BOOK IX

BALANCING FOR A LAST EFFORT

Chapters XCVIII to CVI

Allenby, in rapid embodiment of reliefs from India and Mesopotamia, so surpassed hope that he was able to plan an Autumn offensive. The near balance of the forces on each side meant that victory would depend on his subtly deceiving the Turks that their entire danger yet lay beyond the Jordan.

We might help, by lying quiet for six weeks, feigning a feebleness which should tempt the Turks to attack.

The Arabs were then to lead off at the critical moment by cutting the railway communications of Palestine.

Such bluff within bluff called for most accurate timing, since the balance would have been wrecked either by a premature Turkish retreat in Palestine, or by their premature attack against the Arabs beyond Jordan. We borrowed from Allenby some Imperial Camel Corps to lend extra colour to our supposed critical situation; while preparations for Deraa went on with no more check than an untimely show of pique from King Hussein.
CHAPTER XCIII

ON July the eleventh Dawnay and I were again talking to Allenby and Bartholomew, and, of their generosity and confidence, seeing the undress working of a general’s mind. It was an experience: technical, reassuring, and very valuable to me, who was mildly a general, too, in my own odd show. Bols was on leave while the plans were working out. Sir Walter Campbell also was absent; Bartholomew and Evans, their deputies, plotted to re-arrange the army transport, regardless of formations, with such elasticity that any pursuit could be sustained.

Allenby’s confidence was like a wall. Before the attack he went to see his troops massed in secrecy, waiting the signal, and told them he was sure, with their good help, of thirty thousand prisoners; this, when the whole game turned on a chance! Bartholomew was most anxious. He said it would be desperate work to have the whole army re-formed by September, and, even if they were ready (actually some brigades existed as such for the first time when they went over), we must not assume that the attack would follow as planned. It could be delivered only in the coastal sector, opposite Ramleh, the railhead, where only could a necessary reserve of stores be gathered. This seemed so obvious that he could not dream of the Turks staying blind, though momentarily their dispositions ignored it.

Allenby’s plan was to collect the bulk of his infantry and all his cavalry under the orange and olive groves of Ramleh just before September the nineteenth. Simultaneously he hoped to make in the Jordan Valley such demonstrations as should persuade the Turks of a concentration there in progress. The two raids to Salt had fixed the Turks’ eyes exclusively beyond Jordan. Every move there, whether of British or Arabs, was accompanied by counter-precautions on the Turks’ part, showing how fearful they were. In the coast sector, the area of real danger, the enemy had absurdly few men. Success hung on maintaining them in this fatal mis-appreciation.

After the Meinertzhagen success, deceptions, which for the ordinary
general were just witty hors d'œuvres before battle, became for Allenby a main point of strategy. Bartholomew would accordingly erect (near Jericho) all condemned tents in Egypt; would transfer veterinary hospitals and sick lines there; would put dummy camps, dummy horses and dummy troops wherever there was plausible room; would throw more bridges across the river; would collect and open against enemy country all captured guns; and on the right days would ensure the movement of non-combatant bodies along the dusty roads, to give the impression of eleventh-hour concentrations for an assault. At the same time the Royal Air Force was going to fill the air with husbanded formations of the latest fighting machines. The preponderance of these would deprive the enemy for days of the advantage of air reconnaissance.

Bartholomew wished us to supplement his efforts with all vigour and ingenuity, from our side of Amman. Yet he warned us that, even with this, success would hang on a thread, since the Turks could save themselves and their army, and give us our concentration to do over again, by simply retiring their coast sector seven or eight miles. The British Army would then be like a fish flapping on dry land, with its railways, its heavy artillery, its dumps, its stores, its camps all misplaced; and without olive groves in which to hide its concentration next time. So, while he guaranteed that the British were doing their utmost, he implored us not to engage the Arabs, on his behalf, in a position from which they could not escape.

The noble prospect sent Dawnay and myself back to Cairo in great settle and cogitation. News from Akaba had raised again the question of defending the plateau against the Turks, who had just turned Nasir out of Hesa and were contemplating a stroke against Aba el Lissan about the end of August, when our Deraa detachment should start. Unless we could delay the Turks another fortnight, their threat might cripple us. A new factor was urgently required.

At this juncture Dawnay was inspired to think of the surviving battalion of the Imperial Camel Corps. Perhaps G.H.Q. might lend it us to confuse the Turks' reckoning. We telephoned Bartholomew, who understood, and backed our request to Bols in Alexandria, and to Allenby. After an active telegraphing, we got our way. Colonel
Buxton, with three hundred men, was lent to us for a month on two
conditions: first, that we should forthwith furnish their scheme of
operations; second, that they should have no casualties. Bartholomew
felt it necessary to apologize for the last magnificent, heart-warming
condition, which he thought unsoldierly!

Dawnay and I sat down with a map and measured that Buxton
should march from the Canal to Akaba; thence, by Rum, to carry
Mudowwara by night-attack; thence by Bair, to destroy the bridge
and tunnel near Amman; and back to Palestine on August the thirtieth.
Their activity would give us a peaceful month, in which our two
thousand new camels could learn to graze, while carrying the extra
dumps of forage and food which Buxton's force would expect.

As we worked out these schemes, there came from Akaba one more
elaborate, worked out graphically by Young for Joyce, on our June
understanding for independent Arab operations in Hauran. They had
figured out the food, ammunition, forage, and transport for two
thousand men of all ranks, from Aba el Lissan to Deraa. They had
taken into consideration all our resources and worked out schedules
by which dumps would be completed and the attack begun in
November.

Even had Allenby not pulled his army together this scheme would
have broken down intrinsically. It depended on the immediate
reinforcement of the Arab Army at Aba el Lissan, which King Hussein
had refused; also November was too near the winter, with its muddy
impassable roads in the Hauran.

Weather and strengths might be matters of opinion: but Allenby
meant to attack on September the nineteenth, and wanted us to lead
off not more than four or less than two days before he did. His words
to me were that three men and a boy with pistols in front of Deraa on
September the sixteenth would fill his conception; would be better
than thousands a week before or a week after. The truth was, he cared
nothing for our fighting power, and did not reckon us part of his
tactical strength. Our purpose, to him, was moral, psychological,
diathetic; to keep the enemy command intent upon the trans-Jordan
front. In my English capacity I shared this view, but on my Arab side
both agitation and battle seemed equally important, the one to serve
the joint success, the other to establish Arab self-respect, without which victory would not be wholesome.

So, unhesitatingly, we laid the Young scheme aside and turned to build up our own. To reach Deraa from Aba el Lissan would take a fortnight: the cutting of the three railways and withdrawal to reform in the desert, another week. Our raiders must carry their maintenance for three weeks. The picture of what this meant was in my head— we had been doing it for two years—and so at once I gave Dawnay my estimate that our two thousand camels, in a single journey, without advanced depots or supplementary supply columns, would suffice five hundred regular mounted infantry, the battery of French quick-firing .65 mountain guns, proportionate machine-guns, two armoured cars, sappers, camel-scouts, and two aeroplanes until we had fulfilled our mission. This seemed like a liberal reading of Allenby’s three men and a boy. We told Bartholomew, and received G.H.Q. blessing.

Young and Joyce were not best pleased when I returned to say that the great schedule had been torn up. I did not call their plans top-heavy and too late: I threw the onus of change on Allenby’s recovery. My new proposal—for which in advance I had pledged their performance—was an intricate dovetailing in the next crowded month and a half, of a ‘spoiling’ raid by the British Camel Corps and the main raid to surprise the Turks by Deraa.

Joyce felt that I had made a mistake. To introduce foreigners would unman the Arabs; and to let them go a month later would be even worse. Young returned a stubborn, combative ‘impossible’ to my idea. The Camel Corps would engross the baggage camels, which otherwise might have enabled the Deraa force to reach its goal. By trying to do two greedy things I should end in doing neither. I argued my case and we had a battle.

In the first place I tackled Joyce concerning the Imperial Camel Corps. They would arrive one morning at Akaba—no Arab suspecting them—and would vanish equally suddenly towards Rumm. From Mudowwara to Kissir bridge they would march in the desert, far from the sight of the Arab Army, and from the hearing of the villages. In the resultant vagueness the enemy intelligence would conclude that the whole of the defunct camel brigade was now on Feisal’s front. Such an
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acccession of shock-strength to Feisal would make the Turks very
tender of the safety of their railway: while Buxton's appearance at
Kissir, apparently on preliminary reconnaissance, would put credence
into the wildest tales of our intention shortly to attack Amman. Joyce,
disarmed by these reasonings, now backed me with his favourable
opinion.

For Young's transport troubles I had little sympathy. He, a new-
comer, said my problems were insoluble: but I had done such things
casually, without half his ability and concentration; and knew they
were not even difficult. For the Camel Corps, we left him to grapple
with weights and time-tables, since the British Army was his profession;
and though he would not promise anything (except that it could not
be done), done of course it was, and two or three days before the
necessary time. The Deraa raid was a different proposition, and point
by point I disputed his conception of its nature and equipment.

I crossed out forage, the heaviest item, after Bair. Young became
ironic upon the patient endurance of camels: but this year the pasture
was grand in the Azrak Deraa region. From the men's food I cut off
provision for the second attack, and the return journey. Young
supposed aloud that the men would fight well hungry. I explained that
we would live on the country. Young thought it a poor country to
live on. I called it very good.

He said that the ten days' march home after the attacks would be a
long fast: but I had no intention of coming back to Akaba. Then
might he ask if it was defeat or victory which was in my mind? I
pointed out how each man had a camel under him, and if we killed
only six camels a day the whole force would feed abundantly. Yet
this did not solace him. I went on to cut down his petrol, cars, ammu-
nition, and everything else to the exact point, without margin, which
would meet what we planned. In riposte he became aggressively
regular. I prosed forth on my hoary theorem that we lived by our
raggedness and beat the Turk by our uncertainty. Young's scheme was
faulty, because precise.

Instead, we would march a camel column of one thousand men to
Azrak where their concentration must be complete on September the
thirteenth. On the sixteenth we would envelop Deraa, and cut its
railways. Two days later we would fall back east of the Hejaz Railway and wait events with Allenby. As reserve against accident we would purchase barley in Jebel Druse, and store it at Azrak.

Nuri Shaalan would accompany us with a contingent of Rualla: also the Serdiyeh, the Serahin; and Haurani peasants of the ‘Hollow Land’, under Talal el Hareidhin. Young thought it a deplorable adventure. Joyce, who had loved our dog-fight conference, was game to try, though doubting I was ambitious. However, it was sure that both would do their best, since the thing was already settled; and Dawnay had helped the organizing side by getting us from G.H.Q. the loan of Stirling, a skilled staff officer, tactful and wise. Stirling’s passion for horses was a passport to intimacy with Feisal and the chiefs.

Among the Arab officers were distributed some British military decorations, tokens of their gallantry about Maan. These marks of Allenby’s esteem heartened the Arab Army. Nuri Pasha Said offered to command the Deraa expedition, for which his courage, authority and coolness marked him as the ideal leader. He began to pick for it the best four hundred men in the army.

Pisani, the French commandant, fortified by a Military Cross, and in urgent pursuit of a D.S.O., took bodily possession of the four Schneider guns which Cousse had sent down to us after Bremond left; and spent agonized hours with Young, trying to put the scheduled ammunition, and mule-forage, with his men and his own private kitchen on to one-half the requisite camels. The camps buzzed with eagerness and preparations, and all promised well.

Our own family rifts were distressing, but inevitable. The Arab affair had now outgrown our rough and ready help-organization. But the next was probably the last act, and by a little patience we might make our present resources serve. The troubles were only between ourselves, and thanks to the magnificent unselfishness of Joyce, we preserved enough of team-spirit to prevent a complete breakdown, however high-handed I appeared: and I had a reserve of confidence to carry the whole thing, if need be, on my shoulders. They used to think me boastful when I said so: but my confidence was not so much ability to do a thing perfectly, as a preference for botching it somehow rather than letting it go altogether by default.
CHAPTER XCIX

It was now the end of July, and by the end of August the Deraa expedition must be on the road. In the meantime Buxton’s Camel Corps had to be guided through their programme, Nuri Shaalan warned, the armoured cars taught their road to Azrak, and landing-grounds found for aeroplanes. A busy month. Nuri Shaalan, the furthest, was tackled first. He was called to meet Feisal at Jefer about August the seventh. Buxton’s force seemed the second need. I told Feisal, under seal, of their coming. To ensure their having no casualties, they must strike Mudowwara with absolute surprise. I would guide them myself to Rumm, in the first critical march through the fag-ends of Howeitat about Akaba.

Accordingly I went down to Akaba, where Buxton let me explain to each company their march, and the impatient nature of the Allies whom they, unasked, had come to help; begging them to turn the other cheek if there was a row; partly because they were better educated than the Arabs, and therefore less prejudiced; partly because they were very few. After such solemnities came the ride up the oppressive gorge of Istm, under the red cliffs of Nejed and over the breast-like curves of Imran — that slow preparation for Rumm’s greatness — till we passed through the gap before the rock Khuzail, and into the inner shrine of the springs, with its worship-compelling coolness. There the landscape refused to be accessory, but took the skies, and we chattering humans became dust at its feet.

In Rumm the men had their first experience of watering in equality with Arabs, and found it troublesome. However, they were wonderfully mild, and Buxton was an old Sudan official, speaking Arabic, and understanding nomadic ways; very patient, good-humoured, sympathetic. Hazaa was helpful in admonishing the Arabs, and Stirling and Marshall, who accompanied the column, were familiars of the Beni Atiyeh. Thanks to their diplomacy, and to the care of the British rank and file, nothing untoward happened.

I stayed at Rumm for their first day, dumb at the unreality of these
healthy-looking fellows, like stiff-bodied school boys in their shirt-sleeves and shorts, as they wandered, anonymous and irresponsible, about the cliffs which had been my private resort. Three years of Sinai had burned the colour from their tanned faces, in which the blue eyes flickered weakly against the dark possessed gaze of the Beduin. For the rest they were a broad-faced, low-browed people, blunt-featured beside the fine-drawn Arabs whom generations of in-breeding had sharpened to a radiance ages older than the primitive, blotched, honest Englishmen. Continental soldiers looked lumpish beside our lean-bred fellows: but against my supple Nejdis the British in their turn looked lumpish.

Later I rode for Akaba, through the high-walled Itm, alone now with six silent, unquestioning guards, who followed after me like shadows, harmonious and submerged in their natural sand and bush and hill; and a home-sickness came over me, stressing vividly my outcast life among these Arabs, while I exploited their highest ideals and made their love of freedom one more tool to help England win.

It was evening, and on the straight bar of Sinai ahead the low sun was falling, its globe extravagantly brilliant in my eyes, because I was dead-tired of my life, longing as seldom before for the moody skies of England. This sunset was fierce, stimulant, barbaric; reviving the colours of the desert like a draught — as indeed it did each evening, in a new miracle of strength and heat — while my longings were for weakness, chills and grey mistiness, that the world might not be so crystalline clear, so definitely right and wrong.

We English, who lived years abroad among strangers, went always dressed in the pride of our remembered country, that strange entity which had no part with the inhabitants, for those who loved England most, often liked Englishmen least. Here, in Arabia, in the war's need, I was trading my honesty for her sustenance, inevitably.

In Akaba the rest of my bodyguard were assembled, prepared for victory, for I had promised the Hauran men that they should pass this great feast in their freed villages: and its date was near. So for the last time we mustered on the windy beach by the sea's edge, the sun on its brilliant waves glinting in rivalry with my flashing and changing men.
They were sixty. Seldom had the Zaagi brought so many of his troop together, and as we rode into the brown hills for Guweira he was busy sorting them in Ageyl fashion, centre and wings, with poets and singers on the right and left. So our ride was musical. It hurt him I would not have a banner, like a prince.

I was on my Ghazala, the old grandmother camel, now again magnificently fit. Her foal had lately died, and Abdulla, who rode next me, had skinned the little carcase, and carried the dry pelt behind his saddle, like a crupper piece. We started well, thanks to the Zaagi’s chanting, but after an hour Ghazala lifted her head high, and began to pace uneasily, picking up her feet like a sword-dancer.

I tried to urge her; but Abdulla dashed alongside me, swept his cloak about him, and sprang from his saddle, calf’s skin in hand. He lighted with a splash of gravel in front of Ghazala, who had come to a standstill, gently moaning. On the ground before her he spread the little hide, and drew her head down to it. She stopped crying, shuffled its dryness thrice with her lips; then again lifted her head and, with a whimper, strode forward. Several times in the day this happened; but afterwards she seemed to forget.

At Guweira, Siddons had an aeroplane waiting. Nuri Shaalan and Feisal wanted me at once in Jefer. The air was thin and bumpy, so that we hardly scraped over the crest of Shtar. I sat wondering if we would crash, almost hoping it. I felt sure Nuri was about to claim fulfilment of our dishonourable half-bargain, whose execution seemed more impure than its thought. Death in the air would be a clean escape; yet I scarcely hoped it, not from fear, for I was too tired to be much afraid: nor from scruple, for our lives seemed to me absolutely our own, to keep or give away; but from habit, for lately I had risked myself only when it seemed profitable to our cause.

I was busy compartmenting-up my mind, finding instinct and reason as ever at strong war. Instinct said ‘Die’, but reason said that was only to cut the mind’s tether, and loose it into freedom: better to seek some mental death, some slow wasting of the brain to sink it below these puzzlements. An accident was meaner than deliberate fault. If I did not hesitate to risk my life, why fuss to dirty it? Yet life and honour seemed in different categories, not able to be sold one for another: and
for honour, had I not lost that a year ago when I assured the Arabs that England kept her plighted word?

Or was honour like the Sybil’s leaves, the more that was lost the more precious the little left? Its part equal to the whole? My self-secrecy had left me no arbiter of responsibility. The debauch of physical work yet ended in a craving for more, while the everlasting doubt, the questioning, bound up my mind in a giddy spiral and left me never space for thought.

So we came at last, alive, to Jefer, where met us Feisal and Nuri in the smoothest spirits, with no mention of my price. It seemed incredible that this old man had freely joined our youth. For he was very old; livid, and worn, with a grey sorrow and remorse about him and a bitter smile the only mobility of his face. Upon his coarse eyelashes the eyelids sagged down in tired folds, through which, from the overhead sun, a red light glittered into his eye-sockets and made them look like fiery pits in which the man was slowly burning. Only the dead black of his dyed hair, only the dead skin of the face, with its net of lines, betrayed his seventy years.

There was ceremonial talk about this little-spoken leader, for with him were the head men of his tribe, famous sheikhs so bodied out with silks of their own wearing, or of Feisal’s gift, that they rustled like women while moving in slow state like oxen. First of them was Faris: like Hamlet, not forgiving Nuri his murdered father, Sottam: a lean man with drooping moustache, and white, unnatural face, who met the hidden censure of the world with a soft manner and luscious deprecating voice. ‘Yifham’ he squeaked of me in astonishment ‘He understands our Arabic’. Trad and Sultan were there, round-eyed, grave, and direct-spoken; honourable figures of men, and great leaders of cavalry. Also Mijhem, the rebellious, had been brought in by Feisal and reconciled with his unwilling uncle, who seemed only half to tolerate his small-featured bleak presence beside him, though Mijhem’s manner was eagerly friendly.

Mijhem was a great leader too, Trad’s rival in the conduct of raids, but weak and cruel at heart. He sat next Khalid, Trad’s brother, another healthy, cheerful rider, like Trad in face, but not so full a man. Durzi ibn Dughmi swelled in and welcomed me, reminding me
ungratefully of his greediness at Nebk: a one-eyed, sinister, hook-nosed man; heavy, menacing and mean, but brave. There was the Khaffaji, the spoilt child of Nuri's age, who looked for equality of friendliness from me, because of his father, and not for any promise in himself: he was young enough to be glad of the looming adventure of war and proud of his new bristling weapons.

Bender, the laughing boy, fellow in years and play with the Khaffaji, tripped me before them all by begging for a place in my bodyguard. He had heard from my Rahail, his foster-brother, of their immoderate griefs and joys, and servitude called to him with its unwholesome glamour. I fenced, and when he pleaded further, turned it by muttering that I was not a King to have Shaalan servants. Nuri's sombre look met mine for a moment, in approval.

Beside me sat Rahail, peacocking his lusty self in strident clothes. Under cover of the conversation he whispered me the name of each chief. They had not to ask who I was, for my clothes and appearance were peculiar in the desert. It was notoriety to be the only clean-shaven one, and I doubled it by wearing always the suspect pure silk, of the whitest (at least outside), with a gold and crimson Meccan head-robe, and gold dagger. By so dressing I staked a claim which Feisal's public consideration of me confirmed.

Many times in such councils had Feisal won over and set aflame new tribes, many times had the work fallen to me; but never until to-day had we been actively together in one company, reinforcing and relaying one another, from our opposite poles: and the work went like child's play; the Rualla melted in our double heat. We could move them with a touch and a word. There was tenseness, a holding of breath, the glitter of belief in their thin eyes so fixed on us.

Feisal brought nationality to their minds in a phrase, which set them thinking of Arab history and language; then he dropped into silence for a moment: for with these illiterate masters of the tongue words were lively, and they liked to savour each, unmingled, on the palate. Another phrase showed them the spirit of Feisal, their fellow and leader, sacrificing everything for the national freedom; and then silence again, while they imagined him day and night in his tent, teaching, preaching, ordering and making friends: and they felt
something of the idea behind this pictured man sitting there iconically, drained of desires, ambitions, weakness, faults; so rich a personality enslaved by an abstraction, made one-eyed, one armed, with the one sense and purpose, to live or die in its service.

Of course it was a picture-man; not flesh and blood, but nevertheless true, for his individuality had yielded its third dimension to the idea, had surrendered the world’s wealth and artifices. Feisal was hidden in his tent, veiled to remain our leader: while in reality he was nationality’s best servant, its tool, not its owner. Yet in the tented twilight nothing seemed more noble.

He went on to conjure up for them the trammelled enemy on the eternal defensive, whose best end was to have done no more than the necessary. While we abstinents swam calmly and coolly in the friendly silence of the desert, till pleased to come ashore.

Our conversation was cunningly directed to light trains of their buried thoughts; that the excitement might be their own and the conclusions native, not inserted by us. Soon we felt them kindle: we leaned back, watching them move and speak, and vivify each other with mutual heat, till the air was vibrant, and in stammered phrases they experienced the first heave and thrust of notions which ran up beyond their sight. They turned to hurry us, themselves the begetters, and we laggard strangers: strove to make us comprehend the full intensity of their belief; forgot us; flashed out the means and end of our desire. A new tribe was added to our comity: though Nuri’s plain ‘Yes’ at the end carried more than all had said.

In our preaching there was nothing merely nervous. We did our best to exclude the senses, that our support might be slow, durable, unsentimental. We wanted no rice-converts. Persistently we did refuse to let our abundant and famous gold bring over those not spiritually convinced. The money was a confirmation; mortar, not building stone. To have bought men would have put our movement on the base of interest; whereas our followers must be ready to go all the way without other mixture in their motives than human frailty. Even I, the stranger, the godless fraud inspiring an alien nationality, felt a delivery from the hatred and eternal questioning of self in my imitation
of their bondage to the idea; and this despite the lack of instinct in my own performance.

For naturally I could not long deceive myself; but my part was worked out so flippantly that none but Joyce, Nesib and Mohammed el Dheilan seemed to know I was acting. With man-instinctive, anything believed by two or three had a miraculous sanction to which individual ease and life might honestly be sacrificed. To man-rational, wars of nationality were as much a cheat as religious wars, and nothing was worth fighting for: nor could fighting, the act of fighting, hold any meed of intrinsic virtue. Life was so deliberately private that no circumstances could justify one man in laying violent hands upon another's: though a man's own death was his last free will, a saving grace and measure of intolerable pain.

We made the Arabs strain on tip-toe to reach our creed, for it led to works, a dangerous country where men might take the deed for the will. My fault, my blindness of leadership (eager to find a quick means to conversion) allowed them this finite image of our end, which properly existed only in unending effort towards unattainable imagined light. Our crowd seeking light in things were like pathetic dogs snuffling round the shank of a lamp-post. It was only myself who valeted the abstract, whose duty took him beyond the shrine.

The irony was in my loving objects before life or ideas; the incongruity in my answering the infectious call of action, which laid weight on the diversity of things. It was a hard task for me to straddle feeling and action. I had had one craving all my life — for the power of self-expression in some imaginative form — but had been too diffuse ever to acquire a technique. At last accident, with perverted humour, in casting me as a man of action had given me place in the Arab Revolt, a theme ready and epic to a direct eye and hand, thus offering me an outlet in literature, the technique-less art. Whereupon I became excited only over mechanism. The epic mode was alien to me, as to my generation. Memory gave me no clue to the heroic, so that I could not feel such men as Auda in myself. He seemed fantastic as the hills of Rumm, old as Mallory.

Among the Arabs I was the disillusioned, the sceptic, who envied their cheap belief. The unperceived sham looked so well-fitting and
becoming a dress for shoddy man. The ignorant, the superficial, the deceived were the happy among us. By our swindle they were glorified. We paid for them our self-respect, and they gained the deepest feeling of their lives. The more we condemned and despised ourselves, the more we could cynically take pride in them, our creatures. It was so easy to overcredit others: so impossible to write down their motives to the level of our own uncharitable truth. They were our dupes, wholeheartedly fighting the enemy. They blew before our intentions like chaff, being not chaff, but the bravest, simplest and merriest of men. Credo quia sum? But did not the being believed by many make for a distorted righteousness? The mounting together of the devoted hopes of years from near-sighted multitudes, might endow even an unwilling idol with Godhead, and strengthen It whenever men prayed silently to Him.
Upon this text my mind went weaving across its dusty space, amid the sunbeam thoughts and their dancing motes of idea. Then I saw that this preferring the Unknown to the God was a scapegoat idea, which lulled only to a false peace. To endure by order, or because it was a duty — that was easy. The soldier suffered only involuntary knocks; whereas our will had to play the ganger till the workmen fainted, to keep in a safe place and thrust others into danger. It might have been heroic to have offered up my own life for a cause in which I could not believe: but it was a theft of souls to make others die in sincerity for my graven image. Because they accepted our message as truth, they were ready to be killed for it; a condition which made their acts more proper than glorious, a logical bastard fortitude, suitable to a profit and loss balance of conduct. To invent a message, and then with open eye to perish for its self-made image — that was greater.

The whole business of the movement seemed to be expressible only in terms of death and life. Generally we were conscious of our flesh because it hurt us. Joy came sharper from our long habitude of pain; but our resources in suffering seemed greater than our capacity for gladness. Lethargy played its part here. Both emotions were in our gift, for our pain was full of eddies, confusing its purity.

A reef on which many came to a shipwreck of estimation was the vanity that our endurance might win redemption, perhaps for all a race. Such false investiture bred a hot though transient satisfaction, in that we felt we had assumed another’s pain or experience, his personality. It was triumph, and a mood of enlargement; we had avoided our sultry selves, conquered our geometrical completeness, snatched a momentary ‘change of mind’.

Yet in reality we had borne the vicarious for our own sakes, or at least because it was pointed for our benefit: and could escape from this knowledge only by a make-belief in sense as well as in motive.

The self-immolated victim took for his own the rare gift of sacrifice;
and no pride and few pleasures in the world were so joyful, so rich as this choosing voluntarily another's evil to perfect the self. There was a hidden selfishness in it, as in all perfections. To each opportunity there could be only one vicar, and the snatching of it robbed the fellows of their due hurt. Their vicar rejoiced, while his brethren were wounded in their manhood. To accept humbly so rich a release was imperfection in them: their gladness at the saving of its cost was sinful in that it made them accessory, part-guilty of inflicting it upon their mediator. His purer part, for the mediator, might have been to stand among the crowd, to watch another win the cleanliness of a redeemer's name. By the one road lay self-perfection, by the other self-immolation, and a making perfect of the neighbour. Hauptmann told us to take as generously as we gave: but rather we seemed like the cells of a beehive, of which one might change, or swell itself, only at the cost of all.

To endure for another in simplicity gave a sense of greatness. There was nothing loftier than a cross, from which to contemplate the world. The pride and exhilaration of it were beyond conceit. Yet each cross, occupied, robbed the late-comers of all but the poor part of copying; and the meanest of things were those done by example. The virtue of sacrifice lay within the victim's soul.

Honest redemption must have been free and child-minded. When the expiator was conscious of the under-motives and the after-glory of his act, both were wasted on him. So the introspective altruist appropriated a share worthless, indeed harmful, to himself, for had he remained passive, his cross might have been granted to an innocent. To rescue simple ones from such evil by paying for them his complicated self would be avaricious in the modern man. He, thought-riddled, could not share their belief in others' discharge through his agony, and they, looking on him without understanding, might feel the shame which was the manly disciple's lot: or might fail to feel it and incur the double punishment of ignorance.

Or was this shame, too, a self-abnegation, to be admitted and admired for its own sake? How was it right to let men die because they did not understand? Blindness and folly aping the way of right were punished more heavily than purposed evil, at least in the present consciousness and remorse of man alive. Complex men who knew
how self-sacrifice uplifted the redeemer and cast down the bought, and who held back in this knowledge, might so let a foolish brother take the place of false nobility and its later awakened due of heavier sentence. There seemed no straight walking for us leaders in this crooked lane of conduct, ring within ring of unknown, shamefaced motives cancelling or double-charging their precedents.

Yet I cannot put down my acquiescence in the Arab fraud to weakness of character or native hypocrisy: though of course I must have had some tendency, some aptitude, for deceit, or I would not have deceived men so well, and persisted two years in bringing to success a deceit which others had framed and set afoot. I had had no concern with the Arab Revolt in the beginning. In the end I was responsible for its being an embarrassment to the inventors. Where exactly in the interim my guilt passed from accessory to principal, upon what headings I should be condemned, were not for me to say. Suffice it that since the march to Akaba I bitterly repented my entanglement in the movement, with a bitterness sufficient to corrode my inactive hours, but insufficient to make me cut myself clear of it. Hence the wobbling of my will, and endless, vapid complainings.
CHAPTER CI

Siddons flew me back to Guweira that evening, and in the night at Akaba I told Dawnay, just arrived, that life was full, but slipping smoothly. Next morning we heard by aeroplane how Buxton’s force had fared at Mudowwara. They decided to assault it before dawn mainly by means of bombers, in three parties, one to enter the station, the other two for the main redoubts.

Accordingly, before midnight white tapes were laid as guides to the zero point. The opening had been timed for a quarter to four but the way proved difficult to find, so that daylight was almost upon them before things began against the southern redoubt. After a number of bombs had burst in and about it, the men rushed up and took it easily—to find that the station party had achieved their end a moment before. These alarms roused the middle redoubt, but only for defeat. Its men surrendered twenty minutes later.

The northern redoubt, which had a gun, seemed better-hearted and splashed its shots freely into the station yard, and at our troops. Buxton, under cover of the southern redoubt, directed the fire of Brodie’s guns which, with their usual deliberate accuracy, sent in shell after shell. Siddons came over in his machines and bombed it, while the Camel Corps from north and east and west subjected the breastworks to severe Lewis gun-fire. At seven in the morning the last of the enemy surrendered quietly. We had lost four killed and ten wounded. The Turks lost twenty-one killed, and one hundred and fifty prisoners, with two field-guns and three machine-guns.

Buxton at once set the Turks to getting steam on the pumping engine, so that he could water his camels, while men blew in the wells, and smashed the engine-pumps, with two thousand yards of rail. At dusk, charges at the foot of the great water-tower spattered it in single stones across the plain: Buxton a moment later called ‘Walk-march!’ to his men, and the four-hundred camels, rising like one and roaring like the day of judgment, started off for Jefer. Dawnay went up very brightly to Aba el Lissan, to greet Feisal. Allenby had sent him across to give Feisal a warning message. He was to beg him to do nothing
rash, as the British push was a chance, and if it failed the Arabs would be on the wrong side of Jordan to be given help. Particularly, Allenby begged Feisal not to rush upon Damascus, but to hold his hand till events were surely favourable.

This very sound and proper caution had come on my account. Exasperated one night at G.H.Q., I had blurted out that to me 1918 seemed the last chance, and we could take Damascus, anyhow, whatever happened at Deraa or Ramleh; since it was better to have taken it and lost it, than never to have taken it at all.

Feisal smiled wisely at Dawnay’s homily, and replied that he would try this autumn for Damascus though the heavens fell, and, if the British were not able to carry their share of the attack, he would save his own people by making separate peace with Turkey.

He had been long in touch with elements in Turkey, Jemal Pasha opening the correspondence. By instinct, when sober, Jemal was Islamic, and to him the revolt of Mecca was a judgement. He was ready to do almost anything to compose such a breach in the faith. His letters were, for this reason, illuminating. Feisal sent them to Mecca and Egypt, hoping that they would read into them what we did: but the points were taken literally, and we received injunction to reply that the sword was now our judge. This was magnificent; but in war so rich a diathetical opportunity could not be missed.

True, that accommodation with Jemal was not possible. He had lopped the tall heads of Syria, and we should deny our friends’ blood if we admitted him to our peace: but by indicating this subtly in our reply we might widen the national-clerical rift in Turkey.

Our particular targets were the anti-German section of the General Staff, under Mustapha Kemal, who were too keen on the ‘Turkishness’ of their mission to deny the right of autonomy to the Arabic provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, Feisal sent back tendentious answers; and the correspondence continued brilliantly. The Turkish soldiers began to complain of the Pietists, who put relics before strategy. The Nationalists wrote that Feisal was only putting into premature and disastrous activity their own convictions upon the just, inevitable self-determination of Turkey.

Knowledge of the ferment affected Jemal’s determination. At first
we were offered autonomy for Hejaz. Then Syria was admitted to the benefit: then Mesopotamia. Feisal seemed still not content; so Jemal’s deputy (while his master was in Constantinople) boldly added a Crown to the offered share of Hussein of Mecca. Lastly, they told us they saw logic in the claim of the Prophet’s family to the spiritual leadership of Islam!

The comic side of the letters must not obscure their real help in dividing the Turkish Staff. Old-fashioned Moslems thought the Sherif an unpardonable sinner. Modernists thought him a sincere but impatient Nationalist misled by British promises. They had a desire to correct him rather by argument than by military defeat.

Their strongest card was the Sykes-Picot agreement, an old-style division of Turkey between England, France, and Russia, made public by the Soviets. Jemal read the more spiteful paragraphs at a banquet in Beyrout. For a while the disclosure hurt us; justly, for we and the French had thought to plaster over a split in policy by a formula vague enough for each to interpret in his divergent way.

Fortunately, I had early betrayed the treaty’s existence to Feisal, and had convinced him that his escape was to help the British so much that after peace they would not be able, for shame, to shoot him down in its fulfilment; while, if the Arabs did as I intended, there would be no one-sided talk of shooting. I begged him to trust not in our promises, like his father, but in his own strong performance.

Conveniently, at this juncture the British Cabinet, in joyous style, gave with the left hand also. They promised to the Arabs, or rather to an unauthorized committee of seven Gothamites in Cairo, that the Arabs should keep, for their own, the territory they conquered from Turkey in the war. The glad news circulated over Syria.

To help the downcast Turks, and to show us that it could give as many promises as there were parties, the British finally countered document A to the Sherif, B to their Allies, C to the Arab Committee, by document D to Lord Rothschild, a new power, whose race was promised something equivocal in Palestine. Old Nuri Shaalam, wrinkling his wise nose, returned to me with his file of documents, asking in puzzlement which of them all he might believe. As before, I glibly repeated ‘The last in date’, and the Emir’s sense of the honour
of his word made him see the humour. Ever after he did his best for our joint cause, only warning me, when he failed in a promise, that it had been superseded by a later intention!

However, Jemal went on hoping, he being an obstinate and ruffianly man. After Allenby’s defeat at Salt, he sent down to us the Emir Mohammed Said, brother of the egregious Abd el Kadir. Mohammed Said, a low-browed degenerate with a bad mouth, was as devious as his brother, but less brave. He was very modest as he stood before Feisal and offered him Jemal’s peace.

Feisal told him that he was come at an opportune moment. He could offer Jemal the loyal behaviour of the Arab Army, if Turkey evacuated Amman, and handed over its province to Arab keeping. The seely Algerian, thinking he had scored a huge success, rushed back to Damascus: where Jemal nearly hanged him for his pains.

Mustafa Kemal, alarmed, begged Feisal not to play into Jemal’s hands, promising that when the Arabs were installed in their capital, the disaffected in Turkey would rally them, and use their territory as a base from which to attack Enver and his German allies in Anatolia. Mustafa hoped that the adhesion of all Turkish forces east of the Taurus would enable him to march direct on Constantinople.

Events at the end made abortive these complicated negotiations, which were not disclosed to Egypt or to Mecca, because of the disappointing issue of our first confidence. I feared that the British might be shaken at Feisal’s thus entertaining separate relations. Yet in fairness to the fighting Arabs, we could not close all avenues of accommodation with Turkey. If the European war failed, it was their only way out: and I had always the lurking fear that Great Britain might forestall Feisal and conclude its own separate peace, not with the Nationalist, but with the Conservative Turks.

The British Government had gone very far in this direction, without informing her smallest ally. Our information of the precise steps, and of the proposals (which would have been fatal to so many of the Arabs in arms on our side), came, not officially, to me, but privately. It was only one of the twenty times in which friends helped me more than did our Government: whose action and silence were at once an example, a spur and a silence to me to do the like.
CHAPTER CII

After the peace-talk we could set again to clean work. Joyce and myself decided upon another of our joint car excursions, this time to Azrak, to break trail so far towards Deraa. Therefore we ran out to Jefer to meet the victorious Camel Corps, who came gliding, in splendid trim and formal appearance, across the shining flat just before sunset, officers and men delighted at their Mudowwara success, and their freedom from orders and restraint in the desert. Buxton said they were fit to go anywhere.

They would rest two nights and draw four days' rations from their store, duly set out near Auda's tent by Young's care. Accordingly, on the morrow, early, Joyce and I got into our tender, with the resourceful Rolls to drive us, and ran easily into Wadi Bair, at whose wells lay Alwain, Auda's kinsman, a smooth-cheeked, oppressed silent man; hiding, to possess himself in peace far from Auda.

We stopped only the few minutes to arrange with him the safety of Buxton's men; and then drove out, with a young and very wild Sherari to help us find our way. His camel-training would not equip him to road-pick for a five-ton armoured car: but his knowing the track might serve other cars coming up by themselves later.

The plateau of Erha was good going, its flint openings interspersed with beds of hard mud; and we devoured the fast miles into the shallow heads of Wadi Jinz, well grown with pasture.

There, numbers of grazing camels were being driven anxiously together by their ragged herdsmen of the Abu Tayi, who, riding bareheaded, rifles in hand, were singing a war-chant. When they heard our roaring exhausts they rushed towards us, with urgent shouts of mounted men seen lurking in the low grounds ahead. We put the cars in the direction and after a little flushed five camel-riders, who made off northwards at their best. We ran them down in ten minutes. They couched their camels gracefully and came to meet us as friends — the only role left them, since naked men could not quarrel with swifter men in armour. They were Jazi Howeitat, undoubted robbers, but now

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all kindness, crying loudly at the pleasure of meeting me here suddenly. I was a little short, and ordered them back to their tents at once. They went off, crestfallen, westwards.

We followed Um Kharug's east bank, finding the way firm, but slow, for there were gutters of tributaries to cross; and we had to lay brushwood fascines where the old beds of the flood-water were soft or full of sand. Towards the end of the day the valleys grew thick with tufted grass, grazing for our prospective caravans.

In the morning the northern air and fresh wind of this desert were so cool to us that we made a hot breakfast before we cranked up the cars and purred over the meeting of Um Kharug and Dhirwa, over the broad basin of Dhirwa itself, and past its imperceptible water-parting into the Jesha. These were shallow systems running into Sirhan, by Ammari, which I meant to visit; for if evil came to us at Azrak, our next refuge should be Ammari, if accessible to cars. Such battalions of 'ifs' skirmished about every new plan continually.

The night's rest had refreshed Rolls and Sanderson, and they drove splendidly over the saffron ridge of the little Jesha into the great valley. In the afternoon we saw the chalk banks, and turned down their ashy slopes, into the Sirhan, just by the water-holes. This made our retreat always safe, for no enemy would be mobile enough to close both Azrak and Ammari at once to us.

So we refilled our radiators with the horrible water of the pool in which Farraj and Daud had played, and drew westward over the open ridges, until far enough from the wells to acquit raiding parties from the need to stumble on us in the dark. There Joyce and I sat down and watched a sunset, which grew from grey to pink, and to red; and then to a crimson so intolerably deep that we held our breath in trepidation for some stroke of flame or thunder to break its dizzy stillness. The men, meanwhile, cut open tinned meats, boiled tea, and laid them out with biscuits on a blanket for our supper table. Afterwards there were more blankets, in which we slept lusciously.

Next day we ran quickly across the delta of Ghadaf till we were out on the immense mud-flat which stretched for seven miles, southward and eastward, from the marshes by the old castle of Azrak.

To-day the mirage blotted its limits for us with blurs of steely blue,
which were the tamarisk bounds raised high in the air and smoothed by heat-vapour. I wanted the Mejaber springs, down whose tree-grown bed we might creep unperceived: so Rolls made his car leap forward in a palpitant rush across the great width. The earth fell away in front of us, and a plume like a dust-devil waved along our track behind.

At the end the brakes sang protestingly as we slowed into a young plantation of tamarisk, tall on heaps of wind-collected sand. We twisted through them on the hard, intervening soil, till tamarisk ceased, and damp sand, speckled with close thorn-bushes, took its place. The cars stopped behind the hummock of Ain el Assad, under cover of this high-lipped cup of reeds, between whose vivid stems the transparent water dripped like jewels.

We went gently up the knoll of graves over the great pools, and saw that the watering places were empty. A mirage hung over the open spaces: but here, where the ground was bushed, no heat-waves could collect, and the strong sunlight showed us the valley as crystal clear as its running waters, and deserted except by wild birds, and these herds of gazelles, which, alarmed by the popple of our closed exhausts, were grouping timidly in preparation for flight.

Rolls drew his tender past the Roman fish-pond; we skirted the western lava-field, along the now hard, grass-grown swamp, to the blue walls of the silent fort, with its silken-sounding palms, behind whose stillness lay perhaps more fear than peace. I felt guilty at introducing the throbbing car, and its trim crew of khaki-clad northerners, into the remoteness of this most hidden legendary place: but my anticipation went astray, for it was the men who looked real and the background which became scene-painting. Their newness and certainty (the Definiteness of British troops in uniform) did Azrak greater honour than plain loneliness.

We stopped only a moment. Joyce and I climbed the western tower, and agreed upon the manifold advantages of Azrak as a working base; though, to my sorrow, there was no grazing here, so that we could not linger in it for the interval of our first and second raids. Then we crossed to the northern lobe of the mud-flat, a fit landing-ground for the aeroplanes which Siddons was adding to our flying column. Amongst other qualities was its visibility. Our machines flying two
hundred miles to this, their new base, could not fail to see its electrum shield reflecting the sunlight.

We went back to Ain el Assad, where the armoured car was, and led it at a faster pace out to the open flint desert once again. It was mid-afternoon, and very hot, especially in the glowing metal of the steel-turreted car; but the broiling drivers kept at it, and before sunset we were on the dividing ridge between the Jesha valleys, to find a shorter and easier way than our coming.

Night caught us not far south of Ammari, and we camped on the top of the country, with a breeze, very precious after the blistering day, coming down to us scent-laden from the flowering slopes of Jebel Druse. It made us glad of the men's hot tea, and of the blankets with which we had softly padded the angles of the box-body.

The trip was one delight to me, since I had no responsibility but the road. Also there was the spice of the reflections of the Sherari boy, reflections naturally confided to me, since I alone wore his sort of clothes, and spoke his dialect. He, poor outcast, had never before been treated as a considerate thing, and was astonished at the manners of the English. Not once had he been struck or even threatened.

He said that each soldier carried himself apart like a family, and that he felt something of defence in their tight, insufficient clothes and laborious appearance. He was fluttering in skirts, head-cloth and cloak. They had only shirts and shorts, puttees and boots, and the breeze could take no hold on them. Indeed, they had worn these things so long day and night in heat and sweat busied about the dusty oily cars, that the cloth had set to their bodies, like bark to a tree.

Then they were all clean-shaven, and all dressed alike; and his eye, which most often distinguished man from man by clothes, here was baffled by an outward uniformity. To know them apart he must learn their individual, as though naked, shapes. Their food took no cooking, their drink was hot, they hardly spoke to one another; but then a word sent them into fits of incomprehensible crackling laughter, unworthy and inhuman. His belief was that they were my slaves, and that there was little rest or satisfaction in their lives, though to a Sherari it would have been luxury so to travel like the wind, sitting down; and a privilege to eat meat, tinned meat, daily.
In the morning we hurried along our ridge, to reach Bair in the afternoon. Unfortunately there were tyre-troubles. The armoured car was too heavy for the flints, and always she sank in a little, making heavy going on third speed. This heated up the covers. We endured a vexatious series of bursts, of stoppings to jack up and change wheel or tyre. The day was hot and we were hurried, so that the repeated levering and pumping wore thin our tempers. At noon we reached the great spinal ridge to Ras Muheiwir. I promised the sulky drivers it would be splendid going.

And it was. We all took new heart, even the tyres stood better, while we rushed along the winding ridge, swinging in long curves from east to west and back again, looking now to the left over the shallow valleys trending towards Sirhan, now to the right as far as the Hejaz Railway. Gleaming specks in the haze of distance were its white stations lit by the pouring sun.

In late afternoon we reached the end of the ridge, dipped into the hollow and roared at forty miles an hour up the breast of Hadi. Darkness was near as we cut across the furrows of Ausaji to Bair wells, where the valley was alive with fires; Buxton, Marshall and the Camel Corps were pitching camp, after two easy marches from El Jefer.

There was heartburning among them, for Bair had still only two wells, and both were beset. At one the Howeitat and Beni Sakhr were drawing for six hundred of their camels, thirsty from the pastures a day’s journey to the south-east, and at the other was a mob of a thousand Druses and Syrian refugees, Damascus merchants and Armenians, on their way to Akaba. These unhandy travellers cluttered up our access to the water with their noisy struggles.

We sat down with Buxton in a council of war. Young had duly sent to Bair fourteen days’ rations for man and beast. Of this there remained eight days for the men, ten for the animals. The camel-drivers of the supply column, driven forward only by Young’s strong will, had left Jefer half-mutinous with fear of the desert. They had lost, stolen or sold the rest of Buxton’s stores upon their way.

I suspected the complaining Armenians, but nothing could be recovered from them, and we had to adjust the plan to its new conditions. Buxton purged his column of every inessential, while I cut down the two armoured cars to one, and changed the route.
CHAPTER CIII

AZILY and mildly I helped the Camel Corps in their long watering at the forty-foot wells, and enjoyed the kindness of Buxton and his three hundred fellows. The valley seemed alive with them; and the Howeitat, who had never imagined there were so many English in the world, could not have their fill of staring. I was proud of my kind, for their dapper possession and the orderly busyness of their self-appointed labour. Beside them the Arabs looked strangers in Arabia; also Buxton's talk was a joy, as he was understanding, well read and bold; though mostly he was engaged in preparing for the long forced march.

Accordingly, I spent hours apart by myself, taking stock of where I stood, mentally, on this my thirtieth birthday. It came to me queerly how, four years ago, I had meant to be a general and knighted, when thirty. Such temporal dignities (if I survived the next four weeks) were now in my grasp—only that my sense of the falsity of the Arab position had cured me of crude ambition: while it left me my craving for good repute among men.

This craving made me profoundly suspect my truthfulness to myself. Only too good an actor could so impress his favourable opinion. Here were the Arabs believing me, Allenby and Clayton trusting me, my bodyguard dying for me: and I began to wonder if all established reputations were founded, like mine, on fraud.

The praise-wages of my acting had now to be accepted. Any protestation of the truth from me was called modesty, self depreciation; and charming—for men were always fond to believe a romantic tale. It irritated me, this silly confusion of shyness, which was conduct, with modesty, which was a point of view. I was not modest, but ashamed of my awkwardness, of my physical envelope, and of my solitary unlikeness which made me no companion, but an acquaintance, complete, angular, uncomfortable, as a crystal.

With men I had a sense always of being out of depth. This led to elaboration—the vice of amateurs tentative in their arts. As my war

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was overthought, because I was not a soldier, so my activity was over-
orried, because I was not a man of action. They were intensely
conscious efforts, with my detached self always eyeing the performance
from the wings in criticism.

To be added to this attitude were the cross-strains of hunger, fatigue,
heat or cold, and the beastliness of living among the Arabs. These made
for abnormality. Instead of facts and figures, my note-books were
full of states of mind, the reveries and self-questioning induced or
educed by our situations, expressed in abstract words to the dotted
rhythm of the camels’ marching.

On this birthday in Bair, to satisfy my sense of sincerity, I began
to dissect my beliefs and motives, groping about in my own pitchy
darkness. This self-distrusting shyness held a mask, often a mask of
indifference or flippancy, before my face, and puzzled me. My
thoughts clawed, wondering, at this apparent peace, knowing that it
was only a mask; because, despite my trying never to dwell on what
was interesting, there were moments too strong for control when my
appetite burst out and frightened me.

I was very conscious of the bundled powers and entities within me;
it was their character which hid. There was my craving to be liked —
so strong and nervous that never could I open myself friendly to
another. The terror of failure in an effort so important made me
shrink from trying; besides, there was the standard; for intimacy
seemed shameful unless the other could make the perfect reply, in the
same language, after the same method, for the same reasons.

There was a craving to be famous; and a horror of being known to
like being known. Contempt for my passion for distinction made me
refuse every offered honour. I cherished my independence almost as
did a Beduin, but my impotence of vision showed me my shape best in
painted pictures, and the oblique overheard remarks of others best
taught me my created impression. The eagerness to overhear and over-
see myself was my assault upon my own inviolate citadel.

The lower creation I avoided, as a reflection upon our failure to
attain real intellectuality. If they forced themselves on me I hated them.
To put my hand on a living thing was defilement; and it made me
tremble if they touched me or took too quick an interest in me. This
was an atomic repulsion, like the intact course of a snowflake. The opposite would have been my choice if my head had not been tyrannous. I had a longing for the absolutism of women and animals, and lamented myself most when I saw a soldier with a girl, or a man fondling a dog, because my wish was to be as superficial, as perfected; and my jailer held me back.

Always feelings and illusion were at war within me, reason strong enough to win, but not strong enough to annihilate the vanquished, or refrain from liking them better; and perhaps the truest knowledge of love might be to love what self despised. Yet I could only wish to: could see happiness in the supremacy of the material, and could not surrender to it: could try to put my mind to sleep that suggestion might blow through me freely; and remained bitterly awake.

I liked the things underneath me and took my pleasures and adventures downward. There seemed a certainty in degradation, a final safety. Man could rise to any height, but there was an animal level beneath which he could not fall. It was a satisfaction on which to rest. The force of things, years and an artificial dignity, denied it me more and more; but there endured the after-taste of liberty from one youthful submerged fortnight in Port Said, coaling steamers by day with other outcasts of three continents and curling up by night to sleep on the breakwater by De Lesseps, where the sea surged past.

True there lurked always that Will uneasily waiting to burst out. My brain was sudden and silent as a wild cat, my senses like mud clogging its feet, and my self (conscious always of itself and its shyness) telling the beast it was bad form to spring and vulgar to feed upon the kill. So meshed in nerves and hesitation, it could not be a thing to be afraid of; yet it was a real beast, and this book its mangy skin, dried, stuffed and set up squarely for men to stare at.

I quickly outgrew ideas. So I distrusted experts, who were often intelligences confined within high walls, knowing indeed every paving-stone of their prison courts: while I might know from what quarry the stones were hewn and what wages the mason earned. I gainsaid them out of carelessness, for I had found materials always apt to serve a purpose, and Will a sure guide to some one of the many roads leading from purpose to achievement. There was no flesh.
Many things I had picked up, dallied with, regarded, and laid down; for the conviction of doing was not in me. Fiction seemed more solid than activity. Self-seeking ambitions visited me, but not to stay, since my critical self would make me fastidiously reject their fruits. Always I grew to dominate those things into which I had drifted, but in none of them did I voluntarily engage. Indeed, I saw myself a danger to ordinary men, with such capacity yawing rudderless at their disposal.

I followed and did not institute; indeed, had no desire even to follow. It was only weakness which delayed me from mind-suicide, some slow task to choke at length this furnace in my brain. I had developed ideas of other men, and helped them, but had never created a thing of my own, since I could not approve creation. When other men created, I would serve and patch to make it as good as might be; for, if it were sinful to create, it must be sin and shame added to have created one-eyed or halt.

Always in working I had tried to serve, for the scrutiny of leading was too prominent. Subjection to order achieved economy of thought, the painful, and was a cold-storage for character and Will, leading painlessly to the oblivion of activity. It was a part of my failure never to have found a chief to use me. All of them, through incapacity or timidity or liking, allowed me too free a hand; as if they could not see that voluntary slavery was the deep pride of a morbid spirit, and vicarious pain its gladdest decoration. Instead of this, they gave me licence, which I abused in insipid indulgence. Every orchard fit to rob must have a guardian, dogs, a high wall, barbed wire. Out upon joyless impunity!

Feisal was a brave, weak, ignorant spirit, trying to do work for which only a genius, a prophet or a great criminal, was fitted. I served him out of pity, a motive which degraded us both. Allenby came nearest to my longings for a master, but I had to avoid him, not daring to bow down for fear lest he show feet of clay with that friendly word which must shatter my allegiance. Yet, what an idol the man was to us, prismatic with the unmixed self-standing quality of greatness, instinct and compact with it.

There were qualities like courage which could not stand alone, but must be mixed with a good or bad medium to appear. Greatness in
Allenby showed itself other, in category: self-sufficient, a facet of character, not of intellect. It made superfluous in him ordinary qualities; intelligence, imagination, acuteness, industry, looked silly beside him. He was not to be judged by our standards, any more than the sharpness of bow of a liner was to be judged by the sharpness of razors. He dispensed with them by his inner power.

The hearing other people praised made me despair jealously of myself, for I took it at its face value; whereas, had they spoken ten times as well of me, I would have discounted it to nothing. I was a standing court martial on myself, inevitably, because to me the inner springs of action were bare with the knowledge of exploited chance. The creditable must have been thought out beforehand, foreseen, prepared, worked for. The self, knowing the detriment, was forced into depreciation by others’ uncritical praise. It was a revenge of my trained historical faculty upon the evidence of public judgement, the lowest common denominator to those who knew, but from which there was no appeal because the world was wide.

When a thing was in my reach, I no longer wanted it; my delight lay in the desire. Everything which my mind could consistently wish for was attainable, as with all the ambitions of all sane men, and when a desire gained head, I used to strive until I had just to open my hand and take it. Then I would turn away, content that it had been within my strength. I sought only to assure myself, and cared not a jot to make the others know it.

There was a special attraction in beginnings, which drove me into everlasting endeavour to free my personality from accretions and project it on a fresh medium, that my curiosity to see its naked shadow might be fed. The invisible self appeared to be reflected clearest in the still water of another man’s yet incurious mind. Considered judgements, which had in them of the past and the future, were worthless compared with the revealing first sight, the instinctive opening or closing of a man as he met the stranger.

Much of my doing was from this egoistic curiosity. When in fresh company, I would embark on little wanton problems of conduct, observing the impact of this or that approach on my hearers, treating fellow-men as so many targets for intellectual ingenuity: until I could
hardly tell my own self where the leg-pulling began or ended. This
pettiness helped to make me uncomfortable with other men, lest my
whim drive me suddenly to collect them as trophies of marksmanship;
also they were interested in so much which my self-consciousness
rejected. They talked of food and illness, games and pleasures, with
me, who felt that to recognize our possession of bodies was degrada-
tion enough, without enlarging upon their failings and attributes. I
would feel shame for myself at seeing them wallow in the physical
which could be only a glorification of man’s cross. Indeed, the truth
was I did not like the ‘myself’ I could see and hear.
CHAPTER CIV

I had reached this useful stage when there was a disturbance from the Toweiba tents. Shouting men ran towards me. I pulled myself together to appease a fight between the Arabs and the Camel Corps, but instead it was an appeal for help against a Shammar raid two hours since, away by the Snainirat. Eighty camels had been driven off. Not to seem wholly ungracious, I put on our spare camels the four or five of my men whose friends or relatives had suffered, and sent them off.

Buxton and his men started in the mid-afternoon while I delayed till evening, seeing my men load our six thousand pounds of gun-cotton on the thirty Egyptian pack-camels. My disgusted bodyguard were for this ride to lead or drive the explosives' train.

We had judged that Buxton would sleep just short of the Hadi, so we rode thither: but saw no camp-fire, nor was the track trodden. We looked over the crest of the ridge, into a bitter north wind coming off Hermon into our flustered faces. The slopes beyond were black and silent, and to us town-dwellers, accustomed to the reck of smoke, or sweat, or the ferment of soil freshly dug, there was something searching, disquieting, almost dangerous, in the steely desert wind. So we turned back a few paces, and hid under the lip of the ridge to sleep comfortably in its cloistered air.

In the morning we looked out across fifty miles of blank country, and wondered at this missing our companions: but Daher shouted suddenly from the Hadi side, seeing their column winding up from the south-east. They had early lost the track and camped till dawn. My men jested with humour against Sheikh Saleh, their guide, as one who could lose his road between the Thlaithukhwat and Bair: just like one might say between the Marble Arch and Oxford Circus.

However, it was a perfect morning, with the sun hot on our backs, and the wind fresh in our faces. The Camel Corps strode splendidly past the frosted tips of the three peaks into the green depths of Dhiriwa. They looked different from the stiff, respectful companies which had reached Akaba, for Buxton's supple brain and friendly observation
had taken in the experience of irregular fighting, and revised their training rules for the new needs.

He had changed their column formation, breaking its formal subdivision of two hard companies: he had changed the order of march, so that, instead of their old immaculate lines, they came clotted, in groups which split up or drew together without delay upon each variation of road or ground surface. He had reduced the loads and rehung them, thereby lengthening the camels' pace and daily mileage. He had cut into their infantry system of clockwork halts every so often (to let the camels stale!) and grooming was less honoured. In the old days, they had prinked their animals, cossetting them like Pekinese, and each halt had been lightened by a noisy flapping massage of the beasts' stripped humps with the saddle-blanket; whereas now the spare time was spent in grazing.

Consequently, our Imperial Camel Corps had become rapid, elastic, enduring, silent; except when they mounted by numbers, for then the three hundred he-camels would roar in concert, giving out a wave of sound audible miles across the night. Each march saw them more workmanlike, more at home on the animals, tougher, leaner, faster. They behaved like boys on holiday, and the easy mixing of officers and men made their atmosphere delightful.

My camels were brought up to walk in Arab fashion, that bent-kneed gait with much swinging of the fetlock, the stride a little longer and a little quicker than the normal. Buxton's camels strolled along at their native pace, unaffected by the men on their backs, who were kept from direct contact with them by iron-shod boots and by their wood and steel Manchester-made saddles.

Consequently, though I started each stage alongside Buxton in the van, I forged steadily in front with my five attendants; especially when I rode my Baha, the immensely tall, large-boned, upstanding beast, who got her name from the bleat-voice forced on her by a bullet through the chin. She was very finely bred, but bad-tempered, half a wild camel, and had never patience for an ordinary walk. Instead, with high nose and wind-stirred hair, she would jig along in an uneasy dance, hateful to my Ageyl for it strained their tender loins, but to me not un-amusing.
In this fashion we would gain three miles on the British, look for a plot of grass or juicy thorns, lie in the warm freshness of air, and let our beasts graze while we were overtaken; and a beautiful sight the Camel Corps would be as it came up.

Through the mirage of heat which flickered over the shining flintstones of the ridge we would see, at first, only the knotted brown mass of the column, swaying in the haze. As it grew nearer the masses used to divide into little groups, which swung; parting and breaking into one another. At last, when close to us, we would distinguish the individual riders, like great water-birds breast-deep in the silver mirage, with Buxton’s athletic, splendidly-mounted figure leading his sunburnt, laughing, khaki men.

It was odd to see how diversely they rode. Some sat naturally, despite the clumsy saddle; some pushed out their hinder-parts, and leaned forward like Arab villagers; others lolled in the saddle as if they were Australians riding horses. My men, judging by the look, were inclined to scoff. I told them how from that three hundred I would pick forty fellows who would out-ride, out-fight and out-suffer any forty men in Feisal’s army.

At noon, by Ras Muheiwer, we halted an hour or two, for though the heat to-day was less than in Egypt in August, Buxton did not wish to drive his men through it without a break. The camels were loosed out, while we lay and lunched and tried to sleep, defying the multitude of flies which had marched with us from Bair in colonies on our sweaty backs. Meanwhile, my bodyguard passed through, grumbling at their indignity of baggage driving, making believe never to have been so shamed before, and praying profanely that the world would not hear of my tyranny to them.

Their sorrow was doubled since the baggage animals were Somali camels, whose greatest speed was about three miles an hour. Buxton’s force marched nearly four, myself more than five, so that the marches were for the Zaagi and his forty thieves a torment of slowness, modified only by baulking camels, or displaced loads.

We abused their clumsiness, calling them drovers and coolies, offering to buy their goods when they came to market; till perforce they laughed at their plight. After the first day they kept up with us by
lengthening the march into the night (only a little, for these ophthalmia-stricken brutes were blind in the dark) and by stealing from the breakfast and midday halts. They brought their caravan through without losing one of all their charges; a fine performance for such gilded gentlemen; only possible because under their gilt they were the best camel-masters for hire in Arabia.

That night we slept in Ghadaf. The armoured car overtook us as we halted, its delighted Sherari guide grinning in triumph on the turret lid. An hour or two later the Zaagi arrived, reporting all up and well. He begged that Buxton should not kill, directly in the road, such camels as broke down on the march; for his men made each successive carcase excuse for a feast and a delay.

Abdulla was troubled to understand why the British shot their abandoned beasts. I pointed out how we Arabs shot one another if badly wounded in battle; but Abdulla retorted it was to save us from being so tortured that we might do ourselves shame. He believed there was hardly a man alive who would not choose a gradual death of weakness in the desert, rather than a sudden cutting off; indeed, in his judgement, the slowest death was the most merciful of all, since absence of hope would prevent the bitterness of a losing fight, and leave the man's nature untrammelled to compose itself and him into the mercy of God. Our English argument, that it was kinder to kill quickly anything except a man, he would not take seriously.
CHAPTER CV

Our morrow was like the day before, a steady grind of forty miles. Next day was the last before the bridge-effort. I took half of my men from the baggage train, and threw them forward on our line of march, to crown each hill-top. This was well done, but did not profit us, for in mid-morning, with Muaggar, our ambush in full sight, we were marching strongly and hopefully when a Turkish aeroplane came from the south, flew the length of our column, and went down, before us, into Amman.

We plodded heavily into Muaggar by noon, and hid in the substructures of the Roman temple-platform. Our watchers took post on the crest, looking out over the harvested plains to the Hejaz Railway. Over these hill-slopes, as we stared through our glasses, the grey stones seemed to line out like flocks of grazing sheep.

We sent my peasants into the villages below us, to get news, and warn the people to keep within doors. They returned to say that chance was fighting against us. Round the winnowed corn upon the threshing floors stood Turkish soldiers, for the tax-gatherers were measuring the heaps under guard of sections of mounted infantry. Three such troops, forty men, lay for this night in the three villages nearest the great bridge — villages through whose precincts we must necessarily go and come.

We held a hurried council. The aeroplane had or had not seen us. It would cause, at worst, the strengthening of the bridge-guard, but I had little fear of its effect. The Turks would believe we were the advance-guard of a third raid on Amman, and were more likely to concentrate than to detach troops. Buxton’s men were great fighters, he had laid admirable plans. Success was certain.

The doubt was about the bridge’s cost, or rather as to its value in British life, having regard to Bartholomew’s prohibition of casualties.

The presence of these mule-riders meant that our retreat would not be unencumbered. The camel corps were to dismount nearly a mile from the bridge (their noisy camels!) and advance on foot. The noise
of their assault, not to speak of the firing of three tons of gun-cotton against the bridge-piers, would wake up the district. The Turkish patrols in the villages might stumble on our camel-park — a disaster for us — or, at least, would hamper us in the broken ground, as we retired.

Buxton’s men could not scatter like a swarm of birds, after the bridge explosion, to find their own way back to the Muaggar. In any night-fighting some would be cut off and lost. We should have to wait for them, possibly losing more in the business. The whole cost might be fifty men, and I put the worth of the bridge at less than five. Its destruction was so to frighten and disturb the Turks, that they would leave us alone till August the thirtieth when our long column set out for Azrak. To-day was the twentieth. The danger had seemed pressing in July, but was now nearly over.

Buxton agreed. We decided to cry off, and move back at once. At the moment more Turkish maclines got up from Amman and quartered the rough hills northward from Muaggar, looking for us.

The men groaned in disappointment when they heard the change. They had set pride on this long raid, and were burning to tell incredulous Egypt that their programme had been literally fulfilled.

To gain what we could, I sent Saleh and the other chiefs down to spruce their people with tall rumours of our numbers, and our coming as the reconnaissance of Feisal’s army, to carry Amman by assault in the new moon. This was the story the Turks feared to learn: the operation they imagined: the stroke they dreaded. They pushed cavalry cautiously into Muaggar, and found confirmation of the wild tales of the villagers, for the hill-top was littered with empty meat tins, and the valley slopes cut up by the deep tracks of enormous cars. Very many tracks there were! This alarm checked them, and, at a bloodless price for us, kept them hovering a week. The destruction of the bridge would have gained us a fortnight.

We waited till dusk was thick, and then rode off for Azrak, fifty miles away. We pretended that the raid was become a tour, and talked of Roman remains and of Ghassanide hunting-places. The Camel Corps had a practice, almost a habit, of night-journeys, so that their pace was as by day, and units never strayed nor lost touch. There was a brilliant moon and we marched till it was pale in the morning, passing
the lone palace of Kharaneh about midnight, too careless to turn aside and see its strangeness. Part-blame for this lay on the moon, whose whiteness made our minds as frozen and shadowless as itself, so that we sat still in our saddles, just sitting still.

At first I feared lest we encounter Arab raiders, who might have attacked the Camel Corps in ignorance; so I put forward with my men some half-mile before the column. As we slipped on, gradually we became aware of night-birds, flying up from under our feet in numbers, black and large. They increased, till it seemed as though the earth was carpeted in birds, so thickly did they start up, but in dead silence, and dizzily, wheeling about us in circles, like feathers in a soundless whirl of wind. The weaving curves of their mad flight spun into my brain. Their number and quietness terrified my men, who unslung their rifles, and lashed bullet after bullet into the flutter. After two miles the night became empty again; and at last we lay down and slept in the fragrant wormwood, till the sun roused us out.

In the afternoon, tired, we came to Kusair el Amra, the little hunting lodge of Harith, the Shepherd King, a patron of poets; it stood beautifully against its background of bosky rustling trees. Buxton put headquarters in the cool dusk of its hall, and we lay there puzzling out the worn frescoes of the wall, with more laughter than moral profit. Of the men, some sheltered themselves in other rooms, most, with the camels, stretched themselves beneath the trees, for a slumberous afternoon and evening. The aeroplanes had not found us — could not find us here. To-morrow there was Azrak, and fresh water to replace this stuff of Bair which, with the passing days, was getting too tasty for our liking.

Also Azrak was a famous place, queen of these oases, more beautiful than Amruh, with its verdure and running springs. I had promised everyone a bathe; the Englishmen, not washed since Akaba, were longing towards it. Meanwhile, Amruh was wonderful. They asked me with astonishment who were these Kings of Ghassan with the unfamiliar halls and pictures. I could tell them vague tales of their poetry, and cruel wars: but it seemed so distant and tinselled an age.

Next day we walked gently to Azrak. When we were over the last ridge of lava-pebbles and saw the ring of the Mejabar graves, that most
beautifully put of cemeteries, I trotted forward with my men, to be sure against accident in the place, and to feel again its remoteness before the others came. These soldiers seemed so secure that I dreaded lest Azrak lose its rareness and be drawn back to the tide of life which had left it a thousand years ago.

However, both fears were silly. Azrak was empty of Arabs, beautiful as ever, and even more beautiful a little later when its shining pools were brilliant with the white bodies of our men swimming, and the slow drift of the wind through its reeds was pointed by their gay shouts and splashing echoed off the water. We made a great pit, and buried our tons of gun-cotton, for the Deraa expedition in September; and then roamed about collecting the scarlet sweet-water-berry of the Saa bushes. ‘Sherari grapes’ my followers, indulgent to our caprice, called them.

We rested there two days, the refreshment of the pools being so great. Buxton rode with me to the fort, to examine the altar of Diocletian and Maximian, meaning to add a word in favour of King George the Fifth; but our stay was poisoned by the grey flies, and then ruined by a tragic accident. An Arab, shooting fish in the fort pool, dropped his rifle, which exploded and killed instantly Lieutenant Rowan, of the Scottish Horse. We buried him in the little Mejaber graveyard, whose spotless quiet had long been my envy.

On the third day we marched past Ammari, across Jesha to near the Thlaithukhwat, the old country whose almost imperceptible variations I had come to know. By the Hadi we felt at home, and made a night-march, the men’s strident yells of ‘Are we well fed? No.’ ‘Do we see life? Yes’, thundering up the long slopes after me. When they tired of telling the truth I could hear the rattle of their accoutrements hitched over the wooden saddles — eleven or fifteen hitchings they had, each time they loaded up, in place of the Arab’s all-embracing saddle-bag thrown on in one movement.

I was so bound up in their dark body and tail behind me, that I, too, lost my way between the Hadi and Bair. However, till dawn we steered by the stars (the men’s next meal was in Bair, for yesterday their iron ration was exhausted), and day broke on us in a wooded valley which was certainly Wadi Bair; but for my life I could not tell if we
were above or below the wells. I confessed my fault to Buxton and Marshall and we tittered for a while, till, by chance, Sagr ibn Shaalan, one of our old allies of the distant days of Wejh, rode down the track, and put us on the road. An hour later the Camel Corps had new rations and their old tents by the wells, and found that Salama, the provident Egyptian doctor, calculating their return to-day, had already filled the drinking cisterns with enough water to slake the half of their thirsty beasts.

I determined to go into Aba el Lissan with the armoured cars, for Buxton was now on proved ground among friends, and could do without my help. So we drove fast down the scarp to the Jefer flat, and skipped across it at sixty miles an hour, ourselves the leading car. We threw up such a dust-cloud that we lost our sister, and when we reached the south edge of the flat she was nowhere visible. Probably tyre trouble, so we sat down to wait, gazing back into the dappled waves of mirage which streamed over the ground. Their dark vapour, below the pale sky (which got more and more blue as it went higher), shifted a dozen times in the hour, giving us a false alarm of our coming friends; but at last, through the greyness, came spinning a black spot wagging a long trail of sun-shining dust.

This was Greenhill tearing after, at speed through the shrivelling air, which eddied about his burning metal turret, making it so hot that its naked steel seared the bare arms and knees of the crew whenever the huge car lurched in the soft heat-powdered ground, whose carpeted dust lay waiting for the low autumn wind to sweep it across the open in a blinding choking storm.

Our car stood tyre-deep, and, while we waited, the men slopped petrol on a hillock of dust and boiled tea for us — Army tea, as full of leaves as flood water, and yellow with tinned milk, but good for parched throats. While we drank the others drew alongside, and reported two bursts of Beldam tubes in the heat of their swoop at a mile a minute across the scorching plain. We gave them of our boiled tea, and laughing they knocked the dust off their faces with oily hands. They looked aged, with its greyness in their bleached eyebrows and eyelashes and in the pores of their faces, except where the sweat had washed dark-edged furrows through to the red skin.
They drank hurriedly (for the sun was falling, and we had yet fifty miles to go), throwing out the last dregs on the ground, where the drops ran apart like quicksilver upon the dusty surface till they were clotted and sank in speckled shot-holes over its drifted greyness. Then we drove through the ruined railway to Aba el Lissan, where Joyce, Dawnay and Young reported all going marvellously. In fact, preparations were complete, and they were breaking up, Joyce for Cairo to see a dentist, Dawnay for G.H.Q., to tell Allenby we were prosperous and obedient.
CHAPTER CVI

Joyce’s ship had come up from Jidda, with the Meccan mail. Feisal opened his Kibla (King Hussein’s Gazette) to find staring at him a Royal Proclamation, saying that fools were calling Jaafar Pasha the General Officer Commanding the Arab Northern Army, whereas there was no such rank, indeed no rank higher than captain in the Arab Army, wherein Sheikh Jaafar, like another, was doing his duty!

This had been published by King Hussein (after reading that Allenby had decorated Jaafar) without warning Feisal; to spite the northern town-Arabs, the Syrian and Mesopotamian officers, whom the King at once despised for their laxity and feared for their accomplishments. He knew that they were fighting, not to give him dominion, but to set free their own countries for their own governing, and the lust for power had grown uncontrollable in the old man.

Jaafar came in and proffered his resignation to Feisal. There followed him our divisional officers and their staffs, with the regimental and battalion commanders. I begged them to pay no heed to the humours of an old man of seventy, out of the world in Mecca, whose greatness they themselves had made; and Feisal refused to accept their resignations, pointing out that the commissions (since his father had not approved their service) were issued by himself, and he alone was discredited by the proclamation.

On this assumption he telegraphed to Mecca, and received a return telegram which called him traitor and outlaw. He replied laying down his command of the Akaba front. Hussein appointed Zeid to succeed him. Zeid promptly refused. Hussein’s cipher messages became corrupt with rage, and the military life of Aba el Lissan came to a sudden stop. Dawnay, from Akaba, before the ship sailed, rang me up, and asked dolefully if all hope were over. I answered that things hung on chance, but perhaps we should get through.

Three courses lay before us. The first, to get pressure put on King Hussein to withdraw his statement. The second, to carry on, ignoring
it. The third, to set up Feisal in formal independence of his father. There were advocates of each course, amongst the English, as amongst the Arabs. We wired to Allenby asking him to smooth out the incident. Hussein was obstinate and crafty, and it might take weeks to force him out of his obstacles to an apology. Normally, we could have afforded three weeks; but to-day we were in the unhappy position that after three days, if at all, our expedition to Deraa must start. We must find some means of carrying on the war, while Egypt sought for a solution.

My first duty was to send express to Nuri Shaalan that I could not meet him at the gathering of his tribes in Kaf, but would be in Azrak from the first day of the new moon, at his service. This was a sad expedient, for Nuri might take suspicion of my change and fail at the tryst; and without the Rualla half our efficiency and importance at Deraa on September the sixteenth would disappear. However, we had to risk this smaller loss, since without Feisal and the regulars and Pisani's guns there would be no expedition, and for the sake of reforming their tempers I must wait in Aba el Lissan.

My second duty was to start off the caravans for Azrak—the baggage, the food, the petrol, the ammunition. Young prepared these, rising, as ever, to any occasion not of his own seeking. He was his own first obstacle, but would have no man hinder him. Never could I forget the radiant face of Nuri Said, after a joint conference, encountering a group of Arab officers with the cheerful words, 'Never mind, you fellows; he talks to the English just as he does to us!' Now he saw that each echelon started—not, indeed, to time but only a day late—under its appointed officers, according to programme. It had been our principle to issue orders to the Arabs only through their own chiefs, so they had no precedent either for obedience or for disobedience: and off they went like lambs.

My third duty was to face a mutiny of the troops. They had heard false rumours about the crisis. Particularly, the gunners misunderstood, and one afternoon fell out with their officers, and rushed off to turn the guns on their tents. However, Rasim, the artillery commandant, had forestalled them by collecting the breech-blocks into a pyramid inside his tent. I took advantage of this comic moment to meet the men.
They were tense at first, but eventually out of curiosity they fell to talking with me, who to them had been only an eccentric name, as a half-Beduin Englishman.

I told them the coffee-cup storm which was raging among the high heads, and they laughed merrily. Their faces were turned towards Damascus, not Mecca, and they cared for nothing outside their army. Their fear was that Feisal had deserted, since for days he had not been out. I promised to bring him down instantly. When he, with Zeid, looking as usual, drove through the lines in the Vauxhall, which Bols had had painted specially green for him, their eyes convinced them of their error.

My fourth duty was to start off the troops for Azrak on the right day. To effect this, their confidence in the confidence of the officers had to be restored. Stirling’s tact was called upon. Nuri Said was ambitious, as any soldier would have been, to make much of the opportunity before him, and readily agreed to move as far as Azrak, pending Hussein’s apology. If this was unsatisfactory they could return, or throw off allegiance; if it was adequate, as I assured him it would be, the interim and unmerited services of the Northern Army should bring a blush to the old man’s cheek.

The ranks responded to bluffer arguments. We made plain that such gross questions as food and pay depended entirely on the maintenance of organization. They yielded, and the separate columns, of mounted infantry, of machine-gunners, of Egyptian sappers, of Ghurkas, of Pisani’s gunners, moved off in their courses, according to the routine of Stirling and Young, only two days late.

The last obligation was to restore Feisal’s supremacy. To attempt anything serious between Derra and Damascus without him would be vain. We could put in the attack on Derra, which was what Allenby expected from us; but the capture of Damascus — which was what I expected from the Arabs, the reason why I had joined with them in the field, taken ten thousand pains, and spent my wit and strength — that depended on Feisal’s being present with us in the fighting line, undistracted by military duties, but ready to take over and exploit the political value of what our bodies conquered for him. Eventually he offered to come up under my orders.
As for the apology from Mecca, Allenby and Wilson were doing their best, engrossing the cables. If they failed, my course would be to promise Feisal the direct support of the British Government, and drive him into Damascus as sovereign prince. It was possible: but I wanted to avoid it except as a last necessity. The Arabs hitherto in their revolt had made clean history, and I did not wish our adventure to come to the pitiable state of scission before the common victory and its peace.

King Hussein behaved truly to type, protesting fluently, with endless circumlocution, showing no understanding of the grave effect of his incursion into Northern Army affairs. To clear his mind we sent him plain statements, which drew abusive but involved returns. His telegrams came through Egypt and by wireless to our operators in Akaba, and were sent up to me by car, for delivery to Feisal. The Arabic ciphers were simple, and I had undesirable passages mutilated by rearranging their figures into nonsense, before handing them in code to Feisal. By this easy expedient the temper of his entourage was not needlessly complicated.

The play went on for several days, Mecca never repeating a message notified corrupt, but telegraphing in its place a fresh version toned down at each re-editing from the previous harshness. Finally, there came a long message, the first half a lame apology and withdrawal of the mischievous proclamation, the second half a repetition of the offence in a new form. I suppressed the tail, and took the head marked ‘very urgent’ to Feisal’s tent, where he sat in the full circle of his staff officers.

His secretary worked out the despatch, and handed the decipher to Feisal. My hints had roused expectation, and all eyes were on him as he read it. He was astonished, and gazed wonderingly at me, for the meek words were unlike his father’s querulous obstinacy. Then he pulled himself together, read the apology aloud, and at the end said thrillingly, ‘The telegraph has saved all our honour’.

A chorus of delight burst out, during which he bent aside to whisper in my ear, ‘I mean the honour of nearly all of us’. It was done so delightfully that I laughed, and said demurely, ‘I cannot understand what you mean’. He replied, ‘I offered to serve for this last march under your orders: why was that not enough?’ ‘Because it would not
go with your honour.’ He murmured, ‘You prefer mine always before your own’, and then sprang energetically to his feet, saying, ‘Now, Sirs, praise God and work’.

In three hours we had settled time-tables, and arranged for our successors here in Aba el Lissan, with their spheres and duties. I took my leave. Joyce had just returned to us from Egypt, and Feisal promised that he would come, with him and Marshall, to Azrak to join me on the twelfth at latest. All the camp was happy as I got into a Rolls tender and set off northward, hoping yet to rally the Rualla under Nuri Shaalan in time for our attack on Deraa.