

## LORD OF ARABIA

chains to Constantinople. There before the Mosque of Santa Sophia where the Great Square runs down to the foot of the Bosphorus, the Turks beheaded him with much ceremony.

Then, weary of the harsh land, the Turks and Egyptians established a few garrisons and went gladly home, leaving the Arabs to themselves.

Like sand before the wind the Wahabi Empire of Saud the Great was gone. Nejd lay broken. With no strong man to unite and lead them, the Arabs split once more into quarrelling tribes. All Arabia was ripped into pieces by wars, raids, tribe raiding tribe while their sheiks plotted and intrigued, murdered their kinsfolk and rivals and were in turn murdered. Throughout the nineteenth century Arabia was again a land of bloodshed and strife, a land of brutality and violence where no man's life was safe and to which few travellers came.

Thus it was when, in 1880, on a November morning, at the time when the *muezzins* were calling to the dawn-prayer, there was born, in the palace at Riad, to Abdur Rahman, one of the descendants of Saud the Great and to Sarah his wife, a son whom they named Abdul Aziz, but who was known, after his great ancestor, as Ibn Saud.

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

IBN SAUD was brought up in a wing of the palace. He was suckled by his mother, who was the daughter of one Ahmed Sudairi, a headman of the Dawasir tribe from the south, a big-built woman of a stock from which big men had come. Like all Arab women of good family she had been veiled since the age of seven and shut away indoors with the other women behind latticed windows and locked doors in the palace harem. She rarely went out, and then only heavily veiled, with a negro slave as escort, and to visit other women. Like other Arab women also, she had never been taught to read or write, and except for women's gossip she was ignorant of what went on in the outside world, so that she could neither be a companion nor take any part in the active lives of her men, but she had a shrewd judgment of values. She was devout, and with an innate common sense that made her wise in advice, so that at home she had much influence with her husband and her children.

The palace was an immense, sprawling building of halls and chambers and dark twisting corridors, built round a central courtyard and inside a high wall, but it had no plan, for it had grown haphazardly. As more rooms were required, new houses had been built, connected into the rest by passages and overhead bridges, and the outer wall extended to take them in, until the palace filled all the centre of the town.

As soon as he was weaned, Ibn Saud was taken from the women's quarters and handed over to a negro slave who

became responsible for him and his safety. As he grew up he often visited his mother, was petted and spoiled by her and the other women of the harem, and played with his elder sister Nura, but from that time on his place was with the men.

With him were brought up a number of slave boys of his own age, who were his companions until he grew up and then they became his comrades and the most trusted of his body-guard. Almost as soon as he could walk his father, Abdur-Rahman, took him in hand.

Abdur Rahman was both devout and strict. He was the Imam, the Leader of the Wahabis. Their *ulema*, their Elders or Doctors of the Law, ruled them with a rod of iron. They were dour men, lean in body and outlook, who saw all life with the uncompromising eyes of the fanatic. They allowed themselves no luxury or even comfort. Their houses were bare and drab, their mosques without minarets, domes or any decorations, and they refused all the pleasant things: wine, fine food, tobacco, soft clothes. Singing and music they forbade, and they even frowned on laughter, and they stamped out of life all joy, lest their thoughts might be led away from concentration on God. Their only indulgence was sex and their women. Their God was a stern God demanding absolute service of them. To those who served Him He was kind and merciful, but to the forward and unrepentant He was hard and unforgiving. They were His devoted people, lifted up over the heads of all mankind, with a mission to make all men His servants, even by the sword.

Abdur Rahman made no exceptions for his children. He brought them up as strict Wahabis. He sent Ibn Saud to school in Riad. The boy idled and played and showed

no inclination for book-learning but, by the time he was seven, he was devoutly and regularly attending the public prayers with his father in the Great Mosque five times a day, keeping the Fast, and could intone verses from the Koran.

Abdur Rahman had but one purpose in life. Either he, or, if he failed, his sons after him, must refound the Empire of Saud the Great, knit all Arabs into one people, and convert them into devout Wahabis.

He taught his sons that this was their duty: that this was a task for which God had chosen them. It would mean war, hardship, fighting, and for these he prepared them. He taught Ibn Saud to use a sword and a rifle, to leap in one on to a horse and gallop without saddle or stirrups. To harden him to fatigue he sent him on long journeys. He made him rise regularly two hours before dawn, even in the winter mornings when the winds swept cold and bleak down from the plateau. He made him walk barefooted at midday on the blistering rocks and the sand under the fierce summer sun, and he encouraged him to test his strength, to wrestle and compete with other boys, and to ration himself in food, water and sleep.

Ibn Saud grew up rapidly into a lanky boy, tall and big-boned in contrast to his father who was short and thick-set. He was muscular and hard, full of energy, rarely still, and with a temper that flashed out like lightning and died away as quickly as it came.

But he knew nothing beyond the narrow life of Riad. Behind the desert the town was shut off from the outside world. Its people were haughty as well as puritan. They despised and disliked all foreigners. Their only contacts with the outside world were the caravan merchants, who at rare intervals dared the trade-routes which ran through

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the empty deserts and which were infested by bands of raiding bedouin; and who brought to Riad cloth and brass-work from Ojair and Kuwait on the Persian Gulf; or those from the Red Sea Coast who came with coffee from the Yemen, and with incense, spices and negro slaves from Africa, and who couched their camels and unloaded their bales in the open space before the palace and passed their news.

## CHAPTER II

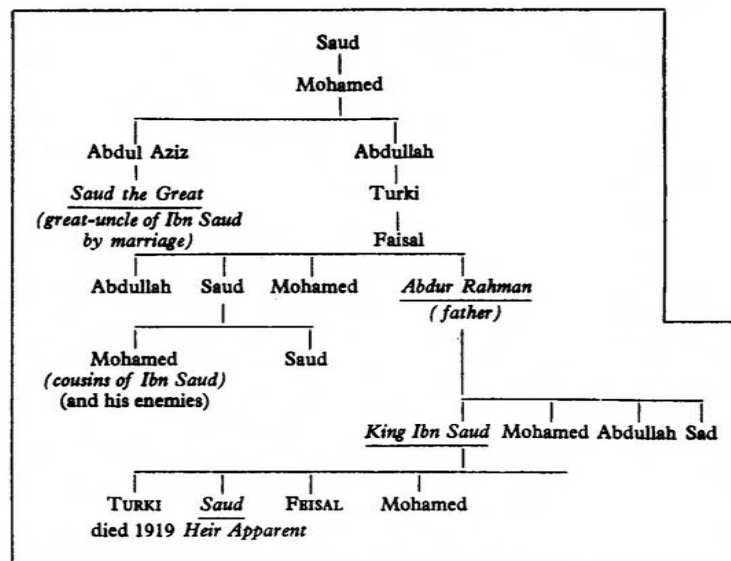
THOSE were days of danger and constant alarms. The country round the town of Riad itself was full of raiding parties of uncontrolled bedouin. Away to the north the Shammar tribes had united under one Mohamed ibn Rashid, a capable, ambitious man, who had made his capital in the town of Hail and who coveted Riad and the other rich villages of Nejd.

Riad was strongly fortified. Round it ran a high wall, turreted, bastioned, and loopholed, along which sentries kept watch night and day. No one entered without being inspected and cross-questioned. At sundown and three times a day, when all the men were in the mosques at prayer, the iron-studded gates of the town were swung to and bolted against all comers.

The palace was a fort also, for Riad itself was torn with civil war. Abdur Rahman was one of four brothers. For ten years his elder brothers Abdullah and Saud had quarrelled and fought backwards and forwards for the mastery. Abdullah had driven out Saud, who had escaped and settled with the Ajman tribes who lived in the province known as the Hasa, to the east. Allied with the Ajmans

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### FAMILY OF KING IBN SAUD



he had raided back into Riad, and driven out Abdullah. He died suddenly, and Abdullah returned, but the sons of Saud kept up the quarrel.

Between the two, the people of Riad were split into factions. They brawled and fought in the streets, and murdered and fought in the palace itself.

Abdur Rahman, together with his fourth brother, Mohamed, tried to act as peacemaker. He pleaded with both sides, warning them that the Rashid would take the first chance to attack them, but he failed, for they were full of venom and threatened him as well so that he had to defend himself and his family in his own wing of the palace.

Finally the sons of Saud collected the Ajman tribesmen once more, took Riad, and imprisoned Abdullah.

In the confusion the Rashid swooped down, captured Riad, drove out the sons of Saud, took Abdullah prisoner to Hail and put in his own governor, a sheik of the Shammar, called Salim.

In the fighting Mohamed was killed by Obaid a cousin of the Rashid.

Abdur Rahman, because of his reputation as a peace-maker and because he had great influence with the Wahabis, the Rashid left in the palace with his family.

Abdullah fell sick. A Persian doctor, passing through Hail on his way to Mecca for the pilgrimage, was called in and warned the Rashid that Abdullah was dying. The Rashid, not wanting to be accused of murdering Abdullah, called Abdur Rahman to Hail and ordered him to take his brother back to Riad. Hardly had they arrived before Abdullah died.

### CHAPTER III

ABDUR RAHMAN was now head of the family. Abdullah had been a poor, weak-kneed, sickly creature, but Abdur Rahman was proud and stout-hearted. He would not sit placid while Riad lay helpless in the hand of the foreigner. He meant to rule. He would chase the Rashid out and free the town.

He set to work without delay. He tried to come to terms with his nephews, the sons of his brother Saud, and get their help, but they refused: they treated him as an usurper and claimed that they, and not he, had the right to leadership.

None the less he planned a rising in the town simultane-

ous with an attack from outside. He held secret meetings with the Nejdi leaders and urged them to rouse the townsfolk of Riad. He sent messengers through the villages and the tribes, but he met with little response. The people were afraid. There was a strong garrison of the Rashid's men in the fort which dominated the town. Once before they had risen and failed, and Salim had hanged and imprisoned many without mercy.

Abdur Rahman worked on undismayed. He was in constant danger, for he was surrounded by spies and traitors, the enemy's spies and the confederates of his nephews, who would have betrayed him at the first opportunity to their common enemy.

Before he could make any effective preparations, however, the Rashid found out what he was at and sent orders to Salim to do away with him and to teach the town a lesson.

Salim decided to take drastic action. Once and for all he would be finished with these turbulent Sauds. They were all stiff-necked and quarrelsome. As long as any remained, there would be neither peace nor security in Riad. The Great Festival was coming to an end, and on the last day it was customary to make visits and exchange congratulations. He decided to catch Abdur Rahman by a trick—he would pay him a formal visit taking his guards with him and after he had talked for a while he would ask for the males of the Saud family to be called so that he might speak with them all. As soon as they were assembled his guards should surround and kill them.

But Abdur Rahman had news of this. Prepared or not, he would fight: better to be killed fighting than to have his throat cut without resistance, so he armed such men as he had, and set them ready.

Salim arrived at the appointed hour, his guards round him, and Abdur Rahman received him in full state in the Audience Chamber of the Palace. To one side, so that Salim should have no suspicions, sat a few of the family, and among them, though still only a child, was Ibn Saud with his negro slave.

The two men exchanged greetings and congratulations full of fair words. With ceremony they performed all the courtesies, begged each other to be seated first, drank coffee together, talked pleasantly of trifles, while each hid what was in his mind as he watched the other and waited for the time to act—until Salim asked that the rest of the family might be called.

Then Abdur Rahman motioned to a slave and gave the arranged signal. His men came swarming into the Audience Chamber with their swords drawn. Overwhelming and killing his guards, they seized Salim and dragged him away.

Standing behind the huge negro slave who protected him, and peering out under an arm, the boy, Ibn Saud, for the first time, saw blood shed in anger.

Immediately the whole town flared up, chased out the Rashid garrison, and prepared to resist. The villagers and the neighbouring tribes joined in.

The Rashid hurried down to crush the revolt, and Abdur Rahman went out to meet him. For weeks they fought in the desultory manner of the desert, a raid here, a skirmish there, but always Abdur Rahman was beaten back, until he was besieged in Riad, and all the country round was in the hands of the Rashid.

As the weeks went by, food and water began to run short in the town. The enemy were cutting down the palms, destroying the irrigation channels and the wells, and mak-

ing a desolation of the gardens. The townsfolk demanded that Abdur Rahman made terms, but he refused. When they threatened to rise against him, very reluctantly, for he would have fought to the bitter end, he sent out a party with a flag of truce. With the party, as surety for his father, went the boy Ibn Saud.

They found the Rashid ready to treat, for he wished to be gone: his men were deserting, tired of the drudgery of the siege, and because there was no loot for them, so he quickly agreed. As soon as Salim had been handed over to him uninjured, he appointed Abdur Rahman to act as his governor in Riad and then withdrew.

But, as he retired, the tribes rose against him, and Abdur Rahman collecting his men hurried out to join them.

With him he took Ibn Saud. The boy was now ten years old, and the time had come to blood him for war. Perched up on a camel, with his negro slave gripping on behind the saddle, he rode with the fighting men as they raided out after the Rashid.

But the Rashid turned. He smashed the tribes and came tearing back on Abdur Rahman. This time he would be finished with these vipers of Sauds.

## CHAPTER IV

ABDUR RAHMAN could not stand for a fight. His men were a handful and afraid of the Rashid: they had begun to desert: the tribesmen who had joined him had already dispersed, so he must make for Riad. To get behind its walls was his only chance.

Slinging Ibn Saud up into a saddle-bag on his camel, and almost alone except for his fighting slaves, he hurried



back and prepared to defend the town. But the townsmen would not listen to him. They would not have another siege. It meant ruin for them. They wanted peace.

Close on his heels came the Rashid, swearing vengeance. Salim had been right, he said: the Sauds were a brood of snakes, treacherous, dangerous, not to be trusted; this time he would show them no mercy; he would wipe them out.

Late one night Abdur Rahman roused his family; they must be gone—and at once; they must run for safety; there was no time to spare; the Shammar scouts had been seen only a few miles away, coming down from the north; the enemy would be at the gates in a few hours. In the dark the women packed up into bundles all that they could carry, while the slaves carried the bundles out to the courtyard and roped them on to the camels. The women clambered up above the bundles. Ibn Saud and his brother Mohamed rode one camel, and before the dawn broke Abdur Rahman led the caravan out by the eastern gate of the town.

Travelling rapidly through the palm-groves and so into the Dahna Desert beyond, with scouts thrown out on the flanks to defend them against a sudden attack, they came safely into the Hasa country. There Abdur Rahman claimed sanctuary with Hithlain the Sheik of the Ajman tribes.

The Ajman gave him protection—the code of the desert forced them to do that—but with a bad grace. The sons of Saud, who were living among them and had intermarried with them, went through the encampments urging that the refugees be expelled. The Rashid demanded their surrender.

Abdur Rahman decided that there was no safety among the Ajman: they might turn on him at any moment. He distrusted them, for they were always treacherous and

unstable, so he arranged for his family to go to the Island of Bahrain, the Island of the Pearl Fishers, in the Persian Gulf, and Ibn Saud who had been ill with a type of rheumatic fever, he sent with the rest.

Then, refusing to accept defeat, he turned to look for helpers to recover Riad, but none of the sheiks would ally with him, so collecting a few bedouin, who were always ready if there was promise of loot, he raided up to Riad, but the people of Nejd gave him no help, and he was easily driven off by the Rashid garrison.

As he returned, the Turkish Governor of the Hasa sent for him. The Turks were nominally the suzerain lords of all Arabia. In reality they held only the rich fringes, the Yemen, the Asir and the Hejaz on the Red Sea coast, with Syria on the north, and southwards by Mesopotamia down to Baghdad, and the provinces of Kuwait and of the Hasa, which ran along the western shore of the Persian Gulf and where they had garrisons in Hofuf, its capital, and in the other towns. In the interior and the inner desert they had no power or control.

Their policy was simple. Their object was to keep the tribes of the Interior from attacking them and from breaking out. To do this they played for a balance of power, setting one sheik against another, creating rivalries, helping the weak against the strong and supporting the defeated. The complete defeat of the Sauds did not suit them, for the Rashid had become too strong and upset their calculations.

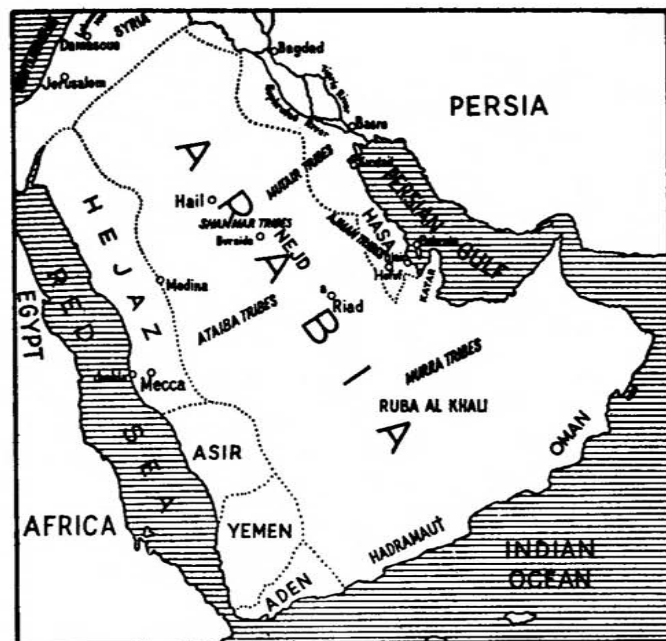
The Governor treated Abdur Rahman with great respect. He offered, with the help of regular Turkish troops and artillery, to send him back to rule Nejd, on condition that he accepted a Turkish garrison in Riad, acknowledged Turkish suzerainty, and paid tribute.

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To this Abdur Rahman gave a blunt refusal. He was first and foremost an Arab and a Wahabi. The Turks were for him invaders and worse than infidels. He would not let them come interfering into Riad. He told them so without compromise, and they marked him down as a dangerous man. They remembered that twenty years before he had led a rising against them in the Hasa itself. At that moment there was trouble throughout the province: the Sheik of Qatar was known to be involved: Abdur Rahman had been visiting the sheik. The Turks suspected that he was behind the present trouble, so they increased their garrisons and threatened both the sheik and Abdur Rahman.

With danger pressing on his heels, driven from pillar to post, a refugee, with the Rashid, the Ajman, with his nephews and the Turks after him, Abdur Rahman, taking with him Ibn Saud, who was now recovered of his fever, made southwards until he came to the palm oasis of Jabrin, and then on into the Great Waste, the Ruba al Khali, the Empty Quarter of Arabia, which stretched five hundred miles of empty desolation and sand down to the Indian Ocean. By the salt-water wells of Khiran he found the encampments of the Murra tribesmen come out of the Great Waste to graze their droves of camels in the low scrub. From them Abdur Rahman claimed protection.

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Map of Arabia in 1900

## CHAPTER V

For many months Ibn Saud lived with his father among the Murra tribes. With them were his younger brother, Mohamed, and his cousin, Jiluwi, a dark, saturnine youth, very dour in manner, who rarely spoke, but was always ready for any adventure. His mother and the women were safe in Bahrain.

The life was crude and brutal. The Murra were the most primitive of all the tribes of Arabia, long-haired, lean men with wild eyes and crafty faces. They lived almost as the animals and but little above the starvation line. Their food was a few dates gathered in the season at Jabrin and carefully rationed out to last the year, camels' milk—for the water of the wells of Khiran was salty and bitter and unfit for men to drink—and occasionally meat, when the hunters killed a gazelle, a sand deer, or a hare. More often their only meat was the *jabru* rats which lived in the rocks, and the tough horny *dhab* lizards, and sometimes a few ostrich eggs found in the sand—things not fit for the pious Moslem to eat. Their greatest luxury was a little camels' liver rubbed in salt and eaten full of blood.

They had no villages, but moved continuously, driving their camels in search of scrub fodder, and wherever there was a little grass. They were the terror of all the other tribes, for without warning they would raid out of the Great Waste, killing and plundering, attacking caravans, and then race back into the safety of the vast waterless steppes where no one could follow them. They raided even as far as the Hadramaut, four hundred miles to the south, and stole the famous milch camels of the Terim and the red riding camels of Oman.

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Among them Ibn Saud became the complete bedouin, living in the wide desert, often without a tent or any covering, under the open sky and the stars. He traveled with them, raided and hunted, and they taught him the ways of the desert: how to track by footmarks and the signs in the sand; how to handle camels on a long journey, doctor their pads and cure them of mange; how to travel distances with only a handful of dates and a skin of curdled milk.

From a boy he became an unkempt bedouin youth. The constant danger, the everlasting alarms, and the hardships toughened his body, and taught him reliance. It made him as lean as leather and at all times ready for action.

But for Abdur Rahman this life was purgatory, for he despised the Murra. They were unclean, loose livers, worse than infidels; they were all but pagans with no religion. To be a refugee among them hurt his pride and roused all his religious indignation. He had at times persuaded them to raid into the Rashid country, but the Rashid was too powerful for such raids to have any effect. Though he never lost heart and was for ever urging it on his sons, he saw little hope of attaining his great ambition of reforming the Empire of Saud or even of recovering Riad. He was over fifty and tired of this life, and he wanted to get back where he could have his wives and his children round him. He sent messengers to many of the sheiks asking for protection, but without success, for he had many and powerful enemies and would be a danger. At last, when he had all but given up hope, Mohamed, the Sheik of Kuwait sent him an invitation to visit Kuwait, and promised him a monthly allowance while he stayed there.

The reason was simple. There had come to the Hasa a new Turkish Governor, Hafiz Pasha, who realized that he



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needed Abdur Rahman. The Rashid had grown so strong that he had become a menace both to the Turks and to Kuwait. Abdur Rahman would be the best counterpoise to the Rashid: he could use the Sauds against the Rashids and so quiet the Rashid. Knowing Abdur Rahman's pride he agreed secretly with Mohamed of Kuwait to invite Abdur Rahman and his family, and he guaranteed Mohamed an allowance from the Turkish Government to keep his guests.

Abdur Rahman accepted the invitation gladly, collected his family from Bahrain, and with a tired sigh of satisfaction settled down in Kuwait.

## PART II CHAPTER VI

KUWAIT lay at the head of the Persian Gulf, an Arab town of sun-dried bricks of yellow clay and twisting alleys, crouching on a low shore—the houses coming down to a sandy beach and a shallow harbour protected by some primitive breakwaters. In the sunlight it lay a patch of staring yellow between the sea glare and the red desert that stretched away beyond it into the heat haze. There was not a garden nor a patch of green nor even a tree to rest the eye—except a few stunted tamarisk trees which fought with the sand.

The Sauds lived in a small one-storied house of three rooms grouped round a courtyard. The rooms were low, with windows of unglazed glass and heavily barred and shuttered. The roofs were flimsily built of thin rafters on which were laid palm-mats covered with beaten mud. It was in a street which was a twisting alley that ran down to that end of the foreshore where the shipwrights and the sailmakers worked and where the pearl fishers hauled up and beached their boats. The filth of the town and the offal of the harbour covered the shore and stank under the sun and the flies.

The Sauds were crowded in their three rooms, for they were a large family. After the spacious palace at Riad with its servants and slaves and the open life with the Murra, this drab town existence weighed heavily on them, and they were very poor.

The Sheik rarely paid the allowance he had promised because the Turkish Government rarely paid him, and