BOOK III

A RAILWAY DIVERSION

Chapters XXVIII to XXXVIII

Our taking Wejh had the wished effect upon the Turks, who abandoned their advance towards Mecca for a passive defence of Medina and its Railway. Our experts made plans for attacking them.

The Germans saw the danger of envelopment, and persuaded Enver to order the instant evacuation of Medina. Sir Archibald Murray begged us to put in a sustained attack to destroy the retreating enemy.

Feisal was soon ready in his part: and I went off to Abdulla to get his co-operation. On the way I fell sick and while lying alone with empty hands was driven to think about the campaign. Thinking convinced me that our recent practice had been better than our theory.

So on recovery I did little to the Railway, but went back to Wejh with novel ideas. I tried to make the others admit them, and adopt deployment as our ruling principle; and to put preaching even before fighting. They preferred the limited and direct objective of Medina. So I decided to slip off to Akaba by myself on test of my own theory.
CHAPTER XXVIII

In Cairo the yet-hot authorities promised gold, rifles, mules, more machine-guns, and mountain guns; but these last, of course, we never got. The gun question was an eternal torment. Because of the hilly, trackless country, field guns were no use to us; and the British Army had no mountain guns except the Indian ten-pounder, which was serviceable only against bows and arrows. Bremond had some excellent Schneider sixty-fives at Suez, with Algerian gunners, but he regarded them principally as his lever to move allied troops into Arabia. When we asked him to send them down to us with or without men, he would reply, first that the Arabs would not treat the crews properly, and then that they would not treat the guns properly. His price was a British brigade for Rabegh; and we would not pay it.

He feared to make the Arab Army formidable — an argument one could understand — but the case of the British Government was incomprehensible. It was not ill-will, for they gave us all else we wanted; nor was it niggardliness, for their total help to the Arabs, in materials and money, exceeded ten millions. I believed it was sheer stupidity. But it was maddening to be unequal to many enterprises and to fail in others, for the technical reason that we could not keep down the Turkish artillery because its guns outranged ours by three or four thousand yards. In the end, happily, Bremond over-reached himself, after keeping his batteries idle for a year at Suez. Major Cousse, his successor, ordered them down to us, and by their help we entered Damascus. During that idle year they had been, to each Arab officer who entered Suez, a silent incontrovertible proof of French malice towards the Arab movement.

We received a great reinforcement to our cause in Jaafar Pasha, a Bagdadi officer from the Turkish Army. After distinguished service in the German and Turkish armies, he had been chosen by Enver to organize the levies of the Sheikh el Senussi. He went there by submarine, made a decent force of the wild men, and showed tactical ability against the British in two battles. Then he was captured and lodged in
the citadel at Cairo with the other officer prisoners of war. He escaped one night, slipping down a blanket-rope towards the moat; but the blankets failed under the strain, and in the fall he hurt his ankle, and was re-taken helpless. In hospital he gave his parole, and was enlarged after paying for the torn blanket. But one day he read in an Arabic newspaper of the Sheriff’s revolt, and of the execution by the Turks of prominent Arab Nationalists — his friends — and realized that he had been on the wrong side.

Feisal had heard of him, of course, and wanted him as commander-in-chief of his regular troops, whose improvement was now our main effort. We knew that Jaafar was one of the few men with enough of reputation and personality to weld their difficult and reciprocally disagreeable elements into an army. King Hussein, however, would not have it. He was old and narrow, and disliked Mesopotamians and Syrians: Mecca must deliver Damascus. He refused the services of Jaafar. Feisal had to accept him on his own responsibility.

In Cairo were Hogarth and George Lloyd, and Storrs and Deedes, and many old friends. Beyond them the circle of Arabian well-wishers was now strangely increased. In the army our shares rose as we showed profits. Lynden Bell stood firmly our friend and swore that method was coming out of the Arab madness. Sir Archibald Murray realized with a sudden shock that more Turkish troops were fighting the Arabs than were fighting him, and began to remember how he had always favoured the Arab revolt. Admiral Wemyss was as ready to help now as he had been in our hard days round Rabegh. Sir Reginald Wingate, High Commissioner in Egypt, was happy in the success of the work he had advocated for years. I grudged him this happiness; for McMahon who took the actual risk of starting it, had been broken just before prosperity began. However, that was hardly Wingate’s fault.

In the midst of my touching the slender stops of all these quills there came a rude surprise. Colonel Bremond called to felicitate me on the capture of Wejh, saying that it confirmed his belief in my military talent and encouraged him to expect my help in an extension of our success. He wanted to occupy Akaba with an Anglo-French force and naval help. He pointed out the importance of Akaba, the only Turkish port left in the Red Sea, the nearest to the Suez Canal, the nearest to the
Hejaz Railway, on the left flank of the Beersheba army; suggesting its occupation by a composite brigade, which should advance up Wadi Itm for a crushing blow at Maan. He began to enlarge on the nature of the ground.

I told him that I knew Akaba from before the war, and felt that his scheme was technically impossible. We could take the beach of the gulf; but our forces there, as unfavourably placed as on a Gallipoli beach, would be under observation and gun-fire from the coastal hills: and these granite hills, thousands of feet high, were impracticable for heavy troops: the passes through them being formidable defiles, very costly to assault or to cover. In my opinion, Akaba, whose importance was all and more than he said, would be best taken by Arab irregulars descending from the interior without naval help.

Bremond did not tell me (but I knew) that he wanted the landing at Akaba to head off the Arab movement, by getting a mixed force in front of them (as at Rabegh), so that they might be confined to Arabia, and compelled to waste their efforts against Medina. The Arabs still feared that the Sheriff's alliance with us was based on a secret agreement to sell them at the end, and such a Christian invasion would have confirmed these fears and destroyed their co-operation. For my part, I did not tell Bremond (but he knew) that I meant to defeat his efforts and to take the Arabs soon into Damascus. It amused me, this childishly-conceived rivalry of vital aims, but he ended his talk ominously by saying that, anyhow, he was going down to put the scheme to Feisal in Wejh.

Now, I had not warned Feisal that Bremond was a politician. Newcombe was in Wejh, with his friendly desire to get moves on. We had not talked over the problem of Akaba. Feisal knew neither its terrain nor its tribes. Keenness and ignorance would lend an ear favourable to the proposal. It seemed best for me to hurry down there and put my side on its guard, so I left the same afternoon for Suez and sailed that night. Two days later, in Wejh, I explained myself; so that when Bremond came after ten days and opened his heart, or part of it, to Feisal, his tactics were returned to him with improvements.

The Frenchman began by presenting six Hotchkiss automatics complete with instructors. This was a noble gift; but Feisal took the
opportunity to ask him to increase his bounty by a battery of the quick-firing mountain guns at Suez, explaining that he had been sorry to leave the Yenbo area for Wejh, since Wejh was so much further from his objective — Medina — but it was really impossible for him to assault the Turks (who had French artillery) with rifles or with the old guns supplied him by the British Army. His men had not the technical excellence to make a bad tool prevail over a good one. He had to exploit his only advantages — numbers and mobility — and, unless his equipment could be improved, there was no saying where this protraction of his front might end!

Bremond tried to turn it off by belittling guns as useless for Hejaz warfare (quite right, this, practically). But it would end the war at once if Feisal made his men climb about the country like goats and tear up the railway. Feisal, angry at the metaphor (impolite in Arabic), looked at Bremond’s six feet of comfortable body, and asked if he had ever tried to ‘goat’ himself. Bremond referred gallantly to the question of Akaba, and the real danger to the Arabs in the Turks remaining there: insisting that the British, who had the means for an expedition thither, should be pressed to undertake it. Feisal, in reply, gave him a geographical sketch of the land behind Akaba (I recognized the less dashing part of it myself) and explained the tribal difficulties and the food problem — all the points which made it a serious obstacle. He ended by saying that, after the cloud of orders, counter-orders and confusion over the allied troops for Rabegh, he really had not the face to approach Sir Archibald Murray so soon with another request for an excursion.

Bremond had to retire from the battle in good order, getting in a Parthian shot at me, where I sat spitefully smiling, by begging Feisal to insist that the British armoured cars in Suez be sent down to Wejh. But even this was a boomerang, since they had started! After he had gone, I returned to Cairo for a cheerful week, in which I gave my betters much good advice. Murray, who had growlingly earmarked Tullibardine’s brigade for Akaba, approved me still further when I declared against that side-show too. Then to Wejh.
CHAPTER XXIX

Life in Wejh was interesting. We had now set our camp in order. Feisal pitched his tents (here an opulent group: living tents, reception tents, staff tents, guest tents, servants) about a mile from the sea, on the edge of the coral shelf which ran up gently from the beach till it ended in a steep drop facing east and south over broad valleys radiating star-like from the land-locked harbour. The tents of soldiers and tribesmen were grouped in these sandy valleys, leaving the chill height for ourselves; and very delightful in the evening we northerners found it when the breeze from the sea carried us a murmur of the waves, faint and far off, like the echo of traffic up a by-street in London.

Immediately beneath us were the Ageyl, an irregular close group of tents. South of these were Rasim's artillery; and by him for company, Abdulla's machine-gunners, in regular lines, with their animals picketed out in those formal rows which were incense to the professional officer and convenient if space were precious. Further out the market was set plainly on the ground, a boiling swell of men always about the goods. The scattered tents and shelters of the tribesmen filled each gully or windless place. Beyond the last of them lay open country, with camel-parties coming in and out by the straggling palms of the nearest, too-brackish well. As background were the foothills, reefs and clusters like ruined castles, thrown up craggily to the horizon of the coastal range.

As it was the custom in Wejh to camp wide apart, very wide apart, my life was spent in moving back and forth, to Feisal's tents, to the English tents, to the Egyptian Army tents, to the town, the port, the wireless station, tramping all day restlessly up and down these coral paths in sandals or barefoot, hardening my feet, getting by slow degrees the power to walk with little pain over sharp and burning ground, tempering my already trained body for greater endeavour.

Poor Arabs wondered why I had no mare; and I forbore to puzzle them by incomprehensible talk of hardening myself, or confess I would rather walk than ride for sparing of animals: yet the first was true and the second true. Something hurtful to my pride, disagreeable,
rose at the sight of these lower forms of life. Their existence struck a
servile reflection upon our human kind: the style in which a God would
look on us; and to make use of them, to lie under an unavoidable obliga-
tion to them, seemed to me shameful. It was as with the negroes, tom-
tom playing themselves to red madness each night under the ridge.
Their faces, being clearly different from our own, were tolerable; but
it hurt that they should possess exact counterparts of all our bodies.

Feisal, within, laboured day and night at his politics, in which so
few of us could help. Outside, the crowd employed and diverted us
with parades, joy-shooting, and marches of victory. Also there were
accidents. Once a group, playing behind our tents, set off a seaplane
bomb, dud relic of Boyle’s capture of the town. In the explosion their
limbs were scattered about the camp, marking the canvas with red
splashes which soon turned a dull brown and then faded pale. Feisal
had the tents changed and ordered the bloody ones to be destroyed: the
frugal slaves washed them. Another day a tent took fire, and part-
roasted three of our guests. The camp crowded round and roared with
laughter till the fire died down, and then, rather shamefacedly, we
cared for their hurts. The third day, a mare was wounded by a falling
joy-bullet, and many tents were pierced.

One night the Ageyl mutinied against their commandant, ibn
Dakhil, for fining them too generally and flogging them too severely.
They rushed his tent, howling and shooting, threw his things about and
beat his servants. That not being enough to blunt their fury, they
began to remember Yenbo, and went off to kill the Ateiba. Feisal
from our bluff saw their torches and ran barefoot among them, laying
on with the flat of his sword like four men. His fury delayed them
while the slaves and horsemen, calling for help, dashed downhill with
rushes and shouts and blows of sheathed swords. One gave him a horse
on which he charged down the ringleaders, while we dispersed groups
by firing very lights into their clothing. Only two were killed and
thirty wounded. Ibn Dakhil resigned next day.

Murray had given us two armoured-cars, Rolls-Royces, released
from the campaign in East Africa. Gilman and Wade commanded,
and their crews were British, men from the A.S.C. to drive and from
the Machine Gun Corps to shoot. Having them in Wejh made things
more difficult for us, because the food we had been eating and the water we had been drinking were at once medically condemned; but English company was a balancing pleasure, and the occupation of pushing cars and motor-bicycles through the desperate sand about Wejh was great. The fierce difficulty of driving across country gave the men arms like boxers, so that they swung their shoulders professionally as they walked. With time they became skilled, developing a style and art of sand-driving, which got them carefully over the better ground and rushed them at speed over soft places. One of these soft places was the last twenty miles of plain in front of Jebal Raal. The cars used to cross it in little more than half an hour, leaping from ridge to ridge of the dunes and swaying dangerously around their curves. The Arabs loved the new toys. Bicycles they called devil-horses, the children of cars, which themselves were sons and daughters of trains. It gave us three generations of mechanical transport.

The Navy added greatly to our interests in Wejh. The Espiegle was sent by Boyle as station ship, with the delightful orders to 'do everything in her power to co-operate in the many plans which would be suggested to her by Colonel Newcombe, while letting it be clearly seen that she was conferring a favour'. Her commander Fitzmaurice (a good name in Turkey), was the soul of hospitality and found quiet amusement in our work on shore. He helped us in a thousand ways; above all in signalling; for he was a wireless expert, and one day at noon the Northbrook came in and landed an army wireless set, on a light lorry, for us. As there was no one to explain it, we were at a loss; but Fitzmaurice raced ashore with half his crew, ran the car to a sitting site, rigged the masts professionally, started the engine, and connected up to such effect that before sunset he had called the astonished Northbrook and held a long conversation with her operator. The station increased the efficiency of the base at Wejh and was busy day and night, filling the Red Sea with messages in three tongues, and twenty different sorts of army cypher-codes.
CHAPTER XXX

FAKHRI Pasha was still playing our game. He held an entrenched line around Medina, just far enough to make it impossible for the Arabs to shell the city. (Such an attempt was never made or imagined.) The other troops were being distributed along the railway, in strong garrisons at all water stations between Medina and Tebuk, and in smaller posts between these garrisons, so that daily patrols might guarantee the track. In short, he had fallen back on as stupid a defensive as could be conceived. Garland had gone south-east from Wejh, and Newcombe north-east, to pick holes in it with high explosives. They would cut rails and bridges, and place automatic mines for running trains.

The Arabs had passed from doubt to violent optimism, and were promising exemplary service. Feisal enrolled most of the Billi, and the Moahib, which made him master of Arabia between the railway and the sea. He then sent the Juheina to Abdulla in Wadi Ais.

He could now prepare to deal solemnly with the Hejaz Railway; but with a practice better than my principles, I begged him first to delay in Wejh and set marching an intense movement among the tribes beyond us, that in the future our revolt might be extended, and the railway threatened from Tebuk (our present limit of influence) northward as far as Maan. My vision of the course of the Arab war was still purblind. I had not seen that the preaching was victory and the fighting a delusion. For the moment, I roped them together, and, as Feisal fortunately liked changing men’s minds rather than breaking railways, the preaching went the better.

With his northern neighbours, the coastal Howeitat, he had already made a beginning: but we now sent to the Beni Atiyeh, a stronger people to the north-east; and gained a great step when the chief, Asi ibn Atiyeh, came in and swore allegiance. His main motive was jealousy of his brothers, so that we did not expect from him active help; but the bread and salt with him gave us freedom of movement across his tribe’s territory. Beyond lay various tribes owning obedience to
Nuri Shaalan, the great Emir of the Ruwalla, who, after the Sherif and ibn Saud and ibn Rashid, was the fourth figure among the precarious princes of the desert.

Nuri was an old man, who had ruled his Anazeh tribesmen for thirty years. His was the chief family of the Rualla, but Nuri had no precedence among them at birth, nor was he loved, nor a great man of battle. His leadership had been acquired by sheer force of character. To gain it he had killed two of his brothers. Later he had added Sherarat and others to the number of his followers, and in all their desert his word was absolute law. He had none of the wheedling diplomacy of the ordinary sheikh; a word, and there was an end of opposition, or of his opponent. All feared and obeyed him; to use his roads we must have his countenance.

Fortunately, this was easy. Feisal had secured it years ago, and had retained it by interchange of gifts from Medina and Yenbo. Now, from Wejh, Fais el Ghusein went up to him and on the way crossed ibn Dughmi, one of the chief men of the Ruwalla, coming down to us with the desirable gift of some hundreds of good baggage camels. Nuri, of course, still kept friendly with the Turks. Damascus and Bagdad were his markets, and they could have half-starved his tribe in three months, had they suspected him; but we knew that when the moment came we should have his armed help, and till then anything short of a breach with Turkey.

His favour would open to us the Sirhan, a famous roadway, camping ground, and chain of water-holes, which in a series of linked depressions extended from Jauf, Nuri’s capital, in the south-east, northwards to Azrak, near Jebel Druse, in Syria. It was the freedom of the Sirhan we needed to reach the tents of the Eastern Howeitat, those famous abu Tayi, of whom Auda, the greatest fighting man in northern Arabia, was chief. Only by means of Auda abu Tayi could we swing the tribes from Maan to Akaba so violently in our favour that they would help us take Akaba and its hills from their Turkish garrisons: only with his active support could we venture to thrust out from Wejh on the long trek to Maan. Since our Yenbo days we had been longing for him and trying to win him to our cause.

We made a great step forward at Wejh; ibn Zaal, his cousin and a
war-leader of the abu Tayi, arrived on the seventeenth of February, which was in all respects a fortunate day. At dawn there came in five chief men of the Sherarat from the desert east of Tebuk, bringing a present of eggs of the Arabian ostrich, plentiful in their little-frequented desert. After them, the slaves showed in Dhaif-Allah, abu Tiyur, a cousin of Hamd ibn Jazi, paramount of the central Howeitat of the Maan plateau. These were numerous and powerful; splendid fighters; but blood enemies of their cousins, the nomad abu Tayi, because of an old-grounded quarrel between Auda and Hamd. We were proud to see them coming thus far to greet us, yet not content, for they were less fit than the abu Tayi for our purposed attack against Akaba.

On their heels came a cousin of Nawwaf, Nuri Shaalan's eldest son, with a mare sent by Nawwaf to Feisal. The Shaalan and the Jazi, being hostile, hardened eyes at one another; so we divided the parties and improvised a new guest-camp. After the Rualla, was announced the abu Tageiga chief of the sedentary Howeitat of the coast. He brought his tribe's respectful homage and the spoils of Dhaba and Moweilleh, the two last Turkish outlets on the Red Sea. Room was made for him on Feisal's carpet, and the warmest thanks rendered him for his tribe's activity; which carried us to the borders of Akaba, by tracks too rough for operations of force, but convenient for preaching and still more so for getting news.

In the afternoon, ibn Zaal arrived, with ten other of Auda's chief followers. He kissed Feisal's hand once for Auda and then once for himself, and, sitting back, declared that he came from Auda to present his salutations and to ask for orders. Feisal, with policy, controlled his outward joy, and introduced him gravely to his blood enemies, the Jazi Howeitat. Ibn Zaal acknowledged them distantly. Later, we held great private conversations with him and dismissed him with rich gifts, richer promises, and Feisal's own message to Auda that his mind would not be smooth till he had seen him face to face in Wejh. Auda was an immense chivalrous name, but an unknown quantity to us, and in so vital a matter as Akaba we could not afford a mistake. He must come down that we might weigh him, and frame our future plans actually in his presence, and with his help.

Except that all its events were happy, this day was not essentially
unlike Feisal’s every day. The rush of news made my diary fat. The roads to Wejh swarmed with envoys and volunteers and great sheikhs riding in to swear allegiance. The contagion of their constant passage made the lukewarm Billi ever more profitable to us. Feisal swore new adherents solemnly on the Koran between his hands, ‘to wait while he waited, march when he marched, to yield obedience to no Turk, to deal kindly with all who spoke Arabic (whether Bagdadi, Aleppine, Syrian, or pure-blooded) and to put independence above life, family, and goods’.

He also began to confront them at once, in his presence, with their tribal enemies, and to compose their feuds. An account of profit and loss would be struck between the parties, with Feisal modulating and interceding between them, and often paying the balance, or contributing towards it from his own funds, to hurry on the pact. During two years Feisal so laboured daily, putting together and arranging in their natural order the innumerable tiny pieces which made up Arabian society, and combining them into his one design of war against the Turks. There was no blood feud left active in any of the districts through which he had passed, and he was Court of Appeal, ultimate and unchallenged, for western Arabia.

He showed himself worthy of this achievement. He never gave a partial decision, nor a decision so impracticably just that it must lead to disorder. No Arab ever impugned his judgements, or questioned his wisdom and competence in tribal business. By patiently sifting out right and wrong, by his tact, his wonderful memory, he gained authority over the nomads from Medina to Damascus and beyond. He was recognized as a force transcending tribe, superseding blood chiefs, greater than jealousies. The Arab movement became in the best sense national, since within it all Arabs were at one, and for it private interests must be set aside; and in this movement chief place, by right of application and by right of ability, had been properly earned by the man who filled it for those few weeks of triumph and longer months of disillusion after Damascus had been set free.
CHAPTER XXXI

Urgent messages from Clayton broke across this cheerful work with orders to wait in Wejh for two days and meet the Nur el Bahr, an Egyptian patrol ship, coming down with news. I was not well and waited with more excellent grace. She arrived on the proper day, and disembarked MacRury, who gave me a copy of long telegraphic instructions from Jemal Pasha to Fakhri in Medina. These, emanating from Enver and the German staff in Constantinople, ordered the instant abandonment of Medina, and evacuation of the troops by route march in mass, first to Hedia, thence to El Ula, thence to Tebuk, and finally to Maan, where a fresh rail-head and entrenched position would be constituted.

This move would have suited the Arabs excellently; but our army of Egypt was perturbed at the prospect of twenty-five thousand Anatolian troops, with far more than the usual artillery of a corps, descending suddenly on the Beersheba front. Clayton, in his letter, told me the development was to be treated with the utmost concern, and every effort made to capture Medina, or to destroy the garrison when they came out. Newcombe was on the line, doing a vigorous demolition-series, so that the moment's responsibility fell on me. I feared that little could be done in time, for the message was days old, and the evacuation timed to begin at once.

We told Feisal the frank position, and that Allied interests in this case demanded the sacrifice, or at least the postponement of immediate advantage to the Arabs. He rose, as ever, to a proposition of honour, and agreed instantly to do his best. We worked out our possible resources and arranged to move them into contact with the railway. Sherif Mastur, an honest, quiet old man, and Rasim, with tribesmen, mule-mounted infantry, and a gun, were to proceed directly to Fagair, the first good water-base north of Wadi Ais, to hold up our first section of railway, from Abdulla's area northward.

Ali ibn el Hussein, from Jeida, would attack the next section of line northward from Mastur. We told ibn Mahanna to get close to El Ula,
and watch it. We ordered Sherif Nasir to stay near Kalaat el Muadhdham, and keep his men in hand for an effort. I wrote asking Newcombe to come in for news. Old Mohammed Ali was to move from Dhaba to an oasis near Tebuk, so that if the evacuation got so far we should be ready. All our hundred and fifty miles of line would thus be beset, while Feisal himself, at Wejh, stood ready to bring help to whatever sector most needed him.

My part was to go off to Abdulla in Wadi Ais, to find out why he had done nothing for two months, and to persuade him, if the Turks came out, to go straight at them. I hoped we might deter them from moving by making so many small raids on this lengthy line that traffic would be seriously disorganized, and the collection of the necessary food-dumps for the army at each main stage be impracticable. The Medina force, being short of animal transport, could carry little with them. Enver had instructed them to put guns and stores on trains; and to enclose these trains in their columns and march together up the railway. It was an unprecedented manœuvre, and if we gained ten days to get in place, and they then attempted anything so silly, we should have a chance of destroying them all.

Next day I left Wejh, ill and unfit for a long march, while Feisal in his haste and many preoccupations had chosen me a travelling party of queer fellows. There were four Rifaa and one Merawi Juheina as guides, and Arslan, a Syrian soldier-servant, who prepared bread and rice for me and acted besides as butt to the Arabs; four Ageyl, a Moor, and an Ateibi, Suleiman. The camels, thin with the bad grazing of this dry Billi territory, would have to go slowly.

Delay after delay took place in our starting, until nine at night, and then we moved unwillingly: but I was determined to get clear of Wejh somehow before morning. So we went four hours and slept. Next day we did two stages of five hours each, and camped at Abu Zereibat, in our old ground of the winter. The great pool had shrunk little in the two months, but was noticeably more salt. A few weeks later it was unfit to drink. A shallow well near by was said to afford tolerable water. I did not look for it, since boils on my back and heavy fever made painful the jolting of the camel, and I was tired.

Long before dawn we rode away, and having crossed Hamdh got
confused in the broken surfaces of Agunna, an area of low hills. When
day broke we recovered direction and went over a watershed steeply
down into El Khubt, a hill-locked plain extending to the Sukhur, the
granite bubbles of hills which had been prominent on our road up from
Um Lejj. The ground was luxuriant with colocynth, whose runners
and fruits looked festive in the early light. The Juheina said both leaves
and stalks were excellent food for such horses as would eat them, and
defended from thirst for many hours. The Ageyl said that the best
aperient was to drink camel-milk from cups of the scooped-out rind.
The Ateibi said that he was sufficiently moved if he just rubbed the
juice of the fruit on the soles of his feet. The Moor Hamed said that
the dried pith made good tinder. On one point however they were all
agreed, that the whole plant was useless or poisonous as fodder for camels.

This talk carried us across the Khubt, a pleasant three miles, and
through a low ridge into a second smaller section. We now saw that,
of the Sukhur, two stood together to the north-east, great grey striated
piles of volcanic rock, reddish coloured where protected from the
burning of the sun and the bruising of sandy winds. The third Sakhara,
which stood a little apart, was the bubble rock which had roused my
curiosity. Seen from near by, it more resembled a huge football half-
buried in the ground. It, too, was brown in colour. The south and
east faces were quite smooth and unbroken, and its regular, domed head
was polished and shining and had fine cracks running up and over it like
stitched seams: altogether one of the strangest hills in Hejaz, a country of
strange hills. We rode gently towards it, through a thin shower of
rain which came slanting strangely and beautifully across the sunlight.
Our path took us between the Sakhara and the Sukhur by a narrow
gorge with sandy floor and steep bare walls. Its head was rough. We
had to scramble up shelves of coarse-faced stone, and along a great
fault in the hill-side between two tilted red reefs of hard rock. The
summit of the pass was a knife-edge, and from it we went down an
encumbered gap, half-blocked by one fallen boulder which had been
hammered over with the tribal marks of all the generations of men who
had used this road. Afterwards there opened tree-grown spaces,
collecting grounds in winter for the sheets of rain which poured off the
glazed sides of the Sukhur. There were granite outcrops here and there,
and a fine silver sand underfoot in the still damp water-channels. The drainage was towards Heiran.

We then entered a wild confusion of granite shards, piled up haphazard into low mounds, in and out of which we wandered any way we could find practicable going for our hesitating camels. Soon after noon this gave place to a broad wooded valley, up which we rode for an hour, till our troubles began again; for we had to dismount and lead our animals up a narrow hill-path with broken steps of rock so polished by long years of passing feet that they were dangerous in wet weather. They took us over a great shoulder of the hills and down among more small mounds and valleys, and afterwards by another rocky zigzag descent into a torrent-bed. This soon became too confined to admit the passage of laden camels, and the path left it to cling precariously to the hill-side with a cliff above and cliff below. After fifteen minutes of this we were glad to reach a high saddle on which former travellers had piled little cairns of commemoration and thankfulness. Of such a nature had been the road-side cairns of Masturah, on my first Arabian journey, from Rabegh to Feisal.

We stopped to add one to the number, and then rode down a sandy valley into Wadi Hanbag, a large, well-wooded tributary of Hamdh. After the broken country in which we had been prisoned for hours, the openness of Hanbag was refreshing. Its clean white bed swept on northward through the trees in a fine curve under precipitous hills of red and brown, with views for a mile or two up and down its course. There were green weeds and grass growing on the lower sand-slopes of the tributary, and we stopped there for half an hour to let our starved camels eat the juicy, healthy stuff.

They had not so enjoyed themselves since Bir el Waheidi, and tore at it ravenously, stowing it away unchewed inside them, pending a fit time for leisurely digestion. We then crossed the valley to a great branch opposite our entry. This Wadi Kiton was also beautiful. Its shingle face, without loose rocks, was plentifully grown over with trees. On the right were low hills, on the left great heights called the Jidhwa, in parallel ridges of steep broken granite, very red now that the sun was setting amid massed cloud-banks of boding rain.

At last we camped, and when the camels were unloaded and driven
out to pasture, I lay down under the rocks and rested. My body was very sore with headache and high fever, the accompaniments of a sharp attack of dysentery which had troubled me along the march and had laid me out twice that day in short fainting fits, when the more difficult parts of the climb had asked too much of my strength. Dysentery of this Arabian coast used to fall like a hammer blow, and crush its victims for a few hours, after which the extreme effects passed off; but it left men curiously tired, and subject for some weeks to sudden breaks of nerve.

My followers had been quarrelling all day; and while I was lying near the rocks a shot was fired. I paid no attention; for there were hares and birds in the valley; but a little later Suleiman roused me and made me follow him across the valley to an opposite bay in the rocks, where one of the Ageyl, a Boreida man, was lying stone dead with a bullet through his temples. The shot must have been fired from close by; because the skin was burnt about one wound. The remaining Ageyl were running frantically about; and when I asked what it was Ali, their head man, said that Hamed the Moor had done the murder. I suspected Suleiman, because of the feud between the Atban and Ageyl which had burned up in Yenbo and Wejh; but Ali assured me that Suleiman had been with him three hundred yards further up the valley gathering sticks when the shot was fired. I sent all out to search for Hamed, and crawled back to the baggage, feeling that it need not have happened this day of all days when I was in pain.

As I lay there I heard a rustle, and opened my eyes slowly upon Hamed's back as he stooped over his saddle-bags, which lay just beyond my rock. I covered him with a pistol and then spoke. He had put down his rifle to lift the gear; and was at my mercy till the others came. We held a court at once; and after a while Hamed confessed that, he and Salem having had words, he had seen red and shot him suddenly. Our inquiry ended. The Ageyl, as relatives of the dead man, demanded blood for blood. The others supported them; and I tried vainly to talk the gentle Ali round. My head was aching with fever and I could not think; but hardly even in health, with all eloquence, could I have begged Hamed off; for Salem had been a friendly fellow and his sudden murder a wanton crime.
Then rose up the horror which would make civilized man shun justice like a plague if he had not the needy to serve him as hangmen for wages. There were other Moroccans in our army; and to let the Ageyl kill one in feud meant reprisals by which our unity would have been endangered. It must be a formal execution, and at last, desperately, I told Hamed that he must die for punishment, and laid the burden of his killing on myself. Perhaps they would count me not qualified for feud. At least no revenge could lie against my followers; for I was a stranger and kinless.

I made him enter a narrow gully of the spur, a dank twilight place overgrown with woods. Its sandy bed had been pitted by trickles of water down the cliffs in the late rain. At the end it shrank to a crack a few inches wide. The walls were vertical. I stood in the entrance and gave him a few moments’ delay which he spent crying on the ground. Then I made him rise and shot him through the chest. He fell down on the weeds shrieking, with the blood coming out in spurts over his clothes, and jerked about till he rolled nearly to where I was. I fired again, but was shaking so that I only broke his wrist. He went on calling out, less loudly, now lying on his back with his feet towards me, and I leant forward and shot him for the last time in the thick of his neck under the jaw. His body shivered a little, and I called the Ageyl; who buried him in the gully where he was. Afterwards the wakeful night dragged over me, till, hours before dawn, I had the men up and made them load, in my longing to be set free of Wadi Kitan. They had to lift me into the saddle.
CHAPTER XXXII

Dawn found us crossing a steep short pass out of Wadi Kitan into the main drainage valley of these succeeding hills. We turned aside into Wadi Reimi, a tributary, to get water. There was no proper well, only a seepage hole in the stony bed of the valley; and we found it partly by our noses: though the taste, while as foul, was curiously unlike the smell. We refilled our water-skins. Arslan baked bread, and we rested for two hours. Then we went on through Wadi Amk, an easy green valley which made comfortable marching for the camels.

When the Amk turned westward we crossed it, going up between piles of the warped grey granite (like cold toffee) which was common up-country in the Hejaz. The defile culminated at the foot of a natural ramp and staircase: badly broken, twisting, and difficult for camels, but short. Afterwards we were in an open valley for an hour, with low hills to the right and mountains to the left. There were water pools in the crags, and Merawin tents under the fine trees which studded the flat. The fertility of the slopes was great: on them grazed flocks of sheep and goats. We got milk from the Arabs: the first milk my Ageyl had been given in the two years of drought.

The track out of the valley when we reached its head was execrable, and the descent beyond into Wadi Marrakh almost dangerous; but the view from the crest compensated us. Wadi Marrakh, a broad, peaceful avenue, ran between two regular straight walls of hills to a circus four miles off where valleys from left, right and front seemed to meet. Artificial heaps of uncut stone were piled about the approach. As we entered it, we saw that the grey hill-walls swept back on each side in a half-circle. Before us, to the south, the curve was barred across by a straight wall or step of blue-black lava, standing over a little grove of thorn trees. We made for these and lay down in their thin shade, grateful in such sultry air for any pretense of coolness.

The day, now at its zenith, was very hot; and my weakness had so increased that my head hardly held up against it. The puffs of feverish
wind pressed like scorching hands against our faces, burning our eyes. My pain made me breathe in gasps through the mouth; the wind cracked my lips and seared my throat till I was too dry to talk, and drinking became sore; yet I always needed to drink, as my thirst would not let me lie still and get the peace I longed for. The flies were a plague.

The bed of the valley was of fine quartz gravel and white sand. Its glitter thrust itself between our eyelids; and the level of the ground seemed to dance as the wind moved the white tips of stubble grass to and fro. The camels loved this grass, which grew in tufts, about sixteen inches high, on slate-green stalks. They gulped down great quantities of it until the men drove them in and couched them by me. At the moment I hated the beasts, for too much food made their breath stink; and they rumblingly belched up a new mouthful from their stomachs each time they had chewed and swallowed the last, till a green slaver flooded out between their loose lips over the side teeth, and dripped down their sagging chins.

Lying angrily there, I threw a stone at the nearest, which got up and wavered about behind my head; finally it straddled its back legs and staled in wide, bitter jets; and I was so far gone with the heat and weakness and pain that I just lay there and cried about it unhelping. The men had gone to make a fire and cook a gazelle one of them had fortunately shot; and I realized that on another day this halt would have been pleasant to me; for the hills were very strange and their colours vivid. The base had the warm grey of old stored sunlight; while about their crests ran narrow veins of granite-coloured stone, generally in pairs, following the contour of the skyline like the rusted metals of an abandoned scenic railway. Arslan said the hills were combed like cocks, a sharper observation.

After the men had fed we re-mounted, and easily climbed the first wave of the lava flood. It was short, as was the second, on the top of which lay a broad terrace with an alluvial plot of sand and gravel in its midst. The lava was a nearly clean floor of iron-red rock-cinders, over which were scattered fields of loose stone. The third and other steps ascended to the south of us: but we turned east, up Wadi Gara.

Gara had, perhaps, been a granite valley down whose middle the
lava had flowed, slowly filling it, and arching itself up in a central heap. On each side were deep troughs, between the lava and the hill-side. Rain water flooded these as often as storms burst in the hills. The lava flow, as it coagulated, had been twisted like a rope, cracked, and bent back irregularly upon itself. The surface was loose with fragments through which many generations of camel parties had worn an inadequate and painful track.

We struggled along for hours, going slowly, our camels wincing at every stride as the sharp edges slipped beneath their tender feet. The paths were only to be seen by the droppings along them, and by the slightly bluer surfaces of the rubbed stones. The Arabs declared them impassable after dark, which was to be believed, for we risked laming our beasts each time our impatience made us urge them on. Just before five in the afternoon, however, the way got easier. We seemed to be near the head of the valley, which grew narrow. Before us on the right, an exact cone-crater, with tidy furrows scoring it from lip to foot, promised good going; for it was made of black ash, clean as though sifted, with here and there a bank of harder soil, and cinders. Beyond it was another lava-field, older perhaps than the valleys, for its stones were smoothed, and between them were straths of flat earth, rank with weeds. In among these open spaces were Beduin tents, whose owners ran to us when they saw us coming; and, taking our head-stalls with hospitable force, led us in.

They proved to be Sheikh Fahad el Hansha and his men: old and garrulous warriors who had marched with us to Wejh, and had been with Garland on that great occasion when his first automatic mine had succeeded under a troop train near Toweira station. Fahad would not hear of my resting quietly outside his tent, but with the reckless equality of the desert men urged me into an unfortunate place inside among his own vermin. There he plied me with bowl after bowl of diuretic camel-milk between questions about Europe, my home tribe, the English camel-pasturages, the war in the Hejaz and the wars elsewhere, Egypt and Damascus, how Feisal was, why did we seek Abdulla, and by what perversity did I remain Christian, when their hearts and hands waited to welcome me to the Faith?

So passed long hours till ten at night, when the guest-sheep was
carried in, dismembered royally over a huge pile of buttered rice. I ate as manners demanded, twisted myself up in my cloak, and slept; my bodily exhaustion, after those hours of the worst imaginable marching, proofing me against the onslaught of lice and fleas. The illness, however, had stimulated my ordinarily sluggish fancy, which ran riot this night in dreams of wandering naked for a dark eternity over interminable lava (like scrambled egg gone iron-blue, and very wrong), sharp as insect-bites underfoot; and with some horror, perhaps a dead Moor, always climbing after us.

In the morning we woke early and refreshed, with our clothes stinging-full of fiery points feeding on us. After one more bowl of milk proffered us by the eager Fahad, I was able to walk unaided to my camel and mount her actively. We rode up the last piece of Wadi Gara to the crest, among cones of black cinders from a crater to the south. Thence we turned to a branch valley, ending in a steep and rocky chimney, up which we pulled our camels.

Beyond we had an easy descent into Wadi Murremiya, whose middle bristled with lava like galvanized iron, on each side of which there were smooth sandy beds, good going. After a while we came to a fault in the flow, which served as a track to the other side. By it we crossed over, finding the lava pocketed with soils apparently of extreme richness, for in them were leafy trees and lawns of real grass, starred with flowers, the best grazing of all our ride, looking the more wonderfully green because of the blue-black twisted crusts of rock about. The lava had changed its character. Here were no piles of loose stones, as big as a skull or a man’s hand, rubbed and rounded together; but bunched and crystallized fronds of metallic rock, altogether impassable for bare feet.

Another watershed conducted us to an open place where the Jeheina had ploughed some eight acres of the thin soil below a thicket of scrub. They said there were like it in the neighbourhood other fields, silent witnesses to the courage and persistence of the Arabs. It was called Wadi Chetf, and after it was another broken river of lava, the worst yet encountered. A shadowy path zigzagged across it. We lost one camel with a broken fore-leg, the result of a stumble in a pot-hole; and the many bones which lay about showed that we were not the only party to suffer misfortune in the passage. However, this ended our lava,
according to the guides, and we went thence forward along easy valleys with finally a long run up a gentle slope till dusk. The going was so good and the cool of the day so freshened me that we did not halt at nightfall, after our habit, but pushed on for an hour across the basin of Murramiya into the basin of Wadi Ais, and there, by Tleih, we stopped for our last camp in the open.

I rejoiced that we were so nearly in, for fever was heavy on me. I was afraid that perhaps I was going to be really ill, and the prospect of falling into the well-meaning hands of tribesmen in such a state was not pleasant. Their treatment of every sickness was to burn holes in the patient's body at some spot believed to be the complement of the part affected. It was a cure tolerable to such as had faith in it, but torture to the unbelieving: to incur it unwillingly would be silly, and yet certain; for the Arabs' good intentions, selfish as their good digestions, would never heed a sick man's protesting.

The morning was easy, over open valleys and gentle rides into Wadi Ais. We arrived at Abu Markha, its nearest watering-place, just a few minutes after Sherif Abdulla had dismounted there, and while he was ordering his tents to be pitched in an acacia glade beyond the well. He was leaving his old camp at Bir el Amri, lower down the valley, as he had left Murabba, his camp before, because the ground had been fouled by the careless multitude of his men and animals. I gave him the documents from Feisal, explaining the situation in Medina, and the need we had of haste to block the railway. I thought he took it coolly; but, without argument, went on to say that I was a little tired after my journey, and with his permission would lie down and sleep a while. He pitched me a tent next his great marquee, and I went into it and rested myself at last. It had been a struggle against faintness day-long in the saddle to get here at all: and now the strain was ended with the delivery of my message, I felt that another hour would have brought the breaking point.
CHAPTER XXXIII

ABOUT ten days I lay in that tent, suffering a bodily weakness which made my animal self crawl away and hide till the shame was passed. As usual in such circumstances my mind cleared, my senses became more acute, and I began at last to think consecutively of the Arab Revolt, as an accustomed duty to rest upon against the pain. It should have been thought out long before, but at my first landing in Hejaz there had been a crying need for action, and we had done what seemed to instinct best, not probing into the why, nor formulating what we really wanted at the end of all. Instinct thus abused without a basis of past knowledge and reflection had grown intuitive, feminine, and was now bleaching my confidence; so in this forced inaction I looked for the equation between my book-reading and my movements, and spent the intervals of uneasy sleeps and dreams in plucking at the tangle of our present.

As I have shown, I was unfortunately as much in command of the campaign as I pleased, and was untrained. In military theory I was tolerably read, my Oxford curiosity having taken me past Napoleon to Clausewitz and his school, to Caemmerer and Moltke, and the recent Frenchmen. They had all seemed to be one-sided; and after looking at Jomini and Willisen, I had found broader principles in Saxe and Guibert and the eighteenth century. However, Clausewitz was intellectually so much the master of them, and his book so logical and fascinating, that unconsciously I accepted his finality, until a comparison of Kuhne and Foch disgusted me with soldiers, wearied me of their officious glory, making me critical of all their light. In any case, my interest had been abstract, concerned with the theory and philosophy of warfare especially from the metaphysical side.

Now, in the field everything had been concrete, particularly the tiresome problem of Medina; and to distract myself from that I began to recall suitable maxims on the conduct of modern, scientific war. But they would not fit, and it worried me. Historico, Medina had been an obsession for us all; but now that I was ill, its image was not clear,
whether it was that we were near to it (one seldom liked the attainable), or whether it was that my eyes were misty with too constant staring at the butt. One afternoon I woke from a hot sleep, running with sweat and pricking with flies, and wondered what on earth was the good of Medina to us? Its harmfulness had been patent when we were at Yenbo and the Turks in it were going to Mecca: but we had changed all that by our march to Wejh. To-day we were blockading the railway, and they only defending it. The garrison of Medina, reduced to an inoffensive size, were sitting in trenches destroying their own power of movement by eating the transport they could no longer feed. We had taken away their power to harm us, and yet wanted to take away their town. It was not a base for us like Wejh, nor a threat like Wadi Ais. What on earth did we want it for?

The camp was bestirring itself after the torpor of the midday hours; and noises from the world outside began to filter in to me past the yellow lining of the tent-canvas, whose every hole and tear was stabbed through by a long dagger of sunlight. I heard the stamping and snorting of the horses plagued with flies where they stood in the shadow of the trees, the complaint of camels, the ringing of coffee mortars, distant shots. To their burden I began to drum out the aim in war. The books gave it pat — the destruction of the armed forces of the enemy by the one process — battle. Victory could be purchased only by blood. This was a hard saying for us. As the Arabs had no organized forces, a Turkish Foch would have no aim. The Arabs would not endure casualties. How would our Clausewitz buy his victory? Von der Goltz had seemed to go deeper, saying it was necessary not to annihilate the enemy, but to break his courage. Only we showed no prospect of ever breaking anybody's courage.

However, Goltz was a humbug, and these wise men must be talking metaphors; for we were indubitably winning our war; and as I pondered slowly, it dawned on me that we had won the Hejaz war. Out of every thousand square miles of Hejaz nine hundred and ninety-nine were now free. Did my provoked jape at Vickery, that rebellion was more like peace than like war, hold as much truth as haste? Perhaps in war the absolute did rule, but to impose a majority was good enough. If we held the rest, the Turks were welcome to the tiny fraction on which they
stood, till peace or Doomsday showed them the futility of clinging to our window-pane.

I brushed off the same flies once more from my face patiently, content to know that the Hejaz War was won and finished with: won from the day we took Wejh, if we had had wit to see it. Then I broke the thread of my argument again to listen. The distant shots had grown and tied themselves into long, ragged volleys. They ceased. I strained my ears for the other sounds which I knew would follow. Sure enough across the silence came a rustle like the dragging of a skirt over the flints, around the thin walls of my tent. A pause, while the camel-riders drew up: and then the soggy tapping of canes on the thick of the beasts’ necks to make them kneel.

They knelt without noise: and I timed it in my memory: first the hesitation, as the camels, looking down, felt the soil with one foot for a soft place; then the muffled thud and the sudden loosening of breath as they dropped on their fore-legs, since this party had come far and were tired; then the shuffle as the hind legs were folded in, and the rocking as they tossed from side to side thrusting outward with their knees to bury them in the cooler subsoil below the burning flints, while the riders, with a quick soft patter of bare feet, like birds over the ground, were led off tacitly either to the coffee hearth or to Abdulla’s tent, according to their business. The camels would rest there, uneasily switching their tails across the shingle till their masters were free and looked to their stabling.

I had made a comfortable beginning of doctrine, but was left still to find an alternative end and means of war. Ours seemed unlike the ritual of which Foch was priest; and I recalled him, to see a difference in kind between him and us. In his modern war — absolute war he called it — two nations professing incompatible philosophies put them to the test of force. Philosophically, it was idiotic, for while opinions were arguable, convictions needed shooting to be cured; and the struggle could end only when the supporters of the one immaterial principle had no more means of resistance against the supporters of the other. It sounded like a twentieth-century restatement of the wars of religion, whose logical end was utter destruction of one creed, and whose protagonists believed that God’s judgement would prevail. This
might do for France and Germany, but would not represent the British attitude. Our Army was not intelligently maintaining a philosophic conception in Flanders or on the Canal. Efforts to make our men hate the enemy usually made them hate the fighting. Indeed Foch had knocked out his own argument by saying that such war depended on levy in mass, and was impossible with professional armies; while the old army was still the British ideal, and its manner the ambition of our ranks and our files. To me the Foch war seemed only an exterminative variety, no more absolute than another. One could as explicity call it 'murder war'. Clausewitz enumerated all sorts of war... personal wars, joint-proxy duels, for dynastic reasons... expulsive wars, in party politics... commercial wars, for trade objects... two wars seemed seldom alike. Often the parties did not know their aim, and blundered till the march of events took control. Victory in general habit leaned to the clear-sighted, though fortune and superior intelligence could make a sad muddle of nature's 'inexorable' law.

I wondered why Feisal wanted to fight the Turks, and why the Arabs helped him, and saw that their aim was geographical, to extrude the Turk from all Arabic-speaking lands in Asia. Their peace ideal of liberty could exercise itself only so. In pursuit of the ideal conditions we might kill Turks, because we disliked them very much; but the killing was a pure luxury. If they would go quietly the war would end. If not, we would urge them, or try to drive them out. In the last resort, we should be compelled to the desperate course of blood and the maxims of 'murder war', but as cheaply as could be for ourselves, since the Arabs fought for freedom, and that was a pleasure to be tasted only by a man alive. Posterity was a chilly thing to work for, no matter how much a man happened to love his own, or other people's already-produced children.

At this point a slave slapped my tent-door, and asked if the Emir might call. So I struggled into more clothes, and crawled over to his great tent to sound the depth of motive in him. It was a comfortable place, luxuriously shaded and carpeted deep in strident rugs, the aniline-dyed spoils of Hussein Mabeirig's house in Rabegh. Abdulla passed most of his day in it, laughing with his friends, and playing games with Mohammed Hassan, the court jester. I set the ball of
conversation rolling between him and Shakir and the chance sheiks, among whom was the fire-hearted Ferhan el Aida, the son of Doughty's Motlog; and I was rewarded, for Abdulla's words were definite. He contrasted his hearers' present independence with their past servitude to Turkey, and roundly said that talk of Turkish heresy, or the immoral doctrine of Yeni-Turan, or the illegitimate Caliphate was beside the point. It was Arab country, and the Turks were in it: that was the one issue. My argument preened itself.

The next day a great complication of boils developed out, to conceal my lessened fever, and to chain me down yet longer in impotence upon my face in this stinking tent. When it grew too hot for dreamless dozing, I picked up my tangle again, and went on ravelling it out, considering now the whole house of war in its structural aspect, which was strategy, in its arrangements, which were tactics, and in the sentiment of its inhabitants, which was psychology; for my personal duty was command, and the commander, like the master architect, was responsible for all.

The first confusion was the false antithesis between strategy, the aim in war, the synoptic regard seeing each part relative to the whole, and tactics, the means towards a strategic end, the particular steps of its staircase. They seemed only points of view from which to ponder the elements of war, the Algebraical element of things, a Biological element of lives, and the Psychological element of ideas.

The Algebraical element looked to me a pure science, subject to mathematical law, inhuman. It dealt with known variables, fixed conditions, space and time, inorganic things like hills and climates and railways, with mankind in type-masses too great for individual variety, with all artificial aids and the extensions given our faculties by mechanical invention. It was essentially formulable.

Here was a pompous, professorial beginning. My wits, hostile to the abstract, took refuge in Arabia again. Translated into Arabic, the algebraic factor would first take practical account of the area we wished to deliver, and I began idly to calculate how many square miles: sixty: eighty: one hundred: perhaps one hundred and forty thousand square miles. And how would the Turks defend all that? No doubt by a trench line across the bottom, if we came like an army with banners;
but suppose we were (as we might be) an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind; and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so we might offer nothing material to the killing. It seemed a regular soldier might be helpless without a target, owning only what he sat on, and subjugating only what, by order, he could poke his rifle at.

Then I figured out how many men they would need to sit on all this ground, to save it from our attack-in-depth, sedition putting up her head in every unoccupied one of those hundred thousand square miles. I knew the Turkish Army exactly, and even allowing for their recent extension of faculty by aeroplanes and guns and armoured trains (which made the earth a smaller battlefield) still it seemed they would have need of a fortified post every four square miles, and a post could not be less than twenty men. If so, they would need six hundred thousand men to meet the illwills of all the Arab peoples, combined with the active hostility of a few zealots.

How many zealots could we have? At present we had nearly fifty thousand for the day. It seemed the assets in this element of war were ours. If we realized our raw materials and were apt with them, then climate, railway, desert, and technical weapons could also be attached to our interests. The Turks were stupid; the Germans behind them dogmatical. They would believe that rebellion was absolute like war, and deal with it on the analogy of war. Analogy in human things was fudge, anyhow; and war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife.

This was enough of the concrete; so I sheered off ἐμποτὴμ, the mathematical element, and plunged into the nature of the biological factor in command. Its crisis seemed to be the breaking point, life and death, or less finally, wear and tear. The war-philosophers had properly made an art of it, and had elevated one item, 'effusion of blood', to the height of an essential, which became humanity in battle, an act touching every side of our corporal being, and very warm. A line of variability. Man, persisted like leaven through its estimates, making them irregular.
The components were sensitive and illogical, and generals guarded themselves by the device of a reserve, the significant medium of their art. Goltz had said that if you knew the enemy's strength, and he was fully deployed, then you could dispense with a reserve: but this was never. The possibility of accident, of some flaw in materials was always in the general's mind, and the reserve unconsciously held to meet it.

The 'felt' element in troops, not expressible in figures, had to be guessed at by the equivalent of Plato's δόξα, and the greatest commander of men was he whose intuitions most nearly happened. Nine-tenths of tactics were certain enough to be teachable in schools; but the irrational tenth was like the kingfisher flashing across the pool, and in it lay the test of generals. It could be ensued only by instinct (sharpened by thought practising the stroke) until at the crisis it came naturally, a reflex. There had been men whose δόξα so nearly approached perfection that by its road they reached the certainty of ἐπιστήμη. The Greeks might have called such genius for command νόησις had they bothered to rationalize revolt.

My mind see-sawed back to apply this to ourselves, and at once knew that it was not bounded by mankind, that it applied also to materials. In Turkey things were scarce and precious, men less esteemed than equipment. Our cue was to destroy, not the Turk's army, but his minerals. The death of a Turkish bridge or rail, machine or gun or charge of high explosive, was more profitable to us than the death of a Turk. In the Arab Army at the moment we were chary both of materials and of men. Governments saw men only in mass; but our men, being irregulars, were not formations, but individuals. An individual death, like a pebble dropped in water, might make but a brief hole; yet rings of sorrow widened out therefrom. We could not afford casualties.

Materials were easier to replace. It was our obvious policy to be superior in some one tangible branch; gun-cotton or machine-guns or whatever could be made decisive. Orthodoxy had laid down the maxim, applied to men, of being superior at the critical point and moment of attack. We might be superior in equipment in one dominant moment or respect; and for both things and men we might give the doctrine a twisted negative side, for cheapness' sake, and be weaker
than the enemy everywhere except in that one point or matter. The decision of what was critical would always be ours. Most wars were wars of contact, both forces striving into touch to avoid tactical surprise. Ours should be a war of detachment. We were to contain the enemy by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert, not disclosing ourselves till we attacked. The attack might be nominal, directed not against him, but against his stuff; so it would not seek either his strength or his weakness, but his most accessible material. In railway-cutting it would be usually an empty stretch of rail; and the more empty, the greater the tactical success. We might turn our average into a rule (not a law, since war was antinomian) and develop a habit of never engaging the enemy. This would chime with the numerical plea for never affording a target. Many Turks on our front had no chance all the war to fire on us, and we were never on the defensive except by accident and in error.

The corollary of such a rule was perfect ‘intelligence’, so that we could plan in certainty. The chief agent must be the general’s head; and his understanding must be faultless, leaving no room for chance. Morale, if built on knowledge, was broken by ignorance. When we knew all about the enemy we should be comfortable. We must take more pains in the service of news than any regular staff.

I was getting through my subject. The algebraical factor had been translated into terms of Arabia, and fitted like a glove. It promised victory. The biological factor had dictated to us a development of the tactical line most in accord with the genius of our tribesmen. There remained the psychological element to build up an apt shape. I went to Xenophon and stole, to name it, his word *diathetics*, which had been the art of Cyrus before he struck.

Of this our ‘propaganda’ was the stained and ignoble offspring. It was the pathetic, almost the ethical, in war. Some of it concerned the crowd, an adjustment of its spirit to the point where it became useful to exploit in action, and the pre-direction of this changing spirit to a certain end. Some of it concerned the individual, and then it became a rare art of human kindness, transcending, by purposed emotion, the gradual logical sequence of the mind. It was more subtle than tactics, and better worth doing, because it dealt with uncontrollables,
with subjects incapable of direct command. It considered the capacity for mood of our men, their complexities and mutability, and the cultivation of whatever in them promised to profit our intention. We had to arrange their minds in order of battle just as carefully and as formally as other officers would arrange their bodies. And not only our own men's minds, though naturally they came first. We must also arrange the minds of the enemy, so far as we could reach them; then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, since more than half the battle passed there in the back; then the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict; and of the neutrals looking on; circle beyond circle.

There were many humiliating material limits, but no moral impossibilities; so that the scope of our diathetical activities was unbounded. On it we should mainly depend for the means of victory on the Arab front; and the novelty of it was our advantage. The printing press, and each newly-discovered method of communication favoured the intellectual above the physical, civilization paying the mind always from the body's funds. We kindergarten soldiers were beginning our art of war in the atmosphere of the twentieth century, receiving our weapons without prejudice. To the regular officer, with the tradition of forty generations of service behind him, the antique arms were the most honoured. As we had seldom to concern ourselves with what our men did, but always with what they thought, the diathetic for us would be more than half the command. In Europe it was set a little aside, and entrusted to men outside the General Staff. In Asia the regular elements were so weak that irregulars could not let the metaphysical weapon rust unused.

Battles in Arabia were a mistake, since we profited in them only by the ammunition the enemy fired off. Napoleon had said it was rare to find generals willing to fight battles; but the curse of this war was that so few would do anything else. Saxe had told us that irrational battles were the refuges of fools: rather they seemed to me impositions on the side which believed itself weaker, hazards made unavoidable either by lack of land room or by the need to defend a material property dearer than the lives of soldiers. We had nothing material to lose, so our best line was to defend nothing and to shoot nothing. Our cards were
speed and time, not hitting power. The invention of bulley beef had profited us more than the invention of gunpowder, but gave us strategical, rather than tactical strength, since in Arabia range was more than force, space greater than the power of armies.

I had now been eight days lying in this remote tent, keeping my ideas general,* till my brain, sick of unsupported thinking, had to be dragged to its work by an effort of will, and went off into a doze whenever that effort was relaxed. The fever passed: my dysentery ceased; and with restored strength the present again became actual to me. Facts concrete and pertinent thrust themselves into my reveries; and my inconstant wit bore aside towards all these roads of escape. So I hurried into line my shadowy principles, to have them once precise before my power to evoke them faded.

It seemed to me proven that our rebellion had an unassailable base, guarded not only from attack, but from the fear of attack. It had a sophisticated alien enemy, disposed as an army of occupation in an area greater than could be dominated effectively from fortified posts. It had a friendly population, of which some two in the hundred were active, and the rest quietly sympathetic to the point of not betraying the movements of the minority. The active rebels had the virtues of secrecy and self-control, and the qualities of speed, endurance and independence of arteries of supply. They had technical equipment enough to paralyse the enemy’s communications. A province would be won when we had taught the civilians in it to die for our ideal of freedom. The presence of the enemy was secondary. Final victory seemed certain, if the war lasted long enough for us to work it out.

* Not perhaps as successfully as here. I thought out my problems mainly in terms of Hejaz, illustrated by what I knew of its men and its geography. These would have been too long if written down; and the argument has been compressed into an abstract form in which it smells more of the lamp than of the field. All military writing does, worse luck.
CHAPTER XXXIV

Obviously I was well again, and I remembered the reason of my journey to Wadi Ais. The Turks meant to march out of Medina, and Sir Archibald Murray wanted us to attack them in professional form. It was irksome that he should come butting into our show from Egypt, asking from us alien activities. Yet the British were the bigger; and the Arabs lived only by grace of their shadow. We were yoked to Sir Archibald Murray, and must work with him, to the point of sacrificing our non-essential interests for his, if they would not be reconciled. At the same time we could not possibly act alike. Feisal might be a free gas: Sir Archibald's army, probably the most cumbrous in the world, had to be laboriously pushed forward on its belly. It was ridiculous to suppose it could keep pace with ethical conceptions as nimble as the Arab Movement: doubtful even if it would understand them. However, perhaps by hindering the railway we could frighten the Turks off their plan to evacuate Medina, and give them reason to remain in the town on the defensive: a conclusion highly serviceable to both Arabs and English, though possibly neither would see it, yet.

Accordingly, I wandered into Abdulla's tent, announcing my complete recovery and an ambition to do something to the Hejaz railway. Here were men, guns, machine-guns, explosives and automatic mines: enough for a main effort. But Abdulla was apathetic. He wanted to talk about the Royal families of Europe, or the Battle of the Somme: the slow march of his own war bored him. However, Sherif Shakir, his cousin and second in command, was fired to enthusiasm, and secured us licence to do our worst. Shakir loved the Ateiba, and swore they were the best tribe on earth; so we settled to take mostly Ateiba with us. Then we thought we might have a mountain gun, one of the Egyptian Army Krupp veterans, which had been sent by Feisal to Abdulla from Wejh as a present.

Shakir promised to collect the force, and we agreed that I should go in front (gently, as befitted my weakness) and search for a target. The
nearest and biggest was Aba el Naam Station. With me went Raho, Algerian officer in the French Army, and member of Bremond’s mission, a very hard-working and honest fellow. Our guide was Mohammed el Kadhi, whose old father, Dakhil-Allah, hereditary lawman of the Juheina, had guided the Turks down to Yenbo last December. Mohammed was eighteen, solid and silent natured. Sherif Fauzan el Harith, the famous warrior who had captured Eshref at Janbila, escorted us, with about twenty Ateiba and five or six Juheina adventurers.

We left on March the twenty-sixth, while Sir Archibald Murray was attacking Gaza; and rode down Wadi Ais; but after three hours the heat proved too much for me, and we stopped by a great sidr tree (loote or ju-jube, but the fruit was scarce) and rested under it the midday hours. Sidr trees cast heavy shade: there was a cool east wind, and few flies. Wadi Ais was luxuriant with thorn trees and grass, and its air full of white butterflies and scents of wild flowers; so that we did not remount till late in the afternoon, and then did only a short march, leaving Wadi Ais by the right, after passing in an angle of the valley a ruined terrace and cistern. Once there had been villages in this part, with the underground waters carefully employed in their frequent gardens; but now it was waste.

The following morning we had two hours’ rough riding around the spurs of Jebel Serd into Wadi Turaa, a historic valley, linked by an easy pass to Wadi Yenbo. We spent this midday also under a tree, near some Juheina tents, where Mohammed guested while we slept. Then we rode on rather crookedly for two more hours, and camped after dark. By ill luck an early spring scorpion stung me severely on the left hand while I lay down to sleep. The place swelled up; and my arm became stiff and sore.

At five next morning, after a long night, we restarted, and passed through the last hills, out into the Jurf, an undulating open space which ran up southward to Jebel Antar, a crater with a split and castellated top, making it a landmark. We turned half-right in the plain, to get under cover of the low hills which screened it from Wadi Hamdh, in whose bed the railway lay. Behind these hills we rode southward till opposite Aba el Naam. There we halted to camp, close to the enemy but quite
in safety. The hill-top commanded them; and we climbed it before
sunset for a first view of the station.

The hill was, perhaps, six hundred feet high and steep, and I made
many stages of it, resting on my way up: but the sight from the top was
good. The railway was some three miles off. The station had a pair of
large, two-storied houses of basalt, a circular water-tower, and other
buildings. There were bell-tents, huts and trenches, but no sign of
guns. We could see about three hundred men in all.

We heard that the Turks patroled their neighbourhood actively at
night. A bad habit this: so we sent off two men to lie by each block-
house, and fire a few shots after dark. The enemy, thinking it a prelude
to attack, stood-to in their trenches all night, while we were comfortably
sleeping; but the cold woke us early with a restless dawn wind blowing
across the Jurf, and singing in the great trees round our camp. As we
climbed to our observation point the sun conquered the clouds and an
hour later it grew very hot.

We lay like lizards in the long grass round the stones of the foremost
cairn upon the hill-top and saw the garrison parade. Three hundred
and ninety-nine infantry, little toy men, ran about when the bugle
sounded, and formed up in stiff lines below the black building till there
was more bugling: then they scattered, and after a few minutes the
smoke of cooking fires went up. A herd of sheep and goats in charge
of a little ragged boy issued out towards us. Before he reached the
foot of the hills there came a loud whistling down the valley from the
north, and a tiny, picture-book train rolled slowly into view across
the hollow sounding bridge and halted just outside the station, panting
out white puffs of steam.

The shepherd lad held on steadily, driving his goats with shrill cries
up our hill for the better pasture on the western side. We sent two
Juheina down behind a ridge beyond sight of the enemy, and they ran
from each side and caught him. The lad was of the outcast Heteym,
pariahs of the desert, whose poor children were commonly sent on hire
as shepherds to the tribes about them. This one cried continually, and
made efforts to escape as often as he saw his goats straying uncared-for
about the hill. In the end the men lost patience and tied him up
roughly, when he screamed for terror that they would kill him.
Fauzan had great ado to make him quiet, and then questioned him about his Turkish masters. But all his thoughts were for the flock: his eyes followed them miserably while the tears made edged and crooked tracks down his dirty face.

Shepherds were a class apart. For the ordinary Arab the hearth was a university, about which their world passed and where they heard the best talk, the news of their tribe, its poems, histories, love tales, lawsuits and bargainings. By such constant sharing in the hearth councils they grew up masters of expression, dialecticians, orators, able to sit with dignity in any gathering and never at a loss for moving words. The shepherds missed the whole of this. From infancy they followed their calling, which took them in all seasons and weathers, day and night, into the hills and condemned them to loneliness and brute company. In the wilderness, among the dry bones of nature, they grew up natural, knowing nothing of man and his affairs; hardly sane in ordinary talk; but very wise in plants, wild animals and the habits of their own goats and sheep, whose milk was their chief sustenance. With manhood they became sullen, while a few turned dangerously savage, more animal than man, haunting the flocks, and finding the satisfaction of their adult appetites in them, to the exclusion of more licit affections.

For hours after the shepherd had been suppressed only the sun moved in our view. As it climbed we shifted our cloaks to filter its harshness, and basked in luxurious warmth. The restful hill-top gave me back something of the sense-interests which I had lost since I had been ill. I was able to note once more the typical hill scenery, with its hard stone crests, its sides of bare rock, and lower slopes of loose sliding scree, packed, as the base was approached, solidly with a thin dry soil. The stone itself was glistening, yellow, sunburned stuff; metallic in ring, and brittle; splitting red or green or brown as the case might be. From every soft place sprouted thorn-bushes; and there was frequent grass, usually growing from one root in a dozen stout blades, knee-high and straw-coloured: the heads were empty ears between many-feathered arrows of silvery down. With these, and with a shorter grass, whose bottle-brush heads of pearly grey reached only to the ankle, the hill-sides were furred white and bowed themselves lowly towards us with each puff of the casual wind.
Verdure it was not, but excellent pasturage; and in the valleys were bigger tufts of grass, coarse, waist-high and bright green when fresh though they soon faded to the burned yellow of ordinary life. They grew thickly in all the beds of water-ribbed sand and shingle, between the occasional thorn trees, some of which stood forty feet in height. The sidr trees, with their dry, sugary fruit, were rare. But bushes of browned tamarisk, tall broom, other varieties of coarse grass, some flowers, and everything which had thorns, flourished about our camp, and made it a rich sample of the vegetation of the Hejaz highlands. Only one of the plants profited ourselves, and that was the hemeid: a sorrel with fleshy heart-shaped leaves, whose pleasant acidity stayed our thirst.

At dusk we climbed down again with the goat-herd prisoner, and what we could gather of his flock. Our main body would come this night, so that Fauzan and I wandered out across the darkling plain till we found a pleasant gun-position in some low ridges not two thousand yards from the station. On our return, very tired, fires were burning among the trees. Shakir had just arrived, and his men and ours were roasting goat-flesh contentedly. The shepherd was tied up behind my sleeping place, because he had gone frantic when his charges were unlawfully slaughtered. He refused to taste the supper; and we only forced bread and rice into him by the threat of dire punishment if he insulted our hospitality. They tried to convince him that we should take the station next day and kill his masters; but he would not be comforted, and afterwards, for fear lest he escape, had to be lashed to his tree again.

After supper Shakir told me that he had brought only three hundred men instead of the agreed eight or nine hundred. However, it was his war, and therefore his tune, so we hastily modified the plans. We would not take the station; we would frighten it by a frontal artillery attack, while we mined the railway to the north and south, in the hope of trapping that halted train. Accordingly we chose a party of Garland-trained dynamiters who should blow up something north of the bridge at dawn, to seal that direction; while I went off with high explosive and a machine-gun with its crew to lay a mine to the south of the station, the probable direction from which the Turks would seek or send help, in their emergency.

Mohammed el Khadi guided us to a deserted bit of line just before
midnight. I dismounted and fingered its thrilling rails for the first time during the war. Then, in an hour’s busy work, we laid the mine, which was a trigger action to fire into twenty pounds of blasting gelatine when the weight of the locomotive overhead deflected the metals. Afterwards we posted the machine-gunners in a little bush-screened watercourse, four hundred yards from and fully commanding the spot where we hoped the train would be derailed. They were to hide there; while we went on to cut the telegraph, that isolation might persuade Aba el Naam to send their train for reinforcements, as our main attack developed.

So we rode another half-hour, and then turned in to the line, and again were fortunate to strike an unoccupied place. Unhappily the four remaining Juheina proved unable to climb a telegraph pole, and I had to struggle up it myself. It was all I could do, after my illness; and when the third wire was cut the flimsy pole shook so that I lost grip, and came slipping down the sixteen feet upon the stout shoulders of Mohammed, who ran in to break my fall, and nearly got broken himself. We took a few minutes to breathe, but afterwards were able to regain our camels. Eventually we arrived in camp just as the others had saddled up to go forward.

Our mine-laying had taken four hours longer than we had planned and the delay put us in the dilemma either of getting no rest, or of letting the main body march without us. Finally by Shakir’s will we let them go, and fell down under our trees for an hour’s sleep, without which I felt I should collapse utterly. The time was just before daybreak, an hour when the uneasiness of the air affected trees and animals, and made even men-sleepers turn over sighingly. Mohammed, who wanted to see the fight, awoke. To get me up he came over and cried the morning prayer-call in my ear, the raucous voice sounding battle, murder, and sudden death across my dreams. I sat up and rubbed the sand out of red-rimmed aching eyes, as we disputed vehemently of prayer and sleep. He pleaded that there was not a battle every day, and showed the cuts and bruises sustained during the night in helping me. By my blackness and blueness I could feel for him, and we rode off to catch the army, after loosing the still unhappy shepherd boy, with advice to wait for our return.
A band of trodden untidiness in a sweep of gleaming water-rounded sand showed us the way, and we arrived just as the guns opened fire. They did excellently, and crashed in all the top of one building, damaged the second, hit the pump-room, and holed the water-tank. One lucky shell caught the front waggon of the train in the siding, and it took fire furiously. This alarmed the locomotive, which uncoupled and went off southward. We watched her hungrily as she approached our mine, and when she was on it there came a soft cloud of dust and a report and she stood still. The damage was to the front part, as she was reversed and the charge had exploded late; but, while the drivers got out, and jacked up the front wheels and tinkered at them, we waited and waited in vain for the machine-gun to open fire. Later we learned that the gunners, afraid of their loneliness, had packed up and marched to join us when we began shooting. Half an hour after, the repaired engine went away towards Jebel Antar, going at a foot pace and clanking loudly; but going none the less.

Our Arabs worked in towards the station, under cover of the bombardment, while we gnashed our teeth at the machine-gunners. Smoke clouds from the fired trucks screened the Arab advance which wiped out one enemy outpost, and captured another. The Turks withdrew their surviving detachments to the main position, and waited rigorously in their trenches for the assault, which they were in no better spirit to repel than we were to deliver. With our advantages in ground the place would have been a gift to us, if only we had had some of Feisal’s men to charge home.

Meanwhile the wood, tents and trucks in the station were burning, and the smoke was too thick for us to shoot, so we broke off the action. We had taken thirty prisoners, a mare, two camels and some more sheep; and had killed and wounded seventy of the garrison, at a cost to ourselves of one man slightly hurt. Traffic was held up for three days of repair and investigation. So we did not wholly fail.
CHAPTER XXXV

We left two parties in the neighbourhood to damage the line on the next day and the next, while we rode to Abdullah's camp on April the first. Shakir, splendid in habit, held a grand parade on entry, and had thousands of joy-shots fired in honour of his partial victory. The easy-going camp made carnival.

In the evening I went wandering in the thorn-grove behind the tents, till I began to see through the thick branches a wild light, from bursts of raw flame; and across the flame and smoke came the rhythm of drums, in tune with hand-clapping, and the deep roar of a tribal chorus. I crept up quietly, and saw an immense fire, ringed by hundreds of Ataiba sitting on the ground one by the other, gazing intently on Shakir, who, upright and alone in their midst, performed the dance of their song. He had put off his cloak, and wore only his white head-veil and white robes: the powerful firelight was reflected by these and by his pale, ravaged face. As he sang he threw back his head, and at the close of each phrase raised his hands, to let the full sleeves run back upon his shoulders, while he waved his bare arms weirdly. The tribe around him beat time with their hands, or bayed out the refrains at his nod. The grove of trees where I stood outside the circle of light was thronged with Arabs of stranger tribes, whispering, and watching the Atban.

In the morning we determined on another visit to the line, for fuller trial of the automatic mine-action which had half-failed at Aba el Naam. Old Dakhil-Allah said that he would come with me himself on this trip, the project of looting a train had tempted him. With us went some forty of the Juheina, who seemed to me stouter men than the high-bred Ateiba. However, one of the chiefs of the Ataiba, Sultan el Abbud, a boon friend of Abdullah and Shakir, refused to be left behind. This good-tempered but hare-brained fellow, sheikh of a poor section of the tribe, had had more horses killed under him in battle than any other Ateibi warrior. He was about twenty-six and a great rider; full of quips and fond of practical jokes, very noisy: tall and strong, with a big, square head, wrinkled forehead, and deep-set bright eyes. A young
moustache and beard hid his ruthless jaw and the wide, straight mouth, with white teeth gleaming and locked like a wolf’s.

We took a machine-gun and its soldier crew of thirteen with us, to settle our train when caught. Shakir, with his grave courtesy to the Emir’s guest, set us on our road for the first half-hour. This time we kept to the Wadi Ais almost to its junction with Hamdh, finding it very green and full of grazing, since it had flooded twice already in this winter. At last we bore off to the right over a ditch on to a flat, and there slept in the sand, rather distressed by a shower of rain which sent little rills over the ground about midnight: but the next morning was bright and hot, and we rode into the huge plain where the three great valleys, Tubja, Ais and Jizil, flowed into and became one with Hamdh. The course of the main stream was overgrown by asla wood, just as at Abu Zereibat, with the same leprous bed of hummocky sand-blisters: but the thicket was only two hundred yards broad, and beyond it the plain with its grained intricacy of shallow torrent-beds stretched for yet further miles. At noon we halted by a place like a wilderness garden, waist deep in juicy grass and flowers, upon which our happy camels gorged themselves for an hour and then sat down, full and astonished.

The day seemed to be hotter and hotter: the sun drew close, and scorched us without intervening air. The clean, sandy soil was so baked that my bare feet could not endure it, and I had to walk in sandals, to the amusement of the Juheina, whose thick soles were proof even against slow fire. As the afternoon passed on the light became dim, but the heat steadily increased with an oppression and sultriness which took me by surprise. I kept turning my head to see if some mass was not just behind me, shutting off the air.

There had been long rolls of thunder all morning in the hills, and the two peaks, Serd and Jasim, were wrapped in folds of dark blue and yellow vapour, which looked motionless and substantial. At last I saw that part of the yellow cloud off Serd was coming slowly against the wind in our direction raising scores of dust devils before its feet.

The cloud was nearly as high as the hill. While it approached, two dust-spouts, tight and symmetrical chimneys, advanced, one on the right and one on the left of its front. Dakhil-Allah responsibly looked
ahead and to each side for shelter, but saw none. He warned me that
the storm would be heavy.

When it got near, the wind, which had been scorching our faces with
its hot breathlessness, changed suddenly; and, after waiting a moment,
blew bitter cold and damp upon our backs. It also increased greatly in
violence, and at the same time the sun disappeared, blotted out by thick
rags of yellow air over our heads. We stood in a horrible light,
ochreous and fitful. The brown wall of cloud from the hills was now
very near, rushing changelessly upon us with a loud grinding sound.
Three minutes later it struck, wrapping about us a blanket of dust and
stinging grains of sand, twisting and turning in violent eddies, and yet
advancing eastward at the speed of a strong gale.

We had put our camels' backs to the storm, to march before it: but
these internal whirling winds tore our tightly-held cloaks from our
hands, filled our eyes, and robbed us of all sense of direction by turning
our camels right or left from their course. Sometimes they were blown
completely round: once we clashed helplessly together in a vortex,
while large bushes, tufts of grass, and even a small tree were torn up by
the roots in dense waves of soil about them, and driven against us, or
blown over our heads with dangerous force. We never were blinded —
it was always possible to see for seven or eight feet to each side — but
it was risky to look out, as, in addition to the certain sand-blast, we
never knew if we should not meet a flying tree, a rush of pebbles, or a
spout of grass-laden dust.

This storm lasted for eighteen minutes, and then leaped forward
from us as suddenly as it had come. Our party was scattered over a
square mile or more, and before we could rally, while we, our clothes
and our camels were yet smothered in dust, yellow and heavy with it
from head to foot, down burst torrents of thick rain and mudded us to
the skin. The valley began to run in plashes of water, and Dakhil-Allah
urged us across it quickly. The wind chopped once more, this time to
the north, and the rain came driving before it in harsh sheets of spray.
It beat through our woollen cloaks in a moment, and moulded them
and our shirts to our bodies, and chilled us to the bone.

We reached the hill-barrier in mid-afternoon, but found the valley
bare and shelterless, colder than ever. After riding up it for three or
four miles we halted, and climbed a great crag to see the railway which, 
they said, lay just beyond. On the height the wind was so terrible that 
we could not cling to the wet slippery rocks against the slapping and 
bellying of our cloaks and skirts. I took mine off, and climbed the rest 
of the way half-naked, more easily, and hardly colder than before. But 
the effort proved useless, the air being too thick for observation. So I 
worked down, cut and bruised, to the others; and dressed numbly. On 
our way back we suffered the only casualty of this trip. Sultan had 
insisted on coming with us, and his Ateibi servant, who must follow 
him though he had no head for heights, slipped in one bad place with a 
fall of forty feet to the stones, and plunged down headlong.

When we got back my hands and feet were too broken to serve me 
longer, and I lay down and shivered for an hour or so while the others 
buried the dead man in a side valley. On their return they met suddenly 
an unknown rider on a camel, crossing their track. He fired at them. 
They fired back, snap-shooting through the rain, and the evening 
swallowed him. This was disquieting, for surprise was our main ally, 
and we could only hope that he would not return to warn the Turks 
that there were raiders in the neighbourhood.

After the heavy camels with the explosives caught us, we mounted 
again to get closer to the line; but we had no more than started when 
brazenly down the visible wind in the misted valley came the food-call 
of Turkish bugles. Dakhil-Allah thrust his ear forward in the direction 
of the sound, and understood that over there lay Madahrij, the small 
estation below which we meant to operate. So we steered on the hateful 
noise, hateful because it spoke of supper and of tents, whereas we were 
shelterless, and on such a night could not hope to make ourselves a fire 
and bake bread from the flour and water in our saddle-bags, and conse-
quently must go hungry.

We did not reach the railway till after ten o’clock at night, in con-
ditions of invisibility which made it futile to choose a machine-gun 
position. At random I pitched upon kilometre 1,121 from Damascus 
for the mine. It was a complicated mine, with a central trigger to fire 
simultaneous charges thirty yards apart: and we hoped in this way 
to get the locomotive whether it was going north or south. Burying 
the mine took four hours, for the rain had caked the surface and rotted
it. Our feet made huge tracks on the flat and on the bank, as though a school of elephants had been dancing there. To hide these marks was out of the question, so we did the other thing, trampling about for hundreds of yards, even bringing up our camels to help, until it looked as though half an army had crossed the valley, and the mine-place was no better and no worse than the rest. Then we went back a safe distance behind some miserable mounds, and cowered down in the open, waiting for day. The cold was intense. Our teeth chattered, and we trembled and hissed involuntarily, while our hands drew in like claws.

At dawn the clouds had disappeared, and a red sun promised, over the very fine broken hills beyond the railway. Old Dakhil-Allah, our active guide and leader in the night, now took general charge, and sent us out singly and in pairs to all the approaches of our hiding-place. He himself crawled up the ridge before us to watch events upon the railway through his glasses. I was praying that there might be no events till the sun had gained power and warmed me, for the shivering fit still jerked me about. However, soon the sun was up and unveiled, and things improved. My clothes were drying. By noon it was nearly as hot as the day before, and we were gasping for shade, and thicker clothes, against the sun.

First of all, though, at six in the morning, Dakhil-Allah reported a trolley, which came from the south, and passed over the mine harmlessly — to our satisfaction, for we had not laid a beautiful compound charge for just four men and a sergeant. Then sixty men sallied out from Madahrij. This disturbed us till we saw that they were to replace five telegraph poles blown down by the storm of the afternoon before. Then at seven-thirty a patrol of eleven men went down the line: two inspecting each rail minutely, three marching each side of the bank looking for cross-tracks, and one, presumably the N.C.O., walking grandly along the metals with nothing to do.

However, to-day they did find something, when they crossed our footprints about kilometre 1,121. They concentrated there upon the permanent way, stared at it, stamped, wandered up and down, scratched the ballast; and thought exhaustively. The time of their search passed slowly for us: but the mine was well hidden, so that eventually they wandered on contentedly towards the south, where they met the Hedia
patrol, and both parties sat together in the cool shade of a bridge-arch, and rested after their labours. Meanwhile the train, a heavy train, came along from the south. Nine of its laden trucks held women and children from Medina, civil refugees being deported to Syria, with their household stuff. It ran over the charges without explosion. As artist I was furious; as commander deeply relieved: women and children were not proper spoil.

The Juheina raced to the crest where Dakhil-Allah and myself lay hidden, when they heard the train coming, to see it blown in pieces. Our stone headwork had been built for two, so that the hill-top, a bald cone conspicuously opposite the working party, became suddenly and visibly populous. This was too much for the nerves of the Turks, who fled back into Madahrij, and thence, at about five thousand yards, opened a brisk rifle fire. They must also have telephoned to Hedia, which soon came to life: but since the nearest outpost on that side was about six miles off, its garrisons held their fire, and contented themselves with selections on the bugle, played all day. The distance made it grave and beautiful.

Even the rifle shooting did us no harm; but the disclosure of ourselves was unfortunate. At Madahrij were two hundred men, and at Hedia eleven hundred, and our retreat was by the plain of Hamdh on which Hedia stood. Their mounted troops might sally out and cut our rear. The Juheina had good camels, and so were safe; but the machine-gun was a captured German sledge-Maxim: a heavy load for its tiny mule. The servers were on foot, or on other mules: their top speed would be only six miles an hour, and their fighting value, with a single gun, not high. So after a council of war we rode back with them half-way through the hills, and there dismissed them, with fifteen Juheina, towards Wadi Ais.

This made us mobile, and Dakhil-Allah, Sultan, Mohammed and I rode back with the rest of our party for another look at the line. The sunlight was now terrific, with faint gusts of scorching heat blowing up at us out of the south. We took refuge about ten o'clock under some spacious trees, where we baked bread and lunched, in nice view of the line, and shaded from the worst of the sun. About us, over the gravel, circles of pale shadow from the crisping leaves ran to and fro, like grey,
indeterminate bugs, as the slender branches dipped reluctantly in the
wind. Our picnic annoyed the Turks, who shot or trumpeted at us in-
cessantly through the middle day and till evening, while we slept in turn.

About five they grew quiet, and we mounted and rode slowly across
the open valley towards the railway. Madahrij revived in a paroxysm
of fire, and all the trumpets of Hedia blared again. The monkey-
pleasure of pulling large and impressive legs was upon us. So when we
reached the line we made our camels kneel down beside it, and, led by
Dakhil-Allah as Imam, performed a sunset prayer quietly between the
rails. It was probably the first prayer of the Juheina for a year or so, and
I was a novice, but from a distance we passed muster, and the Turks
stopped shooting in bewilderment. This was the first and last time I
ever prayed in Arabia as a Moslem.

After the prayer it was still much too light to hide our actions: so we
sat round on the embankment smoking, till dusk, when I tried to go
off by myself and dig up the mine, to learn, for service on the next
occasion, why it had failed. However, the Juheina were as interested in
that as I. Along they came in a swarm and clustered over the metals
during the search. They brought my heart into my throat, for it took
me an hour to find just where the mine was hidden. Laying a Garland
mine was shaky work, but scrabbling in pitch darkness up and down a
hundred yards of railway, feeling for a hair-trigger buried in the
ballast, seemed, at the time, an almost uninsurable occupation. The
two charges connected with it were so powerful that they would have
rooted out seventy yards of track, and I saw visions of suddenly
blowing up, not only myself, but my whole force, every moment. To
be sure, such a feat would have properly completed the bewilderment
of the Turks!

At last I found it, and ascertained by touch that the lock had sunk
one sixteenth of an inch, due to bad setting by myself or because the
ground had subsided after the rain. I firmed it into its place. Then, to
explain ourselves plausibly to the enemy, we began blowing up things
to the north of the mine. We found a little four-arched bridge and put
it into the air. Afterwards we turned to rails and cut about two
hundred: and while the men were laying and lighting charges I taught
Mohammed to climb a splinterly pole; together we cut the wires, and
with their purchase dragged down other poles. All was done at speed, for we feared lest Turks come after us: and when our explosive work was finished we ran back like hares to our camels, mounted them, and trotted without interruption down the windy valley once more to the plain of Hamdah.

There we were in safety, but old Dakhil-Allah was too pleased with the mess we had made of the line to go soberly. When we were on the sandy flat he beat up his camel into a canter, and we pounded madly after him through the colourless moonlight. The going was perfect, and we never drew rein for three hours, till we over-rode our machine-gun and its escort camping on the road home. The soldiers heard our rout yelling through the night, thought us enemies of sorts, and let fly at us with their Maxim: but it jammed after half a belt, and they, being tailors from Mecca, were unhandy with it. So no one was hurt, and we captured them mirthfully.

In the morning we slept lazily long, and breakfasted at Rubiaan, the first well in Wadi Ais. Afterwards we were smoking and talking, about to bring in the camels, when suddenly we felt the distant shock of a great explosion behind us on the railway. We wondered if the mine had been discovered or had done its duty. Two scouts had been left to report, and we rode slowly; for them, and because the rain two days ago had brought down Wadi Ais once more in flood, and its bed was all flecked over with shallow pools of soft, grey water, between banks of silvery mud, which the current had rippled into fish-scales. The warmth of the sun made the surface like fine glue, on which our helpless camels sprawled comically, or went down with a force and completeness surprising in such dignified beasts. Their tempers were roughened each time by our fit of mirth.

The sunlight, the easy march and the expectation of the scouts’ news made everything gay, and we developed social virtues: but our limbs, stiff from the exertions of yesterday, and our abundant food, determined us to fall short of Abu Markha for the night. So, near sunset, we chose a dry terrace in the valley to sleep upon. I rode up it first and turned and looked at the men reined in below me in a group, upon their bay camels like copper statues in the fierce light of the setting sun: they seemed to be burning with an inward flame.
Before bread was baked the scouts arrived, to tell us that at dawn the Turks had been busy round our damages; and a little later a locomotive with trucks of rails, and a crowded labour gang on top, had come up from Hedia, and had exploded the mine fore and aft of its wheels. This was everything we had hoped, and we rode back to Abdulla’s camp on a morning of perfect springtime, in a singing company. We had proved that a well-laid mine would fire; and that a well-laid mine was difficult even for its maker to discover. These points were of importance; for Newcombe, Garland and Hornby were now out upon the railway, harrying it: and mines were the best weapon yet discovered to make the regular working of their trains costly and uncertain for our Turkish enemy.
CHAPTER XXXVI

Despite his kindness and charm, I could not like Abdullah or his camp: perhaps because I was not sociable, and these people had no personal solitude: perhaps because their good humour showed me the futility of my more than Palomides’ pains, not merely to seem better than myself, but to make others better. Whereas nothing was futile in the atmosphere of higher thinking and responsibility which ruled at Feisal’s. Abdulla passed his merry day in the big cool tent accessible only to friends, limiting supplicants or new adherents or the hearing of disputes to one public session in the afternoon. For the rest he read the papers, ate carefully, slept. Especially he played games, either chess with his staff or practical jokes with Mohammed Hassan. Mohammed, nominally Muehdhin, was really court fool. A tiresome old fool I found him, as my illness left me less even than usual in jesting mood.

Abdulla and his friends, Shakir, Fauzan, and the two sons of Hamza among the Sherifs, with Sultan el Abbud and Hoshan, from the Ateiba, and ibn Mesfer, the guest-master, would spend much of the day and all the evening hours tormenting Mohammed Hassan. They stabbed him with thorns, stoned him, dropped sun-heated pebbles down his back, set him on fire. Sometimes the jest would be elaborate, as when they laid a powder trail under the rugs, and lured Mohammed Hassan to sit on its end. Once Abdulla shot a coffee-pot off his head thrice from twenty yards, and then rewarded his long-suffering servility with three months’ pay.

Abdulla would sometimes ride a little, or shoot a little, and return exhausted to his tent for massage; and afterwards reciters would be introduced to soothe his aching head. He was fond of Arabic verses and exceptionally well read. The local poets found him a profitable audience. He was also interested in history and letters, and would have grammatical disquisitions in his tent and adjudge money prizes.

He affected to have no care for the Hejaz situation, regarding the autonomy of the Arabs as assured by the promises of Great Britain to
his father, and leaning at ease against this prop. I longed to tell him that the half-witted old man had obtained from us no concrete or unqualified undertaking of any sort, and that their ship might founder on the bar of his political stupidity; but that would have been to give away my English masters, and the mental tug of war between honesty and loyalty, after swaying a while, settled again expeditiously into deadlock.

Abdulla professed great interest in the war in Europe, and studied it closely in the Press. He was also acquainted with Western politics, and had learned by rote the courts and ministries of Europe, even to the name of the Swiss President. I remarked again how much the comfortable circumstance that we still had a King made for the reputation of England in this world of Asia. Ancient and artificial societies like this of the Sheriffs and feudal chieftains of Arabia found a sense of honourable security when dealing with us in such proof that the highest place in our state was not a prize for merit or ambition.

Time slowly depressed my first, favourable, opinion of Abdulla’s character. His constant ailments, which once aroused compassion, became fitter for contempt when their causes were apparent in laziness and self-indulgence, and when he was seen to cherish them as occupations of his too-great leisure. His casual attractive fits of arbitrariness now seemed feeble tyranny disguised as whims; his friendliness became caprice; his good humour love of pleasure. The leaven of insincerity worked through all the fibres of his being. Even his simplicity appeared false upon experience; and inherited religious prejudice was allowed rule over the keenness of his mind because it was less trouble to him than unchartered thought. His brain often betrayed its intricate pattern, disclosing idea twisted tightly over idea into a strong cord of design; and thus his indolence marred his scheming, too. The webs were constantly unravelling through his carelessness in leaving them unfinished. Yet they never separated into straight desires, or grew into effective desires. Always he watched out of the corner of his bland and open eye our returns to his innocent-sounding questions, reading an insect-subtlety of significant meaning into every hesitation or uncertainty or honest mistake.

One day I entered to find him sitting upright and wide-eyed with a
spot of red in either cheek. Sergeant Prost, his old tutor, had just come from Colonel Bremond, innocent bearer of a letter which pointed out how the British were wrapping up the Arabs on all sides — at Aden, at Gaza, at Bagdad — and hoped that Abdulla realized his situation. He asked hotly what I thought of it. In answer, I fell back on artifice, and replied in a pretty phrase that I hoped he would suspect our honesty when he found us backbiting our allies in private letters. The delicately poisoned Arabic pleased him, and he paid us the edged compliment of saying that he knew we were sincere, since otherwise we would not be represented at Jeddah by Colonel Wilson. There, characteristically, his subtlety hanged itself, not perceiving the double subtlety which negatived him. He did not understand that honesty might be the best-paying cat's paw of rogues, and Wilson, too, downright readily or quickly to suspect evil in the dignitaries above him.

Wilson never told even a half-truth. If instructed to inform the King diplomatically that the subsidy of the month could not at present be increased, he would ring up Mecca and say 'Lord, Lord, there is no more money'. As for lying, he was not merely incapable of it, but also shrewd enough to know that it was the worst gambit against players whose whole life had passed in a mist of deceits, and whose perceptions were of the finest. The Arab leaders showed a completeness of instinct, a reliance upon intuition, the unperceived foreknown, which left our centrifugal minds gasping. Like women, they understood and judged quickly, effortlessly, unreasonably. It almost seemed as though the Oriental exclusion of woman from politics had conferred her particular gifts upon the men. Some of the speed and secrecy of our victory, and its regularity, might perhaps be ascribed to this double endowment's offsetting and emphasizing the rare feature that from end to end of it there was nothing female in the Arab movement, but the camels.

The outstanding figure of Abdulla's entourage was Sherif Shakir, a man of twenty-nine, and companion since boyhood of the four Emirs. His mother was Circassian, as had been his grandmother. From them he obtained his fair complexion; but the flesh of his face was torn away by smallpox. From its white ruin two restless eyes looked out, very bright and big; for the faintness of his eyelashes and eyebrows made his stare directly disconcerting. His figure was tall, slim, almost boyish
from the continual athletic activity of the man. His sharp, decided, but pleasant voice frayed out if he shouted. His manner while delightfully frank, was abrupt, indeed imperious; with a humour as cracked as his cackling laugh.

This bursting freedom of speech seemed to respect nothing on earth except King Hussein: towards himself he exacted deference, more so than did Abdulla, who was always playing tricks with his companions, the bevy of silk-clad fellows who came about him when he would be easy. Shakir joined wildly in the sport, but would smartingly punish a liberty. He dressed simply, but very cleanly, and, like Abdulla, spent public hours with toothpick and toothstick. He took no interest in books and never wearied his head with meditation, but was intelligent and interesting in talk. He was devout, but hated Mecca, and played backgammon while Abdulla read the Koran. Yet by fits he would pray interminably.

In war he was the man at arms. His feats made him the darling of the tribes. He, in turn, described himself as a Bedawi, and an Ateibi, and imitated them. He wore his black hair in plaits down each side of his face, and kept it glossy with butter, and strong by frequent washing in camel urine. He encouraged nits, in deference to the Beduin proverb that a deserted head showed an ungenerous mind: and wore the brım, a plaited girdle of thin leathern thongs wrapped three or four times round the loins to confine and support the belly. He owned splendid horses and camels: was considered the finest rider in Arabia: ready for a match with anyone.

Shakir gave me the sense that he preferred a fit of energy to sustained effort: but there was balance and shrewdness behind his mad manner. Sherif Hussein had used him on embassies to Cairo before the war, to arrange private business with the Khedive of Egypt. The Beduin figure must have looked strange in the stucco splendour of the Abdin. Abdulla had unlimited admiration for Shakir and tried to see the world with his eyes of gay carelessness. Between them they seriously complicated my mission to Wadi Ais.
Of the tactical situation, Abdulla made very little, pretending pettishly that it was Feisal's business. He had come to Wadi Ais to please his younger brother, and there he would stay. He would not go on raids himself, and hardly encouraged those who did. I detected jealousy of Feisal in this, as if he wished ostentatiously to neglect military operations to prevent unbecoming comparison with his brother's performance. Had Shakir not helped me in the first instance, I might have had delay and difficulty in getting started, though Abdulla would have ceded in time and graciously permitted anything not calling directly upon his own energies. However, there were now two parties on the railway, with reliefs enough to do a demolition of some sort every day or so. Much less interference than this would suffice to wreck the working of trains, and by making the maintenance of the Turkish garrison at Medina just a shade less difficult than its evacuation would serve the interests of British and Arab alike. So I judged my work in Wadi Ais sufficiently done, and well done.

I longed to get north again quiet of this relaxing camp. Abdulla might let me do all I wanted, but would do nothing of his own: whereas for me the best value of the revolt lay in the things which the Arabs attempted without our aid. Feisal was the working enthusiast with the one idea of making his ancient race justify its renown by winning freedom with its own hands. His lieutenants Nasir or Sharraf or Ali ibn el Hussein seconded his plans with head and heart, so that my part became only synthetic. I combined their loose showers of sparks into a firm flame: transformed their series of unrelated incidents into a conscious operation.

We left on the morning of April the tenth, after pleasant farewells from Abdulla. My three Ageyl were again with me; and Arslan, the little Syrian Punch-figure, very conscious of Arab dress, and of the droll outlook and manners of all Bedouins. He rode disgracefully and endured sorrow the whole way at the uneasy steps of his camels: but he salved his self-respect by pointing out that in Damascus no decent
man would ride a camel, and his humour by showing that in Arabia no one but a Damascene would ride so bad a camel as his. Mohammed el Kadhi was our guide, with six Juheina.

We marched up Wadi Tleih as we had come, but branched off to the right, avoiding the lava. We had brought no food, so stopped at some tents for hospitality of their rice and milk. This spring-time in the hills was the time of plenty for the Arabs, whose tents were full of sheep-milk and goat-milk and camel-milk, with everyone well fed and well looking. Afterwards we rode, in weather like a summer’s day in England, for five hours down a narrow, flood-swept valley, Wadi Osman, which turned and twisted in the hills but gave an easy road. The last part of the march was after dark, and when we stopped, Arslan was missing. We fired volleys and lit fires hoping he would come upon us; but till dawn there was no sign, and the Juheina ran back and forward in doubting search. However, he was only a mile behind, fast asleep under a tree.

A short hour later we stopped at the tents of a wife of Dakhil-Allah, for a meal, Mohammed allowed himself a bath, a fresh braiding of his luxuriant hair, and clean clothes. They took very long about the food, and it was not till near noon that at last it came: a great bowl of saffron-rice, with a broken lamb littered over it. Mohammed, who felt it his duty in my honour to be dainty in service, arrested the main dish, and took from it the fill of a small copper basin for him and me. Then he waved the rest of the camp on to the large supply. Mohammed’s mother knew herself old enough to be curious about me. She questioned me about the women of the tribe of Christians and their way of life, marveling at my white skin, and the horrible blue eyes which looked, she said, like the sky shining through the eye-sockets of an empty skull.

Wadi Osman to-day was less irregular in course, and broadened slowly. After two hours and a half it twisted suddenly to the right through a gap, and we found ourselves in Hamdh, in a narrow, cliff-walled gorge. As usual the edges of the bed of hard sand were bare; and the middle bristled with hamdh-asla trees, in grey, salty, bulging scabs. Before us were flood pools of sweet water, the largest of them nearly three hundred feet long, and sharply deep. Its narrow bed was cut into the
light impervious clay. Mohammed said its water would remain till the year's end, but would soon turn salt and useless.

After drinks we bathed in it, and found it full of little silver fish like sardines: all ravenous. We loitered after bathing, prolonging our bodily pleasure; and remounting in the dark, rode for six miles, till sleepy. Then we turned away to higher ground for the night's camp. Wadi Hamdh differed from the other wild valleys of Hejaz, in its chill air. This was, of course, most obvious at night, when a white mist, glazing the valley with a salt sweat, lifted itself some feet up and stood over it motionless. But even by day, and in sunshine the Hamdh felt damp and raw and unnatural.

Next morning we started early and passed large pools in the valley; but only a few were fit to drink: the rest had gone green and brackish with the little white fish floating, dead and pickled, in them. Afterwards we crossed the bed, and struck northward over the plain of Ugila, where Ross, our flight commander from Wejh, had lately made an aerodrome. Arab guards were sitting by his petrol, and we breakfasted from them, and afterwards went along Wadi Methar to a shady tree, where we slept four hours.

In the afternoon everyone was fresh, and the Juheina began to match their camels against one another. At first it was two and two, but the others joined, till they were six abreast. The road was bad, and finally one lad cantered his animal into a heap of stones. She slipped, so that he crashed off and broke an arm. It was a misfortune: but Mohammed coolly tied him up with rags and camel-girths, and left him at ease under a tree to rest a little before riding back to Ugila for the night. The Arabs were casual about broken bones. In a tent at Wadi Ais I had seen a youth whose forearm had set crookedly; realizing this, he had dug into himself with a dagger till he had bared the bone, re-broken it, and set it straight; and there he lay, philosophically enduring the flies, with his left forearm huge under healing mosses and clay, waiting for it to be well.

In the morning we pushed on to Khauthila, a well, where we watered the camels. The water was impure and purged them. We rode again in the evening for another eight miles, intending to race straight through to Wejh in a long last day. So we got up soon after midnight,
and before daylight were coming down the long slope from Raal into the plain, which extended across the mouths of Hamdh into the sea. The ground was scarred with motor tracks, exciting a lively ambition in the Juheina to hurry on and see the new wonders of Feisal’s army. Fired by this, we did a straight march of eight hours, unusually long for these Hejaz Bedouin.

We were then reasonably tired, both men and camels, since we had had no food after breakfast the day before. Therefore it seemed fit to the boy Mohammed to run races. He jumped from his camel, took off his clothes, and challenged us to race to the clump of thorns up the slope in front, for a pound English. Everybody took the offer, and the camels set off in a mob. The distance, about three-quarters of a mile, uphill, over heavy sand, proved probably more than Mohammed had bargained for. However, he showed surprising strength and won, though by inches: then he promptly collapsed, bleeding from mouth and nose. Some of our camels were good, and they went their fastest when pitted against one another.

The air here was very hot and heavy for natives of the hills, and I feared there might be consequences of Mohammed’s exhaustion: but after we had rested an hour and made him a cup of coffee he got going again and did the six remaining hours into Wejh as cheerfully as ever; continuing to play the little pranks which had brightened our long march from Abu Markha. If one man rode quietly behind another’s camel, poked his stick suddenly up its rump, and screeched, it mistook him for an excited male, and plunged off at a mad gallop, very disconcerting to the rider. A second good game was to cannon one galloping camel with another, and crash it into a near tree. Either the tree went down (valley trees in the light Hejaz soil were notably unstable things) or the rider was scratched and torn; or, best of all, he was swept quite out of his saddle, and left impaled on a thorny branch, if not dropped violently to the ground. This counted as a bull, and was very popular with everyone but him.

The Bedu were odd people. For an Englishman, sojourning with them was unsatisfactory unless he had patience wide and deep as the sea. They were absolute slaves of their appetite, with no stamina of mind, drunkards for coffee, milk or water, gluttons for stewed meat,
shameless beggars of tobacco. They dreamed for weeks before and after their rare sexual exercises, and spent the intervening days titillating themselves and their hearers with bawdy tales. Had the circumstances of their lives given them opportunity they would have been sheer sensualists. Their strength was the strength of men geographically beyond temptation: the poverty of Arabia made them simple, continent, enduring. If forced into civilized life they would have succumbed like any savage race to its diseases, meanness, luxury, cruelty, crooked dealing, artifice; and, like savages, they would have suffered them exaggeratedly for lack of inoculation.

If they suspected that we wanted to drive them either they were mulish or they went away. If we comprehended them, and gave time and trouble to make things tempting to them, then they would go to great pains for our pleasure. Whether the results achieved were worth the effort, no man could tell. Englishmen, accustomed to greater returns, would not, and, indeed, could not, have spent the time, thought and tact lavished every day by sheikhs and emirs for such meagre ends. Arab processes were clear, Arab minds moved logically as our own, with nothing radically incomprehensible or different, except the premiss: there was no excuse or reason, except our laziness and ignorance, whereby we could call them inscrutable or Oriental, or leave them misunderstood.

They would follow us, if we endured with them, and played the game according to their rules. The pity was, that we often began to do so, and broke down with exasperation and threw them over, blaming them for what was a fault in our own selves. Such strictures like a general’s complaint of bad troops, were in reality a confession of our faulty foresight, often made falsely out of mock modesty to show that, though mistaken, we had at least the wit to know our fault.
CLEANLINESS made me stop outside Wejh and change my filthy clothes. Feisal, when I reported, led me into the inner tent to talk. It seemed that everything was well. More cars had arrived from Egypt: Yenbo was emptied of its last soldiers and stores: and Sharraf himself had come up, with an unexpected unit, a new machine-gun company of amusing origin. We had thirty sick and wounded men in Yenbo when we marched away; also heaps of broken weapons, with two British armourer-sergeants repairing them. The sergeants, who found time hang heavily, had taken mended maxims and patients and combined them into a machine-gun company so thoroughly trained by dumb show that they were as good as the best we had.

Rabegh also was being abandoned. The aeroplanes from it had flown up here and were established. Their Egyptian troops had been shipped after them, with Joyce and Goslett and the Rabegh staff, who were now in charge of things at Wejh. Newcombe and Hornby were up country tearing at the railway day and night, almost with their own hands for lack of helpers. The tribal propaganda was marching forward: all was for the best, and I was about to take my leave when Suleiman, the guest-master, hurried in and whispered to Feisal, who turned to me with shining eyes, trying to be calm, and said, ‘Auda is here’. I shouted, ‘Auda abu Tayi’, and at that moment the tent-flap was drawn back, before a deep voice which boomed salutations to Our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful. There entered a tall, strong figure, with a haggard face, passionate and tragic. This was Auda, and after him followed Mohammed, his son, a child in looks, and only eleven years old in truth.

Feisal had sprung to his feet. Auda caught his hand and kissed it, and they drew aside a pace or two and looked at each other — a splendidly unlike pair, typical of much that was best in Arabia, Feisal the prophet, and Auda the warrior, each filling his part to perfection, and immediately understanding and liking the other. They sat down. Feisal introduced
us one by one, and Auda with a measured word seemed to register each person.

We had heard much of Auda, and were banking to open Akaba with his help; and after a moment I knew, from the force and directness of the man, that we would attain our end. He had come down to us like a knight-errant, chafing at our delay in Wejh, anxious only to be acquiring merit for Arab freedom in his own lands. If his performance was one-half his desire, we should be prosperous and fortunate. The weight was off all minds before we went to supper.

We were a cheerful party; Nasib, Faiz, Mohammed el Dheilan Auda’s politic cousin, Zaal his nephew, and Sherif Nasir, resting in Wejh for a few days between expeditions. I told Feisal odd stories of Abdulla’s camp, and the joy of breaking railways. Suddenly Auda scrambled to his feet with a loud ‘God forbid’, and flung from the tent. We stared at one another, and there came a noise of hammering outside. I went to learn what it meant, and there was Auda bent over a rock pounding his false teeth to fragments with a stone. ‘I had forgotten,’ he explained, ‘Jemal Pasha gave me these. I was eating my Lord’s bread with Turkish teeth!’ Unfortunately he had few teeth of his own, so that henceforward eating the meat he loved was difficulty and after-pain, and he went about half-nourished till we had taken Akaba, and Sir Reginald Wingate sent him a dentist from Egypt to make an Allied set.

Auda was very simply dressed, northern fashion, in white cotton with a red Mosul head-cloth. He might be over fifty, and his black hair was streaked with white; but he was still strong and straight, loosely built, spare, and as active as a much younger man. His face was magnificent in its lines and hollows. On it was written how truly the death in battle of Annad, his favourite son, cast sorrow over all his life when it ended his dream of handing on to future generations the greatness of the name of Abu Tayi. He had large eloquent eyes, like black velvet in richness. His forehead was low and broad, his nose very high and sharp, powerfully hooked: his mouth rather large and mobile: his beard and moustaches had been trimmed to a point in Howeitat style, with the lower jaw shaven underneath.

Centuries ago the Howeitat came from Hejaz, and their nomad clans
prided themselves on being true Bedu. Auda was their master type. His hospitality was sweeping; except to very hungry souls, inconvenient. His generosity kept him always poor, despite the profits of a hundred raids. He had married twenty-eight times, had been wounded thirteen times; while the battles he provoked had seen all his tribesmen hurt and most of his relations killed. He himself had slain seventy-five men, Arabs, with his own hand in battle: and never a man except in battle. Of the number of dead Turks he could give no account: they did not enter the register. His Toweihā under him had become the first fighters of the desert, with a tradition of desperate courage, a sense of superiority which never left them while there was life and work to do: but which had reduced them from twelve hundred men to less than five hundred, in thirty years, as the standard of nomadic fighting rose.

Auda raided as often as he had opportunity, and as widely as he could. He had seen Aleppo, Basra, Wejh, and Wadi Dawasir on his expeditions: and was careful to be at enmity with nearly all tribes in the desert, that he might have proper scope for raids. After his robber-fashion, he was as hard-headed as he was hot-headed, and in his maddest exploits there would be a cold factor of possibility to lead him through. His patience in action was extreme: and he received and ignored advice, criticism, or abuse, with a smile as constant as it was very charming. If he got angry his face worked uncontrollably, and he burst into a fit of shaking passion, only to be assuaged after he had killed: at such times he was a wild beast, and men escaped his presence. Nothing on earth would make him change his mind or obey an order to do the least thing he disapproved; and he took no heed of men’s feelings when his face was set.

He saw life as a saga. All the events in it were significant: all personages in contact with him heroic. His mind was stored with poems of old raids and epic tales of fights, and he overflowed with them on the nearest listener. If he lacked listeners, he would very likely sing them to himself in his tremendous voice, deep and resonant and loud. He had no control over his lips, and was therefore terrible to his own interests and hurt his friends continually. He spoke of himself in the third person, and was so sure of his fame that he loved to shout out stories against himself. At times he seemed taken by a demon of
mischief, and in public assembly would invent and utter on oath appalling tales of the private life of his hosts or guests: and yet with all this he was modest, as simple as a child, direct, honest, kind-hearted, and warmly loved even by those to whom he was most embarrassing — his friends.

Joyce lived near the beach, beside the spread lines of the Egyptian troops, in an imposing array of large tents and small tents, and we talked over things done or to do. Every effort was still directed against the railway. Newcombe and Garland were near Muadhdham with Sherif Sharraf and Maulud. They had many Billi, the mule-mounted infantry, and guns and machine-guns, and hoped to take the fort and railway station there. Newcombe meant then to move all Feisal's men forward very close to Medain Salih, and, by taking and holding a part of the line, to cut off Medina and compel its early surrender. Wilson was coming up to help in this operation, and Davenport would take as many of the Egyptian army as he could transport, to reinforce the Arab attack.

All this programme was what I had believed necessary for the further progress of the Arab Revolt when we took Wejh. I had planned and arranged some of it myself. But now, since that happy fever and dysentery in Abdulla's camp had given me leisure to meditate upon the strategy and tactics of irregular war, it seemed that not merely the details but the essence of this plan were wrong. It therefore became my business to explain my changed ideas, and if possible to persuade my chiefs to follow me into the new theory.

So I began with three propositions. Firstly, that irregulars would not attack places, and so remained incapable of forcing a decision. Secondly, that they were as unable to defend a line or point as they were to attack it. Thirdly, that their virtue lay in depth, not in face.

The Arab war was geographical, and the Turkish Army an accident. Our aim was to seek the enemy's weakest material link and bear only on that till time made their whole length fail. Our largest resources, the Beduin on whom our war must be built, were unused to formal operations, but had assets of mobility, toughness, self-assurance, knowledge of the country, intelligent courage. With them dispersal was strength. Consequently we must extend our front to its maximum,
to impose on the Turks the longest possible passive defence, since that was, materially, their most costly form of war.

Our duty was to attain our end with the greatest economy of life, since life was more precious to us than money or time. If we were patient and superhuman-skilled, we could follow the direction of Saxe and reach victory without battle, by pressing our advantages mathematical and psychological. Fortunately our physical weakness was not such as to demand this. We were richer than the Turks in transport, machine-guns, cars, high explosive. We could develop a highly mobile, highly equipped striking force of the smallest size, and use it successively at distributed points of the Turkish line, to make them strengthen their posts beyond the defensive minimum of twenty men. This would be a short cut to success.

We must not take Medina. The Turk was harmless there. In prison in Egypt he would cost us food and guards. We wanted him to stay at Medina, and every other distant place, in the largest numbers. Our ideal was to keep his railway just working, but only just, with the maximum of loss and discomfort. The factor of food would confine him to the railways, but he was welcome to the Hejaz Railway, and the Trans-Jordan railway, and the Palestine and Syrian railways for the duration of the war, so long as he gave us the other nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of the Arab world. If he tended to evacuate too soon, as a step to concentrating in the small area which his numbers could dominate effectually, then we should have to restore his confidence by reducing our enterprises against him. His stupidity would be our ally, for he would like to hold, or to think he held, as much of his old provinces as possible. This pride in his imperial heritage would keep him in his present absurd position — all flanks and no front.

In detail I criticized the ruling scheme. To hold a middle point of the railway would be expensive, for the holding force might be threatened from each side. The mixture of Egyptian troops with tribesmen was a moral weakness. If there were professional soldiers present, the Beduin would stand aside and watch them work, glad to be excused the leading part. Jealousy, superadded to inefficiency, would be the outcome. Further, the Billi country was very dry, and the maintenance of a large force up by the line technically difficult.
Neither my general reasoning, however, nor my particular objections had much weight. The plans were made, and the preparations advanced. Everyone was too busy with his own work to give me specific authority to launch out on mine. All I gained was a hearing, and a qualified admission that my counter-offensive might be a useful diversion. I was working out with Auda abu Tayi a march to the Howeitat in their spring pastures of the Syrian desert. From them we might raise a mobile camel force, and rush Akaba from the eastward, without guns or machine-guns.

The eastern was the unguarded side, the line of least resistance, the easiest for us. Our march would be an extreme example of a turning movement, since it involved a desert journey of six hundred miles to capture a trench within gunfire of our ships; but there was no practicable alternative, and it was so entirely in the spirit of my sick-bed ruminations that its issue might well be fortunate, and would surely be instructive. Auda thought all things possible with dynamite and money, and that the smaller clans about Akaba would join us. Feisal, who was already in touch with them, also believed that they would help if we won a preliminary success up by Maan and then moved in force against the port. The Navy raided it while we were thinking, and their captured Turks gave us such useful information that I became eager to go off at once.

The desert route to Akaba was so long and so difficult that we could take neither guns nor machine-guns, nor stores nor regular soldiers. Accordingly the element I would withdraw from the railway scheme was only my single self; and, in the circumstances, this amount was negligible, since I felt so strongly against it that my help there would have been half-hearted. So I decided to go my own way, with or without orders. I wrote a letter full of apologies to Clayton, telling him that my intentions were of the best: and went.