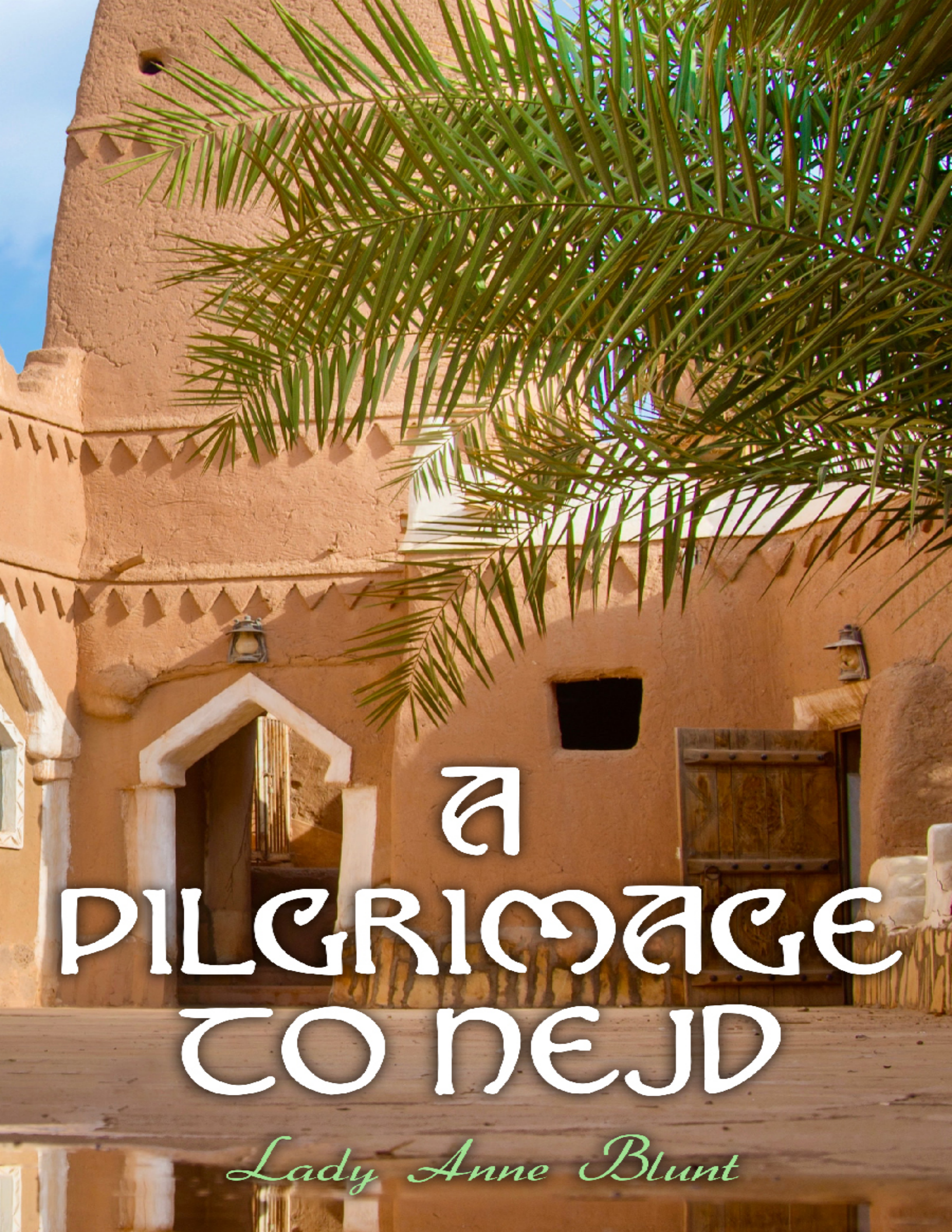

A Pilgrimage to Nejd

Lady Anne Blunt

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A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir and "our Persian Campaign" (Vol. 1&2)

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PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

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Readers of our last year's adventures on the Euphrates will hardly need it to be explained to them why the present journey was undertaken, nor why it stands described upon our title page as a "Pilgrimage." The journey to Nejd forms the natural complement of the journey through Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert; while Nejd itself, with the romantic interest attached to its name, seems no unworthy object of a religious feeling, such as might prompt the visit to a shrine. Nejd, in the imagination of the Bedouins of the North, is a region of romance, the cradle of their race, and of those ideas of chivalry by which they still live. There Antar performed his labours of Hercules, and Hatim Taï the more historical hero entertained his guests. To the Ánazeh and Shammar, especially, whose northward migrations date only from a few generations back, the tradition of their birth-place is still almost a recollection; and even to the Arabs of the earlier invasions, the townsmen of such places as Bozra, Palmyra, and Deyr, and to the Taï Bedouins, once lords of Jebel Shammar, it appeals with a fascination more than equal to that of the Hejaz itself. Nejd is to all of them what Palestine is to the Jews, England to the American and Australian colonists; but with this difference, that they are cut off from the object of their filial reverence more absolutely in practice than these by an intervening gulf of desert less hospitable than any sea. It is rare to meet anywhere in the North an Arab who has crossed the Great Nefûd.

To us too, imbued as we were with the fancies of the Desert, Nejd had long assumed the romantic colouring of a holy land; and when it was decided that we were to visit

Jebel Shammar, the metropolis of Bedouin life, our expedition presented itself as an almost pious undertaking; so that it is hardly an exaggeration, even now that it is over, and we are once more in Europe, to speak of it as a pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage then it is, though the religion in whose name we travelled was only one of romance.

Its circumstances, in spite of certain disappointments which the narrative will reveal, were little less romantic than the idea. Readers who followed our former travels to their close, may remember a certain Mohammed Abdallah, son of the Sheykh of Palmyra, a young man who, after travelling with us by order of the Pasha from Deyr to his native town, had at some risk of official displeasure assisted us in evading the Turkish authorities, and accomplishing our visit to the Ánazeh. It may further be remembered that, in requital of this service and because we had conceived an affection for him (for he appeared a really high-minded young fellow), Mohammed had been given his choice between a round sum of money, and the honour of becoming “the Beg’s” brother, a choice which he had chivalrously decided in favour of the brotherhood. We had then promised him that, if all went well with us, we would return to Damascus the following winter, and go in his company to Nejd, where he believed he had relations, and that we would help him there to a wife from among his own people.

The idea and the promise were in strict accordance with Bedouin notions, and greatly delighted both him and his father Abdallah, to whom they were in due course communicated. Arab custom is very little changed on the point of marriage from what it was in the days of Abraham; and it was natural that both father and son should wish for a wife for him of their own blood, and that he should be ready to go far to fetch one. Moreover, the sort of help we proposed giving (for he could hardly have travelled to Nejd

alone) was just such as beseemed our new relationship. Assistance in the choice of a wife ranks in Bedouin eyes with the gift of a mare, or personal aid in war, both brotherly acts conferring high honour on those concerned. Mohammed too had a special reason in the circumstances of his family history to make the proposal doubly welcome. He found himself in an embarrassing position at home with regard to marriage, and was in a manner forced to look elsewhere for a wife. The history of the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur, the family to which he belonged, will explain this, and is so curious, and so typical of Arabia, that it deserves a passing notice here.

It would appear that seven or eight generations ago (probably about the date of the foundation of the Wahhabi empire) three brothers of the noble family of Arûk, Sheykhs of the Beni Khaled of south-eastern Nejd, quarrelled with their people and left the tribe. The Ibn Arûks were then a very well-known family, exercising suzerain rights over the important towns of Hasa and Katif, and having independent, even sovereign, power in their own district. This lay between the Persian Gulf and Harik, an oasis on the edge of the great southern desert, and they retained it until they and the rest of their fellow Sheykhs in Arabia were reduced to insignificance by Mohammed Ibn Saoud, the first Wahhabi Sultan of Nejd.[1]

At the beginning of last century, all Arabia was independent of central authority, each tribe, and to a certain extent each town, maintaining its separate existence as a State. Religion, except in its primitive Bedouin form, had disappeared from the inland districts, and only the Hejaz and Yemen were more than nominally Mahometan. The Bedouin element was then supreme. Each town and village in Arabia was considered the property of one or other of the nomade Sheykhs in its neighbourhood, and paid him tribute in return for his protection. The Sheykh too not unfrequently possessed a house or castle within the city

walls, as a summer residence, besides his tent outside. He in such cases became more than a mere suzerain, and exercised active authority over the townspeople, administering justice at the gate daily, and enrolling young men as his body-guard, even on occasion levying taxes. He then received the title of Emir or Prince. It was in no other way perhaps that the “Shepherd Kings” of Egypt acquired their position and exercised their power; and vestiges of the old system may still be found in many parts of Arabia.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab, the Luther of Mahometanism, preached his religious reform in Nejd, and converted Ibn Saoud, the Ánazeh Sheykh of Deriyeh, to his doctrines. By Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab’s help Ibn Saoud, from the mere chief of a tribe, and sovereign of one city, became Sultan of all Arabia, and reduced one after another every rival Sheykh to submission. He even ultimately destroyed the system of tribute and protection, the original basis of his power, and having raised a regular army from among the townsmen, made these quite independent of Bedouin rule. Arabia then, for the first time since Mahomet’s death, became a united empire with a centralised and regular government. It must have been about the year 1760 that the three Ibn Arûks, disgusted with the new state of things in Nejd, went out to seek their fortunes elsewhere. According to the tradition, partly embodied in an old ballad which is still current in Arabia, they were mounted all three upon a single camel, and had nothing with them but their swords and their high birth to gain them credit among strangers. They travelled northwards and at first halted in Jôf, the northernmost oasis of Central Arabia, where one of them remained. The other two, quarrelling, separated; the younger going, tradition knew not whither, while the elder held on his way still further north, and settled finally at Tudmur (Palmyra), where he married a woman of the place, and where he ultimately

became Sheykh. At that time Tudmur consisted but of a few houses. His name was Ali, and from him our friend Mohammed and his father Abdallah, and his uncle Faris, the real head of the family in Tudmur, are descended.

Mohammed then had some reason, as far as his male ancestry were concerned, to boast of his birth, and look high in making a “matrimonial alliance;” but *par les femmes* he was of less distinguished blood; and, as purity of descent on both sides is considered a *sine quâ non* among the Arabs, the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur had not been recognized for several generations as *asil*, or noble. They had married where they could among the townspeople of no birth at all, or as in the case of Mohammed’s father, among the Moáli, a tribe of mixed origin. The Ánazeh, in spite of the name of Arûk, would not give their daughters to them to wife. This was Mohammed’s secret grief, as it had been his father’s, and it was as much as anything else to wipe out the stain in their pedigree, that the son so readily agreed to our proposal.

The plan of our journey was necessarily vague, as it included the search after two families of relations of whom nothing had been heard for nearly a hundred years. The last sign of life shewn by the Ibn Arûks of Jôf had been on the occasion of Abdallah’s father’s death by violence, when suddenly a member of the Jôf family had appeared at Tudmur as avenger in the blood feud. This relation had not, however, stayed longer there than duty required of him, and having slain his man had as suddenly disappeared. Of the second family nothing at all was known; and, indeed, to the Ibn Arûks as to the other inhabitants of Tudmur, Nejd itself was now little more than a name, a country known by ancient tradition to exist, but unvisited by any one then living connected with the town.

These singular circumstances were, as I have said, the key-note of our expedition, and will, I hope, lend an interest beyond that of our own personal adventures to the present

volumes. To Mohammed and the Arabs with whom we travelled, as well as to most of those we met upon our journey, his family history formed a perpetual romance, and the *kasid* or ballad of Ibn Arûk came in on every occasion, seasonable and unseasonable, as a chorus to all that happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished; and on more than one occasion we found ourselves borne easily on by the strength of it over difficulties which, under ordinary conditions, might have sufficed to stop us. By extreme good luck, as will be seen in the sequel, we lit upon both branches of the family we set out in search of, the one citizens of the Jôf oasis, the other Bedouins in Nejd, while the further we got the better was the Arûk name known, and relations poured in on us on all sides, eager to shew us hospitality and assistance. We were thus passed on from kinsman to kinsman, and were everywhere received as friends; nor is it too much to say that while in Arabia we enjoyed the singular advantage of being accepted as members of an Arabian family. This gave us an unique occasion of seeing, and of understanding what we saw; and we have only ourselves to blame if we did not turn it to very important profit.

So much then for the romance. The profit of our expedition may be briefly summarised.

First as to geography. Though not the only Europeans who have visited Jebel Shammar, we are the only ones who have done so openly and at our leisure, provided with compass and barometer and free to take note of all we saw. Our predecessors, three in number, Wallin, Guarmani, and Palgrave, travelled in disguise, and under circumstances unfavourable for geographical observation. The first, a Finnish professor, proceeded in 1848, as a Mussulman divine, from the coast of the Red Sea to Haïl and thence to the Euphrates. The account of his journey, given in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, is

unfortunately meagre, and I understand that, though one more detailed was published in his own language, he did not live long enough to record the whole body of his information. The second, Guarmani, a Levantine of Italian origin, penetrated in disguise to Jebel Shammar, commissioned by the French Government to procure them horses from Nejd; and he communicated a lively and most interesting account of his adventures to the “Société de Géographie” in 1865. He too went as a Turkish mussulman, and, being rather an Oriental than a European, collected a mass of valuable information relating chiefly to the Desert Tribes through which he passed. It is difficult, however, to understand the route maps with which his account is illustrated, and, though he crossed the Nefûd at more than one point, he is silent as to its singular physical features. Guarmani started from Jerusalem in 1863 and visited Teyma, Kheybar, Áneyzeh, Bereydah, and Haïl, returning thence to Syria by Jôf and the Wady Sirhán. Mr. Palgrave’s journey is better known. A Jesuit missionary and an accomplished Arabic scholar, he was entrusted with a secret political mission by Napoleon III. and executed it with the permission of his superiors. He entered Nejd, disguised as a Syrian merchant, from Maan, and passing through Haïl in 1864 reached Riad, the capital of the Wahhabi kingdom, and eventually the Persian Gulf at Katif. His account of Central Arabia is by far the most complete and life-like that has been published, and in all matters of town life and manners may be depended upon as accurate. But his faculty of observation seems chiefly adapted to a study of society, and the nature he describes is human nature only. He is too little in sympathy with the desert to take accurate note of its details, and the circumstances of his journey precluded him from observing it geographically. He travelled in the heat of summer and mostly by night, and was besides in no position, owing to his assumed character and the doubtful company in which he was often compelled to travel, to

examine at leisure what he saw. Mr. Palgrave's account of the physical features of the Nefûd, and of Jebel Shammar, the only one hitherto published, bears very little resemblance to the reality; and our own observations, taken quietly in the clear atmosphere of an Arabian winter, are therefore the first of the kind which have reached Europe. By taking continuous note of the variations of the barometer while we travelled, we have been able to prove that the plateau of Haïl is nearly twice the height supposed for it above the sea, while the granite range of Jebel Shammar exceeds this plateau by about 2000 feet. Again, the great pilgrim-road from the Euphrates, though well-known by report to geographers, had never before been travelled by an European, and on this, as on other parts of our route, we have corrected previous maps. The map of Northern Arabia appended to the first volume of our work may be now depended upon as within its limits substantially accurate.

In geology, though possessing a superficial knowledge only of our subject, we have, I believe, been able to correct a few mistakes, and to clear up a doubt, much argued by Professor Wetzstein, as to the rock formation of Jebel Aja; while a short memoir I have appended, on the physical conformation of the great sand desert, will contain original—possibly valuable—matter. The sketches, above all, which illustrate these volumes, may be relied on as conscientious representations of the chief physical features of Central Arabia.

Botanists and zoologists will be disappointed in the meagre accounts of plants and animals I am able to give. But the existence now proved of the white antelope (*Oryx Beatrix*) in Nejd is, I believe, a fact new to science, as may be that of the *Webber*, a small climbing quadruped allied to the marmots.

A more important contribution to knowledge will, I hope, be recognised in a description of the political system to

which I have just alluded under the name of Shepherd rule, and which is now once more found in Central Arabia. I do not know that it has ever previously been noticed by writers on Arabia. Neither Niebuhr nor Burckhardt seem to have come across it in its pure form, and Mr. Palgrave misunderstood it altogether in his contempt of Bedouin as contrasted with town life. Yet it is probably the oldest form of government existing in Arabia, and the one best suited for the country's needs. In connection with this matter too, the recent history of Nejd, with an account of the downfall of the Ibn Saouds, for which I am mainly indebted to Colonel Ross, British Resident at Bushire, and the decay of Wahhabism in Arabia, will prove of interest, as may in a lesser degree the imperfect picture given in the second volume of the extreme results produced in Persia by despotic rule, and the iniquitous annexation of Hasa by the Turks. The value, however, of these "discoveries" I leave to our readers to determine, premising only that they are here pointed out less on account of their own importance, than as an excuse in matter for the manner of the narrative.

With regard to the sequel of our Arabian journey, the further journey from Bagdad to Bushire, I should not intrude it on the notice of the public, but that it serves as an additional proof, if such be wanting, of the folly of those schemes which, under the name of "Euphrates Valley" and "Indo-Mediterranean" railway companies, have from time to time been dangled before the eyes of speculators. A country more absolutely unsuited for railway enterprise than that between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, has probably never been selected for such operations; and, if the recital of our passage through the uninhabited tracts, which form nine tenths of the whole region, shall deter my countrymen from embarking their capital in an enterprise financially absurd, I feel that its publication will not have been in vain.

One word before I end my Preface. It was objected to me at the Royal Geographical Society's meeting, where I read a paper on this "Visit to Nejd," that though we had crossed the Great Sand Desert, and visited Jebel Shammar, we had after all not been to Nejd. Nejd, I was told on the "best authority," was a term applicable only to that district of Central Arabia which is bounded by the Jebel Toweykh and the lesser Nefûds, neither Jebel Shammar nor Kasim being included in it. Strange as this statement sounded to ears fresh from the country itself, I was unable at the time to fortify my refusal to believe by any more special argument than that the inhabitants of the districts in question had always called them so—an argument "quod semper et ab omnibus" which to some seemed insufficient. I have therefore taken pains to examine the grounds of the objection raised, and to give a reason for the belief which is still strong within me that Haïl is not only an integral part of Nejd, but Nejd *par excellence*.

First then, to repeat the argument "quod ab omnibus," I state emphatically that according to the Arabs themselves of every tribe and town I have visited, Nejd is held to include the lands which lie within the Nefûds. It is a geographical expression including three principal sub-districts, Jebel Shammar and Kasim in the North, and Aared in the South. The only doubt I have ever heard expressed was as to the Nefûds themselves, whether they were included or not in the term. The Bedouins certainly so consider them, for they are the only part of Nejd which they habitually inhabit, the stony plateaux of the centre being unfit for pastoral life. Jôf is considered outside the limit northwards, as are Kheybar and Teyma to the north-west, while Jobba and Harik are doubtful, being towns of the Nefûd.

Secondly, I plead written authority:—

1. Abulfeda and Edrisi, quoted by Colonel Ross in his memorandum, include in the term Nejd all those lands lying

between Yemen, Hejaz, and Irak.

2. Yakut, an Arabian geographer of the thirteenth century, quoted by Wetzstein, expressly mentions Aja as being in Nejd.

3. Merasid confirms Yakut in his geographical lexicon.

4. Sheykh Hamid of Kasim, also quoted by Wetzstein, says, “Nejd in its widest sense is the whole of Central Arabia;—in its narrowest and according to modern usage, only the Shammar Mountains and the Land of Kasim, with the Great Desert bordering it to the South.”

5. Niebuhr, the oldest and most respectable of European writers, enumerating the towns of Nejd, says, “Le mont Schamer n’est qu’à dix journées de Bagdad; il comprend Haïl, Monkek, Kafar, et Bokà. L’on place *aussi* dans le Nejdsjed une contrée montagneuse nommée Djof-al-Sirhán entre le mont Schâmer et Shâm (la Syrie),” etc.; thus showing that all, and more than all I claim, were in Niebuhr’s day accounted Nejd.

6. Chesney, in his map of Arabia, published in 1838, includes Kasim and Jebel Shammar within the boundary of Nejd, and gives a second boundary besides, still further north, including districts “sometimes counted to Nejd.”

7. Wallin defines Nejd as the whole district where the *ghada* grows, a definition taken doubtless from the Bedouins with whom he travelled, and which would include not only Jebel Shammar, but the Nefûds and even the Southern half of the Wady Sirhán.

8. In Kazimirski’s dictionary, 1860, I find, “*Ahlu’lghada*, surnom donné aux habitants de la frontière de Nejd où la plante *ghada* croit en abondance.”

Finally, Guarmani gives the following as the result of his inquiries in the country itself: “Le Gebel est la province la plus septentrionale du Neged. C’est, comme disent les Arabes, un des sept Negged;” and on the authority of Zamil,

Sheykh of Áneyzeh, explains these seven to be Aared, Hasa, and Harik, in the south, Woshem in the centre, and Jebel Shammar, Kasim, and Sudeyr, in the north.

Opposed to this mass of testimony, we find among travellers a single competent authority, Mr. Palgrave; and even his opinion is much qualified. After explaining that the name Nejed signifies “highland,” in contradistinction to the coast and the outlying provinces of lesser elevation, he sums up his opinion thus: “The denomination ‘Nejed’ is commonly enough applied to the whole space included between Djebel Shomer on the north, and the great desert to the south, from the extreme range of Jebel Toweyk on the east to the neighbourhood of the Turkish pilgrim-road or Derb-el-Hajj on the west. However, this central district, forming a huge parallelogram, placed almost diagonally across the midmost of Arabia from north-east-by-east to south-west-by-west, as a glance at the map may show, is again subdivided by the natives of the country into the Nejed-el-aala or Upper Nejed, and the Nejed-el-owta or Lower Nejed, a distinction of which more hereafter, while Djebel Shomer is generally considered as a sort of appendage to Nejed, rather than as belonging to that district itself. But the Djowf is always excluded by the Arabs from the catalogue of upland provinces, though strangers sometimes admit it also to the title of Nejed, by an error on their part, since it is a solitary oasis, and a door to highland or inner Arabia, not in any strict sense a portion of it.”

The exact truth of the matter I take, then, to be this. Nejd, in its original and popular sense of “Highlands,” was a term of physical geography, and necessarily embraced Jebel Shammar, the most elevated district of all, as well as Kasim, which lay between it and Aared; and so it was doubtless considered in Niebuhr’s time, and is still considered by the Bedouins of the North, whose recollections date from an age previous to Niebuhr’s. With the foundation, however, of the

Wahhabi Empire of Nejd, the term from a geographical became a political one, and has since followed the fluctuating fortunes of the Wahhabi State. In this way it once embraced not only the upland plateaux, but Jôf and Hasa; the latter, though a low-lying district on the coast, retaining in Turkish official nomenclature its political name of Nejd to the present day. At the time of Mr. Palgrave's visit, the Wahhabis, from whom doubtless his information was acquired, considered Jebel Shammar no longer an integral part of their State, but, as he expresses it, an appendage. It was already politically independent, and had ceased in their eyes to be Nejd. But since his day the Nejd State has seen a still further disruption. Kasim has regained its independence, and Hasa has been annexed to the Turkish Empire. Nejd has therefore become once more what it was before the Empire of Nejd arose, a term of physical geography only, and one pretty nearly co-extensive with our term Central Arabia.

I hold, then, to the correctness of our title, though in this matter, as in the rest, craving indulgence of the learned.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT.

CRABBET PARK,
August 1, 1880.

PILGRIM BANNER.

CHAPTER I.

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"You have been a great traveller, Mercury?"

"I have seen the world."

"Ah, a wondrous spectacle. I long to travel."

"The same thing over again. Little novelty and much change. I am wearied with exertion, and if I could get a pension would retire."

"And yet travel brings wisdom."

"It cures us of care. Seeing much we feel little, and learn how very petty are all those great affairs which cost us such anxiety."

IXION IN HEAVEN.

The charm of Asia—A return to old friends—Desert news—The Palmyrene colony at Damascus—New horses and camels—Mrs. Digby and her husband Mijuel the Mizrab—A blood feud—Abd el-Kader's life—Midhat Pasha discourses on canals and tramways—He fails to raise a loan.

DAMASCUS, *Dec.* 6, 1878.—It is strange how gloomy thoughts vanish as one sets foot in Asia. Only yesterday we were still tossing on the sea of European thought, with its political anxieties, its social miseries and its restless aspirations, the heritage of the unquiet race of Japhet—and now we seem to have ridden into still water, where we can rest and forget and be thankful. The charm of the East is the absence of intellectual life there, the freedom one's mind gets from anxiety in looking forward or pain in looking back. Nobody here thinks of the past or the future, only of the

present; and till the day of one's death comes, I suppose the present will always be endurable. Then it has done us good to meet old friends, friends all demonstratively pleased to see us. At the coach office when we got down, we found a little band of dependants waiting our arrival—first of all Mohammed ibn Arûk, the companion of our last year's adventures, who has come from Palmyra to meet and travel with us again, and who has been waiting here for us, it would seem, a month. Then Hanna, the most courageous of cowards and of cooks, with his ever ready tears in his eyes and his double row of excellent white teeth, agrin with welcome. Each of them has brought with him a friend, a relation he insists on calling him, who is to share the advantage of being in our service, and to stand by his patron in case of need, for servants like to travel here in pairs. Mohammed's *cousin* is a quiet, respectable looking man of about five and thirty, rather thick set and very broad shouldered. He is to act as head camel man, and he looks just the man for the place. Hanna's *brother* bears no likeness at all to Hanna. He is a young giant, with a rather feckless face, and great splay hands which seem to embarrass him terribly. He is dressed picturesquely in a tunic shaped like the ecclesiastical vestment called the "dalmatic," and very probably its origin, with a coloured turban on his head. He too may be useful, but he is a Christian, and we rather doubt the prudence of taking Christian servants to Nejd. Only Ferhan, our Agheyl camel-driver, is missing, and this is a great disappointment, for he was the best tempered and the most trustworthy of all our followers last year. I fancy we may search Damascus with a candle before we find his like again.

The evening we spent in giving and receiving news. Mohammed in his quality of Wilfrid's "brother," was invited to dine with us, and a very pleasant hour or two we had, hearing all that has happened in the desert during the

summer. First of all, the sensation that has been caused there by our purchase of Beteyen's mare, which after all we have secured, and the heart-burnings and jealousies raised thereby. Then there have been high doings among our friends in the Hamád. Faris and Jedaan have (wonderful to relate) made peace, [2] and between them have it all their own way now on the Euphrates, where the caravan road has become quite unsafe in consequence. Ferhan ibn Sfuk, it seems, marched against his brother with some Turkish troops to help him, and Faris retreated across the river; but most of the Shammar have, as we anticipated last year, come over to him. The Roala war is not yet finished. Ibn Shaalan, rejecting the proposals made him through us by Jedaan, persisted in reoccupying the Hama pastures last spring, and Jedaan attacked and routed him; so that he has retreated southwards to his own country. Mohammed Dukhi and Jedaan have parted company, the Sebaa having cleared off scores with the Roala, and being satisfied with the summer's campaign; while the Welled Ali are still a long way on the creditor side in their blood feud. Mohammed Dukhi is a long-headed old rogue, but it is difficult to see how he is to hold his own with Sotamm in spite of a new alliance with Faris el Meziad, Sheykh of the Mesenneh, who still has some hundred horsemen to help him with, and of another with Mohammed Aga of Jerúd. The Welled Ali are at the present moment encamped close to Jerúd, so we shall probably go there, as the first step on our road to Nejd.

Mohammed of course knows nothing about the roads to Nejd or Jôf, except that they are somewhere away to the south, and that he has relations there, and I doubt if anybody in Damascus can give us more information. The Welled Ali, however, would know where the Roala are, and the Roala could send us on, as they go further south than any of the Ánazeh. The difficulty, we fear, this winter will be the accident of no rain having fallen since last spring, so

that the Hamád is quite burnt up and without water. If it were not for this, our best course would undoubtedly be outside the Hauran, which is always dangerous, and is said to be especially so this year. The desert has often been compared to the sea, and is like it in more ways than one, amongst others in this, that once well away from shore it is comparatively safe, while there is always a risk of accidents along the coast. But we shall see. In the meantime we talk to Mohammed of the Jôf only, for fear of scaring him. Nejd, in the imagination of the northern Arabs, is an immense way off, and no one has ever been known to go there from Damascus. Mohammed professes unbounded devotion to Wilfrid, and he really seems to be sincere; but six hundred miles of desert as the crow flies will be a severe test of affection. We notice that Mohammed has grown in dignity and importance since we saw him last, and has adopted the style and title of Sheykh, at least for the benefit of the hotel servants; he has indeed good enough manners to pass very well for a true Bedouin.

There is a small colony of Palmyra people at Damascus, or rather in the suburb of the town called the Maidan, and with them Mohammed has been staying. We went there with him this morning to see some camels he has been buying for us, and which are standing, or rather sitting, in his friends' yard. The colony consists of two or three families, who live together in a very poor little house. They left Tudmur about six years ago "in a huff," they say, and have been waiting on here from day to day ever since to go back. The men of the house were away from home when we called, for they make their living like most Tudmuri as carriers; but the women received us hospitably, asked us to sit down and drink coffee, excellent coffee, such as we had not tasted for long, and sent a little girl to bring the camels out of the yard for us to look at. The child managed these camels just as well as any man could have done.

Mohammed seems to have made a good selection. There are four deluls for riding, and four big baggage camels; these last have remarkably ugly heads, but they look strong enough to carry away the gates of Gaza, or anything else we choose to put upon their backs. In choosing camels, the principal points to look at are breadth of chest, depth of barrel, shortness of leg, and for condition roundness of flank. I have seen the strength of the hocks tested by a man standing on them while the camel is kneeling. If it can rise, notwithstanding the weight, there can be no doubt as to soundness. One only of the camels did not quite please us, as there was a suspicion of recent mange; but Abdallah (Mohammed's cousin) puts it "on his head" that all is right with this camel, as with the rest. They are not an expensive purchase at any rate, as they average less than £10 a piece. One cannot help pitying them, poor beasts, when one thinks of the immense journey before them, and the little probability there is that they will all live to see the end of it. Fortunately they do not know their fate any more than we know ours. How wretched we should be for them if we knew exactly in what wady or at what steep place they would lie down and be left to die; for such is the fate of camels. But if we did, we should never have the heart to set out at all.

Next in importance to the camels are the horses we are to ride. Mohammed has got his little Jilfeh mokhra of last year which is barely three years old, but he declares she is up to his weight, thirteen stone, and I suppose he knows best. Mr. S. has sent us two mares from Aleppo by Hanna, one, a Ras el Fedawi, very handsome and powerful, the other, a bay three year old Abeyeh Sherrak, without pretension to good looks, but which ought to be fast and able to carry a light weight. We rode to the Maidan, and the chestnut's good looks attracted general attention. Everybody turned round to look at her; she is perhaps too handsome for a journey.

December 7.—We have been spending the day with Mrs. Digby and her husband, Mijuel of the Mizrab, a very well bred and agreeable man, who has given us a great deal of valuable advice about our journey. They possess a charming house outside the town, surrounded by trees and gardens, and standing in its own garden with narrow streams of running water and paths with borders full of old fashioned English flowers—wall-flowers especially. There are birds and beasts too; pigeons and turtle doves flutter about among the trees, and a pelican sits by the fountain in the middle of the courtyard guarded by a fierce watch-dog. A handsome mare stands in the stable, but only one, for more are not required in town.

The main body of the house is quite simple in its bare Arab furnishing, but a separate building in the garden is fitted up like an English drawing-room with chairs, sofas, books, and pictures. Among many interesting and beautiful sketches kept in a portfolio, I saw some really fine water-colour views of Palmyra done by Mrs. Digby many years ago when that town was less known than it is at present.

The Sheykh, as he is commonly called, though incorrectly, for his elder brother Mohammed is reigning Sheykh of the Mizrab, came in while we were talking, and our conversation then turned naturally upon desert matters, which evidently occupy most of his thoughts, and are of course to us of all-important interest at this moment. He gave us among other pieces of information an account of his own tribe, the Mizrab, to which in our published enumeration of tribes we scarcely did justice.

But before repeating some of the particulars we learned from him, I cannot forbear saying a few words about Mijuel himself, which will justify the value we attach to information received from him as from a person entitled by birth and position to speak with authority. In appearance he shews all the characteristics of good Bedouin blood. He is short and

slight in stature, with exceedingly small hands and feet, a dark olive complexion, beard originally black, but now turning grey, and dark eyes and eyebrows. It is a mistake to suppose that true Arabs are ever fair or red-haired. Men may occasionally be seen in the desert of comparatively fair complexion, but these *always* (as far as my experience goes) have features of a correspondingly foreign type, showing a mixture of race. No Bedouin of true blood was ever seen with hair or eyes not black, nor perhaps with a nose not aquiline.

Mijuel's father, a rare exception among the Ánazeh, could both read and write, and gave his sons, when they were boys, a learned man to teach them their letters. But out of nine brothers, Mijuel alone took any pains to learn. The strange accident of his marriage with an English lady has withdrawn him for months at a time, but not estranged him, from the desert; and he has adopted little of the townsman in his dress, and nothing of the European. He goes, it is true, to the neighbouring mosque, and recites the Mussulman prayers daily; but with this exception, he is undistinguishable from the Ibn Shaalans and Ibn Mershids of the Hamád. It is also easy to see that his heart remains in the desert, his love for which is fully shared by the lady he has married; so that when he succeeds to the Sheykhat, as he probably will, for his brother appears to be considerably his senior, I think they will hardly care to spend much of their time at Damascus. They will, however, no doubt, be influenced by the course of tribal politics, with which I understand Mijuel is so much disgusted, that he might resign in favour of his son Afet; in that case, they might continue, as now, living partly at Damascus, partly at Homs, partly in tents, and always a providence to their tribe, whom they supply with all the necessaries of Bedouin life, and guns, revolvers, and ammunition besides. The Mizrab, therefore, although numbering barely a hundred tents, are

always well mounted and better armed than any of their fellows, and can hold their own in all the warlike adventures of the Sebaa.

According to Mijuel, the Mizrab, instead of being, as we had been told, a mere section of the Resallin, are in fact the original stock, from which not only the Resallin but the Moáhib and the Gomussa themselves have branched off. In regard to the last-mentioned tribe he related the following curious story:—

An Arab of the Mizrab married a young girl of the Suellmat tribe and soon afterwards died. In a few weeks his widow married again, taking her new husband from among her own kinsmen. Before the birth of her first child a dispute arose as to its parentage, she affirming her Mizrab husband to be the father while the Suellmat claimed the child. The matter, as all such matters are in the desert, was referred to arbitration, and the mother's assertion was put to the test by a live coal being placed upon her tongue. In spite of this ordeal she persisted in her statement, and got a judgment in her favour. Her son, however, is supposed to have been dissatisfied with the decision, for as soon as born he turned angrily on his mother, from which circumstance he received the name of Gomussa or the "scratcher." From him the Gomussa tribe are descended. They first came into notice about seventy years ago when they attacked and plundered the Bagdad caravan which happened to be conveying a large sum of money. With these sudden riches they acquired such importance that they have since become the leading section of the tribe, and they are now undoubtedly the possessors of the best mares among the Ánazeh. The Mizrab Sheykhs nevertheless still assert superiority in point of birth, and a vestige of their old claims still exists in their titular right to the tribute of Palmyra.

Mijuel's son, Afet, or Japhet, whom we met at Beteyen's camp last spring, has taken, it would appear, an active part

in the late fighting. During the battle where Sotamm was defeated by the Sebaa and their allies, the head of the Ibn Jendal [3] family, pursued by some Welled Ali horsemen, yielded himself up a prisoner to Afet whose father-in-law he was, and who sought to give him protection by covering him with his cloak. But the Ibn Smeyr were at blood feud with the Ibn Jendals, and in such cases no asylum is sacred. One of Mohammed Dukhi's sons dragged Ibn Jendal out of his hiding-place and slew him before Afet's eyes. On that day the Sebaa took most of the mares and camels they had lost in the previous fighting, and our friend Ferhan Ibn Hedeb is now in tolerable comfort again with tents and tent furniture, and coffee-pots to his heart's content. I hope he will bear his good fortune as well as he bore the bad.

Mijuel can of course give us better advice than anybody else in Damascus, and he says that we cannot do better in the interests of our journey than go first to Jerúd and consult Mohammed Dukhi. The Welled Ali after the Roala are the tribe which knows the western side of the desert best, and we should be sure of getting correct information from them, if nothing more. The Sebaa never go anywhere near the Wady Sirhán, as they keep almost entirely to the eastern half of the Hamád; and even their ghazús hardly ever meddle with that inhospitable region. Mijuel has once been as far south as to the edge of the Nefûd, which he describes as being covered with grass in the spring. The Wady Sirhán, he believes, has wells, but no pasturage.

Another interesting visit which we paid while at Damascus was to Abd el-Kader, the hero of the French war in Algiers. This charming old man, whose character would do honour to any nation and any creed, is ending his days as he began them, in learned retirement and the exercises of his religion. The Arabs of the west, "Maghrabi" (Mogrebins), are distinguished from those of the Peninsula, and indeed from all others, by a natural taste for piety and a

religious tone of thought. Arabia proper, except in the first age of Islam and latterly during the hundred years of Wahhabi rule, has never been a religious country. Perhaps out of antagonism to Persia, its nearest neighbour, it neglects ceremonial observance, and pays little respect to saints, miracles, and the supernatural world in general. But with the Moors and the Algerian Arabs this is different. Their religion is the reason of their social life and a prime mover in their politics. It is the fashion there, even at the present day, for a rich man to spend his money on a mosque, as elsewhere he would spend it on his stud and the entertainment of guests, and nothing gives such social distinction as regular attendance at prayer. There is too, besides the lay nobility, a class of spiritual nobles held equally high in public estimation. These are the marabous or descendants of certain saints, who by virtue of their birth partake in the sanctity of their ancestors and have hereditary gifts of divination and miraculous cure. They hold indeed much the same position with the vulgar as did the sons of the prophets in the days of Saul.

Abd el-Kader was the representative of such a family, and not, as I think most people suppose, a Bedouin Sheykh. In point of fact he was a townsman and a priest, not by birth a soldier, and though trained, as nobles of either class were, to arms, it was only the accident of a religious war that made him a man of action. He gained his first victories by his sermons, not by his sword; and, now that the fight is over, he has returned naturally to his first profession, that of saint and man of letters. As such, quite as much as for his military renown, he is revered in Damascus.

To us, however, it is the extreme simplicity of his character and the breadth of his good sense, amounting to real wisdom, which form his principal charm. “Saint” though he be “by profession,” as one may say, for such he is in his own eyes as well as those of his followers, he is uninjured by

his high position. It is to him an obligation. His charity is unbounded, and he extends it to all alike; to be poor or suffering is a sufficient claim on him. During the Damascus massacres he opened his doors to every fugitive; his house was crowded with Christians, and he was ready to defend his guests by force if need were. To us he was most amiable, and talked long on the subject of Arab genealogy and tradition. He gave me a book which has been lately written by one of his sons on the pedigree of the Arabian horse, and took an evident interest in our own researches in that direction. He made the pilgrimage to Mecca many years ago, travelling the whole way from Algeria by land and returning through Nejd to Meshhed Ali and Bagdad. This was before the French war.

Abd el-Kader returned our visit most politely next day, and it was strange to see this old warrior humbly mounted on his little Syrian donkey, led by a single servant, riding into the garden where we were. He dresses like a mollah in a cloth gown, and with a white turban set far back from his forehead after the Algerian fashion. He never, I believe, wore the Bedouin kefiyeh. His face is now very pale as becomes a student, and his smile is that of an old man, but his eye is still bright and piercing like a falcon’s. It is easy to see, however, that it will never flash again with anything like anger. Abd el-Kader has long possessed that highest philosophy of noble minds according to Arab doctrine, patience.

A man of a very different sort, but one whom we were also interested to see, was Midhat Pasha, just arrived at Damascus as Governor-General of Syria. He had come with a considerable flourish of trumpets, for he was supposed to represent the doctrine of administrative reform, which was at that time seriously believed in by Europeans for the Turkish Empire. Midhat was the protégé of our own Foreign Office, and great things were expected of him. For