In conjunction with Allenby we laid a triple plan to join hands across Jordan, to capture Maan, and to cut off Medina, in one operation. This was too proud and neither of us fulfilled his part. So the Arabs exchanged the care of the placid Medina Railway for the greater burden of investing, in Maan, a Turk force as big as their available Regular Army.

To help in this duty Allenby increased our transport, that we might have longer range and more mobility. Maan was impregnable for us, so we concentrated on cutting its northern railway and diverting the Turkish effort to relieve its garrison from the Amman side.

Clearly no decision lay in such tactics: but the German advance in Flanders at this moment took from Allenby his British units; and consequently his advantage over the Turks. He notified us that he was unable to attack.

A stalemate, as we were, throughout 1918 was an intolerable prospect. We schemed to strengthen the Arab Army for autumn operations near Deraa and in the Beni Sakhr country. If this drew off one division from the enemy in Palestine it would make possible a British ancillary attack, one of whose ends would be our junction in the lower Jordan valley, by Jericho. After a month's preparation this plan was dropped, because of its risk, and because a better offered.
CHAPTER XCII

In Cairo, where I spent four days, our affairs were now far from haphazard. Allenby’s smile had given us Staff. We had supply officers, a shipping expert, an ordnance expert, an intelligence branch: under Alan Dawnay, brother of the maker of the Beersheba plan, who had now gone to France. Dawnay was Allenby’s greatest gift to us — greater than thousands of baggage camels. As a professional officer, he had the class-touch: so that even the reddest hearer recognized an authentic redness. His was an understanding mind, feeling instinctively the special qualities of rebellion: at the same time, his war-training enriched his treatment of this antithetic subject. He married war and rebellion in himself; as, of old in Yenbo, it had been my dream every regular officer would. Yet, in three years’ practice, only Dawnay succeeded.

He could not take complete, direct command, because he did not know Arabic; and because of his Flanders-broken health. He had the gift, rare among Englishmen, of making the best of a good thing. He was exceptionally educated, for an Army officer, and imaginative. His perfect manner made him friends with all races and classes. From his teaching we began to learn the technique of fighting in matters we had been content to settle by rude and wasteful rules of thumb. His sense of fitness remodelled our standing.

The Arab Movement had lived as a wild-man show, with its means as small as its duties and prospects. Henceforward Allenby counted it as a sensible part of his scheme; and the responsibility upon us of doing better than he wished, knowing that forfeit of our failure would necessarily be part-paid in his soldiers’ lives, removed it terrifyingly further from the sphere of joyous adventure.

With Joyce we laid our triple plan to support Allenby’s first stroke. In our centre the Arab regulars, under Jaafar, would occupy the line a march north of Maan. Joyce with our armoured cars would slip down to Mudowwara, and destroy the railway — permanently this time, for now we were ready to cut off Medina. In the north, Merzuk, with
myself, would join Allenby when he fell back to Salt about March the thirtieth. Such a date gave me leisure: and I settled to go to Shobek, with Zeid and Nasir.

It was springtime: very pleasant after the biting winter, whose excesses seemed dream-like, in the new freshness and strength of nature: for there was strength in this hill-top season, when a chill sharpness at sundown corrected the languid noons.

All life was alive with us: even the insects. In our first night I had laid my cashmere head-cloth on the ground under my head as pad: and at dawn, when I took it up again, twenty-eight lice were tangled in its snowy texture. Afterwards we slept on our saddle-covers, the tanned fleece hooked last of all over the saddle-load to make a slippy and sweat-proof seat for the rider. Even so, we were not left alone. The camelticks, which had drunk themselves (with blood from our tethered camels) into tight slaty-blue cushions, thumbnail wide, and thick, used to creep under us, hugging the leathern underside of the sheep-skins: and if we rolled on them in the night, our weight burst them to brown mats of blood and dust.

While we were in this comfortable air, with milk plentiful about us, news came from Azrak, of Ali ibn el Hussein and the Indians still on faithful watch. One Indian had died of cold, and also Daud, my Ageyli boy, the friend of Farraj. Farraj himself told us.

These two had been friends from childhood, in eternal gaiety: working together, sleeping together, sharing every scrape and profit with the openness and honesty of perfect love. So I was not astonished to see Farraj look dark and hard of face, leaden-eyed and old, when he came to tell me that his fellow was dead; and from that day till his service ended he made no more laughter for us. He took punctilious care, greater even than before, of my camel, of the coffee, of my clothes and saddles, and fell to praying his three regular prayings every day. The others offered themselves to comfort him, but instead he wandered restlessly, grey and silent, very much alone.

When looked at from this torrid East, our British conception of woman seemed to partake of the northern climate which had also contracted our faith. In the Mediterranean, woman's influence and supposed purpose were made cogent by an understanding in which she
was accorded the physical world in simplicity, unchallenged, like the poor in spirit. Yet this same agreement, by denying equality of sex, made love, companionship and friendliness impossible between man and woman. Woman became a machine for muscular exercise, while man's psychic side could be slaked only amongst his peers. Whence arose these partnerships of man and man, to supply human nature with more than the contact of flesh with flesh.

We Westerners of this complex age, monks in our bodies' cells, who searched for something to fill us beyond speech and sense, were, by the mere effort of the search, shut from it for ever. Yet it came to children like these unthinking Ageyl, content to receive without return, even from one another. We racked ourselves with inherited remorse for the flesh-indulgence of our gross birth, striving to pay for it through a lifetime of misery; meeting happiness, life's overdraft, by a compensating hell, and striking a ledger-balance of good or evil against a day of judgement.

Meanwhile at Aba el Lissan things went not well with our scheme to destroy the Maan garrison by posting the Arab Army across the railway in the north, and forcing them to open battle, as Allenby attacked their base and supports at Amman. Feisal and Jaafar liked the scheme, but their officers clamoured for direct attack on Maan. Joyce pointed out their weakness in artillery and machine-guns, their untried men, the greater strategical wisdom of the railway scheme: it was of no effect. Maulud, hot for immediate assault, wrote memoranda to Feisal upon the danger of English interference with Arab liberty. At such a moment Joyce fell ill of pneumonia, and left for Suez. Dawnay came up to reason with the malcontents. He was our best card, with his proved military reputation, exquisite field-boots, and air of well-dressed science; but he came too late, for the Arab officers now felt their honour to be engaged.

We agreed that we must give them their heads on the point, though we were really all-powerful, with the money, the supplies, and now the transport, in our hands. However, if the people were slattern, why, then, they must have a slatternly government: and particularly must we go slow with that self-governing democracy, the Arab Army, in which service was as voluntary as enlistment. Between us we were
familiar with the Turkish, the Egyptian and the British Armies: and championed our respective task-masters. Joyce alleged the parade-magnificence of his Egyptians—formal men, who loved mechanical movement and surpassed British troops in physique, in smartness, in perfection of drill. I maintained the frugality of the Turks, that shambling, ragged army of serfs. The British Army we all were acquainted with in a fashion; and as we contrasted services we found variety of obedience according to the degree of ordered force which served each as sanction.

In Egypt soldiers belonged to their service without check of public opinion. Consequently they had a peace-incentive to perfection of formal conduct. In Turkey the men were, in theory, equally the officers': body and soul: but their lot was mitigated by the possibility of escape. In England the voluntary recruit served as utterly as any Turk, except that the growth of civil decency had taken away from authority the resource of inflicting direct physical pain: but in practice, upon our less obtuse population, the effects of pack-drill or fatigues fell little short of an Oriental system.

In the regular Arab Army there was no power of punishment whatever: this vital difference showed itself in all our troops. They had no formality of discipline; there was no subordination. Service was active; attack always imminent: and, like the Army of Italy, men recognized the duty of defeating the enemy. For the rest they were not soldiers, but pilgrims, intent always to go the little farther.

I was not discontented with this state of things, for it had seemed to me that discipline, or at least formal discipline, was a virtue of peace: a character or stamp by which to mark off soldiers from complete men, and obliterate the humanity of the individual. It resolved itself easiest into the restrictive, the making men not do this or that: and so could be fostered by a rule severe enough to make them despair of disobedience. It was a process of the mass, an element of the impersonal crowd, inapplicable to one man, since it involved obedience, a duality of will. It was not to impress upon men that their will must actively second the officer's, for then there would have been, as in the Arab Army and among irregulars, that momentary pause for thought transmission, or digestion; for the nerves to resolve the relaying private will into active
consequence. On the contrary, each regular Army sedulously rooted out this significant pause from its companies on parade. The drill-instructors tried to make obedience an instinct, a mental reflex, following as instantly on the command as though the motor power of the individual wills had been invested together in the system.

This was well, so far as it increased quickness: but it made no provision for casualties, beyond the weak assumption that each subordinate had his will-motor not atrophied, but reserved in perfect order, ready at the instant to take over his late superior’s office; the efficiency of direction passing smoothly down the great hierarchy till vested in the senior of the two surviving privates.

It had the further weakness, seeing men’s jealousy, of putting power in the hands of arbitrary old age, with its petulant activity: additionally corrupted by long habit of control, an indulgence which ruined its victim, by causing the death of his subjunctive mood. Also, it was an idiosyncrasy with me to distrust instinct, which had its roots in our animality. Reason seemed to give men something deliberately more precious than fear or pain: and this made me discount the value of peace smartness as a war-education.

For with war a subtle change happened to the soldier. Discipline was modified, supported, even swallowed by an eagerness of the man to fight. This eagerness it was which brought victory in the moral sense, and often in the physical sense, of the combat. War was made up of crises of intense effort. For psychological reasons commanders wished for the least duration of this maximum effort: not because the men would not try to give it — usually they would go on till they dropped — but because each such effort weakened their remaining force. Eagerness of the kind was nervous, and, when present in high power, it tore apart flesh and spirit.

To rouse the excitement of war for the creation of a military spirit in peace-time would be dangerous, like the too-early doping of an athlete. Consequently discipline, with its concomitant ‘smartness’ (a suspect word implying superficial restraint and pain), was invented to take its place. The Arab Army, born and brought up in the fighting line, had never known a peace-habit, and was not faced with problems of maintenance till armistice-time: then it failed signally.
CHAPTER XCIII

After Joyce and Dawnay had gone, I rode off from Aba el Lissan, with Mirzuk. Our starting day promised to crown the spring-freshness of this lofty tableland. A week before there had been a furious blizzard, and some of the whiteness of the snow seemed to have passed into the light. The ground was vivid with new grass; and the sunlight, which slanted across us, pale like straw, mellowed the fluttering wind.

With us journeyed two thousand Sirhan camels, carrying our ammunition and food. For the convoy's sake we marched easily, to reach the railway after dark. A few of us rode forward, to search the line by daylight, and be sure of peace during the hours these scattered numbers would consume in crossing.

My bodyguard was with me, and Mirzuk had his Ageyl, with two famous racing camels. The gaiety of the air and season caught them. Soon they were challenging to races, threatening one another, or skirmishing. My imperfect camel-riding (and my mood) forbade me to thrust among the lads, who swung more to the north, while I worked on, ridding my mind of the lees of camp-clamour and intrigue. The abstraction of the desert landscape cleansed me, and rendered my mind vacant with its superfluous greatness; a greatness achieved not by the addition of thought to its emptiness, but by its subtraction. In the weakness of earth's life was mirrored the strength of heaven, so vast, so beautiful, so strong.

Near sunset the line became visible, curving spaciously across the disclosed land, among low tufts of grass and bushes. Seeing everything was peaceful I pushed on, meaning to halt beyond and watch the others over. There was always a little thrill in touching the rails which were the target of so many of our efforts.

As I rode up the bank my camel's feet scrambled in the loose ballast, and out of the long shadow of a culvert to my left, where, no doubt, he had slept all day, rose a Turkish soldier. He glanced wildly at me and at the pistol in my hand, and then with sadness at his rifle against the
abutment, yards beyond. He was a young man; stout, but sulky-looking. I stared at him, and said softly, 'God is merciful.' He knew the sound and sense of the Arabic phrase, and raised his eyes like a flash to mine, while his heavy sleep-ridden face began slowly to change into incredulous joy.

However, he said not a word. I pressed my camel's hairy shoulder with my foot, she picked her delicate stride across the metals and down the further slope, and the little Turk was man enough not to shoot me in the back, as I rode away, feeling warm towards him, as ever towards a life one has saved. At a safe distance I glanced back. He put thumb to nose, and twinkled his fingers at me.

We lit a coffee-fire as beacon for the rest, and waited till their dark lines passed by. Next day we marched to Wadi el Jinz; to flood-pools, shallow eyes of water set in wrinkles of the clay, their rims lashed about with scrubby stems of brushwood. The water was grey, like the marly valley bed, but sweet. There we rested for the night, since the Zaagi had shot a bustard, and Xenophon did rightly call its white meat good. While we feasted the camels feasted. By the bounty of spring they were knee-deep in succulent green-stuff.

A fourth easy march took us to the Atara, our goal, where our allies, Mifleh, Fahad and Adhub, were camped. Fahad was still stricken, but Mifleh, with honeyed words, came out to welcome us, his face eaten up by greed, and his voice wheezy with it.

Our plan, thanks to Allenby's lion-share, promised simply. We would, when ready, cross the line to Themed, the main Beni Sakhr watering. Thence under cover of a screen of their cavalry we would move to Madeba, and fit it as our headquarters, while Allenby put the Jericho-Salt road in condition. We ought to link up with the British comfortably without firing a shot.

Meanwhile we had only to wait in the Atatir, which to our joy were really green, with every hollow a standing pool, and the valley beds of tall grass prinked with flowers. The chalky ridges, sterile with salt, framed the water-channels delightfully. From their tallest point we could look north and south, and see how the rain, running down, had painted the valleys across the white in broad stripes of green, sharp and firm like brush-strokes. Everything was growing, and daily the picture
was fuller and brighter till the desert became like a rank water-meadow. Playful packs of winds came crossing and tumbling over one another, their wide, brief gusts surging through the grass, to lay it momentarily in swathes of dark and light satin, like young corn after the roller. On the hill we sat and shivered before these sweeping shadows, expecting a heavy blast — and there would come into our faces a warm and perfumed breath, very gentle, which passed away behind us as a silver-grey light down the plain of green. Our fastidious camels grazed an hour or so, and then lay down to digest, bringing up stomach-load after stomach-load of butter-smelling green cud, and chewing weightily.

At last news came that the English had taken Amman. In half an hour we were making for Themed, across the deserted line. Later messages told us that the English were falling back, and though we had forewarned the Arabs of it, yet they were troubled. A further messenger reported how the English had just fled from Salt. This was plainly contrary to Allenby's intention, and I swore straight out that it was not true. A man galloped in to say that the English had broken only a few rails south of Amman, after two days of vain assaults against the town. I grew seriously disturbed in the conflict of rumour, and sent Adhub, who might be trusted not to lose his head, to Salt with a letter for Chetwode or Shea, asking for a note on the real situation. For the intervening hours we tramped restlessly over the fields of young barley, our minds working out plan after plan with feverish activity.

Very late at night Adhub's racing horse-hooves echoed across the valley and he came in to tell us that Jemal Pasha was now in Salt, victorious, hanging those local Arabs who had welcomed the English. The Turks were still chasing Allenby far down the Jordan Valley. It was thought that Jerusalem would be recovered. I knew enough of my countrymen to reject that possibility; but clearly things were very wrong. We slipped off, bemused, to the Atarit again.

This reverse, being unawares, hurt me the more. Allenby's plan had seemed modest, and that we should so fall down before the Arabs was deplorable. They had never trusted us to do the great things which I foretold; and now their independent thoughts set out to enjoy the
springtide here. They were abetted by some gipsy families from the north with the materials of their tinkering trade on donkeys. The Zebn tribesmen greeted them with a humour I little understood — till I saw that, beside their legitimate profits of handicraft, the women were open to other advances.

Particularly they were easy to the Ageyl; and for a while they prospered exceedingly, since our men were eager and very generous. I also made use of them. It seemed a pity to be at a loose end so near to Amman, and not bother to look at it. So Farraj and I hired three of the merry little women, wrapped ourselves up like them, and strolled through the village. The visit was successful, though my final determination was that the place should be left alone. We had one evil moment, by the bridge, when we were returning. Some Turkish soldiers crossed our party, and taking us all five for what we looked, grew much too friendly. We showed a coyness, and good turn of speed for gipsy women, and escaped intact. For the future I decided to resume my habit of wearing ordinary British soldiers' rig in enemy camps. It was too brazen to be suspect.

After this I determined to order the Indians from Azrak back to Feisal, and to return myself. We started on one of those clean dawns which woke up the senses with the sun, while the intellect, tired after the thinking of the night, was yet abed. For an hour or two on such a morning the sounds, scents and colours of the world struck man individually and directly, not filtered through or made typical by thought; they seemed to exist sufficiently by themselves, and the lack of design and of carefulness in creation no longer irritated.

We marched southward along the railway, expecting to cross the slower-moving Indians from Azrak; our little party on prize camels swooping from one point of vantage to another, on the look-out. The still day encouraged us to speed over all the flint-strewn ridges, ignoring the multitude of desert paths which led only to the abandoned camps of last year, or of the last thousand or ten thousand years: for a road, once trodden into such flint and limestone, marked the face of the desert for so long as the desert lasted.

By Faraifra we saw a little patrol of eight Turks marching up the line. My men, fresh after the holiday in the Atair, begged me to ride
on them. I thought it too trifling, but when they chafed, agreed. The younger ones instantly rushed forward at a gallop. I ordered the rest across the line, to drive the enemy away from their shelter behind a culvert. The Zaagi, a hundred yards to my right, seeing what was wanted, swerved aside at once. Mohsin followed him a moment later, with his section; whilst Abdulla and I pushed forward steadily on our side, to take the enemy on both flanks together.

Farraj, riding in front of everyone, would not listen to our cries nor notice the warning shots fired past his head. He looked round at our manœuvre, but himself continued to canter madly towards the bridge, which he reached before the Zaagi and his party had crossed the line. The Turks held their fire, and we supposed them gone down the further side of the embankment into safety; but as Farraj drew rein beneath the archway, there was a shot, and he seemed to fall or leap out of the saddle, and disappeared. A while after, the Zaagi got into position on the bank and his party fired twenty or thirty ragged shots, as though the enemy was still there.

I was very anxious about Farraj. His camel stood unharmed by the bridge, alone. He might be hit, or might be following the enemy. I could not believe that he had deliberately ridden up to them in the open and halted; yet it looked like it. I sent Feheyd to the Zaagi and told him to rush along the far side as soon as possible, whilst we went at a fast trot straight in to the bridge.

We reached it together, and found there one dead Turk, and Farraj terribly wounded through the body, lying by the arch just as he had fallen from his camel. He looked unconscious; but, when we dismounted, greeted us, and then fell silent, sunken in that loneliness which came to hurt men who believed death near. We tore his clothes away and looked uselessly at the wound. The bullet had smashed right through him, and his spine seemed injured. The Arabs said at once that he had only a few hours to live.

We tried to move him, for he was helpless, though he showed no pain. We tried to stop the wide, slow bleeding, which made poppy-splashes in the grass; but it seemed impossible, and after a while he told us to let him alone, as he was dying, and happy to die, since he had no care of life. Indeed, for long he had been so, and men very tired
and sorry often fell in love with death, with that triumphal weakness coming home after strength has been vanquished in a last battle.

While we fussed about him Abd el Latif shouted an alarm. He could see about fifty Turks working up the line towards us, and soon after a motor trolley was heard coming from the north. We were only sixteen men, and had an impossible position. I said we must retire at once, carrying Farraj with us. They tried to lift him, first in his cloak, afterwards in a blanket; but consciousness was coming back, and he screamed so pitifully that we had not the heart to hurt him more.

We could not leave him where he was, to the Turks, because we had seen them burn alive our hapless wounded. For this reason we were all agreed, before action, to finish off one another, if badly hurt: but I had never realized that it might fall to me to kill Farraj.

I knelt down beside him, holding my pistol near the ground by his head, so that he should not see my purpose; but he must have guessed it, for he opened his eyes, and clutched me with his harsh, scaly hand, the tiny hand of these unripe Nejd fellows. I waited a moment, and he said, 'Daud will be angry with you', the old smile coming back so strangely to this grey shrinking face. I replied, 'Salute him from me'. He returned the formal answer, 'God will give you peace', and at last wearily closed his eyes.

The Turkish trolley was now very close, swaying down the line towards us like a dung-beetle: and its machine-gun bullets stung the air about our heads as we fled back into the ridges. Mohsin led Farraj's camel, on which were his sheepskin and trappings, still with the shape of his body in them just as he had fallen by the bridge. Near dark we halted; and the Zaagi came whispering to me that all were wrangling as to who should ride the splendid animal next day. He wanted her for himself; but I was bitter that these perfected dead had again robbed my poverty: and to cheapen the great loss with a little one I shot the poor beast with my second bullet.

Then the sun set on us. Through the breathless noon in the valleys of Kerak the prisoned air had brooded stagnantly without relief, while the heat sucked the perfume from the flowers. With darkness the world moved once more, and a breath from the west crept out over
the desert. We were miles from the grass and flowers, but suddenly we felt them all about us, as waves of this scented air drew past us with a sticky sweetness. However, quickly it faded, and the night-wind, damp and wholesome, followed. Abdulla brought me supper, rice and camel-meat (Farraj’s camel). Afterwards we slept.
CHAPTER XCIV

In the morning, near Wadi el Jinz, we met the Indians, halted by a solitary tree. It was like old times, like our gentle and memorable ride to the bridges the year before, to be going again across country with Hassan Shah, hearing the Vickers guns still clinking in the carriers, and helping the troopers re-tie their slipping loads, or saddles. They seemed just as unhandy with camels as at first; so not till dusk did we cross the railway.

There I left the Indians, because I felt restless, and movement fast in the night might cure my mind. So we pressed forward all the chill darkness, riding for Odroh. When we topped its rise we noticed gleams of fire to our left: bright flashes went up constantly, it might be from about Jerdun. We drew rein and heard the low boom of explosions: a steady flame appeared, grew greater and divided into two. Perhaps the station was Lurning. We rode quick, to ask Mastur.

However, his place was deserted, with only a jackal on the old camping-ground. I decided to push ahead to Feisal. We trotted our fastest, as the sun grew higher in the heavens. The road was bestial with locusts — though from a little distance they looked beautiful, silvering the air with the shimmer of their wings. Summer had come upon us unawares; my seventh consecutive summer in this East.

As we approached, we heard firing in front, on Semna, the crescent mound which covered Maan. Parties of troops walked gently up its face to halt below the crest. Evidently we had taken the Semna, so we rode towards the new position. On the flat, this side of it, we met a camel with litters. The man leading it said, ‘Maulud Pasha’, pointing to his load. I ran up, crying, ‘Is Maulud hit?’ for he was one of the best officers in the army, a man also most honest towards us; not, indeed that admiration could anyhow have been refused so sturdy and uncompromising a patriot. The old man replied out of his litter in a weak voice, saying, ‘Yes, indeed, Lurens Bey, I am hurt: but, thanks be to God, it is nothing. We have taken Semna.’ I replied that I was going there. Maulud craned himself feverishly over the edge of the
litter, hardly able to see or speak (his thigh-bone was splintered above the knee), showing me point after point, for organizing the hill-side defensively.

We arrived as the Turks were beginning to throw half-hearted shells at it. Nuri Said was commanding in Maulud’s place. He stood coolly on the hill-top. Most men talked faster under fire, and acted a betraying ease and joviality. Nuri grew calmer and Zeid bored.

I asked where Jaafar was. Nuri said that at midnight he was due to have attacked Jerdun. I told him of the night-flares, which must have marked his success. While we were glad together his messengers arrived reporting prisoners and machine-guns; also the station and three thousand rails destroyed. So splendid an effort would settle the northern line for weeks. Then Nuri told me that the preceding dawn he had rushed Ghadir el Haj station and wrecked it, with five bridges and a thousand rails. So the southern line was also settled.

Late in the afternoon it grew deadly quiet. Both sides stopped their aimless shelling. They said that Feisal had moved to Uheida. We crossed the little flooded stream, by a temporary hospital where Maulud lay. Mahmud, the red-bearded, defiant doctor, thought that he would recover without amputation. Feisal was on the hill-top, on the very edge, black against the sun, whose light threw a queer haze about his slender figure, and suffused his head with gold, through the floss-silk of his head-cloth. I made my camel kneel. Feisal stretched out his hands crying, ‘Please God, good?’ I replied, ‘The praise and the victory be to God’. And he swept me into his tent that we might exchange the news.

Feisal had heard from Dawnay more than I knew of the British failure before Amman; of the bad weather and confusion, and how Allenby had telephoned to Shea, and made one of his lightning decisions to cut the loss; a wise decision, though it hurt us sorely. Joyce was in hospital, but mending well; and Dawnay lay ready at Guweira to start for Mudowwara with all the cars.

Feisal asked me about Semna and Jaafar, and I told him what I knew, and Nuri’s opinion, and the prospect. Nuri had complained that the Abu Tayi had done nothing for him all day. Auda denied it; and I recalled the story of our first taking the plateau, and the gibe by which
I had shamed them into the charge at Aba el Lissan. The tale was new to Feisal. Its raking-up hurt old Auda deeply. He swore vehemently that he had done his best to-day, only conditions were not favourable for tribal work: and, when I withstood him further, he went out of the tent, very bitter.

Maynard and I spent the next days watching operations. The Abu Tayi captured two outposts east of the station, while Saleh ibn Shefia took a breastwork with a machine-gun and twenty prisoners. These gains gave us liberty of movement round Maan; and on the third day Jaafar massed his artillery on the southern ridge, while Nuri Said led a storming party into the sheds of the railway station. As he reached their cover the French guns ceased fire. We were wandering in a Ford car, trying to keep up with the successive advances, when Nuri, perfectly dressed and gloved, smoking his briar pipe, met us and sent us back to Captain Pisani, artillery commander, with an urgent appeal for support. We found Pisani wringing his hands in despair, every round expended. He said he had implored Nuri not to attack at this moment of his penury.

There was nothing to do, but see our men volleyed out of the railway station again. The road was littered with crumpled khaki figures, and the eyes of the wounded, gone rich with pain, stared accusingly at us. The control had gone from their broken bodies and their torn flesh shook them helplessly. We could see everything and think dispassionately, but it was soundless: our hearing had been taken away by the knowledge that we had failed.

Afterwards we understood that we had never expected such excellent spirit from our infantry, who fought cheerfully under machine-gun fire, and made clever use of ground. So little leading was required that only three officers were lost. Maan showed us that the Arabs were good enough with British stiffening. This made us more free to plan: so the failure was not unredeemed.

On the morning of April the eighteenth, Jaafar wisely decided that he could not afford more loss, and drew back to the Semna positions while the troops rested. Being an old college friend of the Turkish Commandant, he sent him a white-flagged letter, inviting surrender. The reply said that they would love it, but had orders to hold out to the
last cartridge. Jaafar offered a respite, in which they could fire off their reserves: but the Turks hesitated till Jemal Pasha was able to collect troops from Amman, re-occupy Jerdun, and pass a pack-convoy of food and ammunition into the beleaguered town. The railway remained broken for weeks.

Forthwith I took car to join Dawnay. I was uneasy at a regular fighting his first guerilla battle with that most involved and intricate weapon, the armoured car. Also Dawnay was no Arabist, and neither Peake, his camel-expert, nor Marshall, his doctor, was fluent. His troops were mixed, British, Egyptian and Bedouin. The last two were antipathetic. So I drove into his camp above Tell Shahm after midnight, and offered myself, delicately, as an interpreter.

Fortunately he received me well, and took me round his lines. A wonderful show. The cars were parked geometrically here; armoured cars there; sentries and pickets were out, with machine-guns ready. Even the Arabs were in a tactical place behind a hill, in support, but out of sight and hearing; by some magic Sherif Hazaa and himself had kept them where they were put. My tongue coiled into my cheek with the wish to say that the only thing lacking was an enemy.

His conversation as he unfolded his plan deepened my admiration to unplumbed depths. He had prepared operation orders; orthodox-sounding things with zero times and a sequence of movements. Each unit had its appointed duty. We would attack the ‘plain post’ at dawn (armoured cars) from the vantage of the hillock on which Joyce and myself had sat and laughed ruefully the last abortive time. The cars, with closed cut-out, would ‘take station’ before daylight, and carry the trenches by surprise. Tenders 1 and 3 would then demolish bridges A and B on the operations’ plan (scale 1/250,000) at zero 1.30 hours while the cars moved to Rock Post, and with the support of Hazaa and the Arabs rushed it (zero 2.15).

Hornby and the explosives, in Talbots No. 40531 and 41226, would move after them, and demolish bridges D, E and F, while the force lunched. After lunch, when the low sun permitted sight through the mirage, at zero 8 hours to be exact, the united mass would attack South Post; the Egyptians from the East, the Arabs from the North, covered by long range machine-gun fire from the cars, and by Brodie’s
ten-pounder guns, sited on Observation Hill. The post would fall and the force transport itself to the station of Tell Shahm, which would be shelled by Brodie from the North-West, bombed by aeroplanes flying from the mud-flats of Rum (at zero 10 hours) and approached by armoured cars from the west. The Arabs would follow the cars, while Peake with his Camel Corps descended from South Post. 'The station will be taken at zero 11.30' said the scheme, breaking into humour at the last. But there it failed, for the Turks, ignorantly and in haste, surrendered ten minutes too soon, and made the only blot on a bloodless day.

In a liquid voice I inquired if Hazaa understood. I was informed that as he had no watch to synchronize (by the way, would I please put mine right now?) he would make his first move when the cars turned northward and time his later actions by express order. I crept away and hid myself for an hour's sleep.

At dawn we saw the cars roll silently on top of the sleeping sandy trenches, and the astonished Turks walk out with their hands up. It was like picking a ripe peach. Hornby dashed up in his two Rolls tenders, put a hundredweight of gun-cotton under bridge A and blew it up convincingly. The roar nearly lifted Dawnay and myself out of our third tender, in which we sat grandly overseeing all: and we ran in, to show Hornby the cheaper way of the drainage holes as mine-chambers. Subsequent bridges came down for ten slabs apiece.

While we were at bridge B the cars concentrated their machine-guns on the parapet of 'Rock Post', a circle of thick stone walls (very visible from their long early shadows) on a knoll too steep for wheels. Hazaa was ready, willing and excited, and the Turks so frightened by the splashing and splattering of the four machine-guns that the Arabs took them almost in their stride. That was peach the second.

Then it was interval for the others, but activity for Hornby, and for myself, now assistant-engineer. We ran down the line in our Rolls-Royces, carrying two tons of gun-cotton; bridges and rails roared up wherever fancy dictated. The crews of the cars covered us; and sometimes covered themselves, under their cars, when fragments came sailing musically through the smoky air. One twenty-pound flint clanged plumb on a turret-head and made a harmless dint. At intervals
everybody took photographs of the happy bursts. It was fighting de luxe, and demolition de luxe: we enjoyed ourselves. After the peri-
patetic lunch-hour we went off to see the fall of ‘south post’. It fell
to its minute, but not properly. Hazaa and his Amran were too wound
up to advance soberly in alternate rushes like Peake and the Egyptians.
Instead they thought it was a steeplechase, and did a camel-charge up
the mound over breastwork and trenches. The war-weary Turks gave
it up in disgust.

Then came the central act of the day, the assault upon the station.
Peake drew down towards it from the north, moving his men by
repeated exposure of himself; hardly, for they were not fierce for
honour. Brodie opened on it with his usual nicety, while the aero-
planes circled round in their cold-blooded way, to drop whistling
bombs into its trenches. The armoured cars went forward snuffling
smoke, and through this haze a file of Turks waving white things rose
out of their main trench in a dejected fashion.

We cranked up our Rolls tenders; the Arabs leaped on to their
camels; Peake’s now-bold men broke into a run, and the force con-
verged wildly upon the station. Our car won; and I gained the station
bell, a dignified piece of Damascus brass-work. The next man took
the ticket punch and the third the office stamp, while the bewildered
Turks stared at us, with a growing indignation that their importance
should be merely secondary.

A minute later, with a howl, the Beduin were upon the maddest
looting of their history. Two hundred rifles, eighty thousand rounds of
ammunition, many bombs, much food and clothing were in the
station, and everybody smashed and profited. An unlucky camel
increased the confusion by firing one of the many Turkish trip-mines
as it entered the yard. The explosion blew it arse over tip, and caused a
panic. They thought Brodie was opening up again.

In the pause the Egyptian officer found an unbroken storehouse, and
put a guard of soldiers over it, because they were short of food. Hazaa’s
wolves, not yet sated, did not recognize the Egyptians’ right to share
equally. Shooting began: but by mediation we obtained that the
Egyptians pick first what rations they needed: afterwards there fol-
lowed a general scramble, which burst the store-room walls.
The profit of Shahm was so great that eight out of every ten of the Arabs were contented with it. In the morning only Hazaa and a handful of men remained with us for further operations. Dawnay’s programme said Ramleh station; but his orders were inchoate, since the position had not been examined. So we sent down Wade in his armoured car, with a second car in support. He drove on, cautiously, stage by stage, in dead silence. At last, without a shot fired, he entered the station yard, carefully, for fear of the mines, whose trip and trigger wires diapered the ground.

The station was closed up. He put half a belt through the door and shutters, and, getting no reply, slipped out of his car, searched the building, and found it empty of men, though full enough of desirable goods to make Hazaa and the faithful remnant prize their virtue aloud. We spent the day destroying miles more of the unoccupied line, till we judged that we had done damage to occupy the largest possible repair party for a fortnight.

The third day was to be Mudowwara, but we had no great hope or force left. The Arabs were gone, Peake’s men too little warlike. However, Mudowwara might panic like Ramleh, so we slept the night by our latest capture. The unwearied Dawnay set out sentries, who, emulous of their smart commanding officer, did a Buckingham Palace stunt up and down beside our would-be sleeping heads, till I got up, and instructed them in the arts of desert-watching.

In the morning we set off to look at Mudowwara, driving like kings splendidly in our roaring cars over the smooth plains of sand and flint, with the low sun pale behind us in the east. The light hid us till we were close in and saw that a long train stood in the station. Reinforcement or evacuation? A moment afterwards they let fly at us with four guns, of which two were active and accurate little Austrian mountain howitzers. At seven thousand yards they did admirable shooting, while we made off in undignified haste to some distant hollows. Thence we made a wide circuit to where, with Zaal, we had mined our first train. We blew up the long bridge, under which the Turkish patrol had slept out that tense midday. Afterwards we returned to Ramleh, and persevered in destroying line and bridges, to make our break permanent, a demolition too serious for Fakhri ever to restore: while Feisal sent
Mohammed el Dheilan against the yet intact stations between our break and Maan. Dawnay joined up with them, geographically, below the escarpment, a day later; and so this eighty miles from Maan to Mudowwar, with its seven stations, fell wholly into our hands. The active defence of Medina ended with this operation.

A new officer, Young, came from Mesopotamia to reinforce our staff. He was a regular of exceptional quality, with long and wide experience of war, and perfect fluency in Arabic. His intended role was to double mine, with the tribes, that our activity against the enemy might be broader, and better directed. To let him play himself in to our fresh conditions, I handed him over the possibility of combining Zeid, Nasir and Mirzuk into an eighty-mile long interruption of the railway from Maan northward, while I went down to Akaba, and took ship for Suez, to discuss futures with Allenby.
CHAPTER XCV

Dawnay met me, and we talked over our brief before going up to Allenby's camp. There General Bols smiled happily at us, and said, 'Well, we're in Salt all right'. To our amazed stares he went on that the chiefs of the Beni Sakhr had come into Jericho one morning, to offer the immediate co-operation of their twenty thousand tribesmen at Themed; and in his bath next day he had thought out a scheme, and fixed it all right.

I asked who the chief of the Beni Sakhr was, and he said 'Fahad': triumphing in his efficient inroad into what had been my province. It sounded madder and madder. I knew that Fahad could not raise four hundred men; and, that at the moment there was not a tent on Themed: they had moved south, to Young.

We hurried to the office for the real story, and learned that it was, unfortunately, as Bols had said. The British cavalry had gone impromptu up the hills of Moab on some airy promise of the Zebn sheikhs; greedy fellows who had ridden into Jerusalem only to taste Allenby's bounty but had there been taken at their mouth-value.

In this season there was no third partner at G.H.Q. Guy Dawnay, brother of our gladiator, he who had made the Jerusalem plan, had gone to Haig's staff: Bartholomew, who was to work out the autumn drive upon Damascus, was still with Cherwode. So the executive of Allenby's work in these months was unequal to the conception.

For, of course, this raid miscarried, while I was still in Jerusalem, solacing myself against the inadequacy of Bols with Storrs, now the urbane and artful Governor of the place. The Beni Sakhr were supine in their tents or away with Young. General Chauvel, without the help of one of them, saw the Turks re-open the Jordan fords behind his back and seize the road by which he had advanced. We escaped heavy disaster only because Allenby's instinct for a situation showed him his danger just in time. Yet we suffered painfully. The check taught the British to be more patient with Feisal's difficulties; convinced the Turks that the Amman sector was their danger point; and made the Beni Sakhr feel

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that the English were past understanding: not great fighting men, perhaps, but ready on the spur of the moment to be odd. So, in part, it redeemed the Amman failure by its deliberate repetition of what had looked accidental. At the same time it ruined the hopes which Feisal had entertained of acting independently with the Beni Sakhr. This cautious and very wealthy tribe asked for dependable allies.

Our movement, clean-cut while alone with a simple enemy, was now bogged in its partner’s contingencies. We had to take our tune from Allenby, and he was not happy. The German offensive in France was stripping him of troops. He would retain Jerusalem, but could not afford a casualty, much less an attack, for months. The War Office promised him Indian divisions from Mesopotamia, and Indian drafts. With these he would rebuild his army on the Indian model; perhaps, after the summer, he might be again in fighting trim: but for the moment we must both just hold on.

This he told me on May the fifth, the date chosen under the Smuts arrangement for the heave northward of the whole army as prelude to the fall of Damascus and Aleppo. As first phase of his arrangement we had undertaken the liability of Maan: and Allenby’s pause stuck us with this siege of a superior force. In addition, the Turks from Amman might now have leisure to sweep us off Aba el Lissan, back to Akaba. In so nasty a situation the common habit of joint operations — cursing the other partner — weighed strongly upon me. However, Allenby’s staunchness was aiming to relieve us. He was threatening the enemy by a vast bridge-head across Jordan, as if he were about to cross a third time. So he would keep Amman tender. To strengthen us on our plateau he offered what technical equipment we needed.

We took the opportunity to ask for repeated air-raids on the Hejaz Railway. General Salmond was called in, and proved as generous, in word and deed, as the Commander-in-Chief. The Royal Air Force kept up a dull, troublesome pressure on Amman from now till the fall of Turkey. Much of the inactivity of the enemy in our lean season was due to the disorganization of their railway by bombing. At tea-time Allenby mentioned the Imperial Camel Brigade in Sinai, regretting that in the new stringency he must abolish it and use its men as mounted
reinforcements. I asked: 'What are you going to do with their camels?' He laughed, and said, 'Ask “Q”.'

Obediently, I went across the dusty garden, broke in upon the Quartermaster-General, Sir Walter Campbell — very Scotch — and repeated my question. He answered firmly that they were earmarked as divisional transport for the second of the new Indian divisions. I explained that I wanted two thousand of them. His first reply was irrelevant: his second conveyed that I might go on wanting. I argued, but he seemed unable to see my side at all. Of course, it was of the nature of a ‘Q’ to be costive.

I returned to Allenby and said aloud, before his party, that there were for disposal two thousand, two hundred riding-camels, and thirteen hundred baggage camels. All were provisionally allotted to transport; but of course, riding-camels were riding-camels. The staff whistled, and looked wise; as though they, too, doubted whether riding-camels could carry baggage. A technicality, even a sham one, might be helpful. Every British officer understood animals, as a point of honour. So I was not astonished when Sir Walter Campbell was asked to dine with the Commander-in-Chief that night.

We sat on the right hand and on the left, and with the soup Allenby began to talk about camels. Sir Walter broke out that the providential dispersing of the camel brigade brought the transport of the ——th Division up to strength; a godsend, for the Orient had been vainly ransacked for camels. He over-acted. Allenby, a reader of Milton, had an acute sense of style: and the line was a weak one. He cared nothing for strengths, the fetish of administrative branches.

He looked at me with a twinkle, 'And what do you want them for?' I reply hotly, 'To put a thousand men into Deraa any day you please'. He smiled and shook his head at Sir Walter Campbell, saying sadly, 'Q, you lose'. The goat became giddy and the sheep sheepish. It was an immense, a regal gift; the gift of unlimited mobility. The Arabs could now win their war when and where they liked.

Next morning I was off to join Feisal in his cool eyrie at Aba el Lissan. We discussed histories, tribes, migration, sentiments, the spring rains, pasture, at length. Finally, I remarked that Allenby had given us two thousand camels. Feisal gasped and caught my knee saying ‘How!’
I told him all the story. He leaped up and kissed me; then he clapped his hands loudly. Hejris’ black shape appeared at the tent-door. ‘Hurry’, cried Feisal, ‘call them.’ Hejris asked whom. ‘Oh, Fahad, Abdulla el Feir, Auda, Motlog, Zaal . . . ’ ‘And not Mirzuk?’ queried Hejris mildly. Feisal shouted at him for a fool, and the black ran off; while I said, ‘It is nearly finished. Soon you can let me go’. He protested, saying that I must remain with them always, and not just till Damascus, as I had promised in Um Lejj. I, who wanted so to get away.

Feet came pattering to the tent-door, and paused, while the chiefs recovered their grave faces and set straight their head-cloths for the entry. One by one they sat down stilly on the rugs, each saying unconcernedly, ‘Please God, good?’ To each Feisal replied, ‘Praise God!’ and they stared in wonder at his dancing eyes.

When the last had rustled in, Feisal told them that God had sent the means of victory — two thousand riding-camels. Our war was to march unchecked to freedom, its triumphant end. They murmured in astonishment; doing their best, as great men, to be calm; eyeing me to guess my share in the event. I said, ‘The bounty of Allenby . . . ’ Zaal cut in swiftly for them all, ‘God keep his life and yours’. I replied, ‘We have been made victorious’, stood up, with a ‘by your leave’ to Feisal, and slipped away to tell Joyce. Behind my back they burst out into wild words of their coming wilder deeds: childish, perhaps, but it would be a pretty war in which each man did not feel that he was winning it.

Joyce also was gladdened and made smooth by the news of the two thousand camels. We dreamed of the stroke to which they should be put: of their march from Beersheba to Akaba: and where for two months we could find grazing for this vast multitude of animals; they must be broken from barley if they were to be of use to us.

These were not pressing thoughts. We had, meanwhile, the need to maintain ourselves all summer on the plateau, besieging Maan, and keeping the railways cut. The task was difficult.

First, about supply. I had just thrown the existing arrangements out of gear. The Egyptian Camel Transport companies had been carrying steadily between Akaba and Aba el Lissan, but carrying less and marching less than our least sanguine estimate. We urged them to increase
weights and speeds, but found ourselves up against cast-iron corps regulations, framed to keep down the figures of animal wastage. By increasing them slightly, we could double the carrying capacity of the column; consequently, I had offered to take over the animals and send back the Egyptian camel-men.

The British, being short of labour, jumped at my idea; almost too quickly. We had a terrible scramble to improvise drivers upon the moment. Goslett, single-handed, had hitherto done supplies, transport, ordnance, paymaster, base commandant. The extra work was cruelty to him. So Dawnay found Scott, a perfect Irishman, for base commandant. He had good temper, capacity, spirit. Akaba breathed quietly. Ordnance we gave to Bright, sergeant or sergeant-major: and Young took over transport and quartermaster work.

Young had overstrained himself, riding furiously between Naimat, Hejaia and Beni Sakhr, between Nasir and Mirzuk and Feisal, striving to combine and move them in one piece. Incidentally he had furiously overstrained the Arabs. In transport duties his drive and ability would be better employed. Using his full power, he grappled with the chaos. He had no stores for his columns, no saddles, no clerks, no veterinaries, no drugs and few drivers, so that to run a harmonious and orderly train was impossible; but Young very nearly did it, in his curious ungrateful way. Thanks to him, the supply problem of the Arab regulars on the plateau was solved.

All this time the face of our Revolt was growing. Feisal, veiled in his tent, maintained incessantly the teaching and preaching of his Arab movement. Akaba boomed: even our field-work was going well. The Arab regulars had just had their third success against Jerdun, the battered station which they made it almost a habit to take and lose. Our armoured cars happened on a Turkish sortie from Maan and smashed it in such style that the opportunity never recurred. Zeid, in command of half the army posted north of Uheida, was showing great vigour. His gaiety of spirit appealed more to the professional officers than did Feisal’s poetry and lean earnestness; so this happy association of the two brothers gave every sort of man a sympathy with one or other of the leaders of the revolt.

Yet there were clouds in the north. At Amman was a forcible
Organizing Ourselves

Turkish concentration of troops earmarked for Maan when supply conditions would let them move. This supply reserve was being put in by rail from Damascus, as well as the bombing attacks of the Royal Air Force from Palestine permitted.

To make head against them, Nasir, our best guerilla general, had been appointed, in advance of Zeid, to do something great against the railway. He had camped in Wadi Hesa, with Hornby, full of explosives and Peake’s trained section of Egyptian Army Camel Corps to help in demolition. Time, till Allenby recovered, was what we had to fight for, and Nasir would very much help our desire if he secured us a month’s breathing space by playing the intangible ghost at the Turkish Army. If he failed we must expect the relief of Maan and an onslaught of the reinvigorated enemy upon Aba el Lissan.
CHAPTER XCVI

NAHIR attacked Hesa station in his old fashion, cutting the line to north and south the night before, and opening a sharp bombardment of the buildings when it was light enough to see. Rasim was the gunner and the gun our Krupp antiquity of Medina, Wejh and Tafileh. When the Turks weakened, the Arabs charged into the station, Beni Sakhr and Howeitat vying for the lead.

We had, of course, no killed; as was ever the way with such tactics. Hornby and Peake reduced the place to a heap of ruins. They blew in the well, the tanks, engines, pumps, buildings, three bridges, rolling stock, and about four miles of rail. Next day Nasir moved north, and destroyed Faraifra station. Peake and Hornby continued work that day and the day following. Altogether it sounded like our biggest demolition. I determined to go up and see for myself.

A dozen of my men marched with me. Below the Rasheidiya ridge we came to the lone tree, Shejerat el Tayar. My Hauranis drew rein under its thorny branches, on which were impaled many tatters of wayfarers’ offered clothes. Mohammed said, ‘Upon you, O Mustafa’. Reluctantly Mustafa let himself down from his saddle and piece by piece took off his clothes, till nearly naked, when he lay down arching himself over the tumbled cairn. The other men dismounted, picked each a thorn, and in solemn file drove them (hard and sharp as brass) deep into his flesh and left them standing there. The Ageyl stared open-mouthed at the ceremony, but before it ended swung themselves monkey-like down, grinning lewdly, and stabbed in their thorns where they would be most painful. Mustafa shivered quietly till he heard Mohammed say, ‘Get up’, using the feminine inflexion. He sadly pulled out the thorns, dressed, and remounted. Abdulla knew no reason for the punishment: and the Hauranis’ manner showed that they did not wish me to ask them. We reached Hesa to find Nasir, with six hundred men, concealed under cliffs and bushes, afraid of enemy aircraft, which had killed many. One bomb had fallen into a pool while eleven camels had been drinking, and had thrown them all, dead,
in a ring about the water-side among torn flowers of oleander. We wrote to Air-Vice-Marshall Salmond for a revengeful counter-stroke.

The railway was still in Nasir’s hand, and whenever they had explosives Hornby and Peake went down to it. They had blown in a cutting, and were developing a new rail-demolition, turning over each section by main force, as it was cut. From Sultani in the north to Jurf in the south, the damage extended. Fourteen miles. Nasir fully understood the importance of maintaining his activity, and there seemed a fair hope of his lasting. He had found a comfortable and bomb-proof cave between two limestone reefs, which articulated like teeth, broke out from the green hill-side. The heat and flies in the valley were not yet formidable. It was running with water: fertile with pasture. Behind lay Tafileh; and if Nasir were hard pressed he had only to send a message, and the mounted peasantry of the villages, on their rough ponies jangling with shrill bells, would come pouring over the range to his support.

The day of our arrival the Turks sent a force of camel corps, cavalry and infantry, down to re-occupy Farasfra as a first counter-stroke. Nasir at once was up and at them. While his machine-guns kept down the Turks’ heads, the Abu Tayi charged up to within a hundred yards of the crumbling wall which was the only defence, and cut out all the camels and some horses. To expose riding-animals to the sight of Beduins was a sure way to lose them.

Afterwards I was down with Auda, near the fork of the valley, when there came the throbbing and moaning overhead of Mercedes engines. Nature stilled itself before the master noise; even the birds and insects hushed. We crawled between fallen boulders, and heard the first bomb drop lower in the valley where Peake’s camp lay hidden in a twelve-foot oleander thicket. The machines were flying towards us, for the next bombs were nearer; and the last fell just in front, with a shattering, dusty roar, by our captured camels.

When the smoke cleared, two of them were kicking in agony on the ground. A faceless man, spraying blood from a fringe of red flesh about his neck, stumbled screaming towards our rocks. He crashed blindly over one and another, tripping and scrambling with arms out-
stretched, maddened by pain. In a moment he lay quiet, and we who had scattered from him ventured near: but he was dead.

I went back to Nasir, safe in his cave with Nawaf el Faiz, brother of Mithgal, head of the Beni Sakhr. Nawaf, a shifty man, was so full and careful of his pride that he would stoop to any private meanness to preserve it publicly: but then he was mad, like all the Faiz clan; uncertain like them; and voluble, with flickering eyes.

Our acquaintance of before the war had been renewed secretly a year before, when three of us crept in after sunset to their rich family tents near Ziza. Fawaz, the senior Faiz, was a notable Arab, a committeeeman of the Damascus group, prominent in the party of independence. He received me with fair words and hospitality, fed us richly, and brought out, after we had talked, his richest bed-quilts.

I had slept an hour or two when a charged voice whispered through a smoke-smelling beard into my ear. It was Nawaf, the brother, to say that, behind the friendly seeming, Fawaz had sent horsemen to Ziza and soon the troops would be here to take me. We were certainly caught. My Arabs crouched in their place, meaning to fight like cornered animals, and kill at least some of the enemy before they themselves died. Such tactics displeased me. When combats came to the physical, bare hand against hand, I was finished. The disgust of being touched revolted me more than the thought of death and defeat: perhaps because one such terrible struggle in my youth had given me an enduring fear of contact: or because I so reverenced my wits and depised my body that I would not be beholden to the second for the life of the first.

I whispered to Nawaf for counsel. He crawled back through the tent-curtain; we followed dragging my few things in their light saddle-pouch. Behind the next tent, his own, sat the camels, kneechaltered and saddled. We mounted circumspectly. Nawaf led out his mare, and guided us, loaded rifle across his thigh, to the railway and beyond it into the desert. There he gave us the star-direction of our supposed goal in Bair. A few days later Sheikh Fawaz was dead.
CHAPTER XC VII

explained to Feisal, that Nasir’s cutting of the line would endure another month; and, after the Turks had got rid of him, it would be yet a third month before they attacked us in Aba el Lissan. By then our new camels should be fit for use in an offensive of our own. I suggested that we ask his father, King Hussein, to transfer to Akaba the regular units at present with Ali and Abdulla. Their reinforcement would raise us to ten thousand strong, in uniformed men.

We would divide them into three parts. The immobile would constitute a retaining force to hold Maan quiet. A thousand, on our new camels, would attack the Deraa-Damascus sector. The balance would form a second expedition, of two or three thousand infantry, to move into the Beni Sakhr country and connect with Allenby at Jericho. The long-distance mounted raid, by taking Deraa or Damascus would compel the Turks to withdraw from Palestine one division, or even two, to restore their communications. By so weakening the enemy, we would give Allenby the power to advance his line, at any rate to Nablus. The fall of Nablus would cut the lateral communication which made the Turks strong in Moab; and they would be compelled to fall back on Amman, yielding us quiet possession of the Jordan bottom. Practically I was proposing that we use up the Hauran Arabs to let us reach Jericho, half-way to our Damascus goal. Feisal fell in with the proposal, and gave me letters to his father advising it. Unhappily the old man was, nowadays, little inclined to take his advice, out of green-eyed hatred for his son who was doing too well and was being disproportionately helped by the British. For dealing with the King I relied on joint-action by Wingate and Allenby, his paymasters. I decided to go up to Egypt personally, to press them to write him letters of the necessary stiffness. In Cairo, Dawnay agreed both to the transfer of the southern regulars, and to the independent offensive. We went to Wingate, argued it, and convinced him that the ideas were good. He wrote letters to King Hussein strongly advising the reinforce-
ment of Feisal. I pressed him to make clear to the King that the continuance of a war-subsidy would depend on his giving effect to our advice: but he refused to be stringent, and couched the letter in terms of politeness, which would be lost on the hard and suspicious old man in Mecca.

Yet the effort promised so much for us that we went up to Allenby, to beg his help with the King. At G.H.Q., we felt a remarkable difference in the air. The place was, as always, throbbing with energy and hope, but now logic and co-ordination were manifest in an uncommon degree. Allenby had a curious blindness of judgement in choosing men, due largely to his positive greatness, which made good qualities in his subordinates seem superfluous; but Chetwode, not content, had interposed again, setting up Bartholomew, his own Chief of Staff, in the third place of the hierarchy. Bartholomew, not made, like Dawnay, with many foreign sides to his imagination, was yet more intricate, yet more polished as a soldier, more careful and conscientious, and seemed a friendly team-leader.

We unrolled before him our scheme to start the ball rolling in the autumn, hoping by our pushes to make it possible for him to come in later vigorously to our support. He listened smiling, and said that we were three days too late. Their new army was arriving to time from Mesopotamia and India; prodigious advances in grouping and training were being made. On June the fifteenth it had been the considered opinion of a private conference that the army would be capable of a general and sustained offensive in September.

The sky was, indeed, opening over us; and we went in to Allenby, who said outright that late in September he would make a grand attack to fulfil the Smuts’ plan even to Damascus and Aleppo. Our role would be as laid down in the spring; we must make the Deraa raid on the two thousand new camels. Times and details would be fixed as the weeks went on, and as Bartholomew’s calculations took shape.

Our hope of victory had been too often dashed for me to take this as assured. So, for second string, I got Allenby’s blessing upon the transfer of Ali’s and Abdullah’s khaki-clad contingents; and set off, fortified, to Jeddah, where I had no more success than I expected. The
King had got wind of my purpose and took refuge, on the pretext of Ramadhan, in Mecca, his inaccessible capital. We talked over the telephone, King Hussein sheltering himself behind the incompetence of the operators in the Mecca exchange, whenever the subject turned dangerous. My thronged mind was not in the mood for farce, so I rang off, put Feisal’s, Wingate’s and Allenby’s letters back unopened into my bag and returned to Cairo in the next ship.