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SOUTHERN NAJD

H. St. J. B. Philby, C.I.E.

Read at the Meeting of the Society, 28 April 1919. Map following page 240.

[NOTE : The names in the following paper are transliterated from the Arabic on the system preferred by the author. The names on the map are on the system adopted for the I/M map. In view of the present conflict of opinion on the best method of transliteration it will be useful to examine the considerable differences, which show the need and the difficulty of agreement.—ED. G.Ÿ.]

WHILE thanking you for the honour you have done me in asking me to tell you to-night something of my experiences in Arabia, I feel that I should warn you at the outset that my qualifications as a lecturer are about equal to those which I possessed for undertaking geographical work when in November 1917 I landed in Arabia.

The material out of which I have had to select a subject for this evening's paper is so voluminous that I experienced much difficulty in deciding between two courses—whether to attempt a general survey of all the ground I covered during the year I spent in Arabia, or whether I should content myself with describing in greater detail some single journey. In the end I was influenced in favour of the latter alternative by the consideration that you would probably be most interested by a description of that part of my wanderings which lay over new country, and I decided to tell you of an excursion I undertook in May and June of last year from Riyadh, the Wahhabi capital, to the southern extremities of the Wahhabi country and back.

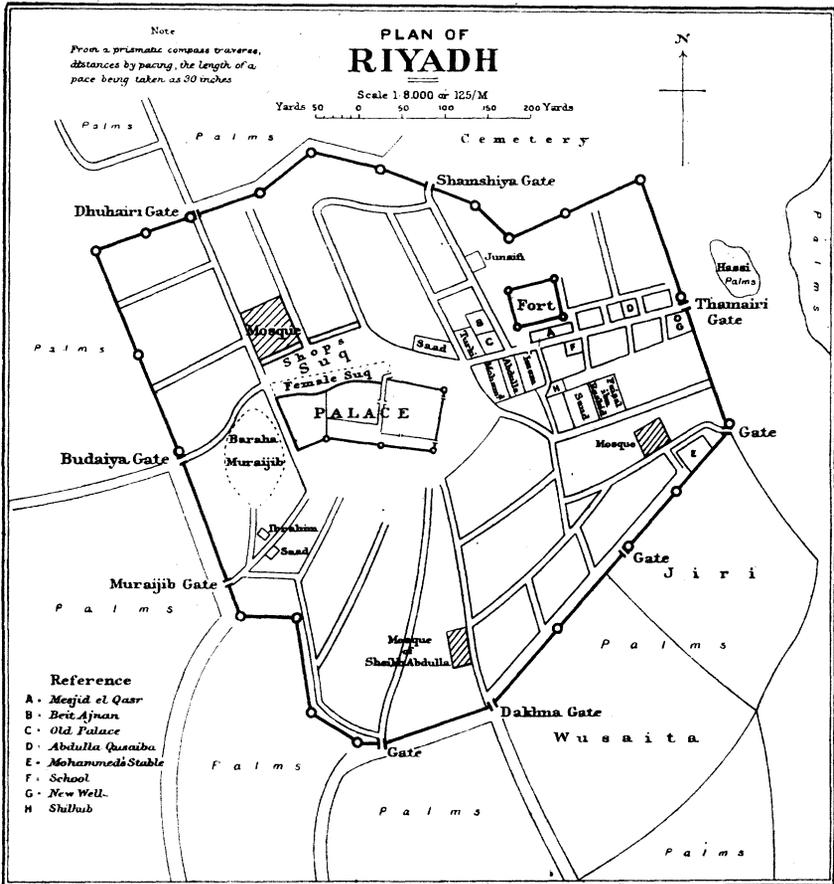
I should have liked by way of introduction to my main theme to have said something of the history and present political situation of Central Arabia, something of the origin and tenets of the Wahhabi sect, and something too of the chief personalities and life of the capital, but the time at my disposal compels me to give up such an idea.

I shall detain you only a few moments at Riyadh. This is a great walled city of clay, built without regard to symmetry in the midst of a considerable expanse of palm-groves, which, with the sister settlements of Manfuha and Masana a short distance to the south-east, forms a single oasis lying in a bay of the steppe desert, standing back from the left bank

N

of Wadi Hanifa at the point where the latter issues from its cliff-bound channel in the Tuwaiq plateau. Of Manfuha, once the capital of a great principality, there is nothing left but the ruins of its clay battlements and houses, while Masana is a village of modern times.

Riyadh, whose history as the capital of Najd goes back rather less than a century to the period succeeding the fall and destruction of the first Wahhabi stronghold, Daraiyya, has a population of some 12,000 to



15,000 souls, and besides its lofty bastioned walls contains only three buildings of any importance—the fort, the great mosque of characteristic Wahhabi type, and the palace of Ibn Saud, the ruler of Najd.

Eastward of Riyadh is the desolate steppe desert sloping down gradually from an elevation of 2000 feet above sea-level to the coast of the Persian Gulf; westward extends the massive barrier of Tuwaiq, a plateau sloping gently upward another 1000 feet in 20 miles to a steep escarpment, beyond which it falls abruptly from 400 to 600 feet to the

western plain. Extending in crescent shape, as its name implies, from Zilfi in the north to a point some 50 or 60 miles south of Wadi Dawasir, a total length of over 400 miles,* with an average breadth of 20 miles, bisecting the Wahhabi country, the Tuwaiq, flanked by sand deserts at either extremity, presents a formidable though by no means impassable barrier to aggression from the west, and from the physical point of view constitutes the backbone of Central Arabia, the power-house as it were of Central Arabian life, for through it run the great drainage arteries of that country to be controlled and directed for the benefit of its denizens, and about it, on either side and on its broad back, cluster the oasis groups which alone give the Arabs a respite from the nomad life—Qasim, Mudhnib, Sirr, Hamada, Washm, Mahmal, western Aridh, and Wadi Dawasir on the west; Sudair, central Aridh, the Fara', highland Aflaj, and Sulaiyyil in the centre; and eastern Aridh, Kharj, and lowland Aflaj on the east.

The delightful spring season of Arabia, when the desert is bright with grass and flowers, was rapidly drawing to a close, when on May 6 we set forth to the southward, having on the previous night seen the last of a long series of daily thunderstorms pass over Riyadh speeding northward. We passed rapidly down the bed of the Shamsiyya torrent, past the royal cemetery of the Wahhabi dynasty and beyond the outer fringe of the palm-groves of Riyadh. Then, skirting the eastern fringe of Manfuha and Masana, we came to the valley of Wadi Hanifa, along which our course lay in a south-easterly direction for the rest of that day and the next until we came to the borders of Kharj.

Down to this point the wadi, which rises some 70 miles away to the north-west near the western escarpment of the plateau, runs down through the Tuwaiq for the most part in a narrow cliff-bound channel, in which lie the settlements of Ayaina, Jubaila, Malqa, Daraiyya, Arqa, Qurai-shiyya, and finally the palm-groves of the Batin. Henceforth it flows generally in a broad shallow valley along the eastern edge of the plateau, and the valley is practically destitute of settlements, but we soon came to a patch of ruins, which they call Jiza, and of which they relate that a century ago it was a flourishing oasis like the others until laid waste by the Egyptian invader; in more recent times, too, it was the scene of a famous conflict between Abdullah and Saud, the sons whom Faisal left to wrangle for his throne with such disastrous results. A mile or two downstream of this place lies a poor palmless settlement called Dakina, a few granges standing in the midst of some unprosperous corn-

* The distances given in the text of the paper were the result of rough estimates made before the observations had been worked up. Subsequent examination has shown that they are considerably underestimated, and corrected figures should be taken from the map. The original distances have been allowed to stand in the text because a part of the discussion is based upon them, and it would have been difficult to adjust them without introducing confusion.—ED. G. J.

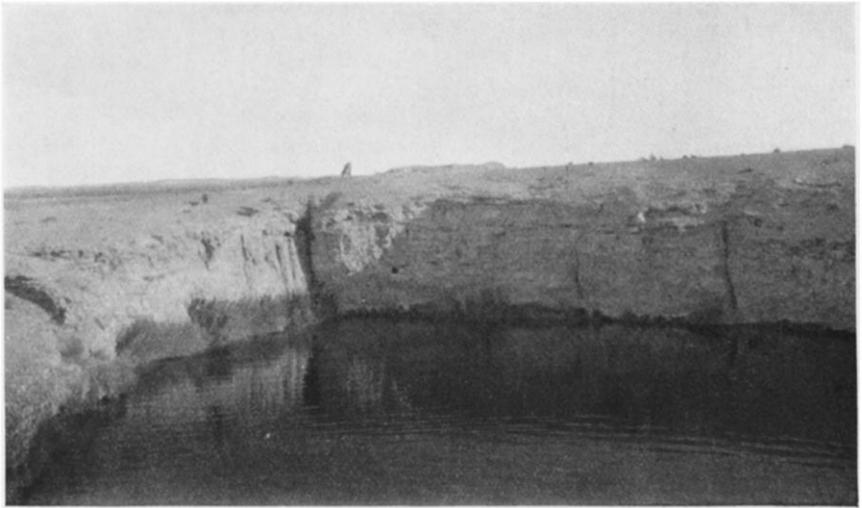
land at the confluence of two petty tributaries with the Wadi. To the east, behind a tract of broken hillocks and parallel to our course, ran the line of the Jubail escarpment, on the hither side of which lay the Wadi Sulaiy, an important tributary, which runs down from the Tuwaiq uplands northward of Riyadh into the Wadi Hanifa at the gates of Kharj. There was little to arrest the attention until the Wadi, carving out a passage for itself through an eastward projection of the Tuwaiq, ran between high rugged cliffs in a narrow winding channel, in whose bed was a profusion of poplars, tamarisks, and acacias, and the wreckage of two groups of masonry wells destroyed only recently by the passage of an unusually powerful flood. Thus we came to and camped for the first night at Haïr, pursuing our course next day down the Wadi, now a broad sandy valley running through a uniformly dreary and monotonous landscape of low ridges and bare rolling downs with no relieving feature but the single well of Hufaira, several miles short of the borders of Kharj, where after a course of little more than 100 miles from its source the Wadi Hanifa loses its identity by fusion with other drainage arteries in a broad channel called the Sahaba.

Whatever may be the case with the upper reaches of the Wadi, there was certainly little enough in the 40 miles of its course between Riyadh and Kharj to suggest a period of great prosperity in the past. Nevertheless there is a strong local tradition that in the halcyon days of the ancient kingdom of Yamama, the valley was dotted with prosperous villages and oases so closely set together that on a certain occasion the news of the birth of a son to a certain notable of Ayaina, the most northerly settlement of the Wadi, was known at Yamama, the capital, some 80 miles distant, the same evening, having been proclaimed by word of mouth from housetop to housetop down the valley. In those days, the story goes, God visited His wrath upon His people in the shape of a double scourge of locusts and plague, from whose effects the stricken land has never recovered. Now it is obvious that this legend cannot be accepted literally, for, though it would account well enough for the present sorry plight of such settlements as Ayaina, Jubaila, and even Yamama itself, it fails to explain how the many other sites, whose existence in the past it vaguely alleges, have come to disappear from off the face of the Earth without leaving a trace of any kind; moreover, it ignores the apparently inexplicable survival of such oases as Daraiyya, Arqa, Riyadh, and Haïr, all of which lie in the path of that legendary visitation. It seems to me therefore that we must reject either the tradition of the Wadi's former glory or the story of the manner of its obliteration, and, in the latter case, seek for a more acceptable explanation of the catastrophe.

Such an explanation is ready to our hand if we accept, as I think we may, on the evidence of tradition supported by the presence here and there to this day of groups of wells, which may well have been the centre



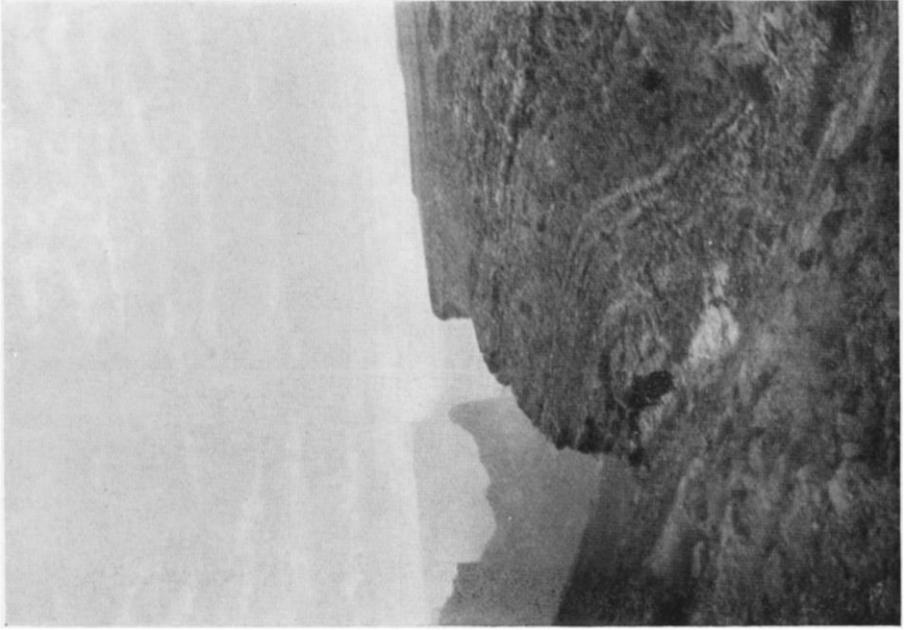
KHARJ: RUINS OF FIRZAN



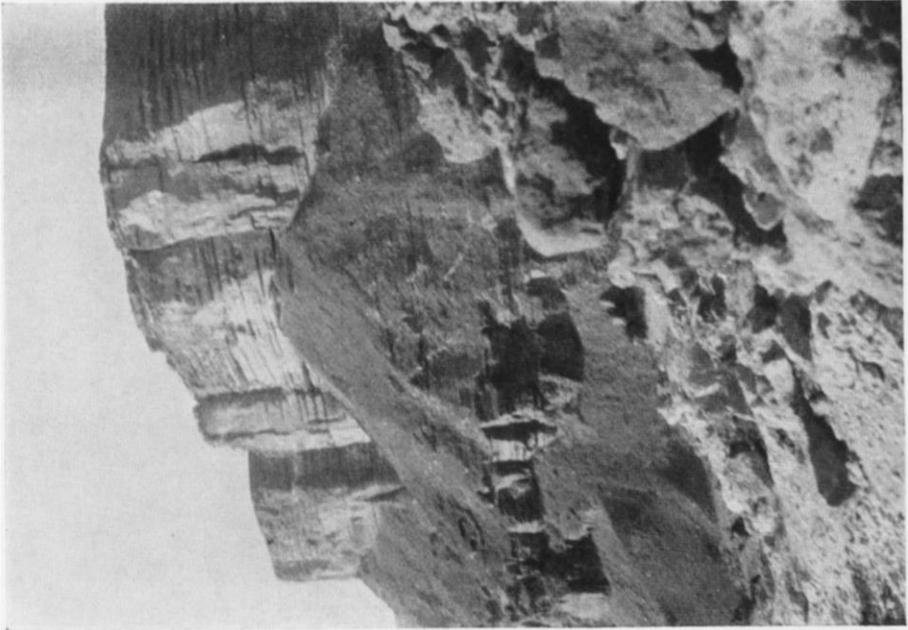
KHARJ: AIN SAMHA POOL



AFLAJ: LAKE OF UMM AL JABAL



HEAD OF SAQTA GORGE



WESTERN ESCARPMENT OF TUWAIQ AT SAQTA GORGE

of flourishing settlements, the view that the legend of the prosperity of the old kingdom of Yamama is not a mere myth. Is it not possible that the Wadi Hamfa was in years past the scene of one of those cataclysmic and devastating floods of whose occasional occurrence we have evidence from other parts of Arabia both in legend and in history? In this case such a flood, resulting from a cloudburst on the uplands of Tuwaiq, would have poured down the narrow channel, mercilessly sweeping before it the rich settlements lying in its path, sparing only those it could not reach on account of their greater elevation, such as Ayaina, Daraiyya, and Riyadh, and utterly obliterating those standing without protection in the more open reaches of the valley, such as Quraishiyya, Jiza, Dakina, and the nameless settlements of which tradition speaks, to far Yamama, the great city of the past, which now lies choked with sand. The task of reconstruction has been slow indeed and is still in progress; the palm-groves of Daraiyya, Arqa, and Haïr have come to a new birth, and new hamlets have sprung up within them; Ayaina and Jubaila are still deserted, and the buildings which escaped the flood lie in ruins for want of tenants; Quraishiyya and Dakina will soon flourish as of old if left to their peaceable development; Jiza and the scattered well-groups of the valley await attention; Riyadh and its sister oases, standing aside from the path of the torrent, are as they were of old, and the old sites in Kharj have risen again in modified glory; it is not unlikely that even the forgotten settlements will some day be re-discovered and re-peopled. Without going further into detail, I may say that in my opinion the facts of to-day fit the theory of a great flood in the past and reconcile the present leanness of the valley with the legend of its old-time prosperity.

The settlement of Haïr is a rich oasis of palms in a deep cliff-bound fissure of the valley at the junction of two great tributaries, the Ha and the Baaija, with the Wadi, which here turns abruptly from a southerly course to the eastward. The two tributaries referred to are said to cleave through the Tuwaiq barrier in deep gorges through which they bring down the drainage of the district of Western Aridh beyond Tuwaiq, another scene of ancient prosperity, of which I cannot here say more than that the process of rejuvenation has been taken in hand and that a chain of new settlements is being built up round the town of Ghatghat, an ancient city rebuilt as a centre of the religious fanaticism of a modern Wahhabi revival.

The palms of Haïr extend for about a mile up the Ha and down the Hanifa from its central basin, in the midst of which lies an extensive shallow pond replenished each year by the passage of floods, from the downstream end of which at the time of my visit a slender stream still flowed down the valley to a deeper pool a mile or more distant. Round this pond stood a dense forest of poplars, tamarisks, and acacias, with a thick undergrowth of weeds fragrant in the mild warm air of early summer, and to one side under the western cliff, whose summit is surmounted by watch-

towers now abandoned, stands the village, a petty collection of mud huts in two groups with a population of some four hundred souls, all of whom are Bani Khadhir of negro extraction, to whom falls the task of cultivating the groves and fields of the settlement for their absentee owners, the Bedawin of the Subai and Suhul tribes. These tribes, once denizens of the western part of Najd, were expelled thence many years ago by the greater tribes of Qahtan and Ataiba and came eastward, where they roam over the downs of Jubail and Arma to the Dahana sands and the Summan downs beyond, but never venture beyond the line of Wadi Hanifa, which is their western boundary. Part of the Subai, 'tis true, stood their ground in the west and remain to this day in the deserts round Khurma and Wadi Ranya, where at the present time their lot is not a particularly happy one, but the Suhul have left no remnant in their old haunts except a few small settled communities round Ruwaidha in the Highlands of Najd.

Though the oasis belongs to them in full proprietary right, these Bedawin avoid the cramped life and sickly climate of the valley and only visit Hair once a year at the date harvest to collect their rents, and again during the month of Ramdhan if it falls in the summer season.

I now come to the district of Kharj in which I spent three days before passing southward towards the Aflaj. It comprises a shallow trough or valley roughly shaped like an isosceles triangle extending southward from an 8-mile base on the Wadi Hanifa to its apex 35 miles distant near the headland of Khashm Khartam, where an important wadi called Ajaimi descends into the district through a narrow passage between the Tuwaiq slope, which bounds Kharj on the west, and a projection of the great desert of Biyadh, which is in fact the vestibule of the sand desert of the south or the Empty Quarter.

The Ajaimi, whose name conceals its identity with the Wadi Sirra, which I crossed on my way to Taif near its far distant source in the western part of the Najd highlands, and which breaks through the Tuwaiq barrier along the boundary-line of the districts of Fara and highland Aflaj under the name of Birk, is perhaps the longest "river," if I may use that word for the sake of brevity, in Central Arabia, and flows down the centre of the Kharj valley, which slopes northward with a gentle eastward tilt, to the Sahaba. Here it joins the Wadi Hanifa and another great "river," the Wadi Nisah, which, rising in some mountains called Bukara west of the Tuwaiq, breaks through the barrier of the latter, like the Birk on the south and the Ha and Baaija on the north, to enter Kharj at its north-western corner. Of the countless tributaries which join the Ajaimi in the Kharj valley from the uplands of Jabal Tuwaiq I need not speak; the channels I have mentioned, Wadi Hanifa, Wadi Nisah, and the Ajaimi, meeting as they do at the lowest part of the trough to form the Sahaba, which runs or rather ran in ancient, perhaps prehistoric, times eastward to the sea at the southern extremity of the promontory of Qatar, these channels are sufficient to illustrate the great importance of Kharj in the

drainage scheme of Central Arabia and to explain the great prosperity of the past of which little now remains. Of the Sahaba I will say no more than that its course is, according to the Arabs, traceable for the greater part of its length as it passes across the desert midway between the oases of Hasa and Jabrin, and that, long having ceased to be a functioning river-bed or drainage channel, it is extremely unlikely that it ever carries water under present conditions further than the western fringe of the Dahana sand-belt, which blocks its course midway. Next to Wadi Rima and Wadi Dawasir, which drain the eastern flanks of the maritime ranges of the Hijaz and Asir to the Euphrates and into the sand desert respectively, the Sahaba is perhaps the most important drainage outlet in Arabia and enjoys a practical monopoly of the surface waters of the central mass of the continent.

The district of Kharj falls naturally into three divisions : the southern and tapering portion of the triangle in which there are no habitations, no cultivation, and no feature of interest ; a central section occupying about half of the remaining portion, in which lies at the present time the centre of such agricultural and political activity as the district enjoys ; and finally the northern or, if I may call it so, the mediæval and prehistoric section, in which, thanks to a score of peaceful years, the desolate ruins of a former prosperity are slowly but surely quickening to new life.

The road from Riyadh enters this last section between two prominent hillocks of a ridge called Firzan, at the base of which rises a spring, from which a subterranean channel, with well shafts at intervals, runs eastward for 3 miles to the village and oasis of Sulaimiyya. Along and over the slope of the ridge, here thickly overlaid with sanddrifts from the Hanifa valley behind, extends a considerable ruin field, which excited my curiosity and is obviously the site of a settlement of the remote past. Here in place of the clay ruins of old Arab settlements the scene was littered with rough-hewn blocks of stone of various sizes arranged in circles of varying diameter about heaps of rubble, mainly composed of a whitish friable mortar, in whose midst stood blocks of stone, as it were the bases of pillars, while in the case of the larger circles a transverse line of great blocks stretched across the centre from side to side. These blocks varied in size from 18 inches and 2 feet in the smaller circles to as much as 5 and even 6 feet in the greater, and the circles themselves from 10 to 45 paces in diameter. It will be sufficient to describe the largest circle I saw in some detail. The blocks set round the circumference at close intervals were from 3 to 4 feet in height and about 2 feet in breadth ; from them the inner surface sloped up uniformly towards the centre, where a gap of several feet, facing east and west, broke the continuity of a transverse line of great boulders, 5 feet or more in height, and in some cases as much or more in length ; in the spaces on either side stood circles of the smaller type already noticed of stones of correspondingly smaller proportions.

The very site of this old settlement, if such it be, on a hillside at

some distance from any possible cultivation, is strangely inconsistent with the ideas of comfort prevalent, doubtless in the past as now, among the Arabs, who prefer to huddle together in their clay dwellings in the heart of their oases rather than expose themselves to the sun and wind, to say nothing of enemies, in the open.

What then is this ruined site, of what period, of what workmanship? I cannot claim that knowledge of archæology necessary to the solution of such a problem, and I can do no more than make a tentative suggestion based not only on the un-Arab character of the material, shape, and situation of these ruins, but on two other facts.

The aqueduct, to which I have referred, is of the type called by the Arabs *Kharaz* or *Saqi* and known to the Persians as the *Kariz*, namely, a subterranean channel, in this case some 4 fathoms deep at the top end, pierced at frequent intervals by well-shafts designed to admit workmen for the inspection, cleaning or repair of the aqueduct. I have seen specimens of such channels in the Sirr and Qasim, and shall soon have occasion to describe those of the Aflaj, but the best-known specimen in the Wahhabi territory is that of Qatif, where we are on strong and even indisputable ground in ascribing the workmanship to the Persians themselves or to Persian influence. Is it possible then that at some period in the remote past Persian influence, perhaps a Persian colony, penetrated to and settled in Kharj, to leave in the district an abiding memorial of its prosperity? I believe that it was so, and that the very name of the Firzan ridge preserves and betrays the identity of the builders of the aqueduct and settlement I have attempted to describe—Firzan, Fursan, the Persians.

Beyond the ruins to the east lies the oasis of Sulaimiyya, in great part the crown property of the Wahhabi ruler, and dependent for the irrigation of its palm-groves on the waters of the Firzan aqueduct and of a number of wells 4 fathoms in depth and of a type common throughout Arabia.

Three miles to the eastward lies the once important city of Yamama, now a straggling village of four small hamlets embedded in palm-groves shorn of their former glory; on the north side a broad expanse of sand rolls up to the edge of the oasis, and here and there from under it appear the clay ruins of what were once the walls and houses, shops and palaces, of the capital of a mighty kingdom. It is clear that the old city lay in the angle formed by the Nisah and Hanifa channels at their junction in the head of the Sahaba near by, and the fact that what remains now of the old settlement is that part of it which lies along the edge of the Nisah and away from the Hanifa, on which side there is a deep sea of drifted sand, would seem to bear out the theory that the catastrophe which laid the place in ruins was a flood in the Hanifa channel. Modern Yamama is greater than Sulaimiyya, and may contain a population of two thousand, comprising elements from the Murra, Bani Hajir, and Qahtan tribes.

Scattered granges dot the landscape, standing amid their cornfields in the beds of the three great wadis, but the only one which calls for remark

is that of Qurain, a fort-like building erected by Ibn Saud in the midst of a large area of lucerne cultivation to serve as a sort of stud-farm for the royal horses. At the time of my visit there were some fifty animals in the spacious courtyard of the fort, animals of all sizes and qualities, stallions, mares and young stock, even an occasional mule and camel. Each was tethered to an open circular clay manger piled high twice daily with lucerne fresh cut from the fields around. A single groom appeared to be in sole charge of the whole stable, and he confessed without shame that the animals in his charge were never exercised or groomed, their open stalls never, or only when absolutely necessary, cleared of refuse. The condition of the courtyard may be easily imagined, but so far as I could see the animals were none the worse for their scurvy treatment, except that a curious ailment, termed "Dabbas," and attributed locally to a germ brought in with the lucerne, was prevalent without other ill effect than temporary disfigurement in every animal which was grey or white or had a touch of whiteness about it. It was curious to note how this disfiguring ailment confined itself exclusively to the white colour and spared no animal in which a speck of it was to be found.

The lucerne fields of Qurain are irrigated by a narrow open channel fed by a triple kariz, whose three heads lay just below high-water level in the sides of three natural reservoirs called Ain Samha, Ain al Dhila, and Ain Mukhisa. For some years only the first of these has been in actual operation, but they are all of similar character, and I shall select for detailed description the most striking of them, the Ain al Dhila, which lies in a great cleft at the foot of a rocky ridge called Qusaia, whose summit is surmounted by a vast concourse of cairn-like mounds of stones and mortar, less striking than though reminding one of the Firzan ruins, and probably traceable to a similar origin, as also is, I think, the irrigation scheme on which the fields of Qurain depend. The reservoir of Ain al Dhila measures roughly 100 × 70 paces. The limestone wall enclosing it towers above the level of the water some 40 feet on the southern and eastern sides, 30 feet on the north, while on the west the wall slopes down gently, affording an easy approach to the water's edge. The water, which has apparently sunk in level a few inches below the outlet leading into a kariz on the northern side, appears to be of a deep blackish-green colour as it lies in the reservoir, but is in fact transparently clear and colourless, though with a slight tinge of a light greenish hue. My companions diving, as all Arabs can, into the reservoir and boulders hurled into it remained visible to an obviously great depth, but we had no line of sufficient length by which to test their assertion that these pools are bottomless, and I had to rest content with their assurances that many efforts had in the past been made without success by the inquisitive to plumb their depths. Whatever be the truth of this matter, these great water-pits are a remarkable feature in the midst of an arid country like Arabia, whose existence was, I believe, not even suspected, and whose

like, as far as I know, is not to be found elsewhere in Arabia except in the Aflaj district, where the phenomenon recurs in a yet more remarkable form. The springs of the Hasa, similar in some respects, lack the depth of these pits of the interior, but doubtless like these and those of the Aflaj owe their being to some hidden subterranean channel, a natural kariz, as it were, extending possibly in a continuous line across the continent.

We now pass out of the southern into the central section of Kharj, to which the centre of gravity has now passed, possibly at the time of and on account of the devastation of Yamama by the flood or other catastrophe which overtook it. Here there are no memorials of the past, but a number of flourishing modern settlements: Dhabaa, a Wahhabi colony recently founded by the more religiously minded members of the Subai tribe under the encouragement and with the financial assistance of Ibn Saud—a wretched collection of mud huts built without order or symmetry round a striking mosque, in size and beauty out of all proportion to the reasonable requirements of a fanatical horde of Bedawin, whose numbers all told cannot exceed a thousand. Time deters me from any attempt to enter into the very interesting subject of these new Wahhabi settlements, which have sprung up all over the country in the last decade under the influence of a vigorous religious revival known as the Ikhwan movement, and likely to have a far-reaching effect on the whole fabric of Bedawin life in Arabia; suffice it here to say that the great empire of a century ago, the empire of the great Saud, fell to pieces because, though the Arabs were inspired by a deep religious impulse, their lack of tribal cohesion was aggravated by the absence of any effective rallying-point for the inculcation of discipline and for the conservation of their strength, while the almost equally great empire of Muhammad Ibn Rashid came to an untimely end because, though the Arabs of Jabal Shammar had all the advantages of a strong rallying-point for their military forces in the great Bedawin city of Hail, they lacked the inspiration of a great religious impulse. Ibn Saud has learned a lesson from the failures of the two outstanding monarchs who preceded him in Central Arabia, and at the present time a dozen towns and villages of recent growth serve as centres for the conservation of the military efficiency and religious ardour on which he relies for the preservation of the integrity of his territories.

Of Najan, the next oasis southward, and the extensive cornlands of Muhammadi beyond it I need not speak. Dilam beyond them is a considerable walled town on the eastern face of the largest oasis in Kharj; it is the political and commercial centre of the district. Here resides the local governor; here the traders of Yaman barter their famous coffee berries, the Mocha coffee known to us but better appreciated by the Arabs, for Indian wares imported through the east coast ports—piece-goods, tea, sugar, and groceries. A formidable fort occupies a considerable area of the south-east corner of the town, whose outer wall forms an L-shaped hexagon pierced by four gates connected by the main

thoroughfares, which meet in the local market-place about the centre of the town. The population, including the residents of outlying hamlets and dwellings in the oasis, may be from seven thousand to eight thousand, among whom the Dawasir tribe appears to predominate. Along the eastern wall lies the cemetery, in which on the evening of my visit I saw a Wahhabi burial-service in operation. The graves are dug out to a depth of about 5 feet in the case of men and somewhat deeper for women. A raised ledge is left on either side of the body to prevent the whole weight of earth resting directly on it when the grave is filled in; the corpse is laid on its side with the face oriented towards Mecca. The winding sheet consists of a complete suit of clothes, all white and sewn together to conceal every part of the body, including hands, feet and face, except in the case of children, for whom a slight aperture is left in the headkerchief, exposing only the face. Finally, when the grave is filled in stones are set up at the head and foot of the grave in the case of men, while an extra stone is placed in the middle over women, the reason for this distinction, as also for the extra depth of a woman's grave, being, so far as I could ascertain, the superstition that, women being in death as in life more timid and flighty than men, their souls require a greater weight to keep them in their proper places, and may return to haunt their forgetful husbands if this precaution is neglected.

We had now finished with the district of Kharj, and I may pass rapidly over the three days' journey which led us to that of the Aflaj. Our course lay southward, all the time between the edge of the Tuwaiq plateau on the west and the low outer cliff of the Biyadh on the east; the distance between the two varied between 10 and 20 miles, and the country over which we passed comprised at first the broad upper valley of the Ajaimi and its tributaries, next a band of down country called Insalah, and finally a somewhat broken plateau of low elevation called Rajd.

Late in the afternoon of May 13 we looked out from the edge of this plateau over a broad circular plain dotted with the oases of the Aflaj; 40 miles in diameter, this plain is encircled by the outer fringes of the Tuwaiq and Biyadh, and slopes very gently away from the former in a south-easterly direction towards the latter. For six days we remained camped at various places before passing on southward, and in that time we made as complete an inspection as possible of all that the district had to show of interest.

The northern section of this plain contains a number of important settlements—the twin hamlets of Umm Shinadhir and Wusaila, by which we camped on the night of our arrival; Laila, the capital and commercial centre, which we made our base of operations during our stay in this section; Ammar south of it; south again the triple oasis of Kharfa, Raudha, and Sughu; and last but not least, the splendid oasis of Saih, east of Laila, whose rich palms are watered by perennial streams issuing from a complicated network of aqueducts, partly open, partly subterranean, and

largely in decayed condition. The sources of these aqueducts lie in a series of six reputedly bottomless reservoirs, like those of Kharj, and one considerable lake, called Umm al Jabal, the like of which probably exists nowhere else in Arabia. This lake, surrounded by a broad border of reedy grasses, is an elongated sheet of water with winglike projections on either side at the southern end, not unlike a kite in shape, its extreme length being about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, and its breadth across the wings perhaps $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. The six reservoirs, which like the Umm al Jabal lake are situated on a broad slightly raised platform of rough limestone sloping in a northerly direction towards the aqueducts, vary in size from a mere pool some 10 yards by 3 in extent to a great pond 500 yards long and 60 yards broad, and are arranged in a semicircle on either side of a central basin, which, though now empty of water and filled in with earth and *débris* nearly to the top, was obviously once a reservoir like the rest, from the eastern side of which the remains of an old open channel lead out into the Biyadh, recalling to local historians the days when, the Murra and Dawasir tribes being at feud, the aqueduct was dug by the former to a distance of four days' journey into the waterless desert to provide their camp with water.

The limestone platform and the country round the aqueducts is strewn with ruins of the same circular type as we have met in Kharj, but somewhat more dilapidated and spread out with less continuity over a considerably greater area, while between this tract and Saih, but nearer the latter and to one side of it, they pointed out to me some great clay ruins of ancient walls and palaces, in which local legend recognizes one of the great cities of the kingdom of Ad, the son of Shaddad. This king, a familiar figure in Islamic lore and doubtless no other than the historic ruler of that name who figures prominently in tales of the ancient glory of south-western Arabia, is represented as the ruler of a vast kingdom extending from Hadramaut in the south to the Aflaj, with his capital at a place called Wubar, a month's journey southward in the Empty Quarter. Glorifying vainly in his pride, he converted his chief city into an earthly Paradise, gathering round himself a bodyguard of two thousand warriors, a stable of two thousand peerless steeds, and a harem of two thousand damsels, the fairest in the world; and one day God rose against him in His wrath and smote him with the dread west wind, whose scorching blast blowing without respite for eight days buried Ad and all his glory in the sea of sand, which to this day is known from its utter desolation as the Empty Quarter.

That great sand desert of the south has never been traversed by a European, but such a task would, as Doughty surmised many years ago, be far from impossible if proper preparations were made, if the journey across this wide expanse of waterless country were performed under proper guidance in the winter or spring season with a caravan of milch camels in full milk. One of my companions, a man of the Murra tribe, whose home



TAMRA IN WADI DAWASIR



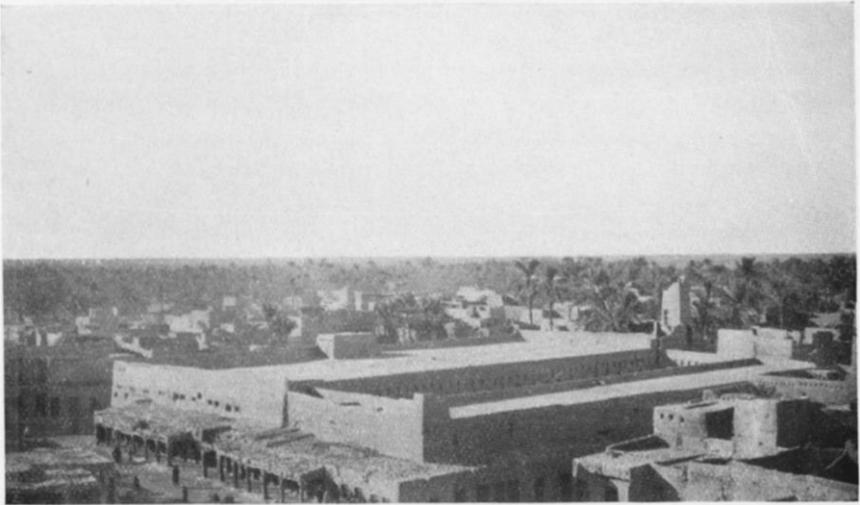
WESTERN EDGE OF TUWAIQ SOUTH OF WADI DAWASIR



SULAIYYIL: HAMLET OF AL HANAISH



RUINS OF DARAIYYA



GREAT MOSQUE AT RIYADH



HUFUF: KUT QUARTER WITH IBRAHIM PASHA MOSQUE

is the oasis of Jabrin south of Hasa, had thrice traversed the desert on raids against the tribes bordering on the Indian Ocean. A wild and primitive tribe are the Murra. In the summer and during the date season they collect about Jabrin, whose great groves of untended palms provide them with their daily sustenance from season to season; at other times they move off with their camels into the desert to a tract called the Khiran, in which are a number of scattered wells of undrinkable water. Their sustenance is now only dates and camel's milk eked out with venison of gazelles and oryx and other produce of the chase; they taste no water until they come again to Jabrin, while their camels watered at the salty wells are turned out to graze untended and return at intervals of their own accord to water again at the same wells and to be milked by their owners, who set by their store in seasoned goatskins.

Somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Khiran are the remnants of an old city called Jafura buried in the sand, but ever and anon the wind, which moans eerily about the sanddunes, discovers some relic of the past, some fragment of sculpture, if they speak true, some arm or leg or head of stone. They told me too of a great bronze or iron statue of a camel which has been seen among the sands still intact and far too heavy to be moved. Beyond this they know little of the history or traditions of the place, which is believed to be haunted, for ghostly voices are heard among the dunes at night. In the sand are found stones said to be capable of motion, which they search out by their tracks, and of which they brought specimens on one occasion for the delectation of the present governor of Hasa. Unfortunately for the purveyors of such tales, the stones they brought refused to do what was expected of them when displayed before the assembly in the governor's palace.

To return to the Aflaj, the ruins of the so-called city of Ad appeared to me to be of typical Arab character, and not of such antiquity as to justify their legendary identification with the abode of that prince. The irrigation system and the circular stone ruins in its neighbourhood seemed to me in all essentials similar to those of Kharj, and, on the same grounds as I have already adduced, I would tentatively ascribe them to a period of Persian penetration or colonization in these parts.

Laila, the capital of Kharj, has had a stormy history of faction strife; often, too, it has played a conspicuous part in the struggles of rival pretenders for the throne of Najd. On the last occasion it incurred the wrath of Ibn Saud by extending its protection to certain refugees from Hariq and Hauta, who had espoused the cause of his cousin Saud when he attempted the throne only a few years ago; the hapless refugees and those responsible for their reception were handed over, some nineteen notables in all, and were led out in pairs to be beheaded in public before the platform on which Ibn Saud himself was seated to witness the execution. At the same time the recalcitrant village of Mubarraz in the Laila oasis was wrecked and sacked at Ibn Saud's orders for the inveterate

hostility of its inhabitants, the Al bu Ras section of the Al Hasan group of the Dawasir, towards the more loyal Ajjalin section, their cousins, who dwelt in Laila itself. The punishment of the province culminated in the sacking of the two main hamlets of Saih, always at variance, as the Dawasir always seem to be, with its nearest neighbour, Laila.

My stay in this section of the Aflaj, though it was attended by no exhibition of hostility towards myself, and though I was made free to move about the various villages at will and was cordially enough received in public, was marked by two incidents illustrative of the attitude of the people towards the intrusion of an alien into their midst. As we marched from our camp at Umm Shinadhir towards Laila a group of women, who had come out, as is their custom, to cut grass in the early morning, showed signs of distress at our approach, and as we drew nearer put down their bundles of fodder and fled precipitately, uttering cries of alarm. It was imperative to prevent their arriving in this state at their homes, and our Dausari guide put his camel to a gallop in pursuit. On his overtaking them, the wretched women fell on their knees crying piteously for mercy, and it was interesting to mark their amazement and relief as we rode by them without other notice than a mild outburst of chaff at their trepidation. "Is not this fellow," they replied, with mingled tears and smiles, "one of those who, wherever they go, slay our men and carry off our women?" The remark was embarrassing, but instructive as a specimen of the teaching of the priests and others who should know better among a people who, for all the light of religion, have not yet emerged from that period of *The Ignorance* in which their pagan ancestors lived.

The second incident was more unpleasant. Some of my party had repaired to a well in a private garden near my camp at Laila to perform their ablutions, when the owner and his servants descended upon them angrily to drive them out with provocative cries of "Infidels! infidels! out with you!" My friends rushed back to camp, and were soon rallying out again armed with rifles, swords and sticks to have their revenge, when I intervened to prevent a conflict.

The southern section of the Aflaj is similar to the northern, but on a poorer scale and without its outstanding features. Ruins of Persian type littered the eastern part along the fringe of the limestone platform, and here and there was a spring with the usual perennial stream watering some exiguous oasis, in which a scanty population dwells in mud huts. Such oases are Suwaidan, Ghauta, Razaiqiyya, Marwan, and Banna. Further to the west lies the only important oasis of this section, namely Badia, which, to judge from the extensive area of clay ruins about which the unprosperous hamlets and palm-groves of the modern settlement lie, must at one time have been one of the most important settlements of the province.

This impression is supported by local tradition, which ascribes the foundation of the old town to a tribe or family called Al Asfar, of whose

origin and history nothing is known except that it was exterminated or driven out by the Jumaila, a section of the great Anaza tribe, which, once the masters of all Central Arabia, were gradually pushed out of their old haunts by invaders from the south-west, and now occupy as a tribe only the northern deserts beyond the Shammar country. The Anaza have, however, influenced the history and character of Central Arabia perhaps more than any other tribe which has passed across that area. To it belongs Ibn Saud himself and the ruling family of Kuwait, to mention only the more important of the many relics which to this day are scattered over Arabia as memorials of its former greatness; to it also must, I believe, be ascribed in very large measure the air of distinction, the noble mien, and the chivalry which we have come to regard as characteristic of the Badawin Arab, for the Dawasir, the Qahtan, and even the Ataiba, the three great tribes of the southern centre to-day, are in comparison with the Anaza of a puny stock. Unfortunately this subject is of too complicated and difficult a nature to permit of more than passing mention.

It was the Hasan group of the Dawasir which drove the Anaza out of Badia, which is now held by the Shakara and Sukhabira sections of the former. The destruction of the old town is ascribed to Abdullah, the son of Faisal, who razed it to the ground as a punishment for the assistance it gave to his brother Saud in his bid for the throne. The several petty hamlets which constitute the modern settlement contain nothing of marked interest to detain us, and I must pass on rapidly further south. Before doing so, however, there is a matter of some importance to the history of the penetration of Arabia to which I must refer. In speaking of Kharj I omitted to mention that my visit to that district had been anticipated by some months by my colleague on the British Mission to Najd, Lieut.-Colonel Cunliffe Owen, R.G.A., who parted from me in December 1917, and visited Kharj before returning to the coast. He has not, I believe, published any account of his visit. I now come to the claim of a much earlier explorer to have visited the Aflaj and to the evidence which has satisfied me that his veracity is open to serious question. William Gifford Palgrave in his narrative of his sojourn in Arabia, states that he visited this district in 1862.

His route was south-westward across Wadi Hanifa to the small village of Safra, where he camped for the first night; next day, after winding for several hours and steadily descending in a south-westerly direction, he found himself in the Aflaj, and at noon he passed the large village of Meshallah with extensive gardens and palm-groves and wells far from copious. The road hence lay mostly in a gorge of some depth, and night (it was the second week in November) fell before he reached Kharfa, and he camped in a sandy palm-sprinkled plain beside the walls. Here in a town of eight thousand inhabitants resided the governor of the province, and hence only 15 or 20 miles to the south lay the first limits of

Wadi Dawasir. The information he collected locally was that Wadi Dawasir was a long monotonous valley bordered on its northern side by the Tuwaiq, and on the south by the Dahana, a length of ten days' journey or, as he himself interprets it, 200 miles. Water is met with everywhere, and the villages consist mainly of palm-leaf huts; at the further, *i.e.* western, extremity of the Wadi one reaches the district of Bisha, and three days' journey to the southward of that point lies Sulaiyyil.

I have selected only the salient points of a narrative, so amazingly at variance with facts—even with possibilities. It will be observed that Palgrave considers 20 miles a fair day's journey, as indeed it is, and that he reached Kharfa in two days' journey from Riyadh, having marched say 40 or even 50 or even 60 miles, if we may assume, though he implies the contrary, that he hurried on the march; now Kharfa lies almost due south of Riyadh at a distance of not less than 110 miles.

Moreover, he names two villages at which he halted *en route*, and which he describes with some vividness—Safra and Meshallah. Neither of these villages is in existence, and I make bold to say that neither ever existed, though both names are easily explicable on the supposition that he relied for his account of the journey not so much on pure invention as on an ill-digested account given him by some arrival at Riyadh from the south. Such a person, supposing him to have halted at Kharfa, would probably have halted again in the Insalah downs, and again on the bare Tuwaiq plateau, which like all such features throughout Arabia are called *Safra*, as we might say "the wilderness." These names faintly remembered, in the first case in a mangled form, Palgrave has quickened into villages and adorned with palms and gardens.

Thirdly, Meshallah is placed on the borders of the Aflaj, and the road thence to Kharfa is said to lie in a gorge of some depth. I have already said that the Aflaj district is a flattish circular plain of 40 miles in diameter; Kharfa lies in the middle of it, all around being the oases already noted, which Palgrave apparently failed to observe. Fourthly, in the days of which he speaks Mubarraz in the Laila oasis and not Kharfa was the seat of the local governor; and lastly, it is incredible that, if he had actually visited the district, he could have failed to become aware of the phenomenon to which it owes its name, the great lake, the six reservoirs and the maze of aqueducts. His account at second hand of the country to the south is too puerile to call for detailed examination, and it will suffice to say that the first beginnings of the Wadi Dawasir lie not 20 but 100 miles to the south, and that the first point at which a traveller touches it is Sulaiyyil, which he puts 60 miles south of its western end and only two instead of seven days' journey from Najran. On these points information acquired in the Aflaj district could not have deceived him.

On May 19 we passed out of the Aflaj and four days later we appeared before Sulaiyyil. Time does not admit of my saying much about the country we traversed. Our route was in a south-westerly direction,

and after we had crossed a broad projection of the Biyadh, which here impinges on the eastern slope of Tuwaiq, passed through a wide circular depression called the Maqran, through which several important drainage channels from the Tuwaiq plateau pass into the Biyadh. At the point where these torrent beds converge in a single stream to disappear through the low cliff of the Biyadh stand three considerable basins of ponded flood water, which though of comparatively recent formation are permanent features in the landscape and are surrounded by thick woods of well-grown trees. The vast herds of camels and sheep of the Dawasir thronged about these pools on one of their periodical waterings at the time of our passage, and the scene was full of life. Thereafter we followed along the bed of a shallow trough-like valley varying in breadth from one to four miles between the now more pronounced cliff of the Biyadh on the one hand and the Tuwaiq on the other, which now presented a more broken appearance than further north, and comprised a jumble of rough ridges rather than a plateau.

In this valley we came to a miserable settlement of scattered granges called Hamam, and at some distance to the south of it entered a passage among the Tuwaiq ridges, from the brow of one of which we looked down on the valley of Wadi Dawasir and its easternmost settlement the oasis of Sulaiyyil, beyond which the Tuwaiq again resumed a plateau character.

The scene that now met our gaze, too sombre to be beautiful, wore nevertheless an air of simple grandeur. The great barrier of Tuwaiq, along whose eastern fringe we had marched for about 300 miles, was here cleft by a broad valley, which, entering it between two frowning headlands conspicuous in the distance at either side of the passage, passed out again slightly south of east over a vast sandy plain bordered on the north by the Biyadh steppe and on the south-west by the slope of the Tuwaiq; from the broken ridges of the northern section of Tuwaiq swept down a wide sandy torrent bed called Majma, at whose confluence with the Wadi stood Sulaiyyil, with its half-dozen petty hamlets nestling in a dark forest of palms.

One problem, which had exercised geographers for long years, was solved for ever and the veil raised on a misconception which by frequent repetition in authoritative quarters had come to be regarded as a fact. "It is practically certain," says the latest authority on the subject to which I have had access, "that the fall of the drainage of Wadi Dawasir is from S.W. to N.E.;" and so it is shown in the latest map of the country I have seen. But the fact is that the fall is from north-west to south-east, or, to be more accurate, in that direction from its nucleus at the junction of the three great wadis of Tathlith, Bisha and Ranya to the oasis of the Wadi, and from somewhat north of west to somewhat south of east from that point to its grave in the southern sand desert, said to be 60 miles or so distant from Sulaiyyil.

The original site of Sulaiyyil was along the channel of the Wadi at a

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point some way to the east of the present settlement, where a few scattered groves and patches of masonry ruins, and a dismantled fort of stone known as Qasr Dhari, attest the splendour of former times, when the Hasan branch of the Dawasir, who are now wholly settled in the Aflaj, held the country until driven out by its present occupants, the Wuddain branch of the same tribe. The latter transferred the settlement to its present site, whose hamlets are occupied by their various sections, each section by itself and until recently at deadly enmity with its neighbours. The chief hamlets are Al Muhammad, Al Hanish, Al Suwailim and Al Dhuwaiyan, each named, as the fashion is in this part of the country, after the section to which it belongs. The whole population may number some 2000, the bulk of whom are engaged in agricultural pursuits, while a few enterprising men of commercial instincts monopolize the Yaman coffee trade, acting as forwarding agents of the sacks of coffee brought up over the desert from Najran.

The ruins of the old settlement, though of masonry, bear no trace of the circular arrangement found in Kharj and Aflaj, thus affording evidence firstly that Persian influence probably never penetrated thus far by the land route, or at any rate never succeeded in establishing itself; and secondly, that the familiarity with stonework displayed by the ancients and long since forgotten by their successors, who live in clay dwellings, was brought by the former with them from the Yaman, whence local tradition represents them as having migrated into the interior.

In connection with the coffee trade I heard a great deal of talk about Najran and the south country, regarding which a few notes must here suffice. The trade route from Sulaiyyil runs due south over the southern section of Tuwaiq across a valley similar to that of the Wadi, and called Fau, and eventually passing out at the extremity of the plateau traverses a flat plain to Najran, which is reached in seven days altogether.

This country is held by the various sections of the powerful Yam tribe, which, when not engaged in marauding expeditions to the confines of the Wadi, pastures its flocks and tends its palms in the broad valleys of Najran and Habuna, both of which are said to run down from the maritime range of mountains eastward into the great desert. This tribe displays a greater variety of religious tendencies than the denizens of the Wahhabi country, the bulk of them owing allegiance to the Biyadiyya sect of Uman origin, and the rest being Zaidis, Wahhabis, and even primitive pagans or semi-pagans, bowing down to rocks and mountains. In this galaxy of faiths there is even room for a small Jewish colony of four families, who came here originally from Sanaa, and have made their fortunes by financial operations and the practice of ornamental metal-work for which Najran enjoys a high reputation.

During the three days of my stay at Sulaiyyil the attitude of the people was an interesting study, varying from extreme cordiality in the case of the Hanish section to passive protest in the case of the Al Muhammad,

their nearest neighbours and worst enemies; the remaining sections were aloof but strictly neutral. Only one incident, however, marred the even tenor of those days, and that was the fault of the leader of my party, who, nettled by the disdainful attitude of the Al Muhammad, asserted his dignity by demanding supplies—quite unnecessarily—in the name of Ibn Saud. These being refused point blank, he sent two armed emissaries to enforce his demand; these were disarmed and sent back with an abusive message. All this had taken place without my knowledge, and it was not till I heard an uproar at a short distance from my tent and was called out to assist in the defence of the camp, that I became aware that something was wrong. Nearly the whole of my party had sallied out under its leader to avenge the insult offered to the latter's emissaries, and the people of Al Muhammad swarmed out as bees from a hive to meet their attack. Fortunately a parley ensued instead of a fight, and the contending parties drew away each satisfied with a moral victory; but we got no supplies, though the confiscated arms were returned to us.

In due course we followed the valley up towards the gap in the Tuwaiq escarpment and, passing the scattered palm-groves of Khuthaiqan, camped for a night before a compact little village called Tamra, lying in a hill-girt recess formed by a petty tributary of the Wadi. Here dwelt a people called the Amur, who, they were careful to explain to me, do not claim affinity with the Dawasir but belong to a cognate group of four sections, known collectively as the Abat Dawasir, which are bound to the Dawasir by ties of long alliance and friendship. In this group I believe we may recognize not perhaps the aboriginal settlers, but the remnant of a very early settlement in this valley, the hosts perhaps of the first Dawasir immigrants, to whom, when they outgrew them in number, they lost their ancient heritage and their political dominion.

At a short distance from Tamra and in the space between the flank headlands of the escarpment lies a considerable tract of somewhat wretched palms in a waterless tract white with saline efflorescence. This is Kabkabiyya, and belongs to the Amur of Tamra, who gather its fruits without the necessity of work, for the salty soil, retaining such rain-water as falls upon it with the tenacity of a sponge, provides sufficient moisture to keep the palms vigorous, and the latter are for the most part left by their lazy owners to fertilize themselves.

From here on May 28 we started off on our way to the Wadi oasis, having previously sent on a messenger to announce our approach. We were now to the west of the Tuwaiq escarpment, which extended on either side of us in an endless echelon of prominent headlands, the general direction of which lay north-east and south-west.

Before us lay an apparently endless plain, whose low dunes and ridges of sand, overgrown with bushes and grasses of the desert, obliterated the channel of the Wadi. Marauders of the Yam tribe had but recently made several descents upon this neighbourhood, and the frowning bastions of

the escarpment to the south were reported to be their favourite lurking-place whence to swoop down on small bodies of unwary travellers. We were sufficiently numerous to render an attack improbable, but we marched circumspectly none the less, and were glad enough as we increased our distance from that spot and approached a solitary oasis called Kimida in the midst of the featureless wilderness.

There was nothing in the place to tempt us to linger, but on our arrival we found one of the messengers we had sent on to announce our coming, and another from the governor of the Wadi, who brought news which decided us to halt for the night. It appeared that on the arrival of our messenger with news of the advent of an infidel, the people of the Wadi, headed by the religious firebrands of its capital, had threatened to prevent such a catastrophe by force if necessary, and in spite of the efforts of the governor to persuade them to wiser counsels, had sent out an advance guard to prevent our passing the eastern edge of the oasis. The governor had accordingly begged us to defer our arrival to give him time to bring his people to a proper frame of mind.

We now sent back letters threatening the Wadi people with the dire consequences of Ibn Saud's displeasure, and announcing our firm intention of arriving at their capital next day. Early next morning we proceeded over the same dreary dunes for some 6 miles, when the bed of the valley reappeared, and almost simultaneously the first palms of the Wadi oasis a short distance ahead. We halted to break our fast, wondering if that palm fringe was picketed, and in due course resumed our march. As we approached the palms we saw our messengers returning followed by an escort, and from them we heard that the more irreconcilable elements had agreed to the withdrawal of their outposts, but had announced their firm intention of barring our access to the capital, a town called Dam near the further end of the oasis.

Groups of inquisitive onlookers were gathered on the roofs of Sharafa, the most easterly hamlet of the Wadi, to see us pass, and as we approached the next group of hamlets, Quaiz, Nazwa and Nuaima, the headman of the last-named came out to tell us that the outlook at Dam was still uncertain, and to beg us to honour him by camping at his gate. In local jealousies we saw a prospect of a satisfactory solution of our difficulties, and readily accepted the invitation.

We now sent on further abusive letters to Dam, and a warning to the governor that he would be held personally responsible for any trouble which might occur on the morrow, and spent the day enjoying the hospitality of our host.

Next morning we resumed our way along the southern fringe of the oasis, whose palms grew thicker as we advanced. Passing between the hamlets of Muqabil and Matala we beheld the extensive town of Dam before us, and we advanced with due caution. Patrols preceded us at some distance, rifles were unslung and loaded for immediate action, while

the pious murmured inarticulate prayers; the walls of the town grew rapidly more distinct, dark objects on the roofs were now seen to be sightseers, and a momentary panic ensued among us as unwittingly we stumbled over the first scarcely perceptible graves of the cemetery. Recovering ourselves, we braced our nerves as we came within effective range, and for five minutes we marched grimly and silently along the wall of the town, scrutinizing the onlookers who commanded us from the roofs. The ordeal was soon over, and we entered unscathed the governor's palace, a newly erected formidable fortress in an open space between the rival towns of Dam and Mishrif. That day and the next the governor would not let me leave the precincts of the fort, but thereafter for the six days I remained here I was made free to move about at will over the whole length and breadth of the Wadi. The irreconcilables had made a virtue of necessity, and headed by the chief Wahhabi prelate of the district had retired into the desert for the period of my stay. Incidentally I may anticipate matters by remarking that the governor was removed from his post by Ibn Saud for the weakness he had displayed in dealing with this affair.

From Faraa, a small group of hamlets at the western extremity of the Wadi, to Sharafa at its eastern end, the palms extend continuously for about 9 miles, for the most part along the sandy north or left bank of the channel; the settlements themselves lay, for the most part, on the opposite bank in the open, on a limestone slope rising southward to a low ridge and thereafter fading imperceptibly into the sand.

Away to the north-west, perhaps 40 or 50 miles distant, rose a mountainous mass called Raiyaniyya, which they reckon to be the head of the Wadi channel, for at its foot lies a wide basin called Hajla, in which, according to local information, the three wadis of Tathlith, Bisha, and Ranya discharge their floods. From the Hajla a channel leads south-east, which would be continuous with the Wadi Dawasir channel except that it is blocked by a barrier of sand some 10 miles broad.

Never within the memory of man had the Wadi been known to flow, until in the summer of 1917 a flood of exceptional violence, descending from the mountains along the Tathlith channel, burst through the barrier of sand and flowed down the long-dry Wadi. The governor was seated in his audience chamber drinking coffee with his guests when they brought him the news. "Bring me a cup," said he, "and let me drink up this flood." That evening the first trickle of water reached Faraa, and for seven days a broad swirling river flowed through the oasis, reaching a point some miles below its eastern extremity; for several months thereafter a deep and gradually evaporating lake stood where water had never been seen before.

The havoc wrought by this flood was terrible. The Wadi oasis escaped with no worse harm than the complete wreckage of many wells in its bed and the obliteration of one small hamlet, called Hanabija, already in an

advanced stage of decay; the palm-groves suffered but little, while the cornfields in the bed profited greatly by its long soaking, and even at the time of my visit a broad line of well-grown weeds adorned the bed of the channel, at whose western end moreover I saw growing numerous flourishing castor-oil plants, the like of which had never before been seen in the Wadi. In the Tathlith channel the damage had been more serious, and comprised 150 human lives, 450 camels and thousands of sheep—a local and probably exaggerated estimate.

The oasis, locally known simply as the Wadi, contains some twenty distinct settlements, for the most part mere hamlets, but including three with populations of 1000 or more which may be dignified by the title of towns. These are Dam itself with about 3000 inhabitants, Mishrif adjacent to it with 2000, and Sabha, more often called Al Wullamin from the section of Dawasir dwelling in it, with about 1000 souls. These three towns account for the bulk of the settled population of the oasis, which does not much exceed 9000, of whom about 2000 are of negro origin and the rest Dawasir tribesmen of various sections of the Wuddain and Misaara groups.

It must be remembered, however, that the nomad counterparts of these settled units retain their proprietary rights in the palm-groves while wandering with their flocks and herds in the sand deserts to the north and south, and that these are probably at least twice as numerous as the settled elements. I should estimate, therefore, that the population dependent on the Wadi is not less than 23,000, including the 2000 negroes.

I have seen it stated in the authority already quoted that the "poorer folk do not build their habitations of anything more permanent than palm-leaf and palm-fibre," but this is not the case, all dwellings in this tract, as in Sulaiyyil and other places in the Wadi Dawasir channel, being of clay, those in the western part of the oasis, and particularly in Mishrif, being of a curious ruddy tint, while the rest are of a duller hue. There are no ruins of any antiquity in this tract.

Mishrif and Dam are the only market towns in the area, each having a small market-place, whose chief business is the purveying of Mocha coffee, ornamental weapons from Najran, camel gear, and to a trifling extent Indian piece goods and sugar. Tea is a practically unknown commodity in these parts, where they use a substitute in the shape of pounded coffee husks; the taste for this beverage, which they call *qishr*, must be acquired before its somewhat sickly flavour can be appreciated.

I must pass rapidly over the stages of my return journey, which after the first day, when we traversed the sandy plain already described and ascended from it to the top of the Tuwaiq escarpment some 500 feet above its level, lay practically without interruption over the broad back of the plateau.

For some 90 miles we proceeded over a bleak landscape almost devoid

of life until we reached the southern border of the Aflaj uplands. Up to this point the country traversed was of a fairly uniform character. From the clear-cut rim of the western escarpment, which we followed at varying distances from it, a gentle, slightly undulating slope extended halfway across the plateau, where it degenerated abruptly into a tract of lumpy downs through which scores of hill torrents ran in narrow cliff-bound ravines, those of the southern half trending southwards towards the valley of Wadi Dawasir, while, after we crossed the watershed, their direction was eastward into the Maqra' depression. In many of these ravines we found great, apparently permanent pools of excellent water, occasional struggling patches of untended palms, and great profusion of a wild and luxuriant vegetation. A brisk northerly breeze, blowing with great regularity by day, made the climate of summer in these southern latitudes surprisingly mild, and the nights were delightfully cool.

In the Aflaj upland tract the scenery became rougher and grander; a secondary escarpment flanked our course on the right, and the slope towards its foot from the western edge of Tuwaiq was narrower and steeper, converging on the heads of the two deep gorges of Hasraj and Batin al Hamar, which pass through the plateau extending eastward from the secondary escarpment into the Aflaj plains where we had already crossed their lower reaches.

At the head of these gorges lay the settlements of Haddar and Hamar respectively, the former a group of palm-groves and hamlets held by various sections of the Dawasir and a small remnant of the Jumaila section of the Anaza of whom I had heard as the former owners of Badia, while the latter, held in ancient times by a section of Qahtan, has now passed into the hands of the Shakara section of the Wuddain group of Dawasir, who also own a part of Badia and a small settlement called Wasit halfway down the Batin al Hamar gorge.

On the summit of a low ridge near Hamar, which according to my aneroid was about 2700 feet above sea-level, I found a great profusion of what appeared to be fossil seashells, of whose significance I cannot venture to speak, as the specimens I collected, both here and at two other spots in the Tuwaiq near Ayaina, still await examination.

From Hamar we made a slight detour to the edge of the western escarpment whence I could look out over a broad prospect of sand desert and distant mountains, some of which I was able to identify with landmarks seen during my passage through the highlands of Najd on my earlier journey to the west coast.

We now followed the eastward-trending, cliff-bound valley of Ashaira past a delightful oasis called Sitara to a much denser settlement called Ghail, whence from an eminence above it I looked out again over the Aflaj plains and its scattered oases. The edge of the plain appeared to be some 4 or 5 miles distant. Through parts of the Ghail oasis runs a perennial stream which appears suddenly above ground in the pebbly

bed of the Ashaira torrent, and flows until exhausted by the demands of irrigation.

From the point at which we entered the Aflaj highlands to the point at which we left it, in the neighbourhood of the exit of Wadi Birk from its deep gorge into the valley of the Ajaimi, our wanderings in this tract had occupied eight days. The fast of Ramdhan, heralded by the appearance of the new moon, began on the day of our arrival at Haddar, and the people whom we came across, both settled folk and Bedawin, showed too obviously signs of extreme irritation, natural enough when one considers that the season was midsummer, and that from the dawn prayer to sunset, for not less than fifteen hours, they were condemned to taste no morsel, nor so much as moisten their lips. My companions were of course, as travellers, exempt from these restrictions, and there is nothing so irritating to those that burn with thirst as to see their fellows drink.

We hastened on, now just within and now just without the eastern fringe of the great barrier of Tuwaiq, and on the sixth day we came again to Hair. The following day we re-entered the Wahhabi capital on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the fast, after an absence of exactly fifty days.

Over this last stage I will pass with the briefest notice of one of the most important and perhaps the most characteristic district of Wahhabiland. The district Al Fara, as it is called, consists of a mighty gorge extending from near the western fringe of Tuwaiq to its point of issue at the edge of the Kharj valley. At its head lies Hariq, a settlement in which Anaza elements predominate; near its outlet lies Hauta, the most insular, the most vainglorious, and the most fanatical of the Najd settlements; at some distance from Hauta to the southward, in the bed of a tributary called Al Faria, lies the third and last oasis of the district, Hilwa.

At the outset of my journey Ibn Saud had warned me specifically to give a wide berth to this district, whose people, he said, are more like to brute beasts than human beings, veritable oxen for their dour temper and bestial ignorance. And one of my party told me of the unrequited blood which lay between him and the people of Hauta, who some years back rose and slew his brother as he alighted at their gates, a guest—the unforgivable offence in chivalrous Najd.

It was, so far as I was concerned, by accident that the rich palms and extensive town of Hauta, whose inhabitants are not less than ten thousand, appeared in the valley on our flank as we traversed the plateau above it, and I could not resist the temptation to halt and view it from the cliffs which overlook its deep gorge. By Arab standards the valley of Hauta, hemmed in by sheer high cliffs, and self-supporting with its interminable date groves, its cornlands, and its deep wells, is impregnable, for no Arab force investing it could sustain life for a sufficiently long period in the arid desert plateau which surrounds it far and wide. This alone of the districts of Najd defied the officials of Ibn Rashid, when he was ruler of the land,

and one of his tax-gatherers rashly entering the city on his unwelcome errand was publicly beaten in the market-place of Hauta with impunity. Ibn Saud has adopted a wise policy with this wild tract, to which he has conceded complete autonomy in recognition of their loyal acceptance of his rule and his mild imposts.

I fear that I have omitted much that I should have liked to say, but that is due to the limitations imposed upon me. I trust that I have said enough to show that there is much in Southern Najd to encourage further investigation, and to show that in Kharj and the Aflaj, in distant Jafura, in Wubar, and possibly other buried cities of the southern sands, there lies open a fruitful field for the archæologist of the future. May I close with a pious hope that a camel and not an aeroplane will carry the first European to traverse the Empty Quarter ?

Before the paper the CHAIRMAN (SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND) said : We shall, I am sure, have a particularly interesting paper this evening, as Arabia is becoming of more and more interest to us British. It has always been one of those great reservoirs from which the floods of human beings have swept over neighbouring countries. It is also, as you know, the source of one of the great religions of the world, and to us British it has during the war had additional interest, because we have had to increase our political responsibilities in it very considerably. Our lecturer this evening is one of those who was employed by the Government in extending our influence in Arabia. Mr. Philby was Captain of Westminster. He afterwards joined the Indian Civil Service in 1907, and he was in India until the outbreak of war, when he made his way to Mesopotamia, and while employed there on political work he carried out a remarkable journey from the shores of the Persian Gulf to the shores of the Red Sea, passing very close to Mecca. He is not this evening giving us an account of that great journey. He has confined himself in his paper to a little side journey which he made in an unknown part of Arabia, but the description which he will give of that part I think we may take as more or less typical of the rest of Arabia. At any rate, we shall get some general impression of the style of country that Arabia is and of the remarkable people who inhabit it. I call upon Mr. Philby to give his paper.

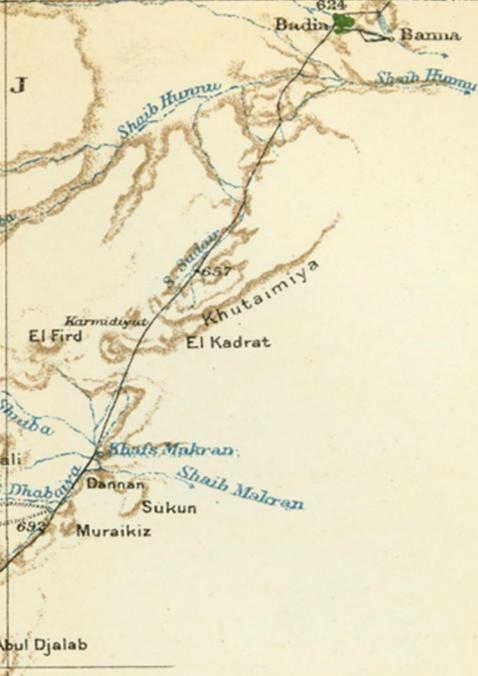
Mr. Philby then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.

The CHAIRMAN : We are unfortunate in not being able to have present here this evening some of our great authorities on Arabia. In the first place, we tried to get Mr. Doughty, who is the greatest living authority, but he has not been able to attend. Miss Gertrude Bell, our latest Gold Medallist, was recently in England, but I am sorry to say, for our sakes but not for hers, that she has gone off to Algeria for a little rest after her arduous work in Mesopotamia. Captain Leachman is still in Mesopotamia, but we are extremely fortunate in having present this evening Commander Hogarth, who has been head of the Arab Bureau in Egypt and who has just come over from Paris.

Commander HOGARTH : Mr. Philby has told you a good deal, but he has not told you one-tenth of what, I imagine, he could have told you, even about what the Chairman calls a little excursion. Three hundred miles out and three hundred miles back, through a very dangerous country which has never



- Gh - Ghadir = Temporary water pan
- Kasr = Fort
- Khafs = Cleft
- Kh - Khashm = Prominent peak, headland
- Nefud = Continuous deep sand
- S = Shaib = Dry water-course
- Wadi = Dry river bed



NOTE.

This map is based upon Mr. Philby's prismatic compass traverse adjusted to his astronomically determined positions, taken with a 6-inch sextant and artificial horizon, as given in the list below. The latitude of Riyadh is the mean of meridian altitudes of the sun by Mr. Philby and Capt. Shakespear, and altitudes of Polaris observed by Lieut. Colonel Pelly in 1865, the greatest difference between them being 2' 20". The latitude of Abu Djifan and Dhurma are from sun meridian altitudes, all other latitudes are from meridian altitudes of the moon. Mr. Philby's latitude of Riyadh by sun meridian altitude is 24° 36' 45" and by the moon (not used) 24° 35' 15". At Mawan and Sulaiyil meridian altitudes of the moon were observed on two successive dates, and the mean result has been accepted; the difference between the two in each case being about 2'. The longitudes depend upon chronometric differences from Riyadh, taking Colonel Pelly's position 46° 41' 48" E. as the longitude of that place. The local mean time and rate of the watch were found by sets of E. and W. altitudes of the sun.

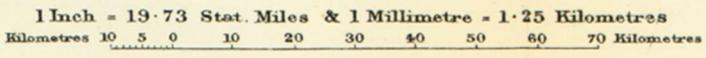
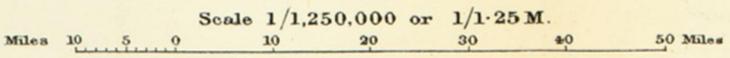
Heights are from aneroid readings, adjusted by boiling-point thermometers, and to sea level at the commencement and termination of the expedition.

Place.	Latitude N.	Longitude E.
Riyadh	24 37 22	46 41 48
Dhurma	24 34 30	" " "
Abu Djifan	24 29 45	" " "
Hair	24 21 7	" " "
Shaib Baldjan	24 5 12	" " "
Mawan	23 53 35	46 47 56
Sulaiyil	20 25 44	45 29 0
Dam	" " "	44 40 0

SOUTHERN NEDJD

**Routes between
RIYADH AND WADI DAWASIR**

from surveys by
H. ST. J. B. PHILBY, C. I. E., I. C. S.
1918.



- Reference**
- Routes ————
 - Sand ▨▨▨▨
 - Ruins ∙
 - Oases ●
 - Heights in metres