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Author(s): S. B. Miles

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scenery, people, flora and fauna, are all Siberian. Dense forest covers the greater part of the surface, the dry Mongolian flora beginning to appear only in the valley-bottoms and southern slopes of the hills around Cha-kul. The region is inhabited, in small numbers, by the Urianchais, who show greater affinities to the southern Siberian tribes than to the Mongols. In the remote upper valleys in the heart of the forest, nomads were encountered, living in birch-bark wigwams, and entirely dependent for their subsistence on their herds of domesticated reindeer. The existence of these animals within the Chinese Empire is of great interest, the more so as proof was obtained that reindeer are indigenous to the country, being found in a wild state also. The further route of the party was to be westward up the valley of the Kemchik (giving an opportunity for investigating the Tannu-ola mountains en route) and across the Altai to Chuguchak and Kulja, which last would be reached probably about the end of October. Owing to the inaccuracy of existing maps, a careful survey of the whole route through the upper Yenesei region had been made by Messrs. Carruthers and Miller, some 1800 square miles being mapped. They had also secured a good number of zoological specimens, while considerable botanical and geological collections had been made by Mr. Price.

ON THE BORDER OF THE GREAT DESERT: A JOURNEY IN OMAN.*

By **Lieut.-Colonel S. B. MILES.**

The Beni Hina tribe is one of the Al Azd stock, and emigrated from the Yemen at the same time as the Beni Riyam. Owing to the leading part taken by this tribe under its famous leader, the Dwarf Khalf, during the civil war which threatened the Yaarebeh dynasty at one time, it has given its name to one of the two great political factions, viz. the Hinawi and Ghafiri, into which Oman is at this day divided. Shaikh Hilal informed me that he had a thousand men-at-arms at his disposal at Nezwa alone, and he reckoned the whole population, including the Riyamis, at ten or twelve thousand, an estimate that seemed to me to be considerably under the mark. The great fortress, I was surprised to find, does not occupy an elevated position, but is situated in a thickly peopled quarter, and is hemmed in on all sides by dwelling-houses. It may be described as consisting of a large quadrangular enclosure, called the Hisn, at one angle of which stands the Kilaa, or citadel, a huge circular tower of solid stone masonry without window, loophole, or embrasure, but rising sheer, smooth, and unbroken to the roof, on which

* Continued from p. 178.

are mounted several parapet guns. The walls are of prodigious thickness and substantiality, and are well preserved; it is, therefore, easy to conceive that in a country where a prolonged investment and blockade are practically out of the question owing to the absence of commissariat organization, as well as to the non-existence of siege artillery, the castle might, if well provisioned, stand out for a long period. Its unquestionably massive structure is manifest at once, and its fame throughout Oman for its impregnability is intelligible enough; but the impression conveyed to my mind by its appearance after what I had heard of it from the Arabs, who invariably speak of it with conscious pride, was one of disappointment. I of course considered myself precluded from taking any measurements, but I may add that Wellsted's estimate of the height seemed to me to be too great by half. Commenced about four centuries ago on the site occupied by the ruins of an ancient tower of the Imams of the Nebhani dynasty, it was subsequently remodelled by some of the Yaarebeh Imams, and was finally brought to completion as it now stands by the Imam Sultan Belarab, who is alleged to have expended on it some eighty thousand dollars. The chief battle-ground lies in the open plain to the south-west of Jebel Akhdar.

The intertribal warfare of the Arab has generally been in the mountain passes when they could choose their own ground, but the plains have always been the arena when they fought in self-defence, and when battles have been forced on them by the invading armies of the Persians, Seljooks, Khalifs, or Wahabees. Resting at the base of the great mountain which overhangs and shields it on the north side, the town occupies a gentle slope intersected by many converging streams and nullahs, and screened from view towards the south by broken ground and low hills, the summits of which are often crowned with towers. This site, so extremely well adapted for defensive operations, gives it an unrivalled position, strategically and commercially, and it offers a haven of security and protection in this land of predatory and lawless marauders to the merchant, while it possesses an additional coign of vantage in commanding the mouths of the three passes leading from Jebel Akhdar, viz. the Wadi Tanuf, Wadi Miyadin, and Wadi Miyan, as well as in its proximity to Zikki, by which it draws to itself the traffic that is carried on up the Wadi Semail from the coast.

Here it was that the Azdite emigrants from the Yemen under Malik bin Fahm in the second century after Christ first established themselves, after having dispossessed and driven off the Parthian occupants of the land. Here it was that the messengers sent by Mohammed from El Medina delivered to the Julanda princes Abd and Jeifar the letters inviting them to accept the new faith of Islam, and abandon the idolatry of their fathers.

It was towards Nezwa as the capital that the many successive waves

of invasion were directed, and here on the plains below were encamped at various times the imperial troops of Haroon al Rashid and other khalifs of Baghdad, the relentless and rapacious Seljooks of Kirman, and other Persian invaders. Here, too, the heretical Omanis fraternized with their schismatic neighbours the Carmathians of Al Bahrain, and it was in the Jami mosque of Nezwa, in the third century of the Hijra, that Abdulla bin Ibadh preached his peculiar doctrines and tenets so successfully that he gradually converted almost the whole country to his views. In this capital a long line of imams or sovereign pontiffs had ruled the destinies of the people and guided the main incidents and events of the chequered life of the nation during the period of a dozen centuries.

I was amused by the visits of the son of the owner, a bright little fellow of twelve, who, being naturally inquisitive, was full of questions about all he saw, and was delighted with the silver watch he received when I left.

I stayed a night at Tanuf, which is 8 miles from Nezwa, on our way to Al Dhahirah, as I had promised Shaikh Suliman when he intercepted us on the road, and had reason to be glad that I had accepted his invitation, as he received me very cordially, and gave me much information, though I could but ill spare the time.

Tanuf is a small, compact town of the Beni Riyam, fortified with a wall of fair height, pierced by two gates, the eastern and the western. The shaikh's house is behind the town, picturesquely built on the very edge of the deep ravine known as Wadi Tanuf, and which, cutting into the heart of the mountain, forms the natural road leading to Seek. Another deep gully or torrent-bed, also debouching at this point in the Wadi Mayin, which penetrates in a more northerly direction and forms a pass, albeit a very rough and precipitous one, across the chain to Rostak, is called the Tareek al Shas. The dark limestone cliffs, the cavernous glen, and the palm trees give a gloomy and sombre aspect to this spot, which has a romantic air of seclusion, and I was not surprised to learn that, shut in as it is, the heat here in the summer months is intolerable.

Shaikh Suliman informed me that Jebel Akhdar extended from the Wadi beni Rowaiha to Jebel Shoum, which was the highest peak in Oman, and he confirmed the tradition that the original Azdite name of Jebel Akhdar, as also that of Nezwa, was Radhwan, and was so called probably after a district in the Yemen. When it was first named Jebel Akhdar is unknown, but after the founding of the town of Shiraizi by the Daillemites about 975 A.D., the mountain seems to have been known for a long time as Jebel Shiraizi.

On the 22nd, having procured fresh baggage camels at Tanuf, and said farewell to the shaikh, who had treated us so urbanely and hospitably, we mounted just outside the gate, and turning our camels'

heads to the north-north-west in the direction of the Akabat al Barak, by which pass we intended to cross over to the Dhahirah, rode off to pursue our journey. The path lay over a monotonous, drear, and stony plain, crossed by numerous nullahs. We passed several villages of the Beni Hina tribe, such as Homra, with a population of about four hundred, and other villages, whose names I omitted to record, and further on, between 10 and 12 miles from Tanuf, two hamlets of the goat-rearing shepherds, viz. Ghomriya and Belad Sait. The popular excitement among these rude and unsophisticated people caused us some amusement, and relieved the day's journey from the tediousness and fatiguing dulness it would otherwise have had.

As we approached Ghomriya, the sudden fire of the matchlocks and the whizzing of the bullets, a salute with which the sentries did not fail to greet us, caused a slight scatteration among our timid camels, and proved that our strange appearance had evidently given rise to as much apprehension as suspicion among the inhabitants, who meant their shots as a warning to keep a respectful distance. It was necessary for our kefeer, the Kelbani shaikh, to ride forward and represent who we were, before their fears were sufficiently allayed to allow us to pass by quietly. We soon discovered that the cause of the panic was due to the fact that a troop of Jenebeh Beduins had ridden rapidly by during the previous night from the east. The latter are at feud with the Beni Hina, who had mistaken our party for the Jenebeh returning to raid the district and lift the camels; hence the scare that had been created, and the vigilant distrust with which we had been regarded.

Some of my party at once examined the ground, and having detected fresh footprints of the dromedaries, could judge that the Jenebeh were in force. That they were actuated by no friendly intentions seemed probable, but whither they had gone no one knew. We also heard to-day that a band of seventy marauding brigands, collected from various predatory tribes in Al Dhahirah, had started on an excursion to harry and plunder the peaceful and prosperous peasants in the outskirts of Minha, and that they had, after crossing the Nejd el Makhârim, camped in the vicinity of Yabreen on the night of the very day we had left it. Shaikh Nasir al Ghafiri, the chief of Bahila, had despatched a kossid with a letter after us, giving warning about these robbers, who were said to be mounted on swift dromedaries, directly he had received intelligence of their proximity; but his kossid had missed us on the road, and had not had the sense or courage to follow us on to Nezwa. These marauding gentry are usually averse to hostilities, and prefer to swoop down on their quarry and carry off their plunder as expeditiously as possible before the villagers can assemble to oppose them. It was just as well that we did not encounter them, for, although my party was quite a match for them, it would have been regrettable had any bloodshed occurred even in self-defence.

After a ride of some hours over a rough country, very scantily dotted with vegetation, we reached the fort of Jebel Kur. Here we strike the Wadi Shama, and having crossed this we commence the ascent of the Wadi Ghol, which presents at this point a broad, sandy, and shallow bed not devoid of trees and other vegetation. These two wadis, the Ghol and the Shama, uniting lower down, are then known under the name of the Wadi Bahila, a torrent which, as I have above described flowing under the walls of that city, loses itself ultimately in the sands of the desert. The Wadi Ghol is not particularly serpentine, and I imagine it is so called because it abounds with snakes. Ghol is the common word used in Oman for this reptile, and in this wild hilly district they are tolerably numerous. Though poisonous species do exist in this land, the great majority of species are, I believe, innocuous, and cases of Arabs dying from snake-bite are extremely rare. Indeed, they appear to regard them but little, and seldom allude to them.

The bed of the Ghol, which is cut through high vertical banks, and contains a perennial supply of water, is occupied by several hamlets of the Yal Khameyyis, a Beduin branch of the Beni Hina, who lead a pastoral life and subsist mainly on their flocks of goats and sheep. It is to the vigilance of these hardy, active, and brave hillmen that the security of this pass is due, as, being ever on the alert, they are able to gather with marvellous quickness on the sign of danger, and thus hold in check the plundering bands of Al Dhahirah, who would otherwise be free to raid and devastate this district at their pleasure. After toiling for two hours up the bed of the wadi, which gradually becomes more steep and stony, we arrived at a shepherd hamlet called Mithar, where we bivouacked for the night at an elevation of 2600 feet. At this place was a very large zareeba or fold for the goats, from which we kept a very respectful distance. The thermometer fell heavily during the night, and I was glad of all the wraps I had with me.

The next morning we started at 7 a.m., and underwent a hard day's work of nine hours in crossing the pass; the severe gradient we had to climb, and the rugged nature of the rocky ground—for there was no pathway to speak of—causing great fatigue to the camels. Quitting Mithar, we recommenced the ascent of the Wadi Ghol, and soon after a haunted glen known as Dhul Jinn was pointed out to me as being the abode of efreetts and evil spirits, and which is carefully avoided after dark by the natives, who firmly believe in hobgoblins.

For four hours we toiled slowly and painfully up the steep mountain-side, strewn with fragments and boulders of light surface-coloured limestone and mottled with scanty bushes of euphorbia, until, with a final spurt and the shouts of the camel-drivers, we arrived at 11 at the summit of the pass, the aneroid barometer indicating an altitude of 3700 feet; the highest peak of Jebel al Kur, just opposite, rearing

its head apparently some 2000 feet above us. Here we halted for half an hour for rest and refreshment and to breathe the camels.

From this point we look down a small valley running south toward Adam, called by some Wadi Seifam, from a town in it of that name, by others Wadi Ali. The juncture of the spur at the head of this vale we crossed, and found ourselves on the north-west side of the Akabat al Barak; and now, for the second time, I gazed upon the little-known, wild, and unpromising plain of Al Dhahirah, the desert province of Oman. Bare and extensive, without any conspicuous feature to catch the eye or obstruct the view, it stretched away into the misty distance and offered a landscape as unattractive as it was unvaried. The descent did not prove so slow and difficult as the ascent, and we soon reached the shoulder of the mountain, a level stretch of sand and pebbles, about halfway down the slope, in which are located two shepherd hamlets, the one called Sint and the other Sunt.

Here the camels' loads were readjusted, and we made a fresh start, the road now falling into the Wadi Ain, at this elevation a rugged ravine, but further down the valley a large and seemingly important stream with running water. The direction it took was pointed out to the west-north-west, and under the name of Wadi Talaif it flows, studded with palms and villages, nearly to the sea at Abu Thabi. This river is, no doubt, the one mentioned by Edrisi noted above, as flowing into the Persian gulf at Julfar; but he was misled as to the source of it, as it rises, not at Nezwa, but in Jebel Kur. The low, sandy, maritime plain usually known as the Pirate coast, but formerly called the Julfar coast, took its name from the old Persian town of Julfar, which stood on the site of the present Ras al Khyma.

We were now able to move on at a fair pace, and at 2 p.m. came to a village called Hail, belonging to the Beni Hina tribe, situated almost at the foot of a very remarkable and, as it appeared to me, nearly perpendicular mass, perhaps 2000 feet in height, so evenly and delicately indented or notched along its ridge, that it had obtained the name of Jebel Misht, from the fancied resemblance its acicular peaks bear to the teeth of a lady's hair-comb. This comb-hill struck me as being so singular that I did not fail to take a photograph of it the following morning, though it was then at a greater distance and had lost some of its peculiarity.

Skirting the fields and cultivation of Hail, which with Jebel Misht we left on our right, we rode on for two hours more, and, just as it was getting dusk, arrived at our destination, Al Ein, a small hamlet of about 100 souls, so called from its copious spring. The sudden appearance of a mounted party, evidently well armed, threw the good people into a ferment, and in their excitement the guard in their watch-tower greeted us with a volley from their match-locks. We were so near at the time that one of the bullets grazed a

camel's leg, but no harm was done; and as such incidents were too common to be noticed, we were soon seated amicably on the bank of the nullah in the midst of the elders, who expressed regret for their precipitation. They gave me the names of the other hamlets in the ravines springing from Jebel al Kur, viz. Shedait and Nadan; but it is evidently a desolate region where the paucity of the population attests the poverty of the soil, and where the rarity of vegetation proves the scantiness of water. The only industry I could hear of at Al Ain was the manufacture of coarse pottery. The elevation of this place is 1400 feet.

After I had taken some photographs on the 24th, we mounted and resumed our journey down the Wadi Ain for some distance, and then turned off to the right over a sterile plain mottled with a few stunted acacias and euphorbias towards Bât, which we reached after 12 miles of travel. This town is inhabited by about 400 of the Beni Kelban, who cultivate wheat and indigo chiefly, and engage themselves in dyeing cloth, the dye stuff being made in large earthen jars called kabaia. We were not received here with any demonstrations of welcome, and the reason was soon apparent. It seemed that we had intruded upon a divided community, who had fallen out about a felel that irrigated their fields, and so bitter had the quarrel become that it had culminated in a permanent split, each party having constructed for itself a hujra, or walled enclosure, and having boycotted each other were now nurturing in their bosoms that implacable animosity so distinctive of local and parochial controversies. Here we halted for an hour to drink coffee, while our Kefer Shaikh Nasir, who belonged to this tribe, interviewed the elders and busily studied the pros and cons of the dispute, in which he seemed much interested. We then proceeded on to Mohaira, where the watchmen on our approach saluted us from a distance with a desultory matchlock fire until Seyyid Hamood sent forward a man to expostulate, whereupon the recognition of friends having dispelled the cloud of anxiety, the sunshine of joy took its place, and the people, headed by their venerable shaikh, came out in procession to welcome us with noisy demonstrations, shouts, firing, and dancing. This being over, followed an invitation to pass the night there, which we agreed to do in view of the fatigue of our camels and other circumstances. The shaikh treated us cordially and lodged us comfortably. The village is small, perhaps seventy or eighty houses, but is refreshingly surrounded with plantations and orchards of dates, mangoes, limes, and plantains, etc., and the cultivation includes fields of wheat, jowari, lucerne, pulse, sugar-cane, and indigo, a bountiful stream of water sufficing to supply the whole needs of the population.

The following day we marched 8 miles on to Deriz, one of the chief towns of the Beni Ghafir tribe in this province, having a population

of about 1200. On sighting our party, the shaikh and his people came out in a very friendly way to greet us. There is a small dilapidated fort here with two guns, and I was told there were hot springs in the vicinity. After a short halt at Deriz, I rode off with some of my party to visit the fort of Al Einein, or the Two Springs, a famous bone of contention in these parts for many years past. The castle is a large and lofty but rather decayed structure, with a walled courtyard flanked and strengthened by two towers, and though looked on by the natives with much respect, it did not appear to me a very strong place.

Within a short distance of the castle there is an extensive grove of date and other fruit trees, watered by three felejes or subterranean streams, half of which belong to the Ibriyin tribe, who are strong in this district and were the former owners of Al Einein, and half to the present possessors of the castle, the Beni Ali, who receive a yearly revenue of 200 bags of dates and 100 dollars in cash for the farm of their moiety. There are no inhabitants at Al Einein now; intestine dissensions and tribal wars have driven them away, and there is but one village left in the vicinity, Irâka, which lies just behind Al Einein and belongs to the Ibriyin.

About the year 1880 the Sultan, for political reasons, transferred his alliance from the Yemen or Hinawi faction to that of the Nizar or Ghafiri faction, a move which had a very disturbing effect in the country. In Dhahireh, where the general interest had been concentrated on Boo Einein, the change brought matters to a crisis, and a struggle for the possession of that fort ensued, which ended in its passing from one faction to the other. A large number of tribes were engaged in the contest, and the general commotion was out of all proportion to the value of the stake at issue, this being quite insignificant to any party. After much heavy fighting, the fort fell into the hands of the Beni Ali tribe, a result injurious to the prestige of the Sultan, whose power and authority continued to wane until they were restored by the decisive defeat of his brother Abdul Azeez towards the end of 1883, from which time they remained paramount until his death.

Turning again to join the party, we rode past the deserted ruins of Al Ghabbi, an ancient and historic town of some extent, and here I lingered for some little time, recalling to my mind the troublous times of 1875, when the place was sacked and destroyed by the Beni Ali tribe after a siege and a sanguinary conflict.

It was about 2 p.m. when we arrived at the town of Obra, where I intended to halt, and we had hardly dismounted and been received by the shaikh, when one of the baggage-camel drivers came up and reported that he had been waylaid by robbers and looted on the road. At first we were incredulous, as none of the rest of the party had seen anything likely to excite suspicion as we came along; but on inquiry it turned out that, trusting to the fact of his being a native of Obri,

and imagining that he was safe from thieves in his own district, the driver had lagged behind with the intention of coming up slowly alone. He found, however, that he had overrated the fraternal feelings of his townsmen, and that robbers are no respecters of persons, for having been espied on his solitary ride, he had been dexterously cut off by two men, who had compelled him to unpack his load and exhibit his treasures. They relieved him of his matchlock and dagger, and took a bundle of clothes belonging to my servant, but did not touch the other articles in the load, which included among other things the photographic camera. After overhauling the pack the thieves decamped, as we heard afterwards, to a distant village, while our camel-driver, having repacked his load, had ridden post haste in to Obri.

The shaikh was greatly shamefaced at what had occurred, and, admitting himself responsible, promised full restitution; but, as I was well aware, he was quite helpless in the matter, and had no control practically over his people. Later in the day Seyyid Hamood learned that the two robbers were part of the band of seventy who had crossed into Oman on a marauding expedition, as mentioned above, and who, having just returned from there, were scattering homeward. It was refreshing to hear on the best authority that the raid had been a conspicuous failure, and that the would-be spoilers had not only gained little, but had been roughly handled into the bargain. They had, it seems, attempted a surprise on a village not far from Nezwa, and had managed to collect a few camels and women's silver ornaments before the alarm could be raised and the men summoned from their work; but the resistance had then been so stubborn that, though the villagers were in the minority, they had compelled the marauders to retire, leaving two of their number dead on the ground. Three of the villagers had been killed, and many had been wounded on both sides.

Obra is a large town subdivided into sixteen haras or sections, and is situated under a low white hill called Herbareh. The irrigation channels of the rich fruit orchards and cornfields which cover their luxuriant and well-watered oasis are supplied from two magnificent felejes leading from the adjacent hills. The date palm, whose graceful plumes are such a marked feature in Arab landscape, is here, as one may say, subordinate to the other fruits, of which Obra can boast an immense profusion and great variety. The oasis, however, will take long to recover from the effects of the great hurricane of March, 1885, which swept across it in the full tide of its fury, committing terrible havoc among the orchards, uprooting and hurling trees to the ground. Many of the best houses in the place were also demolished, including the wali's, whose residence was found to be little better than a heap of ruins. There is a small castle here with a high wind tower, and nearer to the white hill the site of a more ancient and ruined castle was pointed out to me, renowned in the land, and still fresh in men's

memories as having sustained many years back one of the most furious sieges recorded in Oman history.

No little interest is lent to the bazaar of this town by the fact that it is not only by far the largest and most frequented in Al Dhahirah, but also possesses the characteristic feature of being the "Thieves' Auction Mart," where the booty and loot annexed and collected by the highwaymen of this Alsatia are disposed of to the highest bidder. I therefore paid it a long visit, and found that, in addition to the advantage of being a thieves' bazaar, it contained shops and booths of every description, and presented a very lively appearance, all the artisans being evidently in full employment, the town comprising considerable indigenous industries and productions. The market, dirty and malodorous though it be, is thronged with spare gaunt Beduins and townsmen, all well armed, jostling each other or haggling in a loud key with negro and other sellers about the price of commodities, and presenting an animated picture of Arab life. It consists of about three or four score shops, displaying all the articles usually required by Arabs, tradesmen working at their crafts, eager, bustling, and no lack of employment, negresses in rows squatting on the ground with baskets of fruit, kabobs, cakes, sweeties, and bowls of lubia soup. The wali, Mohammed bin Abdulla al Yakibi by name, was very civil and desirous of showing attention. He escorted me all over the town, the glories and beauties of which he was resolved should not be hidden from me, and was very careful to point out the lion of the town, viz. the Jami or Great Mosque, a plain, undecorated, unimposing structure, with nothing remarkable about it whatever, but which the inhabitants are very proud of, and consider to be the largest Ibadhi mosque in Oman.

As I have said above, Obra is a famous place for fruit. Limes, mangoes, sweet limes, dates, peaches, apricots, quinces, figs, bananas, oranges, pomegranates, pomeloes, almonds, plums, guavas, citrons, melons, and others, are grown and largely exported. Obra may, indeed, be looked on as the present capital of Al Dhahirah, and contains roughly about 5000 inhabitants. Al Dhahirah means the Ultramontane province, or that which lies behind the Batineh and the range known as Al Hajar. It enjoys the worst reputation for the lawless and predatory character of its dwellers, the tribes occupying it being one and all thievish, treacherous, and turbulent, subsisting to a large extent on the produce of their raids and incursions into the Batineh and other districts. In a country where every able-bodied man is habitually well armed and ready to fight and plunder, the quantity of available rascaldom is pretty considerable, and the quality of ruffianism is quite in keeping. It is a poor, wild, and thinly populated province, and is, though I have twice visited it, less known to me than any other.

In March, 1836, Obra was visited by Wellsted and Whitelock, who

remained two days. The fact was perfectly well remembered by the people, and the spot on which their tent had been pitched was at once pointed out to me. It happened, unfortunately for them, that the time chosen for their visit was not an auspicious one, as the Wahabees were then marching through the town towards Oman, and the two officers narrowly escaped ill treatment at the hands of these fanatics, having been pelted with stones, driven out of the town, and eventually compelled to return to the coast. The elevation of Obra is 1180 feet.

As it was considered not improbable that we might meet with roving bands of Arabs on the road to Dhank, which was our next destination, Seyyid Hamood arranged with the Wali Shaikh Mohammed al Yakibi to accompany us thither, and he also took the precaution to engage one or two men of the Beni Kattab tribe as kefeers. The shaikh, however, was not ready to start when we were mounting our camels the next morning, so we set off without him, and had ridden more than halfway before he joined the party. Our course now lay due north, and soon after leaving Obra we crossed a low ridge of hills with an average height perhaps of 400 feet, the road for the rest of the way lying over a slightly undulating plain, sterile, waterless, and unadorned, save with the scantiest vegetation. Trending away at some distance on our right hand, and running parallel with our course towards the north, is the range known as Al Hajar, the intervening ground being rough and hilly, intersected by shallow ravines. On our left, towards Bereymi, no vestige of a hill is seen to break the level line of the horizon, and the ground falls with a gentle declivity. It is a wild and little-known part, with a few villages, such as Sedaikée, Senanah, and others; but I could not afford the time to visit it.

Here we may be said to quit the margin of the Great Desert, and to turn our faces towards the inhabited regions. This wilderness, on the eastern border of which we are now standing, stretches away to the westward for about 700 miles, forming the largest and most inhospitable expanse of sandy waste on the continent of Asia. Broadly speaking, it is devoid of rivers, trees, mountains, and human habitations, unexplored and unexplorable, foodless, waterless, roadless, and shadeless, wind-swept, and a land of quietude, lethargy, and monotony, perhaps unparalleled in the world. The extent may be best described by saying that it covers an area ten times that of England and Wales. The surface of the desert is said to be generally undulating, presenting here and there low ranges of hills, with groups of green and shallow wadies or oases, usually dry, but with an outline marked by verdure. The greater part would seem to be absolutely bare. In this desert the vegetation, it may be noted, chiefly consists of euphorbias, various acacias, such as camel-thorn, sayel, ghafé and samr. Tamerisk, dwarf palms, probably a species of *chamerops*, oleander, senna, *colocynth*, the *rhamnus* or *sidr*, rak, coarse grass in tufts, the useful *calotropis* or silk tree, which

provides cordage and medicine, etc. The rainfall is scanty, but the Arabs make use of pools of water left after rain in the watercourses, and frequently obtain water in the ravines by digging. There are also springs of brackish water welling up here and there; the vegetation, however, obtains its chief supply of moisture from the dews, which are extremely copious in this country.

The desert is generally spoken of by the Omani Arabs as *Al Jafur*, or the unfrequented space, and as *Al Ramool*, or the sands; sometimes as *Al Ahkâf*, or the sandhills; also as the *Sahar*, or desert. In Arab geographical works it is called by the expressive name of *Roba al Khali*, or the empty habitation. The Bedouins, too, have of course their own names for the various districts and oases distinguished by special characteristics. The Beduin who roam the desert are mostly contingents from the tribes on the border surrounding it, and none of them, I believe, can be considered as truly nomadic. It is, however, difficult to believe that any part of the desert can be wholly inaccessible to the hardy Beduin and his friend the camel, with their wonderful power of endurance under privation of all kinds, as they can travel comfortably 60 or 70 miles a day, and carry food sufficient for several days, the scarcity of water being the one great obstacle they have to contend with.

In the eastern part of the desert the extensive tracts clothed with verdure are of great value to the people of Oman, as the Beduin who range it are able to rear vast numbers of camels, and thus perform a valuable service to their brethren dwelling in towns and villages, by providing them with an adequate supply of these useful animals. The Omani Beduins who are chiefly engaged in this pursuit are the *Deru*, the *Aal Wahibeh*, and *Awamir* tribes, and the sale of young camels at *Adam*, *Obra*, and other markets constitutes their chief support; they also rear large numbers of goats. The *Affar* Beduins, who are a section of the *Awamir*, are said to scour the desert more extensively than any other Omanis; they are very wild, truculent, and under no human control. They appear to live in an almost chronic state of semi-starvation. I have seen many of them and heard many stories about them. The large and powerful *Jenebeh* tribe, whose chief towns are *Soor* and *Al Ashkharah*, and who still possess the coast-line from *Ras al Had* to *Dhofer*, as they have done for two thousand years or more, are a seafaring race and do not rear camels. The speed and other high qualities of the Omani camel place it on a par with the famous *Mahra* breed, with which it is indeed identical, and which is deemed by the Arabs to be unsurpassed. That in former times attempts were made to establish caravan routes across the desert can hardly be doubted, but no efforts in this direction have been made for many years past.

In his *Alte Geographie Arabiens* Sprenger discusses the various routes through the desert, and mentions that in the year 616 H., 1219

A.D., some Beduins from the Neyd visited Dhofar in the time when Al Haboodhy ruled in that town, and started thence across the desert to Yemama, but never returned. The number of mammals to be found in these parts of the desert where vegetation exists does not, probably, exceed a dozen in species. The *Oryx beatrix*, known generally to the Arabs as the bakr al wahshi, or wild ox, but called by the Omanis the boosohla, is found in most parts, but is said not to approach within 50 miles of the sea-coast. There are two or three species of gazelle—one is the graceful reem, or white doe, which is rather scarce in the Omani desert; another species, the thabi, is of a rather darker colour and abound in the oasis. The wild ass, known as the himar al wahshi, inhabits the Antal and Yuba districts between Adam and Ras Madraka, and is not common elsewhere. The flesh of it is said to be more esteemed by the Arabs than that of any other game. The hydrax, or coney of scripture, has lately been discovered near Dhofar. The wolf, hyena, black hedgehog, hare, jerboa, and field rat make up the list of all the animals I could hear of.

It began to rain heavily soon after we had started, and the wind was so bitterly cold and piercing that by the time we had arrived at Mazun, a Belooch town 18 miles from Obra, we were all shivering, and I was so benumbed that I could hardly dismount. This place is inhabited exclusively by Belooches of the Hôt tribe, and contains no Arab. A large portion of the population came out to gaze at us, but their demeanour was unmistakably unfriendly, and they did not invite us to enter the town, which I accordingly did not visit; but we lighted a big fire to warm ourselves, and those who could manage it changed their clothes, for we were drenched through. The Belooch stood around scowling at us as we remained, but were otherwise inoffensive. This was the only place I visited on this journey where I was not welcomed, for the little ebullitions of excitement that had occurred at some of the villages on the road as we passed were simply the result of fear caused by our sudden appearance, and were not due to unfriendly feeling, as was shown by the reaction that took place when they learned who we were. Mazun seemed to be a large town, with a high wall round it, but without fort, bastion, or tower that I could see. The elders told me that the Hôt had established themselves there seven generations back, perhaps about 200 years.

Turning our backs unregretfully upon the Belooch town, we pursued our journey for 8 miles further, still going north, and arrived at Dhank about 4 p.m. We found that a good many people had assembled in the open space where we had to alight, and the shaikh gave us a very friendly, though undemonstrative reception. Dhank was of much greater extent than I had expected to find it, and I was charmed with its quaint situation and beauty. The number of people is said to be about 4000, composed mainly of four tribes, viz. the Naim, Washâsha,

Azeez, and Al Boo Shamis, of which the first-named may be considered the predominant. The head shaikh and Wali of Dhank, and Shaikh Mohammed bin Ali al Naimy happened at this time to be absent at Al Beraimi, and the shaikh in charge was Khalfan bin Ali, whom I had not met before. The settlement is on the bank of a rapid stream flowing half round the base of a low transverse ridge or eminence of dark basaltic rock, which divides the town into two parts, the upper and lower, the houses being mostly interspersed among, and more than half concealed by, rich clumps of palms, orchards, and gardens. The bazaar is insignificant, and is hardly a third the size of that of Obra. The industries here are, however, most varied, though the trade appears to be less than at Obra. Besides indigo dyeing, there are several textile industries, the principal being woollen and cotton fabrics of different kinds, while bishts or camel-hair cloaks, with embroidered collars, and camel saddle-cloths are also worked here.

The castle in which Shaikh Mohammed resides is situated in Aliyya or upper Dhank, and is known as the Imam's house, built originally by the Imam Sultan bin Saif al Yaareby in the middle of the seventeenth century. Owing to the configuration of the ground, its plan is somewhat peculiar, being very long and narrow, and the curtain walls strengthened with six turrets. Some additions were made by Seyyid Azzan bin Kais in 1869, and it is now in fairly good condition.

A great deal of indigo is cultivated here, and, indeed, throughout Al Dhahireh. I was surprised at the extent of ground under it. The people showed me their dye vats, and told me that not only homespuns, but foreign imported cloths were dyed here. The house in which I was lodged was surrounded on all sides by the huts and sheds of the cloth-weavers, whose rudely constructed, creaking looms kept up an unmusical din well into the night, and this, accompanied as it was by the melancholy cry of the little booma or screech owl, in the palm grove, which latter is in Oman considered a bird of good omen, formed a concert which effectually prevented sleep. The elevation of this place is 950 feet above the sea. The Wadi Dhank is joined a little way off by the Wadi Boo Kerba, and these, flowing in a north-westerly direction, become confluent with the Wadi Safa, a large nullah in the ramool or desert pouring into the Persian gulf, nearly parallel with the Wadi Ain. These streams diminish their volume considerably in the hot season, but nature then compensates by the heavy fall of dew at night, which imperceptibly saturates the surface and quenches the thirst of the vegetation, thus reviving it and causing it to endure through a time of drought that would otherwise be fatal to it.

We had now reached the furthest point I had purposed visiting on this excursion, and as I was pressed for time, I reluctantly requested Seyyid Hamood the next morning to lead us in the direction of Mascat,

and accordingly, mounting our dromedaries, we began to ascend the narrow stony bed of the Wadi Dhank, which is densely fringed with palms, until we emerged from the gap in the rock through which it flows, and at once a pleasant change in the scenery burst abruptly upon us. The romantic and sequestered glen in which Dhank lies is sombre, the air heavy with moisture and fragrance, and the dark foliage of the trees combines with the purple rock to enhance the gloom.

After passing the gap, the wadi, we find, spreads out to a width of about half a mile, forming an open, picturesque landscape, with a fine stream of water in the middle of the bed, of which the wall-like banks rise to about 100 feet. The little plain beyond is memorable in recent history as being the battlefield that witnessed the bloodiest conflict fought between the two great rivals for the throne of Muscat, viz. Seyyid Toorky bin Saeed and Seyyid Azzan bin Kais. It was in 1869. Seyyid Azzan was at that time Imam of Muscat, having ousted his cousin, Seyyid Salim bin Thowainy, from power about a year previously, and, being thus master of considerable resources, had been able to muster an army of four thousand men. Seyyid Toorky's force was numerically much inferior, but this deficiency in strength was more than compensated by the unusually bitter hatred and spirit of revenge that had been inspired by the persecuting zeal of Azzan and his metowwa Khaleyli, who had inflicted numerous cruelties and humiliations on their religious opponents. Seyyid Toorky, moreover, though by nature less energetic, was a more wise and prudent man, and handled his troops more skilfully. On the other hand again, Azzan was in possession of a serviceable brass field-piece, which had been dragged to the spot in charge of a Persian topchi, and which added greatly to the pride and confidence of his followers. Though strong and well posted, and aided by the thunders of the one-gun battery, Azzan's force was unable to resist the impetuous and fierce attack of its despised enemy, who, rushing on with cries and shouts and wielding their double-edged swords, mowed down their foe in heaps and gave no quarter. In dire dismay Azzan's army broke and fled in confusion, the rout was soon complete, and the active pursuit added greatly to the slaughter. The loss of the vanquished was about three hundred killed. Seyyid Azzan and his priestly advisers hardly drew bridle till they reached Mascat, and he never recovered the prestige he lost in this affair. Within a year he was besieged in his capital, and was slain in a conflict outside the walls of Muttrah by his exasperated enemies. One of my party had been present in the engagement, and his description of the fight as he pointed out to me the positions of the combatants and the salient features of the battle intensified the interest of the scene.

At 4 miles from Dhank we came to the village of Dut, and 7 miles further on is Fida, whose narrow belt of palms and other fruit trees

fringes the wadi for a long distance. Both these places belong to the Beni Zeed. Between Fida and Al Einein lies a sterile, uninhabited tract, almost entirely destitute of vegetation and water. Leaving the wadi at Fida and turning to the right, we direct our course to the east, pausing at the top of the bank to catch a distant view of the picturesque town, castle, and palm grove of Yenkal, which my companions had described and were eager to point out to me. It is a populous and prosperous settlement, about 5 miles further up the same valley, and its fort is famed in Oman history as a venerable stronghold commanding one of the chief roads and passes through the mountains. I regretted not being able to visit it. At the town of Aridh, which we reached about 5 p.m. and where we halted for the night, there are numerous hot springs with curative virtues. It contains a mixed population of the Beni Shekail, Beni Omar, and Beni Kelban tribes, and is now in the possession of our guide Shaikh Nasir, like its neighbouring town Makiniyat. Both these places belonged formerly to the people of Deriz, but were captured and annexed by the Beni Kelban in 1867. The air assumed by Shaikh Nasir was one of increased dignity, and his face beamed with smiles as he welcomed us to his town, and he did the honours of hospitality with great *éclat*. The aneroid showed an elevation of 1250 feet.

On the 28th we left Aridh at 7.50 a.m., and after riding in a north-easterly direction for four hours and a half over barren, lifeless, and rather broken ground, gradually but perceptibly rising as we approached the range, we reached Maskin, a village of the Beni Kelban and a poverty-stricken place at the head of the Wadi al Kebeer, and in a notch of the watershed or crest. This chain, which divides the kingdom broadly into two parts, maintains throughout its whole length the same remarkable and characteristic features, presenting on the western or land side a more or less gentle declivity which merges into the desert, while on its eastern or seaward face it bears a wild and lofty aspect, falling abruptly in steep, precipitous crags to the mountain plain below. In the former case the valleys are shallow, verdant, and populous, in the latter their appearance is very different, being rugged, headlong torrent beds, and passing over a rough and stony passage difficult to climb and but thinly studded with hamlets, as cultivation is almost wholly precluded until the more level plain is reached. The view from this spot was really noble and extensive, and a short rest here gave me an opportunity of enjoying a landscape of a very enchanting and diversified character.

Our objective after leaving Maskin was the city of Rostak, which lies at the foot of the stupendous walls of Jebel Akhdar, and our best route would have been to follow down the winding but well-trodden bed of the Wadi Beni Ghafir, which is a natural highway, but to this our guide raised objections on account of the intertribal dissensions

then raging in the valley. Under the guidance, therefore, of two men who rode in front, we struck diagonally across the bluff brow of the mountain, and from noon to dark continued zigzagging in a generally south-east direction down the uncommonly rough and broken face, twisting and turning now down a narrow torrent bed, now along a smooth and level ledge bristling with euphorbias, calotropis, and fragrant oleander, now among crags and boulders, making slow progress, but without any serious mishap, until at a sudden bend we arrive at a clump of palms in a glen, and as these always betoken Arab habitations—for the Arab and the date do not exist separately—I determined to halt, and we were soon bivouacked round a big fire. The wretched hamlet we had stumbled on is called Mahbeh, and we found it was supplied by a copious spring gushing from the rock. Slowly as we had worked our way down the mountain-side, we had outstripped the baggage camels, which toiled painfully after, and were not brought up by their drivers for some hours. About three in the afternoon we had passed, on our right hand at some distance, the lofty peak known as Jebel Shoum, which was pointed out to me by my companion as the highest summit of Jebel Akhdar, and which certainly seemed from this spot to overtop the rest, though not by much. I now looked on it for the first time, but it was soon lost to view behind nearer summits. Shaikh Nasir informed me that Jebel Shoum rose up very abruptly above the ravine called Wadi Hajar, opposite Wadi Ein, and in this case it must stand on the north-west side of the cluster.

On the following morning we entered and descended for some hours the Wadi Beni Ghafir, in which a fine stream of water flows continuously. Then striking out of this valley, we came upon a small walled town called Dahis, with a fortlet in the centre perched on a commanding eminence. Beyond this our path falls into the Wadi Sohtan, a pleasant and fertile glen which had remained for years a cause of strife between the Beni Ghafir and the Ibriyin tribes till a few months previous to my visit, when the quarrel culminated in an outbreak of hostilities, terminating after a long and bloody conflict in the rout and expulsion of its ancient and rightful occupants, the Ibriyin. The valley was still in a somewhat disturbed and unsettled state, as no man could be seen that was not fully armed and with lighted match, but we passed through the Beni Ghafir villages unchallenged and unopposed, though without the usual friendly demonstrations of welcome. I was told that the Wadi Sohtan joined the Wadi Rostak to the north-west of that town. After further winding among a labyrinth of low dark hills, we entered the outskirts of the city of Rostak, and, dismounting in the square space in front of the chief house, were cordially and frankly welcomed by Seyyid Hamood bin Azzan, and I was assigned a lodging in a handsome stone sablah just opposite Seyyid Hamood's house. But before taking possession

of our quarters we all sat down, as in duty bound, in Seyyid Hamood's gateway to partake of coffee and exchange the news, I for one being very glad indeed to be off my camel and to get a rest after our tedious journey from Aridh; and while we were conversing up came Seyyid Saood, the second son of the late Imam Seyyid Azzan bin Kais, and of course every one present jumped up to receive him. He was soon seated amongst us, and his face plainly betokened the pleased surprise he felt at seeing so large a party of strangers in the gateway. Indeed, Seyyid Hamood and others had been equally astonished at seeing us, as they remarked that their latest news of our movements reported us to be still beyond the mountain range. Saood seemed to be a fair, bright, and handsome youth of about eighteen years, and of pleasing, dignified manners. He had, since his father's death in 1870, been with his elder brother Hamood, under the care of his paternal uncle Ibrahim, who usually resides at Rostak, but who happened to be at this moment absent at the fortress of El Hazam in the Batineh. I reckon Rostak to be the third largest town in Oman, Mascat being the first, and Semail the second. It holds fifteen villages in fief, and with these the population is estimated at 14,000. The bazaar is substantially and regularly built, and contains eighty shops with every description of merchandise for sale. In more than one of them I saw trays of fried locusts.

Rostak is a place of great salubrity, and is famous for its cool and temperate climate. Fanned as it is by the sea-breeze on one side, and sheltered from the scorching blasts of the great desert by the noble mountain which towers so majestically and precipitously on its south-west side, the air is dry and mild, and it would, like Nakhl, make an excellent sanatorium for Mascat. It owes much of its reputation, however, to its thermal springs, of which it possesses two very copious ones, ranking among the hottest in Oman. We passed them as we rode into the town, and saw that they were both enclosed in large circular tanks or reservoirs. They are much resorted to by the people, who have great faith in their medicinal virtues. The waters contain in solution a good deal of calcareous matter, and it is astonishing how many use them both internally and for ablution. Being close together, they probably derive their origin from the same source or fountain, and find their way through the fissures or dislocations of the rock.

I saw here vines, papayas, guavas, and mangoes, etc. Lucerne, wheat, millet, maize, and barley are grown, besides maseybili, lubia or Egyptian beans, bakili and other legumens, pulses, and vegetables of several different kinds.

Concerning the mango, I may here quote a curious observation of an old traveller, Mr. Parsons, who in his 'Travels in Asia,' p. 210, says, "This (August) is the season in which mangoes are ripe, which are so very excellent in their kind as to be preferred to any from India.

The stones of the Mascat mangoes are an acceptable present to those gentlemen in India who have gardens large enough to allow room for their growth. We bought a thousand mangoes for two rupees (five shillings), and endeavoured to preserve some of the largest to present to our friends in Bombay; but they would not keep sound during the few days we remained here. We picked out the largest of the stones, which Captain Farmer and myself divided between us."

How the Mascat mango came to be so much appreciated by the English at Bombay is a mystery, as it is rather coarse and stringy, and is far inferior to the Bombay variety, which was brought to perfection by the Portuguese, and is the best in existence. Mr. Parsons was a passenger in H.M.S. frigate *Seahorse*, which was lying in Mascat harbour in August, 1775, and one of whose officers, at that time a midshipman, was the great Horatio Nelson.

The general appearance of Rostak is superior to that of other Oman towns, and struck me as very fine and attractive, with its large white mansions, its venerable castle, its handsome though undecorated mosques, all embedded in magnificent plantations of shady mango, date, plantains, and orchards of fruit trees, backed by the frowning cliffs and crags of the grand cluster of Jebel Akhdar rising tier on tier above it. Traces of the great hurricane were everywhere visible in the town, and the upper story of Seyyid Hamood bin Azzan's house, a large and substantial stone structure, of which I took a photograph, bore evidences of the rough treatment it had experienced at the time.

The castle is a large and imposing structure said to be of great antiquity. It stands at some little distance from the town, but not, as is usually the case, on an elevated or commanding position. I gazed with considerable interest on this time-worn pile, which, though rather dilapidated, had the reputation of great strength among the Arabs, and is perhaps the oldest inhabited building in this part of Arabia. Within a large courtyard, the angles of which are strengthened with bastions, stands the keep or citadel, consisting of a body with four turrets. One of these, called the Burj al Rih or Wind tower, was built by one of the Yaarebeh princes, another turret was built by the Imam Ahmed bin Saeed when he established his residence here about 1750 A.D. The most ancient part of this stronghold, which bears a close resemblance to an old Anglo-Norman castle, is probably that part with its turret known as Burj Kesra ibn Shirwan, and the erection of which is ascribed to the period of the great Sassanian monarch Noushirwan, or, as some say, Khosru Parviz, in whose reign the famous expedition about 600 A.D. to expel the Abyssinians from the Yemen was undertaken.

The command of this expedition was entrusted to a Persian noble named Khuzrad Narsis, generally known by his title Wahraz, who, on his way down the Persian gulf from Obolla, detached a force of four thousand men, probably about one-fifth of his whole army, to invade

and occupy Oman. The Persians landed at Sohar, and were so far successful that they were able to subdue the Batineh coast as far as Rostak, where they remained for about thirty years until the advent of the Moslem troops under Ikrima and Hodhaifa compelled them to evacuate the country.

The erection of the castle is due, according to Arab tradition, to the governor left in Oman by Wahraz. Its appearance is imposing and its structure substantial, and with successive repairs has remained for many centuries. Castles or fortlets similar to that at Rostak, of which there are about twenty in Oman, form the military and political centre of a province, and were built to overawe as well as protect the surrounding country. In domestic and intestine wars, whether tribal or dynastic, as well as against foreign aggression, they have played a very important part, and many a long and vigorous siege has become memorable in the annals of the country. The castle had generally a walled enclosure with or without mural towers, and the plan of the work was, of course, greatly influenced and affected by the disposition of the ground. Flanking towers or bastions are sometimes found, but the secondary defences are seldom strong. The concentric system is said to be of Arab origin, and was used in England after the Crusades.

The appellation of Rostak signified a market town, and we conjecture that the Persians were attracted to it, not only by the hot springs, but also by its central position as a meeting-place or market for the Arabs. The headquarters of the Persian Government were, according to Ross's '*Annals of Oman*,' near the great port of Sohar, but it is locally traditioned that this castle of Rostak was ordered to be built by the king, who caused an iron chain to be suspended therein connected in some mysterious way with his palace at Ctesiphon. Any of his Arab subjects who had reason to complain of injustice or oppression were at liberty to come to the fort and shake the chain, the immediate consequence of which was investigation and severe punishment of the offender by Noushirwan.

Rostak has always been a place of political importance, and it was for a long time the capital of Oman, but it was in the seventeenth century, in the days of the Yaarebeh sultans, that it reached its climax of power. The founder of the Al Boo Saeedi dynasty, which succeeded, retained it as the capital until the end of the eighteenth century, when Mascat took its place. Since then it has been the appanage of the Kais branch of the family, and is now in the possession of Seyyid Ibrahim bin Kais, who has made more than one attempt to imitate the example of his brother Azzan and wrest the sovereignty of Oman from the present branch. At Adam the house in which the Imam Ahmed bin Said was born had been shown me, and here at Rostak, where he died in 1783 after a reign of over forty years, I saw his tomb. It bore a long inscription, of which I obtained a

transcript, in which the date of the Imam's death is given, according to the Mohammedan calendar, as 19th of Muharram 1198 H.

Though the wadi in which the town stands is here called Wadi Rostak, it is known as the Wadi Auf higher up, from a small tribe of that name occupying the ravine and claiming to be originally from the Hejaz. Lower down, I was told, it is called the Wadi Fareh. Rostak is 800 feet above the sea. From this direction Jebel Akhdar appeared to be a tabular range without any salient peaks. The bluff point marked on the chart, and the altitude of which is given at 9900 feet, cannot be the same as Jebel Shoum, as the latter is said to be invisible from the sea. It has an angle of 270 from Rostak. The formation of the rock-masses here is very similar to that of Nakhil, and is no doubt metamorphic, the wavy appearance of the sedimentary rocks exhibiting the power of lateral pressure or of the oscillation of the Earth's crust during the time it was in a fluid condition. The hot springs, it may be added, are without taste or odour, but leave a slight deposit. The cold springs, which are also abundant and which help to supply the town and irrigation conduits, are of the temperature of the ground, and have a different origin from the thermal ones.

Rostak is distant about 90 miles from Mascat, and as the time I had allowed myself was getting short, I determined to ride there in two days, as the camels were still fresh and in good spirits. On the morning of departure, therefore, after taking some photos of the castle, we started off; but as none of us were acquainted with the road, we travelled for a considerable distance on the way to Sowaik, until we were put right by some villagers. At 11 a.m. we reached Mansoorah, and soon after passed a small square town on a hill. At 1 p.m. we arrived at Jemma, a large village with a tower and castle, the latter standing on an eminence. Here we stopped an hour for rest and refreshment, while I seized the opportunity to look at the castle, which has an historical interest of its own. It was in 1807 that Seyyid Bedr bin Saif, who had usurped power with the aid of the Wahabees on the death of Seyyid Sultan three years before, was at Jemma with the two sons of Sultan—Salim and Saeed. Instigated and encouraged by others, Saeed took advantage of an unguarded moment to stab Seyyid Bedr, who, being alone and unsupported by his dependents, leaped from the window and tried to escape, but was pursued and killed. Seyyid Saeed rode at once to Mascat and seized the throne, which he retained till his death in 1856.

The ground from Rostak to Barkah, which we reached at sunset, has a gentle declivity, and our camels sped over the sandy soil at a rapid pace, being conscious, no doubt, that they were homeward bound. The distance is about 45 miles. Mascat, which is about the same distance, was reached the next evening, December 31.