

## FROM BAHRAIN TO TAIF

### A MISSIONARY JOURNEY ACROSS ARABIA

---

On Thursday evening, May 19th, a messenger came from the Bahrain agents for Ibn Saoud, saying that a telegram had just come from the King asking me to come at once to Taif, Hedjaz, to treat a member of his family. On Friday all preparations were made, our baggage put in a launch which then sailed around the island to Zillag, and at midnight we went aboard there. The next morning just after sunrise we arrived at Ojeir. A car was waiting for us and after arranging for our baggage, which had to go by donkeys, we were off. In two hours and twenty minutes we were in Hofuf. We spent the day there calling on friends and waiting for baggage. Lorries were sent to the edge of the sand-dunes to meet our baggage and returned with it in the afternoon. On the morning of the twenty-second we started the long journey almost across the peninsula. We left Hofuf about 8:30 with a Chevrolet touring car and two lorries. We carried petrol, water and food sufficient to get us to Riadh if necessary, though we did replenish our water at two wells and bought a sheep for dinner at one of the wells.

We arrived at the small town of 'Arier shortly after noon and rested for about an hour. Three other cars were there, large open busses, en route to Hassa from the Hedjaz. There were twenty passengers, fourteen of whom were young Hedjazis who had learned to operate wireless telegraphy and who were going to man the wireless stations or relieve men already at work at Hassa, Ojeir, Katif and Jubail.

'Arier has perhaps thirty houses belonging to the Ajman tribe. It is one of the towns started during the

Ikhwan movement. A small date garden of about fifty trees testifies to the attempt made, when greater zeal reigned, of becoming urbanites. These trees have not been watered for two years, showing a withering of spiritual as well as of natural resources.

The Sheikh, Ibn Juma', gave his verbal allegiance to Ibn Saoud during the rebellion of 1930-31, but secretly he is said to have helped the rebels. One of his sons was killed fighting with the rebel forces. Just a few months ago it was learned that the old Sheikh had killed or caused the death of seven men in a sortie, burying them in the sand. He was fined Rs.14,000 and is now a permanent invited guest at Ibn Jalooie's court. When we stopped at 'Arier en route home we were entertained by a son of Ibn Juma', a very spirited young man who rules the small town with a high hand.

From 'Arier on we had a very bad stretch of desert-sand, hummocks and ruts—and we made very slow progress. Our lorries got stuck several times and all hands (twenty pairs in all) were required to push them out. One of them had engine trouble too. We lost sight of this car eventually and spent some time looking for it. It would have taken several hours to repair its damages so we took off most of its load and went on without it.

We spent the first night in Wadi Jidda and the second night at Wadi et Tairie. Here were a couple of wells and also some rain water in a deep ravine. We cooked our supper, made coffee and then drove a safe distance from the Wadi to sleep, for there were many mosquitoes and sand flies. There was considerable vegetation here, mostly acacia trees.

We had not followed the usual caravan route between Hassa and Riadh and so did not strike Abu Jifan. We were about forty or fifty miles north of that route and thus avoided the sand dunes of the Dahna. The Dahna here was sandy but quite level and not very hard to cross. The next morning at eight o'clock we arrived in Riadh just forty-eight hours after we had left Hofuf. We had

travelled just about half of that time, taking twenty-four hours to do three hundred miles, or just less than fifteen miles per hour. This part was by far the worst stretch of the road; beyond Riadh we made better time. I was surprised at the definite roadway, not one of macadam, but made only by tracks of numerous cars.

A telegram had been sent from Hofuf, at our departure, so Riadh knew when to expect us. The same telegram had been sent to the King in Taif and he had directed the Crown Prince, Amir Saoud, to have me examine his (the King's) five small sons and then to speed me on and not to allow more than two hours in Riadh.

The Amir Saoud resembles his father more than ever. He has the same cordial greeting for visitors that the King has and that same charming smile. I was given the same room in the Palace that I occupied in 1923, and at once a swarm of visitors and patients came in. We were soon invited to lunch with the Amir and five members of the Rashid family, who, as permanent prisoner guests, dine with the Amir daily. Then I saw the five young princes, several more patients, and was taken by the Amir to his summer palace on the Wadi Hanifa, near Deraiyah, where his ancestors ruled years ago. The Amir and a younger brother wanted examinations. We were shown around the Amir's very fine gardens as well as the palace and then departed.

Another car joined our party, also bound for Taif. We left Riadh at 1 P. M. We had been held up five hours instead of two as ordered by the King. Our course now lay northwest in the Wadi Hanifa, the same road our camel caravan had taken eight years ago when bound for Shukra. Here are the ruins of Jubaila, where we filled our water skins and drums; and farther on are the ruins of 'Ainain. The latter must have been a very large and prosperous city. Parts of the city walls still remain, enough to get an outline of the city. Ruins of houses and wells are everywhere and it is safe to estimate a population of 25,000 at least. It is referred to as the country of

the Bni Mu'amer, who cursed the prophet Mohammed and were cursed of Allah for so doing. It is also said that armies of locusts caused the ruination of the town. I wonder how much lack of water had to do with it.

After the Wadi we entered the Ared hills and found a very acceptable motor road. For some distance it runs on the ledges of the hillsides. We left these hills by a rather steep decline on a well made road. Jebel Tuwaik was now visible to our right and we were on the Ared-Washem plateau. Here are small "farms" where wheat, oats and alfalfa are grown.

The house, well and stable are surrounded by a high wall, so built because the memory of other days is still fresh. We also saw the towns of Awained, Burra, Thurmada, and camped at sunset outside the walls of Meerad. There are perhaps a thousand date trees in its oasis and other fruits also.

I think most of us went to sleep almost at once for we had been on the go since four o'clock that morning. But our cook got firewood from the town, bought and butchered a sheep and at eleven P. M. wakened us for a good dinner. Half an hour later we started off again and rode three and a half hours, making very good time, for the roads were fair. But the Nefud es Sirr was now ahead of us and we waited for dawn to lighten our way across it. It took us about an hour and a half to cross the Nefud; and just after sunrise we arrived at Dowadamie. Just outside the town is a large castle built last year by the Government. It is a supply house where we replenished our petrol, oil and water; it also has sleeping rooms built especially to accommodate the royal family when travelling.

From here on the road was not bad, and except for stops for some engine and tire trouble we made good time. We now passed through the country of the Ataiba Bedouin, who were tending thousands of sheep and goats, for this is good pasture country. We camped that night at Bir 'Afeef, bought a fat young lamb, got buckets of

milk, and feasted well. In Nejd all sheep are black; we were now nearing the Hedjaz border, and saw both black and white sheep; in Hedjaz all sheep are white.

The next morning we started at three o'clock, for there was still a long, hard road ahead of us. At dawn when the Arabs stopped the cars for morning prayers we were in the midst of a large meadow, and it seemed to be full of singing meadow-larks. Their full-throated, joyful acclaim of the new morning burst upon us as a most pleasant surprise.

At about eight A. M. we passed a large "General" truck, stalled for want of petrol. It had come from 'Anaiza and had been in this spot since sunset of the previous evening. As soon as our driver saw the car he ordered that our extra tin of petrol be hidden and it was with considerable disfavor that he followed my request to give some of our supply. The next supply station was only another hour's drive and we had an ample supply, but self-preservation is the first law of the desert. Desert dwellers or travellers do not give water or petrol (both now in the same class) to strangers.

We now crossed a salt-pan and somewhat later a field that at a distance looked snow-covered but on approaching it proved to be covered with small white flints. About nine o'clock we arrived at El Moiya. Here a fort stands on the edge of a wadi. It too is a supply station and we replenished all our needs. We also had a good meal of rice, *dihan* (clarified butter), dates and bowls of butter milk. We resumed our journey at eleven A. M. and had the best roads of our trip, for we crossed the Rukba plains. These plains are good grazing lands, especially for camels, as the trees and shrubs, mostly of the acacia family, are plentiful. This part is perhaps seventy-five miles wide. The King has an annual gazelle hunt here and his cars and guns are said to have brought down four hundred gazelles in one day last year, but we saw none on our two crossings.

We were now approaching some hills, and dark clouds

indicated that a storm was imminent. At Er Rashaida there was much evidence of heavy rains; the road was washed away; young grass was shooting forth; and the wells and wadi were freshly filled. It looked for all the world like a large picnic grove with plenty of shade trees for all. There were about twenty cars parked, mostly of the open bus variety. Some were en route for Riyadh but most were Hedjaz-bound after having delivered returning pilgrims.

Er Rashaida is a preparation place for the entrance into Mecca or Taif. Caravans water their camels here for the last time; passengers bathe and put on fresh clothes and rest for the night or often for a day and a night. We too refreshed ourselves a bit and began on our last lap, another three hours' ride.

Soon we saw cultivation, a few small towns, huge boulders and valleys, and then several cars with royal servants who recognized us and sped ahead to announce our coming. We were within sight of the Palace when a car came to meet us, and half an hour before sunset we were ushered into the marble-floored vestibule and up the marble staircase into the King's reception room.

The journey from Riyadh to Taif had taken us two and a half days. The distance is six hundred miles. We covered it in thirty-one hours of actual driving or at an average rate of about twenty miles per hour. We had made the whole trip from Bahrain in six days. A camel caravan would have taken from thirty to forty-five days to cover that distance.

The King has changed but little since I last saw him. He was most cordial in his greeting; and all during my two months' stay he was ever kind and cordial. Physically he is perhaps a bit stouter than he was a few years ago, and now has a sprinkling of gray hairs. He still captivates his callers by his very charm and graciousness. One day as I was sitting in his reception room a white-bearded old religious leader called. As the visitor was crossing the room toward the royal seat, the King arose,

took several steps toward him, extended his hand, smiled most graciously and led him to the seat at his right, saying that he had not learned of the old man's arrival until that very morning but that had he known he would have called on him. "We are duty bound and rejoice to honor you. You are our father in age, also in wisdom and we respect and honor you, etc., etc."

I was told of a leading Moslem from India who had written and spoken much against the Wahhabis and their chief, especially after their capture of the Hedjaz. In due time he came to Mecca on a pilgrimage. The King through a mutual friend had the Indian pay a visit to him, and just the personal contact made a loyal admirer out of a bitter enemy.

The government is rather hard pressed just now financially. This year there were only about 20,000 pilgrims instead of 100,000. The government budget is still on the basis it was on four years ago, and not till this year have they begun to cut down expenses. The government is considerably behind in paying bills and salaries, but no more and perhaps less than more highly complicated governments. One thing is certain, the King himself is not amassing great wealth. Compared to the rulers of native states in India he is a poor man. True, the government is practically a one-man government, and all the possessions of the government are his, but that is only in property and rolling stock—cars particularly. It would be unthinkable for the King to amass unlimited quantities of gold, as did his predecessor in the Hedjaz. I was told that on one occasion he told a group of merchants to be careful of the common people, and not to rob them, adding, "Rob me as much as you can, others are doing it too, but I do not want you to put heavy burdens on the people." There is now a Dutch Financial Adviser with offices in Jidda. It is too early to tell how much he can accomplish.

Certainly, Arabia has not been so knit together for years, if ever. In no country is life or property more safe

than there. Crime is at a minimum, and raiding by Bedouins is hardly known. The rebel Bedouins received such a crushing blow two years ago that it will probably be a long time before they dare make another attempt. The recent attempt of Ibn Rifadah, coming out of his hiding place in Trans-Jordania, is illustrative of what happens. He expected, apparently, a general uprising, and Egyptian and Continental newspapers led the public to expect as much. Yet he could not lure more than four hundred men to his banners. The King was slow in attacking, giving him plenty of time to raise recruits; in the meantime, carefully completing his own preparations. When all was ready the whole force was wiped out, the leader being among the dead. Just before this battle some twenty citizens of Jidda and Mecca were suddenly arrested and sent to Riyadh for safe keeping. There was pretty strong evidence that they had been corresponding with and giving secret information to enemies. After the slaughter they were released.

My chief regret is that so little progressive work for internal development and improvement is done. There is no development of primary education. The plan to send a score or more promising boys and young men out of the country for schooling has fallen flat. The plan for dispensaries and hospitals has not advanced, except in a very limited way. Too much money has been and is being spent on motor cars, petrol, and personal expenses. The Saoud family is rapidly getting more numerous, and their upkeep is keeping pace with their numbers. On the other hand, progressive legislation and its execution is a very difficult task. The King is far in advance of his citizens, and it means pushing or pulling them where they have no interests. Then, too, men who can really help him in guiding and executing governmental affairs are rare in his own land. Nearly all his chief advisers and department heads are at present Syrians with a scattering of Egyptians, Nejdies and Hedjazies. The medical department is a case in point. For several years this de-

partment was receiving £30,000 annually for its expenses. Yet from what I saw and what I learned of it, the government is not nearly getting its money's worth.

We were given the third floor of the same building in which the Taif government dispensary had its quarters on the first floor. There were two doctors in Taif, the regular dispensary man, and the surgeon, who had come from Mecca about three weeks before to look after the case for which we were called. Patients were few and far between, certainly not more than twenty-five daily. The Director of Health for Hedjaz arrived from Mecca the day after we did and remained there all the time. He was told by the King to give us a place to work and to prepare an operating room, which he did and did well. At once that dispensary was crowded with patients, the street was jammed, the hallway, the stairs and the corridors to our living rooms as well. This was a great surprise to me, for I had no idea that we would get any rush of patients. It did not take us very long to fill the ward space allowed us, and we had to slow down.

After remaining there a month I asked for permission to leave and this was granted. People had been coming from Jidda, Mecca, Medina and many smaller places. Many more inquiries were coming in, asking about the length of our stay. When they learned we were leaving, a petition signed by about two hundred citizens was presented to the King asking him to have us stay at least another month. We promised another two weeks. When that was up, some special friends of the King from Mecca sent him a telegram and a messenger asking that I be detained to treat some members of their family. After that I was detained some more because of the illness of the Amir of Jidda; and lastly I was detained several days in Riadh by telegraphic orders of the King to treat a member of his family there.

In one respect this tour was different from any other of my experience, in that we had to work with other doctors. Our relationship was very pleasant throughout,

and they helped us in every way possible. The surgeon was especially helpful. Every afternoon we operated together and it was a pleasure to both of us. He is a man of about thirty-eight years, born in Mecca, educated in Beirut and in the French medical school there. Then he returned to Mecca and became the Director of Public Health under King Hussain. When Ibn Saoud came he was dismissed but later was given a position as government doctor. After a couple of years he went to Europe to study surgery, where he spent two and a half years, mostly in Paris. On his return he was appointed surgeon to the Mecca hospital and the Hedjaz Department of Health. He is an able man, but not very happy in his post.

I met many people from Mecca,—Arabs, Indians, Javanese, Bokharies, etc. Mecca must have a very mixed population. It is said that there are at least five thousand Javanese and many more of mixed parentage; the Bokharies from Chinese Turkestan number at least two thousand.

One of the most interesting Meccans was the Keeper of the keys of the Ka'aba (House of God). This office has been kept by the family of Shaibah since Mohammed appointed them. The old man, now Sheikh, is very proud of the fact that the Koran charges their family with that trust. He is over eighty years old and is ailing with a malignant illness. In spite of his close proximity to the "house of God" all his life, he is terribly afraid of death. I was a frequent visitor to his house and always found him and his family very friendly and congenial. A grandson spoke English fairly well.

When the Ikhwan attacked Taif, this family, like many Meccans in the summer, was living in Taif. There was considerable slaughter and one of the Sheikh's sons was killed before his eyes. He wept most bitterly and with red eyes and profuse tears was dragged by some Ikhwan to their chief who asked him why he was weeping so. The old man responded that he was weeping for

joy for now the real Muslimin had come to the Hedjaz and, glory be to God, he could now die as a real Moslem. This answer so pleased the Ikhwan Sheikh that he released the old "Keeper of the Keys," for he had now professed his conversion to true Islam.

Another interesting group were some Indians from Delhi, here called Dehlawies. They were loyal supporters of Ibn Saoud; in fact were accused by the Ashraf of having been in communication with him during the reign of Sharif Hussain. The one with whom I became best acquainted had had a price placed on his head by the former King. These people have lived in Mecca for a hundred years or more but still maintain their Indian dress, food, language and customs. Their women speak no Arabic. They also have more of the milk of human kindness in their make-up, a quality perhaps acquired in India. They were appointed by the King to distribute alms among the needy of Taif after its capture by the Ikhwan and to restore the aqueduct leading water into Mecca when it was damaged; and they paid a good deal of this out of their own pockets. Obaid Allah Dehlawy had never seen a Christian until he met me. Now he is anxious to see a Jew!

The Ashraf and Sayyad are also an interesting group. Their number is legion. During the reign of the Turks many of them lived in Istanbul, and, I was told, received allowances from the Turkish government. Soon after Mustafa Kemal became dictator, these allowances were stopped and they were reduced to poverty. Many of them had some property in the Hedjaz and returned, hoping to live on the income of that. Naturally, they are not overwhelmed with enthusiasm for the Wahhabi government but they are making the best of their lot.

The dinners we were invited to were very interesting. One variety was probably in Turkish style though my host claimed it to be Hedjazy; perhaps it was a mixture of the two. Plates, knives, forks and spoons were used, though fingers were called upon to assist. A tablecloth was either

spread on the floor or on a low table about a foot above the floor. Food in large bowls was placed on the middle of the table and each person helped himself. When one course was finished, the bowls were removed, clean plates, forks and spoons supplied and a new course brought on. Eight or nine courses were customary. For the benefit of our housekeepers I give one of the menus: soup, rice and mutton, spiced meat stuffed in cucumber jackets, pudding, stuffed tomatoes, spiced meat in dough jackets (pigs in blanket), chicken, meat *pilau*, fruit.

Several dinners were very plain,—roasted sheep and plain white rice with clarified butter and fruit. The Syrians also put on several very fine dinners. My chief objection was the long wait for these meals. It seems to be their custom to have their after dinner conversation before dinner, for we invariably had to wait from one to two hours. There were some very interesting conversations too. One of the men was a very well read Arab historian, and history, philology and biography were the chief topics of conversation. Many a good story, usually at the expense of the devil or the *jinn*, was also told. Religion and politics were very carefully avoided on such occasions. The long waits for food had to be filled in some way, so one man conveniently sent for the barber. He sat in the bay window of the parlor getting his hair cut and beard trimmed, while the doctors were asked by another diner to examine his abdomen as he lay on a couch in another bay window, his shirt pulled up over his head.

Abd el Latif, former Customs Director of Kuwait, was also in Taif, a guest of the King. He had just been to Iraq, Persia and Syria, developing a scheme and a company to carry pilgrims from those countries to Mecca. Concessions must be gained from these various governments as well as the Nejd-Hedjaz government. The chief obstacle seems to be that each country wants the lion's share of the profits and it seems as though either the poor pilgrims will be robbed or the company make no divi-