

LORD OF ARABIA

the mosques and the fort wall, to warn the people that he had captured the fort.

The population of Riad rose. They were tired of the Rashid and his injustices. They wiped out the other posts of Rashid soldiers in the town, and welcomed Ibn Saud with open arms. The remainder of the garrison in the fort surrendered. Ibn Saud was master of Riad.

PART III

CHAPTER XV

IBN SAUD had taken Riad, but he held little else. The villagers and tribesmen of Nejd still would not rise and join him. They had often before seen a town taken by a raid and lost within the same day. For twenty years the Sauds had been continually beaten by the Rashid. They waited cautiously. Only a few hundred hardy ones joined him. With these, his old companions, and the people of Riad he could not hope to stand up to the Rashid with his prestige and all his thousands of fighting men of the Shammar tribes behind him.

Riad he was determined to hold at all costs, so he set to work to make it impregnable before the Rashid counter-attacked, and the whole population turned out to help him. In many places the walls were broken. They built them up with feverish energy, expecting an attack at any moment. They re-dug the moat and built towers and loopholes for rifles. They brought in provisions and stored them, and unearthed rifles and ammunition which had been hidden during the rule of the Rashid. Ibn Saud worked out the details of the defence and organized the men into a garrison.

When the news of this came to the Rashid he sneered.

"The poor fool", he said, "he is as a bird that has flown into the snare". For the moment he was busy with other things. He considered Ibn Saud of no great importance. As soon as he was ready he would come down and teach

this cheap, filibustering raider and the people of Riad a lesson: he would show them that they could not murder his Governor and flout him in this way.

Ibn Saud had no intention of being caught in any snare. He had no military training: he knew nothing of the maxims of Napoleon, but he had an instinctive military sense which warned him not to get caught in the walled town by a superior force. Riad he would make able to stand a siege, but he himself would get out into the open country and keep his mobility of action.

He sent word of his success to his father begging him to come to Riad as he would trust the defence of the town to no one else.

Abdur Rahman slipped quietly away out of Kuwait with his son Abdullah, and taking the road into the Hasa made for Riad. He had to travel with caution, for the whole countryside was full of the Rashid's men, and the Rashid himself was advancing on Riad. Ibn Saud sent Jiluwi with 150 horsemen to meet him. By taking unfrequented tracks across the Dahna Desert, they came at last, after many difficulties, safe to Riad.

The people of Riad received Abdur Rahman as their ruler with acclaim. A few days later he summoned the ulema, the Doctors of the Law, and the notables and before them abdicated his rights and nominated Ibn Saud as his successor. He gave him as a symbol the sword of Saud the Great, which, for a hundred years, had been handed down by the Sauds from father to son. It was a fine sword, the blade of Damascus steel, the handle covered with gold, and the scabbard inlaid with silver.

Though a man of action and a fighter, even in his youth

Abdur Rahman had been studious and devout. As he grew older he became more sedentary and even more religious. He spent long hours in reading the Koran and the Holy Writings. He shut himself away in contemplation. He was always ready to advise and encourage his sons, but he did not wish to lead them any more. It required a young man to lead in the fighting that was ahead.

Ibn Saud treated his father as before with great respect. At public prayers he stood behind him, letting the old man take the place of Imam, Leader of the Prayers. He deferred to him often, listened to his advice, but from now on Ibn Saud was the ruler of Riad and the claimant to rulership of Nejd and beyond that of all Arabia.

CHAPTER XVI

AS SOON as Ibn Saud was satisfied that the town could stand a siege, he handed over the defence to his father and brothers. Taking a force of picked men with a hundred camels and forty horses, and his brother Sad, he set out. Sad was his favourite brother, much like himself in build and temperament. He was only a youth, but he had the same great shoulders, the same genial manner, the same courage and love of a fight, and the same sudden bursts of fierce anger; but he had not Ibn Saud's judgement or self-control.

Keeping Riad as his base Ibn Saud made to the south, into the districts known as the Aflaj and the Harj, which formed the southern half of Nejd. Here the sheiks were of the Dawasir tribes and related to his mother, and the people were stout-hearted and had always been hostile to the Rashid.

He worked on a definite scheme. He went from village to village, rousing the people, organizing their defences, giving them arms, and now and again putting in a few fighting men to encourage them.

The Rashid soldiers came after him, but they could never corner him, for he never stopped to fight, but moved at a great speed. They found the whole countryside bit by bit prepared against them. If they went into a village they might be caught in an ambush. If they attacked the villagers would resist, and suddenly out of the blue would come Ibn Saud on their rear. He raided their camps at night. If a detachment were isolated he surrounded and wiped it out. They had successes, took a village, beat Ibn Saud off with loss, but always he came back, and the villagers and tribesmen were filled with a new spirit and fought them.

The fear of Ibn Saud grew on them. He came tearing down on them unexpectedly from all directions. He became a legend. His taking of Riad with six men was told all round the camp-fires and grew in the telling. He had throttled a man with one hand. The legend grew until he was a giant twice the size of ordinary men. He had taken on three men at once and split all three open with his sword. He had carried off a man in a fight, picking him up at full gallop, slinging him across the horse, and then let him go with a present as if he did it out of pure devilment. He covered distances with such speed that he appeared to be in two places at once.

The Rashid determined to be done with all this. Though a bad ruler, he was a good soldier. He realized that he had under-estimated Ibn Saud. Collecting a large force of Shammar tribesmen he came south from Hail to deal with him.

When he was near Riad his spies warned him that the town was now walled and garrisoned and ready to resist him: he would have to besiege it if he wished to take it. His advisers urged him to occupy the wells round the town and cut off the water supply, but he did not want a siege: he wanted a dramatic capture when he could make an example of the rebels. He had heard that Ibn Saud had bolted south and was afraid to meet him. He would go after him. Dilam, the capital of the Harj, which lay south of Riad, had declared for Ibn Saud. He would feint at Riad, but pass it and make straight for Dilam.

His manœuvre succeeded. He reached the village of Najan, four miles to the north of Dilam, unnoticed, and rested for the night. He would march into Dilam by daylight in full state and make an example of the town.

CHAPTER XVII

IBN SAUD was far away down in the south. As soon as he heard of the Rashid's advance he realized that the crucial time was come. His taking of Riad was a quick raid, of no great permanent military value except that it had given him prestige. Now he must meet the Rashid in the open and fight him. He had sent out the reports of his own flight to draw the enemy as far south as possible.

He set to work to collect a force. His own men were a mere handful, good for a raid but useless for a battle. Day and night he travelled up and down the country, urging the headmen of the villages and the sheiks of the tribes to join him; but they were fearful and lagged. They came only reluctantly. They were still afraid of the Rashid and his Shammar fighters. Gradually Ibn Saud drove out their fears and roused them to enthusiasm.

He worked continuously. He slept little. He ate sparingly and as he travelled. He covered great distances and spent all the hours of rest in earnest argument, more wearying than travelling, until even his constitution felt the strain. At last he had collected a thousand fighting men and given them a rendezvous at the village of Hauta, when late one afternoon a scout riding hard brought the news that the Rashid lay at Najan, ready to attack Dilam.

There was no time to lose. It was seventy miles from Hauta to Dilam. With all the men who had arrived he set off. He must get there before dawn. To mislead any spies he gave out that he was going westwards and rode north along the foot of the Tuwaiq hills.

He urged his men to hurry. His own riding camel was fast, but she was tired so that in the dark she often stumbled on the rough ground and once, when he struck her with his riding cane, she fell and threw him. A bedouin riding close behind him tripped over him and came down with a crash with his camel on top of him. Behind came more men and camels. Out of the tumult, camels roaring and struggling, men shouting, confusion, his guards dragged Ibn Saud free. He was badly bruised and partly stunned.

As soon as he could sit up he climbed back into the saddle. He would not halt a minute. All that night he drove his men, whipping up the laggards, keeping the straggling column of camel and horsemen together, urging them forward. He was in great pain, but refused to give in and allowed neither his men nor himself any rest, so that they reached Dilam while it was still dark.

To the north of the town towards Najan was a belt of palm-trees. In these Ibn Saud distributed his force. Entering the town with his guards he ordered the gates to be closed and the walls to be manned.

Then he collapsed. He was worn out. For seven days he had been continuously on the move without sleep and with only a handful of dates for food. His guards carried him into a house, rubbed him with oil and wrapped him in blankets, and he slept until the call to the midday prayer. Then he woke, stiff and sore from his fall, but refreshed and ready.

CHAPTER XVIII

MEANWHILE as soon as it was day, the Rashid advanced with a screen of mounted scouts ahead of his main body. As they came to the palm-groves Ibn Saud opened fire on them: four horses and six men were killed, and the rest galloped back.

The Rashid sent more men ahead, but when these were held up he realized that he had in front of him, not the townsfolk of Dilam but some regular fighting men. All that day and the next morning he tried to find out their numbers and dispositions by raids and small attacks, but Ibn Saud held his men in. He had allotted places in the line for the coming fight to each tribe, and given them orders to keep concealed, using only the minimum force to hold off the enemy's raids; and so to mislead the Rashid into thinking that he had only a few men in front of him.

He had just returned to Dilam and was sitting down to the midday meal when the alarm was sounded. The enemy were advancing across the open in a long double line. The Rashid, piqued at the holding up of his plans, had determined to walk through the resistance and brush it aside. He marched with his banners flying, his footmen in the centre, and on the flanks his cavalry brandishing their swords and shouting.

Still Ibn Saud held his fire. It was not easy, for his men

were wild with excitement at the coming fight, straining to be let go. When the enemy were close he gave the order. The sudden burst of rifle-fire staggered and broke their lines. They had expected a few stray shots and not a solid hail of bullets. They hesitated. At once with his men behind him, yelling his battle-cry, Ibn Saud rode straight at them. They gave back. They started to run. The run became a panic. After them at full gallop came Ibn Saud with his tribesmen and the people of Dilam. They smashed into the running enemy, broke them up, and drove them over the plains in full retreat with the Rashid leading the way, up past Riad and beyond until the pursuit was stopped only by lack of ammunition and the weariness of the animals.

The news went out like a flash. It was a victory: the first time for many years that a Saud had beaten the Rashid. All the Harj and the Aflaj rose, drove out the remainder of the Rashid's men and joined Ibn Saud. All southern Nejd was with him.

But the Rashid had a stout heart. He was not finished so easily. He realized that he must fight for his life, and without delay, before Ibn Saud grew any stronger. As soon as he reached Hail he collected a new force and feinted at Kuwait. Mubarak called to Ibn Saud for help. Ibn Saud marched out of Riad eastwards towards Kuwait.

This was what the Rashid wanted. Having drawn his enemy away he turned south and made a rush at Riad, but Abdur Rahman was ready for him and held him off from the walls.

As soon as the news reached Ibn Saud he did not hurry back to Riad, but cut westward across the enemy's line of retreat and harried his villages. The Shammar, afraid for their homes and families, broke up, scattered and made

homewards as fast as they could. The Rashid's army had disappeared.

Taking his chance, Ibn Saud took village after village and threw out the Rashid's men from Shagra, Thamida, and Thadiq, until he controlled the country of Nejd for fifty miles north of Riad.

CHAPTER XIX

THESE successes gave Ibn Saud a new position. He held half Nejd. He had made a name for himself as a fighter. He had driven the Rashid almost back on to his own ground. He had a considerable force, more men were coming in daily, and he could fight the Rashid in the open.

Backwards and forwards they fought all that autumn of 1902 and the spring of 1903 until a great drought and famine in that year held them up. Bit by bit Ibn Saud established himself.

It was a personal duel between Ibn Saud and the Rashid. The Rashid could count on his Shammar tribes round Hail. Ibn Saud could count on the people of Riad and the surrounding districts. These formed a nucleus. Beyond these their forces were constantly changing. Other tribes joined them, the Mutair, the Harb, the Ataiba, the Ajman, but they had no loyalty to one or the other. They were fickle and treacherous. They would change sides in a night. The pique or ambition of a sheik, the promise of gold or loot, a small defeat would set them attacking their own allies or raiding them as they retreated. There was no regular army on either side. The personalities of the leaders were the decisive factors.

The Rashid was short, dark, lowering in looks, brusque in manner; a harsh, unlovable man and ungenerous. He had no patience and no ability to handle the tribesmen.

He understood force only. He ruled by force. He fought for loot. He was a freebooter and a destroyer.

Ibn Saud was open-handed and large-hearted. He had unlimited patience. He knew how to deal with the tribesmen, how to flatter their pride and how to ignore their follies. He had the characteristics which the Arabs admire: he was generous and liberal: he was a great lover, a brave and skilful fighter, and, despite his Wahabi upbringing, he enjoyed laughter and boasting. Moreover, he had youth and faith. The Rashid was getting old and casual. Ibn Saud believed in himself. He believed in his people and that once again he would make them great. He could inspire his men with his own inspiration. He conquered not to destroy but to rule, and as he advanced he did not loot but consolidated what he had taken by promises of prosperity.

Late in 1903, when the first rain had come and the famine had broken and there was grazing to be found and water in the wells, Ibn Saud advanced northwards. Between him and the country of the Shammar was the Qasim, the richest district of old Nejd, of which Anaiza and Buraida were the principal towns. The Rashid still held the district, but the people were for Ibn Saud.

He swept quickly over the Qasim, meeting with little resistance—for the Rashid was far away in the north dealing with a revolt of his own tribesmen—defeated and killed Husein Jarid the Rashid Governor of the district, took Anaiza, and surrounded and besieged Buraida, which was strongly fortified and garrisoned and had shut its gates against him.

Collecting such men as he could the Rashid sent them under Obaid one of his cousins to the relief of his garrison in Buraida.

Ibn Saud turned on Obaid and beat him back in a fierce fight. The Shammar tribesmen broke and ran for home. Obaid was captured.

Ibn Saud was seated on his Arab mare when Obaid was brought before him.

"So", he said, looking down at him, "it is Obaid ibn Rashid, he who murdered my uncle Mohamed in Riad".

Dismounting he drew his sword, which his father had given him and which now he carried always. For a while he balanced the sword in his hand.

"Do not kill me, O Abu Turki", cried Obaid.

"This is no place for mercy", replied Ibn Saud. "I will do justice, the justice of just revenge for murder".

He struck three times, deftly with the wrist and forearm. With the first he struck low to hamstring, and as Obaid swayed to the blow he struck higher cutting deep into his neck so that the blood spurted out as from a broken pipe, and with the third, quick and supple as a whip lash, while the man sagged but before he fell, he cut him open so that his heart lay exposed as it beat and shivered and palpitated.

Then he kissed the sword, drew the blade clean and sheathed it.

The garrison in Buraida, now without hope of relief, surrendered, and all the Qasim up to the country of the Shammar accepted Ibn Saud. He had forced the Rashid out of Nejd. Nejd was once more under a Saud.

When Ibn Saud marched back to Riad even the most sour-faced Wahabis came out to meet him with joy. In the Great Mosque, with the consent of the Elders, the religious leaders, the governors, and the sheiks, after the midday prayer he was solemnly declared by his father to be Amir of all Nejd and Imam of the Wahabis.