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ACROSS THE GREEN MOUNTAINS OF OMAN.

By Colonel S. B. MILES.

Jebel Akhdar, or the Green Mountain, as the Arabs call it, lies about 60 miles south-west of Muskat, and is the central and culminating point of the great chain forming the backbone of Oman. Viewed from the nearest part of the coast, some 40 miles away, this gigantic mass looms, a most conspicuous and majestic feature, in the distance, its dark precipitous front rising abruptly, cliff above cliff, in wild and desolate nakedness to a height of nearly 10,000 feet. The sight of the mountain is so impressive that from the moment I first saw it I made the determination to visit it, and the accounts I subsequently heard of its inhabitants and pensile gardens increased my desire to make its acquaintance. But the country at that period was very unsettled, tribal and dynastic wars being of perpetual occurrence, and it was not for several years that a fitting opportunity for carrying out my design presented itself.

In the middle of the year 1876 I found myself able to undertake the trip, and the Sultan having caused instructions to be despatched to the Governor of Nakhl to make arrangements with the Beni Riyam who possess Jebel Akhdar, and other tribes on the way, to provide an escort, I sailed from Muskat on June 27 in a native boat for Sib, where I landed and camped for the night in a garden near the shore. The next morning, having procured camels, I started in company with two sheikhs, who had come from Nakhl to meet me, for Burka, where I arrived about mid-day. After an interview with the governor and a short rest, we resumed our journey and struck inland in a direction almost due south, the path leading along the Wady Hammam.

We were now traversing the eastern part of the maritime plain

known as the Batina, which, except in the oases, is an uncultivated desert, the surface being in some parts sandy, in others stony. At 10 miles we came suddenly upon a small but rich oasis named El Wasit, near the junction of the Wadis Hammam and Maawal, where we experienced, in the cool and humid atmosphere of the date groves, a most refreshing change from the heat and glare. We now ascended the Wady Maawal, and, skirting the base of the Nakhl range, arrived, after another hour or so, at the village of Hibra, where we stopped for the night at the house of Sezzid Ali, a grand-nephew of the Sultan. The Wady Maawal is known in the upper part as Wady Mayin, and has several villages, viz. Jenab, Hibra, Afy, Musalmat, Wasit, etc. The Maawal tribe to which it belongs is Kahtanite, and numbers about twelve thousand souls. In the fifth or sixth century of our era this tribe began to assume a predominant position in the country, as the Julanda princes who then ruled over Oman belonged to a Maawal family, a circumstance which gave the tribe a status analogous to that held by the Âl Bu Saidis at the present day. The Julanda dynasty is supposed to be referred to in the Koran (Sura 18). It acquired great reputation in the Moslem world from the action of the brothers Abd and Jaifar, who reigned at Nezwa in the Time of Ignorance, and who accepted the new faith immediately on receipt of the prophet's letter of invitation, and championed it against the idolaters in Oman. The persecutions of Mowiya and Hejaj brought the dynasty to an end, and compelled the last of the line to seek safety in exile. The Maawal tribe was ever unfriendly towards H.H. Sezzid Turky, and was severely chastised in 1883 for their share in the attack on Muskat.

The following day we entered the ravine leading to the secluded glen where lay embosomed the town of Nakhl, or, as one may call it, for the three words have the same signification, Palmyra or Tadmor. The approach was one of striking and impressive singularity. We were now close under the lofty mass of Jebel Nakhl, which, rising abruptly, towered over us to a height of 5240 feet, and as we rode up the winding torrent bed, it seemed as if we were about to penetrate the very bowels of the mountain. No sign of human habitation, no cultivation, no gardens were visible, nothing but dark and desolate rocks met the eye; the silence was profound, and I was wondering where the town could possibly be, when from above, in front of us, several matchlocks were suddenly discharged in our direction, and I perceived a watch tower perched on a steep pinnacle 200 feet high, standing guard, as it were, over the entrance, and from which the sentries had fired to give notice of our approach. Rounding an angle, we were now confronted with the massive ramparts of the fortress, which, warned by the watch tower, immediately began to fire a salute from a battery of twelve-pounder iron guns, the sound of which reverberated sharply from the rocky walls of the glen. The town itself,

however, still remained invisible until, skirting the pinnacle, we passed under a two-arched viaduct, when the whole settlement, houses, palms, gardens, orchards, and cultivation, burst upon the view, presenting a scene of a very picturesque character. It was getting hot when we arrived, and though the sun poured its scorching beams upon the black rocks around us, and heated the air to an insufferable degree, I could not help stopping for some minutes to gaze upon the scene, and to admire the remarkable strength of the position.

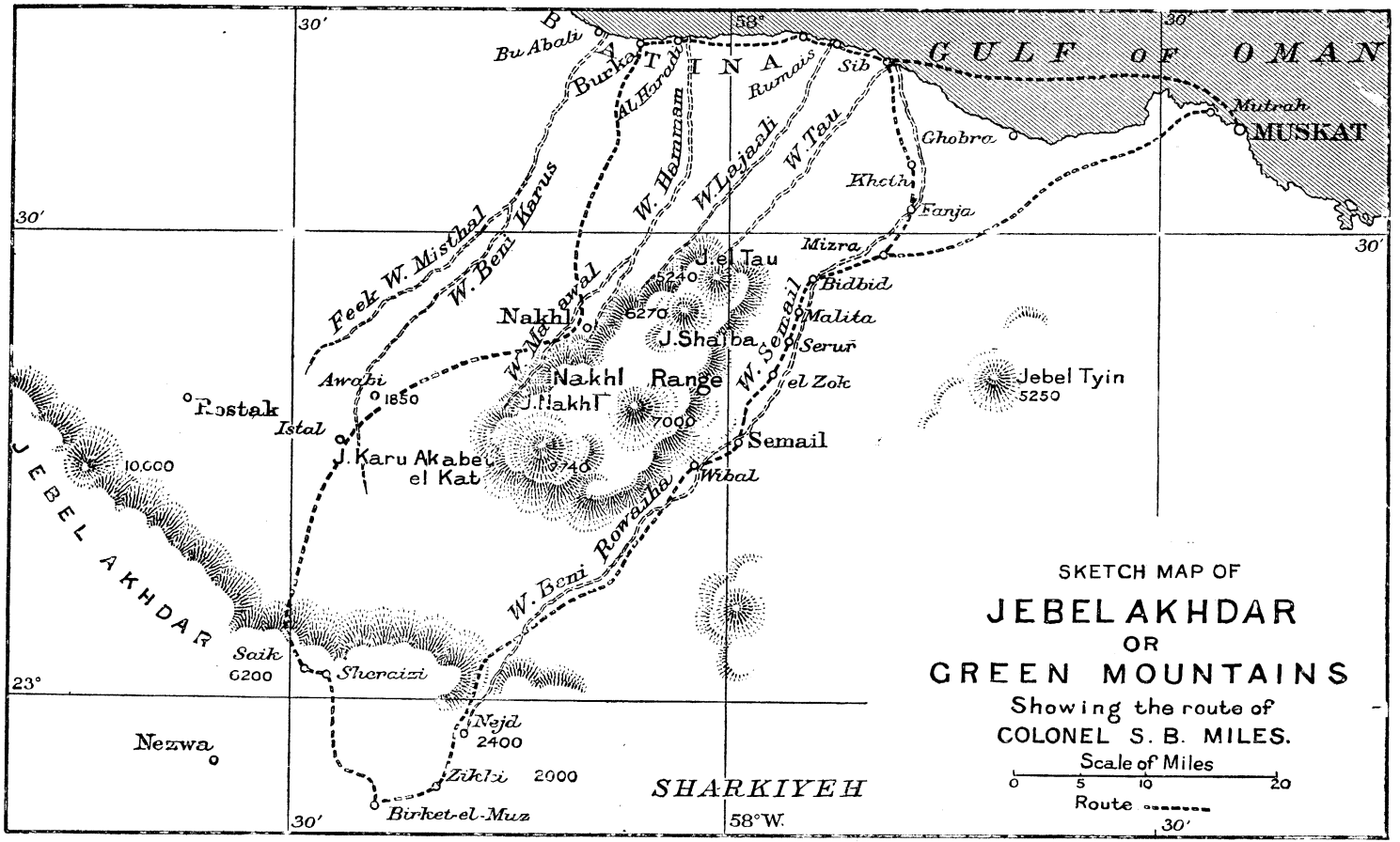
I was very cordially received by the Waly, or governor, Sezzid Salim bin Khalfan, who came down to meet me and conducted me to a small house in a pretty garden that had been prepared for me, and for the use of which I was indebted to the courtesy of one of the Sultan's officials. Here I was detained three days by the dilatory habits of the Arabs, and then, having received letters requiring my presence at Muskat, I returned thither by the shortest route. A week later, July 9, I started again, accompanied this time by Mr. Maguire, the B.I.S.N. Company's agent, and, taking a direct course, we made our first stage at the village of Halban, not far from Jebel Tau, the abutment of the Nakhl range, where we camped for the night. We found Halban a place of unusual industrial activity, the people being busily engaged in the manufacture of indigo dye from plants extensively cultivated in the neighbourhood. It is prepared in large earthen jars, and the dye is used to give the imported textile fabrics of Manchester that dark blue colour so highly favoured and almost exclusively worn by the women of Oman of all ranks and conditions. In the evening we inspected the village school, which was near our camp, and was held in the open air like an Indian pâtshâla, the sacred peepul being here represented by a large mango tree. The pedagogue was an old moolla, rod in hand, and among the twenty-one children sitting at his feet we counted five girls, one of whom was learning to write. Among the crowd of visitors that came to see us was the Sheikh of Al Tau, who pointed to his town in a west-south-westerly direction, and gave us a pressing invitation to visit it, saying it was three times as large as Halban. The next day, skirting the base of the mountain, we rode on to Nakhl, crossing numerous nullahs or ravines, and passing two villages, Farah and Lajaali, on the way.

The houses at Nakhl are built of sun-dried bricks or stones plastered over; many are high and spacious, and, though with but slender pretensions to architectural beauty, not destitute of exterior decoration. The lintels are often carved, and the doors ornamented and strengthened with pointed iron knobs or bosses. The windows are never glazed, but are closed at night with strong wooden shutters, and are sometimes furnished with mashrabiyehs, sometimes protected by strong iron cross-bars. The interiors are badly planned; the stairs are narrow and steep, and the upper apartments long and narrow. Plaster or cloth

ceilings are not in vogue, but the teak beams and rafters are often handsomely carved or painted in various devices. The windows are usually placed very low, so that the occupants reclining on the floor may look out of them, and at the top of the room circular holes in the wall serve to assist ventilation. On the floor are carpets or mats and cushions, but other furniture is scarce, and tables and chairs, of course, not to be seen. Strong wooden brass-bound boxes are the receptacles for apparel and valuables; and round the room are ranged broad shelves, on which is displayed a quaint and wondrous assortment of cuckoo clocks and other timepieces, coffee-pots, china figures and ornaments, English and Indian toys, and a variety of other curios, highly valued by their owner. In this ardour for collecting, as well as in the style of house decoration, Persian taste is very perceptible. Most of the houses have a small garden attached.

A noticeable fact here, it may be observed, is the mixed character of the population. This comprises, besides Arabs, Persians, Negroes, and Zattut, a very large proportion of Bayâsir, a race supposed to have emigrated originally from Hadhramaut. The Bayâsir are an industrious and peaceable folk, and many of them are wealthy, but are held as aliens by the tribal Arabs, and are never entrusted, I believe, with positions of authority and command. When a Bayâsir happens to meet a sheikh on the road he will not go up to kiss hands and give salutation without first dropping his sandals by the side of the path, after the manner of servants and inferiors.

Nakhl is abundantly supplied with water, and, indeed, one of the most characteristic features in its physical aspect is the existence of copious thermal springs, the medicinal virtues and efficacy of which are famous in the land. The chief fountain, or rather group of fountains, is called Hammam Thowâreh, and lies at the head of the ravine, a little distance from the town, among fragrant gardens and shady palms and mangoes. The sight is very curious. In the midst of a numerous family of smaller springs, the father of fountains gushes up out of a cavity in the ground, apparently about 6 feet in depth and 2 in diameter, and pours forth a volume of water, roughly calculated by me at 200 gallons per minute. This is the hottest, as well as the largest, spring at Nakhl, and has a temperature, I found, of 106° Fahr. There are at least twenty other springs in its vicinity, yielding altogether a very bountiful supply, but the temperature of those I tested did not exceed 104° Fahr. They are all tasteless and inodorous. On the other side of the town is a similar assemblage of springs called Hammam Odaisee, the most prolific of which issues from a hole in the rock and is led into a tank, from whence it flows to irrigate the fields. This spring was 105° Fahr., and another near it was 102° Fahr. Notwithstanding the high repute and universal belief in the curative properties of these waters, I did not observe, either here or at Thowâreh,



any facilities for bathing, such as are to be seen at Bosher, although the local faith is that hygienic effects can be more rapidly and permanently obtained by ablution than by taking the water internally. The supply of water is sufficient not only for the domestic requirements of the people without the need of wells, but enough and to spare for the irrigation of the gardens, fields, and date-groves of the settlement. The natives assert that the heat of the water decreases in summer weather and increases in winter, and they have a firm belief that the supply is unvarying and inexhaustible. The rivulets issuing from these hot springs abound in little fish, even where the water is still warm; they are about the size of minnows, and are of two species.

Mechanical ingenuity is not the forte of the Arab, and I was somewhat surprised to find, in one of the streams near the path, a flour-mill turned by water-power. It was rather a primitive and diminutive affair, but it was the first thing of the kind I had then seen in Arabia, though I have since noticed similar ones near Rostak. The mill consisted of a circular upper stone, bevelled up to a thin edge, revolving upon a stone floor, and attached below to a vortex wheel, which was set vertically with oblique floats or blades. The grain was put in unhusked, and appeared to be ground very slowly.

The castle is built on an eminence overlooking the town, between Jebel Laban and the pinnacle rock, the ascent up the ramp to the main gateway being very steep. This gate leads through a strong outer rampart pierced with embrasures and armed with a battery of iron guns mounted on rickety carriages, and, passing this, you find yourself in the courtyard, in which stands the keep, consisting of a high curtain flanked by two towers, from whose lofty battlements a superb view is presented towards the coast. It has three gates, and is in rather a dilapidated condition. Standing within the gorge and protected by the heights around, the castle is well placed, and is considered invulnerable by the Arabs, who have a deep sense of its military importance. Owing to its position, Nakhl has indeed played a by no means insignificant part in the history of Oman during the past three centuries, particularly in the closing years of the Yarebeh dynasty, and has sustained many sieges. The ruins of two other forts are to be seen here, one on the north side called Jeneb, dismantled by Sezzid Saed bin Sultan, and, after being repaired, was finally demolished by Sezzid Azzan in 1868; and another which stood near Thowâreh, and was razed to the ground by Sezzid Toorkee in 1874. Enfolded in the iron embrace of the deep gorge in which it lies, the town is shut in on all sides, and, occupied as the confined space mainly is with palms and houses, there is little room left for cultivation. The town has a regular and well-supplied market, and is divided into five quarters, viz. Atik, Hadhain, Safrat el Ijal, Khoryeh, and Hujret el Kurein. The date trees are extremely prolific, and the fruit is esteemed of superior

sweetness and lusciousness—virtues which are ascribed by the people to the copious and constant irrigation of the plantations.

Out of a population of about 6000 the pure Arabs do not exceed 1500, representing the following tribes: Yaarebeh, Harrâs, Beni Kharus, Sereeriyin, Al Khozair, and Hadhârim. The number of fighting men is 800, mostly Bayâsir. In the lower classes there is much admixture of Persian blood. Each hâra or quarter of this town had a "sablah" of its own. This institution is very popular, and consists of a small shed, or covered platform, raised above the ground and open on all sides; it may be 15 or 20 feet square, with a light roof of mats and palm leaves resting on wooden posts. I have seen some, however, more substantially built, and bearing some resemblance to a mosque. Situated centrally in the village, it forms the council hall where the sheikhs and leading Arabs assemble daily to discuss local politics and chat over the events of the day. The tobacco-pipe of Turkey and Persia being almost unknown in Oman, the inevitable coffee-pot is in full requisition, and the sheikhs' slaves may be seen close by busily engaged in roasting, pounding and cooking the berry for the company.

There are numerous hand-looms at Nakhl, in which coloured lungies and puggrees are woven, as well as cotton cloth of the natural brown variety called "khodrung." The blue yarn required is dyed here, but the red and yellow yarns are imported from Bombay. Embroidered silk belts for ladies are also made here. Another industry is the production of porous earthen vessels for cooling water, the quantity made in the Nakhl factories being almost sufficient for the home demand. The clay used is a bluish marl, brought from the neighbouring village of Musalmât, mixed with sand. The kalib, or potter's wheel, has two discs, the lower one, which is called "raha," being turned by a treadle. The clay to be moulded is placed on the upper wheel, and is fashioned by an iron instrument called "moshal," the finishing touches being done with a sort of comb called a barit.

During my stay I visited some of the schools, of which there are five here, and saw the children imbibing instruction in the usual Moslem style, repeating aloud sentences of the Koran or rules of grammar read out by the mollah. They attend in the morning, and may be seen at an early hour hurrying to school, boys and girls together, some with a "minfa," or wooden Koran-stand, on their heads, some with a painted board or camel shoulder-blade, on which they learn to write, under their arm. The instruction given is of a very elementary character—reading, writing Arabic grammar, the Koran, and a little arithmetic being the only subjects. But the boys of the learned and wealthy are often educated at home by a mollah, and advanced further. The lack of method is partly compensated for by the precocity and tenacity of memory shown by the boys. Nakhl deserves attention for the comparatively advanced state of education

among the people, there being a larger proportion of persons in this town able to read and write than in any other in Oman. There is a good number, also, of professional scribes. Books, consequently, are not so scarce here as elsewhere. The higher position of learning here is attributed to the influence of the Persians, who occupied this part of the country during the time of Nadir Shah.

Nakhl has, for the greater part of the year, a temperate and pleasant climate, being preserved from the scorching winds that sweep over the great desert, and partly shaded from the sun's rays by the impending mass of mountains to the east and south. It is, moreover, cooled and refreshed by the sea-breeze from the coast; but we found from personal experience that the heat, though dry, could be sometimes stifling and oppressive in the extreme. The elevation, taking the mean of two aneroids, is 1100 feet.

On July 11 our kafeer, Sheikh Selim, having intimated that he had procured an escort, and that he was ready to conduct us to the foot of the pass, we mounted horses and left Nakhl at 3 a.m. the next day. Our route lay along the Rostak road, which, following the sweep of the range, led us west by south over a barren country with an intricate system of low hills, ridges, and ravines. Some of these ravines are inhabited by warlike tribes, and it may be convenient here to give the names of these ravines as they occur in succession from Sib westward. The first of them is the Wady Tau; the second is the Wady Lajaali, also called Wady Halban, and having its exit at Romais; and the third is the Wady Hammam, or Nakhl, which joins the Wady Maawal, and reaches the sea at Al Harâdi. The fourth river, the Wady Beni Kharus, becomes a confluent in its lower course with the Wady Misthal, and flows into the sea at Bu Abâli. The Wady Misthal belongs chiefly to the Beni Riyam, who occupy Fik and three other villages.

Soon after leaving Nakhl we pass to our left Towye, a hamlet lying at the foot of the Akabet el Kat, a rugged way, little better than a goat track, but the only one over the range to the Semail valley. At 8 a.m. we reached Felej el Khosair, in the Wady Beni Kharus, where we dismount for breakfast, while the sheikh trots on to Awabi to make various arrangements. This little dell is highly cultivated, and produces an abundance of fruit and vegetables. The fragrance pervading the air from the shrubs and sweet-scented herbs was very pleasant and enjoyable.

Leaving Felej el Khosair at 4 p.m., we rode on for two hours till we came to Towye Saih, a hamlet of the Dahaul Arabs, where the ravine suddenly expands into a small plain three-fourths of a mile in extent, and a mile beyond this we reach El Awabi, where we halt. The wady here turns sharp to the left through a deep and narrow defile, and at this point on the left bank, completely commanding the passage, stands

the castle Bait Awabi, in a position of great natural strength. Commanding the most accessible pass up Jebel Akhdar on the north, this fort has ever been a bone of contention between rival chiefs and factions. In particular it forms a constant source of trouble and hostility between the Ibriyin and Beni Riyam tribes, the former holding possession of it, while the latter would like to destroy it. Shortly before my visit the fort had been attacked by the Beni Riyam, who had mauled it very considerably, without, however, effecting a capture. One of the towers, I noticed, had been almost levelled to the ground. At one time the Ibriyin, fearing a strong coalition against themselves, offered Bait Awabi to the sultan, Sezzid Turky, who declined it. Subsequently His Highness changed his mind and asked for it, but in the mean time the tribe had changed their minds, and refused to give it up. It was eventually purchased by the sultan for a large sum, and the transit dues, which had been previously levied by the Ibriyin on goods passing through the defile, were then abolished.

Awabi lies about halfway between Nakhl and Rostak. The settlement covers a fairly large area, and every available spot has been reclaimed for tillage. The wheat and jowari had just been reaped, but other crops were still standing, and the fields, kept neat and regular, bore witness to industry and good husbandry. Stall-fed cattle of the small humpbacked kind are numerous, and almost every house appeared to have a cow or two. They are fed on barley, dates, and lucerne; and, though there is plenty of coarse grass, they are not allowed to roam about the hills. Awabi has a population of about 2000, with a fighting strength of nearly 400. It is occupied by three tribes, viz. the Beni Kharus, Ibriyin, and El Harras, who appear to dwell together amicably. The headman of the town, Sheikh Jabir, was very attentive and obliging, but was not very communicative. He was much depressed by the chastisement recently inflicted on his people by the Beni Riyam, and pointed out to me, sadly, the havoc they had committed among the date palms, the prostrate trunks of which were lying about in hundreds.

The shoran or bastard saffron plant grows plentifully in these hills, and the dried flowers are used by the women, who generally go about unveiled, to daub their own and children's faces with. It stains the skin yellow, and does not improve their appearance, though perhaps they think otherwise. The ladies who can afford it employ true saffron for the same purpose.

The preparation of dried dates, known in Oman as "bisr," and in India as "kharak," is carried on largely at Awabi, and as the season had now commenced, I took the opportunity to observe the process, and was taken round the factories by the sheikh. The dates selected are almost exclusively of the "Mubsili" and "Khanaizi" varieties, and are picked before they are quite ripe. The factory had a chimney about 15 feet high, and contained several open, circular, copper boilers,

capable of holding five gallons each, and nearly full of water. Into these vessels the dates are put, and allowed to simmer over a slow fire. As the water in the copper decreased from evaporation, it was filled up again, but it gradually became inspissated by the extraction of the juice of the date. The fruit is left in the water about half an hour, and is then taken out and spread on mats or cloths in the sun to dry, after which it becomes hard and of a pale red colour. It is exported in large quantities from Muskat to India. We were here transferred to a new escort, part of our old one returning hence to Nakhl, and camels were here substituted for horses, as being better suited for rough hill work, and the gradient between this and the next stage being very severe.

After leaving Awabi, the elevation of which is 1850 feet, the next morning we were led past the fort in a direction generally tending south-west, the tortuous ravine gradually narrowing to a cleft with perpendicular sides 600 to 800 feet high, and though evidently swept occasionally by impetuous torrents, pleasantly fringed, and adorned in places with rhamnus, tamarisk, oleander, asclepias, and other trees and shrubs that have clung tenaciously to the ground and withstood the rushing waters. At two and a half hours, 6 miles from Awabi, we come to Istâl, a village of the Beni Kharus; and a little further on a heap of ruins on the right bank above us, indicating the site of an ancient castle, named Hisn Salut, is pointed out. This fortlet, which was finally destroyed less than half a century ago, in one of the many tribal wars for the possession of this defile, had a chequered history, and as we passed it the Arabs of my party had a lively discussion on bygone events associated with it. The formation, as disclosed by the Wady Beni Kharus, appeared to consist, at first, of an argillaceous slate, giving place, as we ascended, to a dark sandstone variegated with reddish or brown streaks, the stratification being sometimes confused and dipped at great angles, sometimes crumpled by pressure, and apparently metamorphic.

Opposite the village of Istâl is a curious high ridge with a serrated crest, called Ikhbal. Above this the structure changes, limestone predominates, and a pleasing transformation takes place in the scenery, the hills assuming a verdant appearance that was denied to the lower slopes. In this part of Oman many of the wadies are cut through conglomerate, which usually forms the bed, and the Wady Beni Kharus is no exception to this rule.

Between Istâl and Aleya we passed six small hamlets occupied by shepherds and mixed tribes, owning large flocks of goats. At Aleya, where the aneroid barometers showed an altitude of 2400 feet, we dismounted and halted in order to begin the real ascent of the mountain about nightfall, the sun's rays at this season of the year forbidding any attempt at alpine climbing in the heat of the day. It was destined,

however, that I should traverse the mountain alone, as during the afternoon a kosid arrived with the post-bag, and my companion received letters recalling him to Muskat on business. He was accordingly obliged to relinquish the design of coming with me any further, and it was arranged he should return to Muskat the next day. The rugged conformation of the mountain sides here is picturesque, but the area available for cultivation is very limited, for the space is confined by the intersecting ravines that furrow the slope.

As may be naturally supposed, the ground has not been reclaimed without considerable difficulty and labour, the inequalities of the surface in some places necessitating the fields and orchards being raised and banked up. The soil is very fertile, and the earth is merely scratched by the plough, which is small, light, and simple. I saw a man turning up the stubble with a plough drawn by a single bull. The ears of corn are cut off close, and are threshed with flails made of date-stalks. Fruit grows here in profusion, and we noticed the citron, vine, lime, orange, and other kinds. A few coffee plants may be seen here, and it is the only place in Oman where it still lingers, the flourishing plantations that formerly existed having now all disappeared.

The sheikh informed me in the evening that he had made an arrangement with the owner of six asses, just arrived from above, to take us to Nezwa for fifty dollars, and to this I willingly agreed; but as six animals were not nearly sufficient for our requirements, and as no others were procurable, we had to hire porters to carry up the rest of the baggage. The sturdy Arabs who are accustomed to do this work, carry the burden on their backs in a net supported by a band or rope across the forehead, and seem to think little of their performances.

It was a little after midnight on the 13th that, after taking leave of my companion and of the sheikhs who had so obligingly conducted us thus far on the journey from Nakhl, I commenced the ascent of the Akabat el Hajar or Lhojar, as it is popularly termed. It was quite dark as we began the ascent of the precipitous mountain in front of us, up a rugged watercourse, and I wondered how the Arabs could see their way along the narrow path. At times we had a stiff climb, and zigzagged up the acclivity at a perilous angle; at other times the track was less steep and easier. As we leave the torrent bed and continue to progress upward, the gradient becomes much more formidable, and the mountain now presents sheer perpendicular cliffs and bold buttresses. The path would be here quite impassable for beasts of burden had it not been artificially improved by the construction of successive series of rough steps formed of huge slabs of stone, and by the curbing and revetting up of the road in parts where it overhangs a precipice. The stupendous nature and difficulty of the work and the skill and enormous labour bestowed on it claimed my wonder and admiration, but it was in vain that I endeavoured to gather any local tradition respecting

its origin. The absence of tradition and the character of the work led me to regard it as of Persian conception and execution. A scattered Arab tribe like the Beni Riyam, always at war with its neighbours, could not have done it, and I think the most probable period to which it can be assigned is that of the Dailemite conquest of Oman in the tenth century of our era.

We found the asses we had hired of the hillmen to be surprisingly strong and sturdy animals; they were as surefooted as mules, and so active that they performed the ascent, a toilsome climb of 5000 feet, in five hours without exhibiting much fatigue. Unlike any others I had seen, these creatures were more stoutly built and much more spirited than their humble kindred of the plains. Their owners seem to treat them well, and do not, I believe, take them beyond the foot of the mountain. It is said that these asses are descendants of domesticated animals that have run loose in certain localities, three of which were mentioned to me; the asses in these colonies are probably in much the same half-wild state as the ponies in the New Forest and on Exmoor. Where the nature of the path permitted, the one I rode was accustomed to make short and rapid spurts, and then stop to regain breath. It was an impetuous, vicious little brute, always trying to bite somebody, and had acquired in consequence the name of Dheyaib, or the "Little Wolf." The saddles used are heavy and clumsy, and the load put on them appeared to be almost as much as a mule would carry. Owing to the sharp hard rim and deep cavity of its hoof, the ass is well fitted to climb rocky hills, and its value to the Arab in this mountainous region is great.

After about five hours of incessant toil, we reached the summit of the pass as the sun rose, and my weary party camped by the side of a little rill for two hours for rest and refreshment. I could have enjoyed a longer stay, as at some points it was possible to obtain a glorious panoramic view of wild and majestic scenery. We were here standing on one of the highest ridges of the mountain, and the escarpment, as it appeared to us, dropped almost perpendicularly from crag to crag, sheer to its base; the sea, though far distant, appearing from the dizzy height to be close under us. I found that one of my aneroids had given way during the ascent, but the other, graduated to 10,000 feet, was all right, and showed we had attained an altitude of nearly 8000 feet.

On resuming our journey, we descended for some distance a gradually shelving and undulating grassy plain with many large trees, which, however, were too far off to be recognized, and then came to a broad and verdant vale, which intersected our path and led away to the south-west. We saw a few shepherds tending their flocks in the distance, but the only wayfarers we met on the road were a party of women carrying bundles of grass on their heads for their cattle. After travelling in an east-south-east direction for 10 or 11 miles, we dismounted at a small

mosque and grove of trees by the wayside, and while resting here were joined by some of the sheikhs of Saik, Mohammed bin Saed and others, who had come out to welcome us and escort us to their town. The temperature at this spot at noon was 85° Fahr. in the shade, and there was an exhilarating and bracing freshness in the air truly delightful. From this point several high peaks were visible, but there was no village nor sign of human habitation near.

In the company of our new guides we now moved on again, and, passing on the way the spring and felej that supply Saik with water, we found ourselves, on turning a corner, suddenly brought to a stand on the very brink of a yawning chasm, dropping vertically to a depth of 400 feet below us, and effectually barring our progress. I looked about wonderingly, when the sheikh, taking me by the arm and pointing to a white village with a pretty green setting, lying in a sequestered nook at the foot of the cliff, said, "There is Saik; I will show you the way down to it." It was certainly the most singular situation for a settlement I ever beheld, and the mode of access to it was not less remarkable. Steps cut in the rock led to the bottom of the cliff, and down this long and slippery staircase my little steed tripped nimbly and steadily, but I was not sorry when we reached the ground. The whole community was there to receive us, and quarters were assigned to me in a small house that was vacant, while my party camped in an open space outside the village. This curious cluster of houses has a population of about four hundred, who subsist by growing corn and fruit, and exchanging their surplus produce for dates, cloth, hardware, etc., for they have no manufactures. They have many wells, and have also a small felej to irrigate their vineyards, fields, and orchards.

The cereals are wheat and jowaree, and two crops are gathered in the year. The rose, myrtle, and jasmin luxuriate in the gardens. Strong but rude trellises support the vines, which were still very abundant, though they were said to have much decreased of late years from blight or phylloxera. This misfortune is attributed by the natives to the machinations of an Afghan, who, about twenty years previously, had endeavoured to preserve grapes by adopting the Kabul method of packing the fruit in cotton-wool. A consignment was sent to the Zanzibar market, but the venture did not prove a success, and the attempt to start a trade in boxed grapes was abandoned. A year or two later the vines happened to be attacked by disease, and the people sagely concluded that the Afghan had cursed their vineyards after the failure of his speculation.

After receiving and dismissing a crowd of visitors, I went in the afternoon to pay a return visit to Sheikhs Nasir and Suliman, sons of the old temeemeh or chieftain of the Beni Riyam, Saif bin Suliman, by whom I was cordially received and regaled with coffee and conversation. They took me over their house, which, though the largest in

Saik, is an unpretentious structure, two stories high, built, like the rest of the houses at Saik, of stone cemented with yellow clay, and surrounded by a pleasant orchard and garden. I had hardly returned to my cottage, after visiting the sheikhs and taking a walk through the town, when a violent thunderstorm with hail and heavy rain burst upon us and lasted for some time. The rain on the rocky plateau above soon concentrated in the watercourses, and the tumultuous cascades that began to tumble down the steep walls of the chasm afforded a fine spectacle. The people informed me they had already had several smart showers, and that there was generally a fair amount of rain during the monsoon.

At 4 p.m. to-day the thermometer stood at 82° Fahr., at 6 p.m. it was 80°, and at 10 p.m. 74°. I found the elevation of Saik to be 6200 feet. The word Saik in Arabic signifies "a cleft or chasm."

This was the first point in the interior at which I had touched the route of Lieuts. Wellsted and Whitelock, and, having made inquiry as to whether there was any remembrance of their visit, I was gratified to meet with some who had personally witnessed their arrival forty-two years before. At my request, Sheikh Mohammed sent for two old men of the village and brought them to my cottage. I found that they retained a clear impression of the event, and their statements amusingly indicated how narrowly the strangers had been watched. The Arabs remembered that the officers had tents with them, used brass instruments to gaze at the sun, and spent much of their time in writing. Among other objects of wonder and curiosity, it had been noted that they possessed a bottle full of snakes.

The sheikhs of the Oman tribes have, in general, but little power over the other members in time of peace, but the temimeh of the Beni Riyam may be regarded as an exception, and he is indeed, from this and other causes, one of the most prominent sheikhs in the country. He is seldom on good terms with the Sultan of Muskat, and defiantly appropriates to his own use the produce of the Bait el Mal or crown lands, which belong of right to the ruler. In connection with this family, I am sorry to have to record one of those domestic tragedies so common in Arabia. Sheikh Nasir bin Saif died a few years after my visit, leaving three sons, the eldest of whom, Mohammed, inherited his father's position as temimeh. In 1886 Mohammed and his second brother were murdered by their uncle Suliman, who usurped authority and held it until 1899, when Nasir's third son retaliated and put his uncle Suliman to death.

The Beni Riyam occupy the towns of Sheraizi, Saik, Nezwa, Zikki, Birket el Muz, and Tanuf, and number about 17,000, of whom 3000 are fighting men. The tribe is Himyaritic and of Kamar origin, its eponymus being Riyam bin Nahfan bin Tobba bin Zaid bin Amr bin Hamdan. Their ancient domicile was in the province of Hamdan,

in the Yemen near Jebel Atwa, on the summit of which, where fire issued from the ground, was the temple of Riyam, a fane of great sanctity with idols of the sun and moon, and a great resort of pilgrims. According to the Arab geographer Hamdani, the ruins of this temple were still to be seen about the year 950 A.D. Tradition relates that the Beni Riyam emigrated in remote times from the Yemen, in company with their cousins the Mahra, and marched on to Oman, leaving the Mahra on the way, in the land they now occupy. After crossing the peninsula, the Beni Riyam were fortunate enough to secure as their new habitation a vantage-ground in the most inaccessible and central part of the country, and called the mountain, after the name of their old capital Radha, Jebel Radhwan, since changed, when or why I know not, to Jebel Akhdar. The fire temple seems to have passed out of the memory of the tribe, who now regard Radhwan as the name of an ancient prophet that arose among them. A portion of the tribe is said to derive its descent from Malik bin Fahm, who invaded Oman in the second century after Christ.

On the 14th I moved across to Sheraizi, which lies a mile to the eastward, and was received by the headman, Sheikh Salim bin Abdulla, whose present was a basket of peaches. The town is much larger than Saik, and offers a most striking contrast to it in the position it occupies. Though less quaint and romantic in appearance, Sheraizi is more favourably and finely situated, being perched near the head of a ravine, like an eagle's nest, on the brow of a lofty cliff which falls rapidly to the valley beneath, commanding an extensive prospect. The town is built on so steep a declivity that the houses appear to overhang one another, and the only communication is by means of narrow, dirty, irregular steps leading up and down from one row to another. The houses are small and mean-looking; they are constructed of stone, and are sometimes, but rarely, plastered with clay on the outside, as at Saik. Just under the town there is a copious spring of pure water, which gushes from the rock to fill a circular cistern, sufficing for the requirements of the inhabitants, and serving the conduits that fertilize the terraces below.

I spent most of the day in wandering about the place and examining the extensive hanging gardens which are spread along the precipitous valley walls and form the most interesting and beautiful characteristic feature at Sheraizi. To the left of the town, beneath it, and on the opposite slope of the valley, the whole face of the hillside, to the depth of 1000 feet or more, is cut into a parallel series of ledges or terraces, most symmetrically arranged and highly cultivated as vineyards, orchards, and cornfields. These curious pensile gardens, the like of which I had never seen before, with their varied foliage and ripening fruit, apricots, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, formed a very attractive and pleasing sight, and had evidently been most carefully constructed,

the terraces being stepped up with revetments wherever the natural features of the ground had not availed, to maintain the earth in position. Owing to the sharp angle of the slope, the ledges are in general very narrow, perhaps 10 or 12 feet in width, and considerable ingenuity has been displayed in their disposition and in overcoming the difficulties of the ground. The labour bestowed on them, however, would have been futile without an abundant supply of water, and in this respect nature has been prodigal, the cultivation being easily and perpetually irrigated by the numerous mountain streamlets, which are taught to meander from one ledge to another in turn, being confined by little embankments along the margin. Extensive as these terraces appear, the space they cover is not very large, and the inhabitants would be glad of more soil. The limited scope for tillage necessitates economy, and the corn may often be seen intergrown with leguminus, and sometimes even with melons and other cucurbitaceous plants.

Opposite the town, and on the other side of the intervening valley, which is called the Wady Miyadin, and flows to the south-south-east, is a conical hill with a ruined tower and mosque on the summit; and to the right, lying south-east by south, is El Jabul, a curious peak, which, I was told, was looked on as a potential stronghold, having served as a refuge for the tribe in old times. It is now untenanted, and no vestiges are left of ancient buildings. It is capable of easy defence, as the path leading up it is so steep, narrow, and rugged. The scenery of this valley, with its regular and richly varied terraces, like giant steps on the mountain-side, is as beautiful as it is extraordinary, and of a character of which it is impossible to give an adequate idea.

In the afternoon clouds again gathered round the peaks, and we had a pelting thunderstorm, which was very grand; the lightning was very vivid, and the cataracts of water seemed to gratify the Dailemites immensely.

The women here, and throughout the valleys of Jebel Akhdar, fetch water for domestic purposes in large copper vessels instead of in earthen jars, as in other parts of Oman. They also use copper cooking-pots almost exclusively, the employment of this metal being due, no doubt, to the difficulty of bringing earthenware up from the plains, and to the absence of clay in these mountains suitable for good pottery. The hillmen procure these vessels from Nezwa, where I afterwards found the manufacture of copper ware to be one of the principal industries.

During our ascent of the Akabet el Hajar to the plateau, the change in the character of the vegetation had been complete, marking the difference of elevation by the substitution of that of the temperate zone for the tropical and subtropical verdure of the plains. The plantain, the mango, and the stately date palm, which forms such a conspicuous feature in the scenery of Arabia north of the eighteenth parallel, and

which we last saw in the Wady Beni Kharus, have all disappeared, and in their place we have the walnut, pine, apple, and pomegranate. The fig, peach, apricot, vine, almond, and lime also flourish. M. Aucher Eloy mentions the cherry, but I did not observe it. The pomegranate is a handsome shrub, with dark green foliage and crimson flowers. It receives more attention at Sheraizi than any other product except the vine, and the fruit, though small in size, is of superior excellence. It forms the chief item of export from Jebel Akhdar, being shipped from Muskat to the value of 10,000 dollars annually for the Bombay market. The Arabs are very fond of the pomegranate, and employ it for making sherbet. The rind is very astringent, and is used medicinally as a febrifuge and anthelmintic. The terraces appeared to offer a peculiarly suitable site for growing coffee, and it was once extensively grown here, but from some cause the plantations failed, and the plant has now entirely disappeared.

I need hardly say that the assumption as to the nutmeg growing in these hills is erroneous, Wellsted's mistake having probably arisen from the name this spice bears in some European languages. Mace, the arillus or covering of the nutmeg, is another word indicating the belief prevalent in old times that Oman was the habitat of the spice, it being derived from Maceta, the appellation given to Cape Mussendom by the Greek geographers. Like so many other articles still bearing Arabic names, *e.g.* sugar, pepper, olibanum, rice, etc., the nutmeg was introduced into the Mediterranean by the Arabs.

The vineyards at Sheraizi are very extensive, and are regularly irrigated and manured. The vines are trained on rough trellises at certain distances, and produce both varieties of fruit, white and black. The grapes, which ripen here in August, were hanging in goodly bunches, and it did not seem to me that the people had any reason to complain of the crop, but they grumbled a good deal. Although much of the fruit may be eaten, and a portion made into raisins, there can be no doubt that the bulk of the crop is intended for the manufacture of wine of an inferior kind, which is entirely reserved, I believe, for home consumption. I did not, of course, witness the process, as it was too early in the season, and I had no opportunity of tasting the vintage, but I should imagine it, from the description I heard of the method employed, to be far from satisfactory. After crushing the grapes and mixing water with the whole mass of pulp, juice, skins, etc., they leave the liquid for about three weeks to ferment. The wine thus made is considered fit to drink in about three months after the fruit has been plucked. The wine thus made is consumed in the long winter evenings by the Sheraizi men, whose wine-bibbing propensities are notorious and reprobated throughout Oman. The Arabs of the interior, being a temperate and abstemious race, regard the constant manufacture of wine in their very midst by these Persians as a scandal

to their religion, and do not permit the production of spirituous liquor in any other part of the country, so far as I am aware.

Jebel Akhdar was explored botanically to some extent in 1836 by M. Aucher Eloy, the intrepid and indefatigable French naturalist, who ascended the mountain by the Akabet el Hajar, and returned to Muskat by the Wady Semail. In his zealous and enthusiastic search for plants, he traversed the greater part of his journey on foot with infinite toil, reaching the coast again at last enriched with many specimens of new species, but weary, fever-stricken, and footsore. In his journal, which was edited by M. Jaubert in 1838, he gives a graphic account of his sufferings and adventures. M. Aucher Eloy tells us he found many pretty flowers well suited for introduction into Europe; he collected about 250 species, and reckons there may be 500 altogether in Oman, an estimate which will, I suspect, be found much below the mark. In the vicinity of Nakhl the botanist found a tree of the genus Niehburia, and a very pretty flowering shrub, which he named *Vogelia leprosa*, also a beautiful new Dichyptera. The vegetation on Jebel Shaiba, the altitude of which is 6270 feet, was new to him. At El Hajar was a new Bœhravia, and at Aukaud a new violet, a new genus of primula, and a new species of Lunius, which he named *Aurea*. At the dispersion of M. Aucher Eloy's collection, the Kew Herbarium took 2600 specimens, and the British Museum 1907.

This mountain is estimated by Lieut. Wellsted to have a length of 30 miles from east to west, and an extreme breadth of 14 miles from north to south. The highest point visible from the sea was reckoned by the nautical surveyor at 9940 feet, but I have not been able to ascertain the local name of this peak with precision, some Arabs giving it as Jebel Hauz, some as Jebel Shum. The abruptness of the north and south sides render this grand rocky mass inaccessible from the plains, except by means of the torrent beds that ages of surface drainage and the waters of living springs have scored in its rugged flanks. Three of these natural highways leading to the summit can be travelled by animals with burdens, and form, consequently, the main passes. On the north side the Akabet el Hajar has been already mentioned as the one by which we ascended; the southern side offers two, the Wady Tanuf and the Wady Miyadin, the former being longer, but of the same character as the Wady Miyadin, which will be described further on. There is also, on the north side, the Akabet Fik, and on the south side the Akabet Shash, and perhaps others, but they are little better than goat-tracks. Eclipsed in height by a few peaks only, the northern flank of the mountain presents the most elevated ridge, and this feature is characteristic of the whole chain, which is much more lofty, abrupt, and precipitous throughout its length on its northern face than on its south flank towards the desert. The plateau declines gradually from north to south, and then falls rapidly to the plain in cliffs which, though wild

and striking, are less imposing in their grandeur than those on the seaward front. Owing to this conformation, the ravines thrown to the south by the watershed are the longest and most numerous, and drain off by the two great arteries, the Wady Miyadin and the Wady Tanuf, the bulk of the surface or rain-water that falls on the mountain. Among the tributaries received by the Wady Miyadin are the Wady Sarut and Wady Saik. The chief tributary of the Wady Tanuf is the precipitous Wady Beni Habib, in which are two villages, Ain and Akr.

To two or three only of the peaks visible from Sheraizi could the Arabs give names; they pointed out Jebel Hauz, a few miles to the south-west, and Jebel el Ham, a tall peak to the northward. Jebel Akhdar must have been very different at the distant period when it received the appellation, then, no doubt, an appropriate one, of "The Verdant Hill," from the drear and arid aspect it presents at the present day. Though immense masses of exposed rock, destitute of vegetation, give the mountain generally a savage and unattractive appearance, there are some parts that are well wooded, and the plateau we crossed had much long grass and herbage. Many of the deep ravines, moreover, are said to possess dense thickets of thorny undergrowth and euphorbia, and the extent of cultivation at Saik and Sheraizi strengthen the conjecture that the range in former days was better clothed with arboreal vegetation. The destruction, if it ever took place, of the forests that once covered the surface of the plateau, would have given full scope to the denuding power of the rain, and the long-continued effect of this would be to wash the fertile soil into the valleys below. This would prevent the renovation of the forests, and thus we have a bare landscape instead of a tract shaded by extensive woods. Again, the denudation of trees must have caused reciprocal action in reducing the rainfall.

If any useful minerals exist in Jebel Akhdar—and the only one I noticed was iron—they are little explored and utilized by the inhabitants, who devote themselves either to agriculture, in the case of townsmen, or to rearing animals. The bold and hardy shepherds, who are by their calling sprinkled about everywhere with their flocks, number several thousands, and form the chief fighting material of the tribe. Though so widely scattered, they assemble with great celerity and promptitude when summoned by the sheikhs for war.

There is a paucity of animal-life in these hills. Wolves, hyenas, wild goats, ibex, wild cat, and leopard are said to be found; but the last named, if existing at all, is very rare. Kites and vultures may be seen circling round in the sky, but other birds appeared to be scarce, both as regards species and individuals.

Almost from the commencement of the rise of the Arab empire in the seventh century, the possession of Omen was coveted by the khalifs, who regarded it as an integral portion of their dominions; but the people

of Oman never freely accepted this view, and preferred independence, holding that subjection to the central government merely meant the payment of a heavy tribute without any corresponding advantage. The result was that for three centuries Oman became the ever-recurring scene of sanguinary conflict and devastation, and was reduced to the position, except during some fitful intervals of repose, of a tributary province of the empire. But persistent as the efforts were to effect a complete subjugation of the land, there was one part, Jebel Akhdar, that long remained impregnable and defied successively the Khalifs Mowiya, Abbas, Harun, Motadhid and Mutti, whose troops overran all Oman, except this mountain stronghold, at the foot of which they surged and struggled, like angry waves against a rocky islet, in vain. The remarkable achievement of its capture was reserved for the Buwayid Malik of Fars, Adhad ul dowla. The uncle of this prince, Muiz ul dowla, had previously, in 354 H. (965 A.D.), invaded Oman, but hostilities had then been averted by the prompt submission of Nâfi the black, who, having murdered his master Eusof twelve years before, then held power with a Turkish guard. Nâfi was left in charge as governor, but was expelled soon after by a combined Carmathian and Omani force. This revolt was followed, in 355 H., by a second Buwayid invasion under Abul Faraj and Adhad ul dowla, who ravaged the country and brought it once more to obedience. In 362 H. (972 A.D.) the Buwayid army of occupation in Oman, which consisted partly of Persian and partly of negro troops, the latter numbering several thousands, broke out into open mutiny, and threw the country into anarchy. The news quickly reached Bagdad, but the Amir ul Oomra, Izz ul dowla, was powerless to take action in so distant a province, being himself at that time in a critical position, and his cousin, Adhad ul dowla, therefore, who had long wished to annex Oman to Fars, seized the opportunity to despatch a force from Siraf across the Persian Gulf to restore order. His general, Abul Harab, defeated the mutineers in three successive battles, and took possession of the country for his master. His treatment of the inhabitants, however, was so oppressive that they were soon in revolt against him. The national gathering was so strong that the newly elected Imam Sheikh Ward bin Ziyad and his deputy Sheikh Hafs bin Rashid were able to drive the intruders back to their ships.

For the moment Oman was again free, but the dark cloud of humiliation that followed this transient gleam of liberty was more calamitous than any previous one. Adhad ul Dowla met the disaster by sending an army under his wazeer Abul Kasim al Mathhad, powerful enough to crush all opposition. The fleet sailed first to Sohar, and then moved on to Kuryat, where the Imam Ward had concentrated the Arab tribes. On the plain between the sea and the Devil's Gap a great battle ensued, and the Arabs, worsted, but not subdued, retired up the Tyin valley, pursued by the enemy to Nezwa, where a second stand was made.

This conflict, more desperate and sanguinary than the first, resulted in the destruction of the Omani force. The Imam Ward was slain on the field, and the country fell prostrate at the feet of the victors. Jebel Akhdar alone remained intact, and in this mountain fastness the survivors now took refuge. No previous conqueror had ever ventured to attack these menacing and almost inaccessible heights, but the wazir Abul Kasim felt so elated and confident that he resolved to crown his work by storming and reducing this last citadel of the Arabs.

In two divisions, up the precipitous and rugged Wady Miyadin and Wady Tanuf, the Persians fought their way in face of the Arabs, who defended the mountain by hurling down rocks, slinging stones, and shooting arrows against their eager and relentless enemies. Step by step the Persians pushed on, and step by step the Arabs retreated, fighting desperately for many days. The summit was gained at last, and the final stake had then to be fought out in the open field. In this battle, which took place on a small plain called Sherif, above the Wady Beni Kharus, the Arabs are said to have numbered 10,000, but the Persian strength is not given. The struggle was long and bitterly contested, but the despairing valour of the Omanis could not prevail against the superior arms and training of their adversaries, who, after a terrific carnage, utterly vanquished them. The Arabs' cup of humiliation was now full, and Abul Kasim's conquest of the land was absolute and complete. The women and children of the Arabs became, of course, the spoils of the victors, and many of these Dailemites or Persians, attracted by the salubrity and fertility of the mountain, resolved to settle there, selecting for their new abode a village on the site of the present town of Sheraizi, which they re-named the "Little Shiraz," after the capital of Fars. As the Persian power waned before the Seljukian Turks, and as the Arabs recovered strength and freedom, the people of Sheraizi gradually became absorbed in the Beni Riyam tribe, of which they now form a distinct and dependent section. Though they have assimilated themselves to the Arabs, during the long period of their occupation, in language, dress, and habits, and are only to be distinguished by a somewhat fairer complexion and different physiognomy, it is evident they maintain themselves as a separate community and keep aloof as much as possible from the Arabs, seldom mingling, rarely intermarrying with them, and never descending into the plains. Though they are said to be a dissipated and depraved race, they are a peaceable and quiet folk. Their industry has been concentrated on agriculture, and the elaborate work of terraces, if not originally designed, has been at least vastly improved by them. It must not be forgotten, also, that they have conferred a benefit on the country by the introduction of many valuable fruits, as the pomegranate and the vine, the walnut and the peach, and the

almond and the mulberry, most of which were brought over from Persia after the Buwayid conquest in the tenth century of our era.

Not being prepossessed with the sour-visaged people of Sheraizi, and being pressed for time, I remained only one day here, and bid adieu early on the morning of the 15th. The descent of the precipice commenced immediately after leaving the town, and I rode down the declivity, passing on the way a few hardy plants which struggled for existence at the edges of the ravine, where they derived a scanty nourishment, until we reached, at about 1000 feet, the Wady Sarut, just under El Jebûl, which rises perpendicularly from the torrent bed to a considerable height. Another steep descent of some 2000 feet down the rough and stony bed, half choked with great boulders and fragments of rock, led us into the Wady Miyadin, and, following this, we came to a village called Musaira with a small plantation of date palms, the sight of which, at such a high elevation, was a surprise. Although this pass is less precipitous than, and does not bear comparison with, the Akabet el Hajar, it has required an almost equal amount of rough engineering work, and the steps have been most laboriously and ingeniously constructed. Riding down it was no easy matter, but my steed made his way along the slippery path with great steadiness. A small but perennial stream flows along the Wady Miyadin, fed by the springs issuing from crevices in the rock. These springs appeared to be more abundant in the higher parts of the mountain. On reaching the bottom of the pass, we experienced a hot simoon wind blowing strongly up the valley from the direction of the desert. The air was most oppressive and stifling, but the thermometer only indicated 110° Fahr.

The banks of the wady at this part exhibited chiefly a dark bluish, veined limestone and a very brittle ferruginous shale. Miyadin, where we stopped for coffee, is a pretty village under high cliffs, with a felej giving a bountiful supply of water, and many date, lime, and other fruit trees. The hot breath of the simoon was here suddenly changed into a cool and refreshing current of humid air, and to this succeeded a thunderstorm with heavy rain. At 1 p.m. we were again winding down the ravine, which now presented a more gentle declination towards the south. Three miles further we came to Misfa, a small hamlet, and here the banks of the wady begin to recede and to decrease in height, vegetation at the same time becoming more abundant, tamarisk, rhamnus, palm, and acacias fringing the bed. For two hours more we rode along the gradually opening valley until, emerging from the hills, we found ourselves upon a spacious plain, now parched and dried by the burning rays of a summer sun, and with the horizon unbroken save by distant clumps of palms. Here we suddenly changed our direction and turned to the east, arriving at length at the gate of a stone-built castle, where we knocked for entrance. This castle was

Bait Rudaida, the residence of Sezzid Hamad bin Hilal, a second cousin of H.H. Sezzid Turky, and an amiable and intelligent youth of sixteen, who welcomed me in the most friendly and hospitable manner.

I was accommodated at first, after the usual complimentary interview and coffee, in a little mosque within the castle precincts, until a room had been prepared for me upstairs, our arrival here having been entirely unexpected. In the mean time I had leisure to look round and see the castle, which is of similar size and style to Bait el Felej, near Muskat. Surrounded by an exterior wall which forms the courtyard, the Bait consists of a long rectangular structure, two stories high, protected by defensive towers at the angles, and enclosing an inner quadrangle open to the air. Inside the courtyard are quarters for the garrison, and in one corner is a small mosque. If well guarded, it could well resist an Arab force, unprovided with artillery; but it was at this time in sad want of repair. The cause of this was not difficult to discover, the young prince being a ward of the Muskat government, and little care being exercised to guard his interests and protect his revenues and property. At this time, however, the boy was in high favour with the Sultan, and had lately been presented with a small iron gun, of which he was immensely proud. Bait Rudaida is close to the town of Birket el Muz, or "Pool of Plantains," from which it is separated by a low conical hill, capped by a watch tower, placed there to command the water-supply. Around the town is an extensive date grove, intermingled with orchards and cultivation. The population is about 3000, and the settlement is divided into three hujrahs, or sections, one belonging to Sezzid Hamad, and the other two to the El Amair and Beni Riyam tribes respectively.

In the afternoon I walked over the Sezzid's estate with him, and then through the town, which owes its prosperity and extent to the fostering care and liberality of Sezzid Hilal, on whom it had been bestowed when a mere hamlet, as an appanage in addition to Sowaik, by Sezzid Sultan bin Ahmed. The fields produce the usual kinds of corn and vegetables grown in Oman, but were not so regular or well tilled as in most other parts. The product in which Sezzid Hamad seemed to take the keenest interest was sugar-cane, and he did not neglect to show me over his luxuriant plantations. He possessed a rude mill for extracting the juice, and made many inquiries as to the best method of refining sugar. The cane is propagated here, as in India, from cuttings, not from seed, and it is believed to have existed in Oman from time immemorial. Frequent and copious irrigation is necessary for the successful production of sugar-cane, and the Sezzid's fields were watered by a felej or subterranean stream drawn from the hills. The felej is a kind of artificial river, and is one of the most ingenious institutions for bringing water to stimulate the prodigal hand of nature that could possibly be conceived.

The hills abound in fountains, but the soil is so porous and thirsty, and the evaporation from the intense heat so rapid, that irrigation of the valleys and lowlands by any other method would be exceedingly difficult. The ground, though apparently arid and bare, is often fertile enough, and only requires water. Vivify it by irrigation, and it will yield an abundant harvest. The system is wonderfully well adapted to the country and to the economic condition and habits of the Arab. After the initial labour and cost, it requires but little trouble to keep it in repair, and the continual expense and toil of raising water to the surface from wells is avoided. The construction of these underground watercourses is generally undertaken by the tribal communities in each town or village on a sort of joint-stock basis, each individual contributing his quota in money or in personal labour. They are universal throughout Oman, and there are few villages without at least one of these felejes. From a spring at the base of a hill, which may be many miles distant, the villagers conduct the water to their fields through a tunnel or conduit below the surface in the following manner. A line of vertical cylindrical shafts, 4 or 5 feet in diameter and 100 to 150 feet apart, is first sunk between the spring and the village, and these shafts or pits are then connected together by a channel underground in such a way that the body of water, flowing by gravitation, reaches the surface as it approaches the cultivation. The felej is always commenced near the spring, where the shafts are deepest, and the work carried on to the point where the water is required for distribution.

The plan is, of course, more troublesome and expensive than an open irrigation canal, but it has the advantage—one of great importance in this parched and desiccated land—of avoiding loss by absorption and evaporation. In long felejes the upper shafts are often 30 or 40 feet deep, and in some cases the connecting channels are lined with masonry or brickwork. This, however, depends very much on the nature of the soil, a circumstance which also dictates the distance between the shafts. Near the villages the pits are frequently made accessible by steps or a sloped path, to enable the women to procure pure and cool water for domestic purposes. The rows of mounds formed by excavating these pits are a conspicuous and peculiar, though a rather unsightly, feature in an Oman landscape.

The upper apartments of the castle were high and spacious, but very modestly furnished, and not scrupulously clean. The ground floor was devoted to kitchens and storerooms. The place looked dismally bare and empty, comfortless and neglected, and bore the appearance of a house whose glory had departed. It had once been rich in articles of luxury, collected by its founder in the days of his prosperity, but these had all vanished. The work of confiscation and spoliation of Sezzid Hilal's estate was completed by the Metowa under the Azzan-Khalaili *régime* about 1869, but the Birket el Muz property was restored to

the rightful owner, Sezzid Hamad, as an act of justice by Sezzid Turky.

Round the room I occupied ran a broad wooden shelf, on which was ranged a miscellaneous gathering of lamps, clocks, china, medicine-bottles, etc., and among these curiosities was a dusty heap of Arabic manuscripts, of which I made a careful list. They were mostly religious works, and belonged, I found, to a learned Ibadhi Mulla, known as the Kazi, to whom had been entrusted the guardianship and education of Sezzid Hamad. This prince was devoid of political ambition. He never interfered, when he grew up, in the jealous intrigues and factious quarrels so rife among the chieftains of Oman, but led a quiet homely life, absorbed in books and country pleasures, until his retirement to East Africa, where he died in early manhood. His father, Sezzid Hilal bin Mohammed, of whose noble disposition and generous spirit some account was given by Lieut. Wellsted, was a notable personage in his day, and a warm friend of the English. He held a foremost place in general estimation as a member of the ruling family, and was regarded as a man fully worthy to guide the destinies of the nation had he been called to the throne. His memory was long cherished in the country, and seldom, I believe, has a man's death been more sincerely lamented in Oman than when Sezzid Hilal was treacherously murdered by his cousin Kais in 1864. The story of this tragedy was related to me as follows:—

About two years before the close of the reign of H.H. Sezzid Thowaini, who was murdered by his eldest son Salim in 1866, Sezzid Kais of Rostak formed a plot to destroy him and seize the government of Muskat himself. He communicated his plan to Sezzid Hilal, who was too prominent and influential a personage to be ignored, but the latter, having always been loyal to Sezzid Thowaini, indignantly refused to join, and denounced the plot. Sezzid Kais then determined to be revenged, but, failing to find an assassin, had to undertake the task himself. Approaching his cousin Hilal, who, unlike most men of his rank, seldom wore a sword, in an apparently friendly manner, Kais suddenly drew his sword and struck him savagely on the head. Staggered by the unexpected blow, Hilal recovered sufficiently to plunge his dagger into the bowels of his assailant, who fell dead. Hilal was removed to Sowaik, where he expired shortly after. The fort at Sowaik was then assaulted by the adherents of Kais, and, though gallantly defended by Hilal's sister, was captured and annexed to Rostak.

We managed to get the camels ready and make a start at six the next morning, though our courteous young host, Sezzid Hamad, was loth to let us depart, and insisted on accompanying us a good part of the way on horseback before he would take leave. Our road lay over a level plain dotted with acacia and scant herbage, and intersected by

shallow watercourses, the most considerable of which is the Wady Hajar, with a village of the same name. Two hours at a slow trot took us to Zikki, a large and important town on the banks of the Wady Halfain. The wali, or governor, Sheikh Mohammed bin Sinan, who at this time held the castle on behalf of the Sultan, came out to meet us, and received me very cordially. After coffee in a large subla inside the courtyard, the sheikh showed me all over the castle, and then, taking me to an upper apartment, informed me that he wished to give a general entertainment to the Arab escort. I was anxious to push on and cover another stage in the afternoon before halting for the night, but the sheikh was so earnest and persistent in offering hospitality, declaring that it would lower him in the eyes of his people to allow my party to pass his gate unfeasted, that I felt obliged to submit and acquiesce in his wish, though I knew from experience that on such occasions the culinary preparations demand deliberation, and that our day's march was at an end.

The town of Zikki has some beautiful plantations of palms and extensive cultivation, and stands in a very picturesque locality. It is divided by the Wady Halfain, and is supplied by one of the most copious springs of water I have seen in Oman. On the left bank the ground is low, fertile, and well tilled by its occupiers, the Beni Riyam. The right bank is much higher, and on this elevated site are built the castle and the walled quarter of the Beni Rowaiha. Outside the settlement are several watch towers and hamlets of the Âl Amair and other tribes. The population may be 8000, and is mainly composed of the two tribes mentioned, the Beni Riyam being by far the strongest. These tribes, locally known as "Yemen" and "Nizâr," live in a chronic state of antagonism and warfare with each other, ever vigilant against surprise, and ever ready for a skirmish, except in the short intervals of "salfa," or truce. The political relations of both tribes are somewhat confused, as the Yemenite Beni Riyam are now ranked as Ghaffirees, and the Maddic Beni Rowaiha as Hinawis.

The castle is a lofty structure, compact and massive, with walls about 5 feet thick. It was at this time scarcely a century old, having been built on the site of an ancient fort by Mohammed Jabri, maternal uncle of Sezzid Said bin Sultan, but it had an antiquated appearance from its battered and dilapidated condition, one tower having tumbled down bodily. Outside and in front of the castle were two mounted iron guns, old, honeycombed, and unsafe, but capable, as I can affirm, of making a prodigious noise, for they were fired as a salute on our arrival, and this is a quality of immeasurable value in a country where the use of artillery is so little known. The castle not only overawes the whole settlement, but, standing as it does in a commanding position at the head of the Semail valley, dominates and controls one of the chief highways and arteries of traffic. Its possession, therefore, has

always been regarded as a matter of military importance by the central government.

The Wady Halfain is a perennial stream for some distance from its source, and flows to the south-east, reaching the sea at Ghubbet Hashish. About halfway down its course it meets the Wady Kalbuh and Wady Andam, and its grassy bed, which is much frequented by the Bedouins for grazing their flocks, forms the natural road from Mahot to Adam. The elevation of Zikki is about 2000 feet.

The Waly Sheikh Mohammed had duly performed his promise of collecting fresh camels for us, and we were on our way again at daylight next morning. I was about to take leave of him, when he announced his intention of accompanying us part of the way, and from this resolve I could not dissuade him. He rode a handsome and fiery black Arab, and kindly offered me one of his stud, but I preferred a dromedary, as we had a stage of nearly fifty miles before us, and the camel is superior to the horse in speed and comfort on a protracted journey. With our faces towards the north, we found ourselves climbing a gentle acclivity to the crest of the mountain chain, along a rough and stony watercourse, the stupendous crags and precipitous cliffs of Jebel Akhdar rising in dark masses on our left hand, deeply furrowed by ravines and clefts, while to our right the ridge trended away east by north. An hour's ride brought us to the Nejd or summit of the chain, which is 400 feet higher than Zikki. Various names were assigned to this pass by different persons I spoke to, viz. Nejd Beni Rowaiha, Nejd Mujberriya, and Nejd Soharma, but they were all of one accord as to the Nejd being the lowest point of depression along the range. The watershed in this vicinity provides the source of two of the longest rivers in Oman, flowing in opposite directions, viz. the Wady Halfain, already described, and the Wady Beni Rowaiha, or Wady Semail. Crossing the ridge, we descended a stony ravine leading into the main bed of the Wady Beni Rowaiha, and we now saw, stretching out in front of us to the coast, the largest, most populous, and, politically, the most important valley in the land. This long, rich, and splendid valley, lying between two mountain ranges, forms one of the main channels of communication between the coast and the interior, and, though here and there barren, is studded along the banks of its ever-flowing river with a succession of towns and villages, bordered by palms and cornfields, orchards, gardens, and cultivation. Its aspect is much diversified, exhibiting at some places vegetation in great exuberance, while at times we rode over desolate tracts of sand and pebbles without a sign of house or tree. The ranges that form the flanks are somewhat irregular masses of varying height, soaring at some points to lofty peaks several thousand feet in altitude.

At one part the hills approach and contract the valley to a narrow passage, at another they retire to let it expand. Flowing in a generally

north-eastern direction, the Wady Semail is fed by innumerable springs and rivulets, and is swelled after rain by the tributary, but transient streams poured into it by the ravines and torrents. The volume of water that reaches the sea would, of course, be much more considerable were it not for the enormous quantity drained off by the inhabitants to irrigate their fields. The source of the river is in Jebel Akhdar, and the flow is tolerably fast, but without any sudden falls to Semail, from whence the descent is more slow and gradual. Computing the curves and windings, the entire length can hardly be less than 100 miles.

Passing from one fertile strip to another, and wading across the narrow bed of the stream many times in our winding path, we continued to sink more into the heart of the valley, which became more populous, cultivated, and attractive, as we advanced. After five hours' hard travelling we arrived at Wibal, where Sheikh Mohammed left us. He pressed me to stay the night, and I was half inclined to accept the invitation, as I felt rather fatigued, and would have liked the opportunity to see the place, but I decided to move on, and after making the usual presents to the sheikh, I took leave. Wibal stands on the left bank, under a conspicuous white hill surmounted by a watch tower. Behind it to the west rises the imposing Nakhl range, one of the peaks of which, called Jebel Karu Akabet el Kat, with a rugged pass close by leading to Rostak, has been estimated at 7000 feet.

For two hours more we trotted on in the fast-fading light, and it was nigh sunset as we approached the outskirts of the Semail Aliya, or Upper Semail, and began to pass through patches of cultivation and gardens, intermingled with the indistinct forms of houses and date-leaf huts. It was not easy to pick our way among the intricate network of irrigation channels and the labyrinth of palms, and thinking it better not to penetrate further, lest we should disturb and alarm the people by the sudden appearance of a mounted party in their midst at nightfall, we turned off to camp by the stream.

The Beni Rowaiha are the remnant of a renowned and noble tribe, the Beni Abs. Of the race of Adnan and the stock of Ghatafan, they claim descent from the Beni Hâshim, and on their first arrival in Oman called themselves the Beni Hâsham. The patronymic of the tribe seems to be Rawaha bin Rabia; they are, however, often still spoken of by other Arabs as the Wilad Abs. Though one of the most recent immigrants, having probably entered Oman after Mohammed, the Beni Rowaiha have gained possession of one of the best-watered valleys in the country, and now hold an influential position, being a powerful community of about eighteen thousand souls, peopling thirty villages. Surviving to some extent to this day—for the breach has never been completely healed—the feud between the Abs and Dhobyan had its origin in a quarrel about a horse-race in Nejd, in the sixth century of our era, and the war that then took place is known to fame as the

"War of Dâhis," the two tribes being at this time enemies and neighbours in Oman, as they were in Nejd 1400 years ago. The story of the War of Dâhis, which lasted for forty years, is a typical illustration of the internecine strife that occurs at intervals in Arab nomadic life, even at the present day. The details of it, as collected from many Arab poets and narrated by Fresnel and Caussin de Perceval, are very curious, but are too long for insertion here, and I can only give a bold outline.

In the year 562 A.D., the Sheikh of the Abs, Kais ibn Zohair, made a successful foray on the Thalaba tribe, and as a ransom for the booty and captives taken, demanded and received a famous horse named Dâhis. The extraordinary fleetness of Dâhis became the theme and boast of the tribe, and the envy of their neighbours, and it was not long before a match was made to race him with another horse. This was done by a cousin of Kais, who agreed with Sheikh Hamad bin Bedr of the Dhobyan tribe, to run Dâhis against a Fezara mare named Ghuba for a wager of ten camels over a course of fifty bow-shots. The match had been made entirely unknown to Kais, who, when informed, highly disapproved of it, and wished to withdraw, but eventually the wager was increased to a hundred camels, and the length of the course to a hundred bowshots. As the day fixed for the race approached, the horses were kept without water, the plan being that the horse which first plunged its nose into the water-trough 10 miles from the starting-point should be declared the winner. The racers were to run riderless, and to make them gallop their best, maddening thirst was to take the place of whip and spur. Over the yielding sandy plain the superior strength of Dâhis told, and he was soon well ahead of his rival the mare, which, though fleet, had less staying power. He would undoubtedly have won the race had it not been for a ruse of the Dhobyan Sheikh, who had concealed a man in a hollow in the course, with orders to check Dâhis and throw him off his stride. The trick succeeded, and Ghubra was first at the goal. Kais was informed of the stratagem by onlookers, and was beside himself with rage and vexation. As the race, however, had taken place in the country of the Dhobyan, he was powerless to do more than protest, and after vainly endeavouring to induce Sheikh Hamad to repair the injustice by restoring the wager, he returned home. The Abs were so hot and eager for revenge that the first blow was soon struck, and the first victim was a brother of Sheikh Hamad, who had acted so perfidiously. On this event hostilities would have ensued, of course, if the Abs had not immediately paid the Dhobyan the bloodwit of one hundred camels. Sheikh Hamad accepted this payment for his brother's death, but, after doing so, avenged himself by treacherously slaying a brother of Sheikh Kais.

In the war that now followed, the first battle, known as Dhul Marâkib, was a triumph for the Abs, but in the second the Abs were disastrously beaten, and obliged to give hostages. A long truce was

then concluded, at the termination of which, in the year 576 A.D., Sheikh Hamad, instead of restoring the hostages given by the Abs, foully murdered them.

The attack made by Sheikh Kais, directly he heard the news, was so sudden and furious that the Dhobyan were taken by surprise, and suffered a loss of twelve killed. After this the position of the Abs became so critical, for they were much inferior in strength to the Dhobyan, that they resolved to migrate. They were pursued by the Dhobyan, who were plundering the baggage, when the Abs, making a sudden onslaught, routed them with great slaughter, killing Sheikh Hamad bin Bedr, whose treachery had caused the war. After many wanderings and adventures, the Abs arrived at last in the territory of their old enemies, the Amir bin Saasaa, by whom they were kindly and hospitably received.

The Amir were at this time at feud with the Beni Temim, who had meanwhile allied themselves with the Dhobyan, and as war was now inevitable, the two coalitions collected their strength for the final struggle, the force put into the field by the Dhobyan and Temim tribes being, it is said, the largest ever assembled in Arabia. The Abs and Amir tribes retired to a precipitous defile called Shoab Jabala, where they awaited attack. The enemy, confident in numbers, attempted to storm the ravine, but were thrown into confusion by a device, and the Abs, rushing down, utterly routed and dispersed them. This famous fight took place in 579 A.D., and practically terminated the campaign, though the tribes continued a desultory war for about thirty years longer, when they were finally reconciled by mediation, and the Abs returned to their former abode. Sheikh Kais ibn Zohair, however, scorned to make peace with his enemies, the Dhobyan, and retired to Oman, where he turned Christian, and became a monk or recluse.

Such is the brief story as preserved in ancient poetry, but the oral tradition of the tribes has somewhat varied it in course of ages; for instance, many Arabs believe now that Dâhis was ridden by Sheikh Kais, and the mare Ghubra by Sheikh Hamad.

Early the next morning, July 17, I crossed the boundary and entered Semail Sifâla, or Lower Semail, where I was met and greeted by the Wali Sezzid Nasir, whose acquaintance I had made two years before at Soor. After coffee I informed him of my intention to proceed on to Muskat at once, and asked him to procure fresh camels without delay. To this he demurred, begging me to stay with him till the following day, and saying it was his duty to entertain my Arab following in proper style before he could let them depart. I did not relish the delay, but it was impossible to refuse the Sezzid's hospitable courtesy, and I therefore consented to the feast on condition that the camels were forthcoming by 1 p.m. Sezzid Nasir then led me to a summer abode in a small garden at the edge of the stream, where I was furnished with

the customary carpets and cushions, and where he left me to enjoy the luxury of a bath before breakfast.

The "Dayara," or circle of Semail, may be called the capital of the valley, as it contains the residence of the wali, a strong castle, and is the chief centre of population in it, being occupied by various tribes. It is, however, not a single compact town, but rather an aggregation of twelve adjoining, unwalled villages, with their plantations, fields, watch towers, and homesteads, forming, as a whole, a picturesque and luxuriant settlement, extending along the valley for 10 miles, with an average breadth of 1 mile. The names of the different villages composing the Dayara are—Semail Al Hajir, Ghobra, Harras, Zok, Mizra, Sital, Jemmar, Bistan, Sifeh, Jebeliya, Dubk, and Sil el Saheileh. These are divided into two nearly equal parts, known as Upper and Lower Semail, the former being held by the Beni Rowaiha and other Hinawi tribes, and the latter by the Ghaffiris. The castle stands in Upper Semail. The boundary-line separating these two hostile camps is sharply defined by a small transverse ditch called Sherkat el Haida, and across this ditch many a fight has taken place, for the tribes are constantly quarrelling and skirmishing. In these little affairs the combatants usually commence operations by firing at each other across the Sherkat from behind cover, and then, heated with the fray and stung to fury by the taunts of their adversaries, engage at close quarters, using their long double-edged Omani swords with great effect. Sometimes, when the river is very low, the Himawis above try to dam up the stream, and thus cut off the supply of water from their enemies, the Ghaffiris, and this plan, when successful, which, however, is rarely the case, quickly brings about a suspension of hostilities and a truce.

There is a daily bazaar or market held close under the north side of the fort, and consisting of the usual food-supplies required, fruit, vegetables, meat, and salt fish, but no cloth or hardware shops. Semail, indeed, can boast of but little trade. Authority is too weak, and the general feeling of insecurity too prevalent, to allow of much traffic being carried on.

The settlement is rich in "Fard" dates, one of the finest varieties of this fruit produced anywhere. It is the kind most appreciated and esteemed by the Americans, who are good judges, and a very large quantity of boxed Fard dates is annually shipped to the New York and Boston markets. At the period of which I am writing (1876), Muskat was regularly visited by sailing ships from Boston for cargoes of pressed dates in bags, but of late years a change has taken place, and the Fard dates are now packed in boxes, and exported to the United States by steamer. Fruits grow here in great abundance and variety, and of excellent quality. Muskat and other markets are largely supplied from Semail.

The only manufacture in the place worth mention is cloth-weaving,

and the creaking of the loom may be heard in every hamlet. Lungies, puggries, and khodrungs are the chief articles produced, the cotton of which they are made, both white and brown varieties, being extensively grown in the valley. The loom is somewhat heavy and clumsy in construction, and is horizontal (not vertical like the Jewish looms we read of in Scripture), and the weaver sits and works at it in a shallow pit, with half his body below the surface.

The annual revenue derived by the Sultan of Muskat from Semail for local expenditure is said to be 6000 dollars; two-thirds of this amount being yielded by the zakât, or tax, and the remaining one-third representing the produce of the Bait al Mâl, or crown lands, which are usually farmed out.

The population of Semail is probably from 20,000 to 25,000 souls, but in such a large and scattered place is difficult to estimate.

The eastern range has fewer peaks, and presents a more broken contour, than the western. It is known by many different appellations as we pass along it, its highest peak (5250 feet) being called Jebel Tyin. Just above the village of El Zok the road to Ak branches off, and it takes three hours of very rough travelling to reach the village of that name. The Wady Ak is regarded as the key of Muskat from the direction of the Sharkiyah, or eastern province, as it offers the most direct route to the capital. When on the war-path to attack Muskat, the Sharkiyah tribes, if permitted, pour down this steep and rugged defile into the wild entanglement of hills and ravines beneath, and thence into the Wady Semail; but the Nedâbiyin tribe, to whom the Akabet el Ak belongs, is usually subsidized by the Sultan to hold the pass. The valley is here very much shut in, but I obtained a fine view of the gigantic mass of Jebel Akhdar from the village of Ghobra.

On an isolated rocky eminence rising sheer above the floor of the valley, to which it presents on the western side a precipitous cliff, 300 feet in height, stands the ancient castle, whose imposing aspect adds much to the local scenery. The position is a commanding one, and well suited to enable the castle to serve the threefold purpose for which it was no doubt intended, viz. to overawe the turbulent part of the community, to command the passage of the valley, and to protect the whole settlement.

The hill has been scarped at the base on all sides, and the plan of the castle has been entirely influenced by the nature of the ground. The massive barbican, or gateway, in which are apartments forming the residence of the akeed, or captain of the garrison, is on the eastern and lowest side, and is joined to the keep at the south-western corner by low curtain walls, embracing an area of irregular shape and considerable extent. The keep is a large circular tower of solid stone masonry, built on the highest point of the rock, affording a superb view over the valley. In the barbican are two wells cut through the

rock, giving an unfailing supply of water, and in the keep is a capacious reservoir, always kept filled. I counted eight iron guns in the fort altogether, three mounted on field carriages, the others dismounted. The castle was in a battered and shattered condition at this time, having sustained a bombardment during the recent operations undertaken by the Sultan to recover possession of it from a rebellious relative, but the wali informed me he had received orders from Muskat to repair the breaches in the walls. The wali is the castellan as well as the governor of the district, but does not reside in the castle, the guardianship of which is entrusted to the akeed, who at this time was a Belooch with sixty men under him. Sezzid Nasir told me he took care to interfere as little as possible with the tribesmen, and confined himself to maintaining peace and order and settling disputes. I gathered that the position he held was one demanding much tact, patience, and discretion, and was not a very enviable one, but he was evidently treated with great deference and respect by all.

Our host's hospitalities occupied all the forenoon, and I found my party extremely reluctant to make a move; but, though the day's march before us was no shorter than that of the previous day, I resolved to push on, and having taken leave of my courteous friend Sezzid Nasir, I mounted my camel and started.

From Semail castle the road winds down the valley in a north-north-easterly direction for 12 miles, as far as Serur, from whence it runs nearly due north. Serur is a rich and pleasant oasis of some extent in the possession of the Beni Hina tribe. At this point the stream disappears from sight, and sinks in the porous soil to flow underground for some distance, when it again reappears. A mile beyond Serur is the hamlet of Malita, and at another mile we came to Bidbid, a charming little oasis with a multitude of dates, rising like a green islet out of the broad barren sandy bed. In the centre is an old fortlet, untenanted, and fast crumbling to dust. Below Serur the hills begin to retreat from the river-bed, especially on the western or left bank, and the valley now gradually merges into a broad and open plain.

At Mizra, a village with an isolated rock and watch tower, the road to Muskat branches off to the right; but I may as well continue, from notes made on a subsequent trip, the description of the valley down to Sib, before going on with the narrative of the present journey. After leaving Bidbid, the path runs along the left bank over stony ground for about 5 miles, and then leads into a populous and thriving oasis called Fanja, the wady at this part being known as Batha Fanja. This town belongs to the Beni Hina and Hedâdebeh tribes, and is surrounded by a luxuriant belt of palms and well-cultivated fields, extending perhaps 3 miles in length. It lies 20 miles from Semail, and the population exceeds three thousand. The town owes its prosperity to the existence of excellent potter's clay in the neighbourhood, suitable for

cooking utensils and glazed earthenware. The large jars used by the indigo-dyers and similar vessels are also produced at these potteries. Just beyond Fanja a masonry aqueduct, 3 miles in length, called the Felej el Dhowaikar, runs at some height along the elevated right bank, and leads to a village and fortlet of that name, now in ruins. It was constructed, I was told, in the middle of the eighteenth century, by the Imam Sezzid Ahmed bin Said, to whom Dhowaikar belonged, and appeared to be an unusually costly piece of engineering for Arabs to undertake, but when, long years ago, Dhowaikar was destroyed and deserted, the aqueduct fell into desuetude and decay, and has since been breached in many places by mountain torrents. At three hours from Fanja, and about 35 miles from Semail, we arrived at the castle of Khoth, which is picturesquely perched on a solitary hill, rising out of the river-bed, with a hamlet and patch of fruit orchards below. It belongs to the Hedâdebeh tribe, and is considered a position of some importance, as the castle overlooks, and to some extent commands the lines of communication between Muskat and the Batina. On the left or western bank, the Wady Sakhnan, known in its upper course as the Wady Beni Jabir, unites here with the Wady Semail. It can be reached in the vicinity of Semail by a low pass, and affords, thence, an alternative and short road to the Batina plain. The country between Khoth and the sea, a distance of about 12 miles, is bare, uninhabited and uninteresting.

Resuming our journey from Mizra,* we took an easterly direction, and skirted on our right the hill range, which here trends along the coast, the path leading over a tract of broken and stony ground, very irksome to the camels, and necessitating a slower pace. Passing a low ridge known as the Nejd el Shubba, we rode for about 16 miles over a narrow maritime plain, much furrowed and intersected by ravines, and having several hamlets belonging to petty tribes, to Wataya, the site of a palace built by Sezzid Thowaini, now in ruins. It was now getting late, but in another hour or so, passing Rui and Bait el Felej, we arrived at Mutrah.

THE CRUX OF THE UPPER YANGTSE.

By ARCHIBALD LITTLE.

A DESIRE to see the upper Yangtse in flood-time induced us to venture upon a voyage from Ichang to Kweifu and on to Wan Hien, traversing the four great gorges and the principal rapids at a season when few care to brave the perils of navigation. The up-river trade from Ichang to Chung-king practically comes to a stop by the middle of June, and

* This is not the Mizra at Semail.