and impossible for good Moslems, and how he had usurped the title of Caliph without sanction or right. And proposing that the people of Najd, acting for all, should march into the Hejaz and depose Husein, as soon as the pilgrimage season was over. The message was signed by Feisal, the second son of Ibn Saud. He himself did not appear in it.

It was characteristic of Ibn Saud that, even when he was advancing and until the final minute for action, he always left open some way of retreat; so that if he took the wrong road he could retrace his steps and reach his object by another. The Conference, and not he, should decide and send the message to all Moslems. If there was an error it would be their error, and he would be free to put it right.

The message met with little response. Islam was split into a multitude of jarring sects. Each had its own differ-
mapped out his plan of campaign. He would attack through Khurma and Turaba straight at Mecca and Jeddah and the heart of the Hejaz.

Now, partially as feints to draw off attention from his main attack, partially to prevent Abdullah and Feisal of Baghdad from sending help to their father, and partially to find out the general position, he sent out columns of Ikhwan—one towards the Iraq frontier, another across the railway between Medina and Damascus, and another from Jauf up the Wadi Sirhan towards Transjordania, and he sent Sultan Ibn Bijad, the sheik of the Ataiba, to raid up and down the Hejaz frontier, and Luwai from Khurma to thrust cautiously forward towards Mecca and find out what opposition he might expect.

Beyond Khurma was the town of Taif. It was a pleasant place set among hills, full of gardens of flowers and trees and cool breezes, and was protected with a fort and a garrison of soldiers and a high wall round it. The notables of Mecca had built themselves palaces in Taif, and here they and King Husein and his family came when the heat of the arid plains below had become intolerable.

Late one August evening news came to Luwai that Ali, the eldest son of Husein and the Commander of his army, had come to Taif for a change of air. Luwai sent word to Bijad, who, collecting as many men as he could, hurried down and attacked Taif at once. Ali, who was no soldier, bolted and the garrison of the town followed him. The townsfolk, left in the lurch, came to terms with Bijad and opened the gates of the town. As the Ikhwan marched in they were fired on from a police post and retaliated by massacring three hundred of the inhabitants and by looting many houses. As soon as the news was out more Ikhwan flocked in from every side.

Meanwhile Ali had called up his troops and taken up a position at Hada, across the road from Taif to Mecca. The Ikhwan dashed straight at him, broke through his force, smashed it, and marched on Mecca itself.

CHAPTER LXII

In Mecca there was panic. The massacres in Taif had grown in the telling until they had become a great slaughter. The people of Mecca, craven-hearted at all times, ran this way and that, wild-eyed, slobbering lips, looking for somewhere to hide them and finding nowhere, crying out that the Ikhwan were on them: the Ikhwan were at the gates and would kill them all. Some took their goods and made away down to the sea-coast towns. The fear of the Ikhwan was a terror behind them. Ali, like his brother Abdulla, flying from Turaba, had rushed back to his father and increased the panic.

Husein bristled with pugnacious anger. The old man was no coward. He would fight the accursed Wahabis to the last, and he refused to see Ali, but calling him a coward he chased him out of the palace and out of Mecca telling him to be gone out of danger to the safety of Jeddah, and then he sent a call out to his tribes, summoned the people and prepared to resist.

But neither the people nor the tribesmen would come to his help. Even his soldiers and his servants began to leave him. Except for his household and his slaves he was almost alone.

He would none the less have resisted, but a delegation came to him begging him to abdicate in favour of his son Ali: as long as he was king they had no hope of negotiating
with the enemy: if he abdicated they might get terms and save Mecca from assault: the road down to Jedda was still free of the enemy and he could escape to the sea while there yet was time.

Husein cursed the delegation roundly. He would not abdicate. He would fight. He cursed them for a pack of poor curs to be terrified at the first bit of danger, and he drove them away.

Tawil, the Director of Customs in Jedda, the one man he trusted, called up over the long-distance telephone from Jedda and advised him to abdicate. Husein cursed him also. Tawil stopped advising and bluntly told Husein that it was his duty to his country. Husein flew into a passion and stamped up and down the palace like a madman.

His Turkish wife, the only person who could handle him when he was angry, and his family begged him to leave Mecca while there was time. Already crowds were collecting round the palace shouting that he must go: some were for killing him and taking the money he had hoarded; others for handing him over to the enemy in return for safety. They were threatening the doors. The guards were not to be trusted. At any moment the crowds might rush the palace. At last Husein realized that he must go. He abdicated and prepared to leave.

In the palace were a dozen motor-cars. They were the only ones in the Hejaz, for Husein had allowed no one but himself to own a car. On to these he piled his worldly goods, rugs, bedding, gold and silver ornaments and boxes of gold pieces which he had received as his subsidy from the English. One car carried his family. Arming his slaves and the few soldiers still loyal to him he made them ride on the running boards, and at the head of this fleet he drove out through the streets which were full of hostile crowds who lowered at him but had not the courage to attack him—out from the city into the open country beyond and down the road across the hills to Jedda.

A week later Husein went aboard his private yacht which lay off in the harbour with his family and his goods, but especially with the boxes of gold pieces he had received as his subsidy from the English. He supervised the transport of those boxes himself. He counted them often. He tested the locks and the cording. He watched over them to be sure they were safe.

When all was ready he sailed away, first to Akaba and then to the island of Cyprus, to the end a pig-headed, irascible, preposterous old man, yet clean living and devout, without fear and also without common sense.

CHAPTER LXIII

No one was more surprised at the complete success of his Ikhwan than Ibn Saud himself. Hafiz Wahba and his other advisers had foretold this success, but he had not believed them, and he had never been quite sure that at the last minute the English would not step in and protect Husein. If that did not happen he knew that he could defeat him, but he expected at least some serious fighting. He had ordered Bijad and Luwai to go forward only to make a reconnoissance, and he had not expected this sudden collapse of the enemy.

Even now with Husein gone the people of the Hejaz showed no spirit. Ali had returned to Mecca to organize resistance. He had failed, for the people of the town were cowed and the tribesmen would not come in, for they were
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paralysed with fear of the Ikhwan. Ali himself was a mild and good-natured little man, but no fighter. He had tried to stand loyally by his father, but Husein had treated him with contempt and refused to have anything to do with him. He had not wished to be king or to lead a forlorn hope. All he had wanted was to be left in peace, but Tawil had hustled him into acceptance and urged him to resist.

First he appealed to the English for help—a few aeroplanes, some money and arms, and their intervention against Ibn Saud—but the English replied that this was now a religious quarrel and in matters of religion it was against all their principles to intervene. They had at last realized the follies into which the misjudgment of Lawrence and the Arab Bureau in Cairo had led them—and the power of Ibn Saud.

Failing with the English, Ali turned to Ibn Saud himself and begged for an armistice to discuss terms of peace. Ibn Saud refused bluntly. Until the whole brood of the family of Husein had gone out of the Hejaz, he said, there could be no peace; and he ordered Bijad and Luwai to lead their men forward but to see that they kept them in hand and that there were no more massacres and lootings as in Taif. He threatened that he would hold the commanders responsible for any excesses committed by their men.

Ali, with the few men left to him and taking the police of Mecca, bolted and shut himself into Jedda where he had a strong wall round him and the English consul; and the open sea behind him if he wished to escape away.

Bijad made camp on the Nejd road outside Mecca and sent forward four of his Ikhwan on camels, unarmed and dressed as pilgrims. They found Mecca silent, the shops and the bazars closed, the houses shuttered and barred,

for the people had barricaded themselves into their houses. Riding across the city through the deserted streets the four Ikhwan halted at the principal points and proclaimed that all were safe under the protection of God and Ibn Saud.

The next day Luwai with two thousand men, in pilgrim garb, but armed, marched in and took possession. Luwai had nothing but contempt for the Meccans and their ways. Had he been free he would have treated them brutally, purged the city of its practices and forced them all, with the sword, to become Wahabis, but he was afraid to disobey Ibn Saud. None the less, his men roughly manhandled the soft Meccans. They smashed the ornaments and decorations on the mosques, and threw down some of the tombs and shrines that seemed to them idolatrous. Beyond that Luwai allowed them no licence but kept them firmly in hand.

From Mecca they swept out over the country, and the tribesmen and villages submitted without resistance. Only some of the tribes, the Billi and others round Wejh, in the far north, stood their ground; and the ports of Jedda and Yenbo with the town of Medina, which was strongly fortified, closed their gates and refused to surrender.

Except for these, Ibn Saud was the master of the Hejaz.

CHAPTER LXIV

At once he summoned a great meeting in Riad and sent out word of his conquest to all countries, announcing that he had expelled Husein the Usurper: that he held the Sacred Land and the Sacred City, but he held it only as a trust for all: “Now that the rule of injustice and tyranny is over”;

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he wrote, "our most cherished desire is that the Sacred Land of Islam be open to all Moslems and that the ordinance of the Sacred Places be decided by all Moslems. We ourselves will go to Mecca. We pray our Moslem brothers to send us representatives there to discuss with us".

Then, having appointed his eldest son, Saud, to act for him in Riad, he called his headmen and sheiks about him, the ulema and the notables, the captains of his soldiers and his ministers and, leading the way on his great racing yellow camel, he rode out of Riad by the Meccan Gate, his bodyguard round him, and a great company of the Ikhwan marching behind him. With this great host he travelled slowly making a triumphant progress across the plateau of Nejd, through the steppes beyond into the country of the Ataiba, and so up into the mountains of the Hejaz. At eachhalt the villagers and tribesmen from far and near flocked in to do fealty to him and to rejoice at the news.

On the fourteenth day he sent his ministers forward with Hafiz Wahba his Chief Counsellor and Damluji his Foreign Secretary to prepare for his arrival.

On the fifteenth day he passed through the last range of mountains that circle Mecca; and coming into a broad valley from where, laid out far below him, he could see the Sacred City, he dismounted and made camp.

Here he ceased to be the conqueror and became the pilgrim, on pilgrimage to the Sacred City. He put off his sword, his gold headrope, and his robes. He wrapped round him the pilgrim dress of two simple pieces of white seamless cloth, one piece round his loins and one piece over his shoulders, and with sandals on his feet, bare-headed, he rode on horse-back, unarmed and without pomp or ceremony, past the mountain of Arafat, by the

valley of Abtah and the wide road of Muabda, down to the Sacred City, repeating many times as he went the talbiya:

"Here am I, O God, at Thy command
Thou art One and Alone. Here am I".

By the Graveyard of the Maala he was met by Luwai, and, passing into the city, he went on foot, with the Ikhwan and the people pressing round him, to the Great Mosque and there he performed all the rites of the lesser pilgrimage, of the Umra, with humble reverence as a devout Moslem.