

THE HEART OF ARABIA*

These two splendid volumes, complete with maps and indexes, will be read with solid satisfaction by all those who are interested in Arabia, whether from the point of view of the student of geography, or from the point of view of the reader who wants an authoritative pronouncement on the political situation in Central Arabia. The illustrations are first class, and we sympathize with the author in that his supply of films failed him on his return journey from the Wadi Douasir, with the result that 300 miles of country upon which European eyes had never before rested, had to remain still unphotographed.

We congratulate Mr. Philby on his journey across Arabia from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea. Like all his work, it was evidently done with extreme thoroughness. He tells us that he made his records "day by day and almost hour by hour," and we can well believe it. His note book and pencil must have been ever ready to his hand and it is difficult to estimate the toil which his detailed survey work must have necessitated.

But fine as was his journey across Arabia, it is his penetration to the southwest from Riyadh that fascinates us most. In his discovery of the Lake of Umm el Jebal, Mr. Philby has once more placed on the map of Arabia, the lake of the old geographers. He shows that the "Heart of Arabia" once supported great civilizations, of which nothing now remains but mysterious ruins where "Jinns moan piteously on windy nights." The stone circles of Kharj hold their secret more closely even than Stonehenge, and it is evident that there is plenty of work in Arabia for an archæologist.

Perhaps the greatest of Mr. Philby's achievements was

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his penetration to the northern boundary of the Empty Quarter, which he skirted from east to west. He tells us that he never met but one Arab who claimed to have crossed the Ruba' al Khali, and this one, Jabir ibn Faraj, said that he had crossed it three times from the northern boundary to the Indian Ocean. Jabir is therefore probably the first human being of whom this achievement is recorded, although in the new light which Mr. Philby brings to bear on this little known part of Arabia, it is quite likely that men of the Murra tribe *do* cross it from time to time. Mr. Philby lays stress on his opinion that the Ruba' al Khali is not the barren place we have always supposed it to be, for camel fodder is plentiful and the Oryx abounds. It seems, too, that the ostrich is still found in this part of the country and perhaps also in the northern Hamad.

Palgrave, the Jesuit traveler of 1862, is dealt with relentlessly, but we believe, justly. For many years he has been suspected of gross exaggeration, but it has devolved upon our latest Arabian explorer to give him the "*coup de grace*." In just one detail, however, we must support Palgrave as against Mr. Philby. The latter states that "venereal diseases are exceedingly rare in the Wahhabi country," while the former declares that they are "frightfully common." They are certainly common.

For the first time we have before us an authoritative statement on recent politics in Central Arabia. Mr. Philby was to visit Ibn Saud, the Sultan, or Emir of Nejd as he then was, and induce him to take up a definitely pro-British attitude. He was also to do his utmost to persuade Ibn Saud to declare war on Ibn Rashid and the Shammars, who, with the fitful encouragement and assistance of the Turks, were always a potential thorn in the sides of the British. The mission was eminently successful, for Ibn Saud *did* definitely ally himself with the British, and *did* take up arms against Ibn Rashid. Mr. Philby's description of the scene where Ibn Saud declares war on Ibn Rashid's envoys is very fine. The

campaign was a long and costly one, but to-day the power of the Shammars is broken. Ibn Saud reigns supreme in Hail.

This book gives us an opportunity to study Ibn Saud, Arabia's strong man. Like all who have had much to do with Ibn Saud, Mr. Philby has come under the spell of his influence, and can scarcely find it in his heart to think of him anything but good. There is no doubt but that Ibn Saud is worthy of our good opinion. His magnificent personality, both physical and spiritual, is enough to take anyone by storm, while his energy, industry and capacity for work will excite and hold the admiration of any Westerner. Ibn Saud's romantic history draws one to him. Beginning his career as an outlaw living in Kuwait, he has regained the kingdom of his fathers and has brought law and order out of feud and chaos throughout the length and breadth of Central Arabia. Like so many strong men, he can make friends out of enemies, having first defeated them. Mr. Philby gives several instances of this. It will be interesting to see whether Ibn Saud is able to secure the loyalty of the Shammars now that he has conquered them. Much will depend on success or failure in this respect. We hope that some day Mr. Philby will be able to give us the story of the Hail campaign. In the present work he gives us only the beginnings.

It is true we now have peace throughout Ibn Saud's dominions, with security such as Central Arabia has not known for many a year, but as Mr. Philby says, it is "a peace which is the handmaid of a narrow creed." Wahhabism, as interpreted by the "Ikhwan" has come into its own again, and has been the instrument by which Ibn Saud has asserted and consolidated his supremacy. A great religious reformation has been created and used for political ends, and when we say this we do not necessarily impugn the sincerity of Ibn Saud's devotion to Islam. "To the tribesmen the new faith is an end in itself—to Ibn Saud it is a means to a political end." The

difficulty of Ibn Saud's position is that the "Ikhwan" hate the Christian with a fierce hatred, and yet at the same time it is British support which has made possible the conquests of Ibn Saud with his "Ikhwan" army. Again and again in this book we see how great was the prejudice against Mr. Philby, in spite of all that Ibn Saud said and did, and in spite of money and presents distributed by Mr. Philby with an extremely lavish hand.

The book shows beyond a doubt that Mr. Philby has little faith in "Arab unity"—that dream of Sir Mark Sykes and a few others who have more enthusiasm for, than knowledge of, Arabia. It is impossible to read this book without realizing the hopeless antagonism between "The King of the Hejaz" and Ibn Saud, which after all, is only one of the antagonisms of Arabia. Meanwhile, Great Britain is helping both Hussein and Ibn Saud. There is no doubt that Ibn Saud's integrity is of a very high order, but just how great a strain his loyalty to Great Britain can stand, is one of the important phases of the question of Central Arabia. The Arab has ever an eye to the main chance, and his lust for gold is insatiable. In this last, or lust, Ibn Saud is no exception. It is hard to believe that Ibn Saud was quite guiltless in the matter of contraband passing through his territory during the late war. On one occasion (September, 1917), at all events, Mr. Philby admits that Ibn Saud was indirectly responsible for the passage through Buraida of a Shammar caravan of 3,000 camels en route for Hail, and presumably eventually for Damascus or some other Turkish center of activity.

With reference to Ibn Saud's family life we are afraid we cannot quite agree with Mr. Philby's very lenient treatment of the subject of divorce. The fact is that Ibn Saud is a veritable *Haroun al Rashid*. A man who, in the prime of life, has run through 75 real wives, and no one knows how many concubines, is hardly a model of domestic idealism. Perhaps Mr. Philby, like the