





# A PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD



PORTRAIT OF LADY ANNE BLUNT IN ARAB COSTUME (BY MOLONY).

[Frontispiece.]

# A PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD,

*THE CRADLE OF THE ARAB RACE.*

A VISIT TO THE COURT OF THE ARAB EMIR, AND  
"OUR PERSIAN CAMPAIGN."

BY LADY ANNE BLUNT.

AUTHOR OF "THE BEDOUIN TRIBES OF THE EUPHRATES."

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

WITH MAP, PORTRAITS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS FROM  
THE AUTHOR'S DRAWINGS.

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TO

SIR HENRY CRESWICKE RAWLINSON,

K.C.B., F.R.S.

BY

THE AUTHORESS.





## PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

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READERS of our last year's adventures on the Euphrates will hardly need it to be explained to them why the present journey was undertaken, nor why it stands described upon our title page as a "Pilgrimage." The journey to Nejd forms the natural complement of the journey through Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert; while Nejd itself, with the romantic interest attached to its name, seems no unworthy object of a religious feeling, such as might prompt the visit to a shrine. Nejd, in the imagination of the Bedouins of the North, is a region of romance, the cradle of their race, and of those ideas of chivalry by which they still live. There Antar performed his labours of Hercules, and Hatim Tai the more historical hero entertained his guests. To the Anazeh and Shammar, especially, whose northward migrations date only from a few generations back, the tradition of their birth-place is still almost a recollection; and even to

the Arabs of the earlier invasions, the townsmen of such places as Bozra, Palmyra, and Deyr, and to the Taï Bedouins, once lords of Jebel Shammar, it appeals with a fascination more than equal to that of the Hejaz itself. Nejd is to all of them what Palestine is to the Jews, England to the American and Australian colonists ; but with this difference, that they are cut off from the object of their filial reverence more absolutely in practice than these by an intervening gulf of desert less hospitable than any sea. It is rare to meet anywhere in the North an Arab who has crossed the Great Nefûd.

To us too, imbued as we were with the fancies of the Desert, Nejd had long assumed the romantic colouring of a holy land ; and when it was decided that we were to visit Jebel Shammar, the metropolis of Bedouin life, our expedition presented itself as an almost pious undertaking ; so that it is hardly an exaggeration, even now that it is over, and we are once more in Europe, to speak of it as a pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage then it is, though the religion in whose name we travelled was only one of romance.

Its circumstances, in spite of certain disappointments which the narrative will reveal, were little less romantic than the idea. Readers who followed our former travels to their close, may remember a

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certain Mohammed Abdallah, son of the Sheykh of Palmyra, a young man who, after travelling with us by order of the Pasha from Deyr to his native town, had at some risk of official displeasure assisted us in evading the Turkish authorities, and accomplishing our visit to the Anazeh. It may further be remembered that, in requital of this service and because we had conceived an affection for him (for he appeared a really high-minded young fellow), Mohammed had been given his choice between a round sum of money, and the honour of becoming "the Beg's" brother, a choice which he had chivalrously decided in favour of the brotherhood. We had then promised him that, if all went well with us, we would return to Damascus the following winter, and go in his company to Nejd, where he believed he had relations, and that we would help him there to a wife from among his own people.

The idea and the promise were in strict accordance with Bedouin notions, and greatly delighted both him and his father Abdallah, to whom they were in due course communicated. Arab custom is very little changed on the point of marriage from what it was in the days of Abraham ; and it was natural that both father and son should wish for a wife for him of their own blood, and that

he should be ready to go far to fetch one. Moreover, the sort of help we proposed giving (for he could hardly have travelled to Nejd alone) was just such as beseemed our new relationship. Assistance in the choice of a wife ranks in Bedouin eyes with the gift of a mare, or personal aid in war, both brotherly acts conferring high honour on those concerned. Mohammed too had a special reason in the circumstances of his family history to make the proposal doubly welcome. He found himself in an embarrassing position at home with regard to marriage, and was in a manner forced to look elsewhere for a wife. The history of the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur, the family to which he belonged, will explain this, and is so curious, and so typical of Arabia, that it deserves a passing notice here.

It would appear that seven or eight generations ago (probably about the date of the foundation of the Wahhabi empire) three brothers of the noble family of Arûk, Sheykhs of the Beni Khaled of south-eastern Nejd, quarrelled with their people and left the tribe. The Ibn Arûks were then a very well-known family, exercising suzerain rights over the important towns of Hasa and Katif, and having independent, even sovereign, power in their own district. This lay between the Persian Gulf and Harik, an oasis on the edge of the great southern

desert, and they retained it until they and the rest of their fellow Sheykhs in Arabia were reduced to insignificance by Mohammed Ibn Saoud, the first Wahhabi Sultan of Nejd.\*

At the beginning of last century, all Arabia was independent of central authority, each tribe, and to a certain extent each town, maintaining its separate existence as a State. Religion, except in its primitive Bedouin form, had disappeared from the inland districts, and only the Hejaz and Yemen were more than nominally Mahometan. The Bedouin element was then supreme. Each town and village in Arabia was considered the property of one or other of the nomade Sheykhs in its neighbourhood, and paid him tribute in return for his protection. The Sheykh too not unfrequently possessed a house or castle within the city walls, as a summer residence, besides his tent outside. He in such cases became more than a mere suzerain, and exercised active authority over the townspeople, administering justice at the gate daily, and enrolling young men as his body-guard, even on occasion levying taxes. He then received the title of Emir or Prince. It was in no other way

\* Such at least is the family tradition of the Ibn Arûks. Niebuhr writing in 1765 gives Arâr as the name of the Beni Ehaled Sheykhs.

perhaps that the "Shepherd Kings" of Egypt acquired their position and exercised their power; and vestiges of the old system may still be found in many parts of Arabia.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab, the Luther of Mahometanism, preached his religious reform in Nejd, and converted Ibn Saoud, the Anazeh Sheykh of Deriyeh, to his doctrines. By Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab's help Ibn Saoud, from the mere chief of a tribe, and sovereign of one city, became Sultan of all Arabia, and reduced one after another every rival Sheykh to submission. He even ultimately destroyed the system of tribute and protection, the original basis of his power, and having raised a regular army from among the townsmen, made these quite independent of Bedouin rule. Arabia then, for the first time since Mahomet's death, became a united empire with a centralised and regular government. It must have been about the year 1760 that the three Ibn Arûks, disgusted with the new state of things in Nejd, went out to seek their fortunes elsewhere. According to the tradition, partly embodied in an old ballad which is still current in Arabia, they were mounted all three upon a single camel, and had nothing with them but their swords and their high birth to gain them credit among strangers. They

travelled northwards and at first halted in Jôf, the northernmost oasis of Central Arabia, where one of them remained. The other two, quarrelling, separated; the younger going, tradition knew not whither, while the elder held on his way still further north, and settled finally at Tudmur (Palmyra), where he married a woman of the place, and where he ultimately became Sheykh. At that time Tudmur consisted but of a few houses. His name was Ali, and from him our friend Mohammed and his father Abdallah, and his uncle Faris, the real head of the family in Tudmur, are descended.

Mohammed then had some reason, as far as his male ancestry were concerned, to boast of his birth, and look high in making a "matrimonial alliance;" but *par les femmes* he was of less distinguished blood; and, as purity of descent on both sides is considered a *sine quâ non* among the Arabs, the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur had not been recognized for several generations as *asil*, or noble. They had married where they could among the townspeople of no birth at all, or as in the case of Mohammed's father, among the Moâli, a tribe of mixed origin. The Anazeh, in spite of the name of Arûk, would not give their daughters to them to wife. This was Mohammed's secret grief, as it had been his father's, and it was as much as

anything else to wipe out the stain in their pedigree, that the son so readily agreed to our proposal.

The plan of our journey was necessarily vague, as it included the search after two families of relations of whom nothing had been heard for nearly a hundred years. The last sign of life shewn by the Ibn Arûks of Jôf had been on the occasion of Abdallah's father's death by violence, when suddenly a member of the Jôf family had appeared at Tudmur as avenger in the blood feud. This relation had not, however, stayed longer there than duty required of him, and having slain his man had as suddenly disappeared. Of the second family nothing at all was known ; and, indeed, to the Ibn Arûks as to the other inhabitants of Tudmur, Nejd itself was now little more than a name, a country known by ancient tradition to exist, but unvisited by any one then living connected with the town.

These singular circumstances were, as I have said, the key-note of our expedition, and will, I hope, lend an interest beyond that of our own personal adventures to the present volumes. To Mohammed and the Arabs with whom we travelled, as well as to most of those we met upon our journey, his family history formed a perpetual romance, and the *kasid* or ballad of Ibn Arûk came in on every occasion, seasonable and unseasonable, as a chorus to all that



happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished ; and on more than one occasion we found ourselves borne easily on by the strength of it over difficulties which, under ordinary conditions, might have sufficed to stop us. By extreme good luck, as will be seen in the sequel, we lit upon both branches of the family we set out in search of, the one citizens of the Jôf oasis, the other Bedouins in Nejd, while the further we got the better was the Arûk name known, and relations poured in on us on all sides, eager to shew us hospitality and assistance. We were thus passed on from kinsman to kinsman, and were everywhere received as friends ; nor is it too much to say that while in Arabia we enjoyed the singular advantage of being accepted as members of an Arabian family. This gave us an unique occasion of seeing, and of understanding what we saw ; and we have only ourselves to blame if we did not turn it to very important profit.

So much then for the romance. The profit of our expedition may be briefly summarised.

First as to geography. Though not the only Europeans who have visited Jebel Shammar, we are the only ones who have done so openly and at our leisure, provided with compass and barometer and free to take note of all we saw. Our predecessors,

three in number, Wallin, Guarmani, and Palgrave, travelled in disguise, and under circumstances unfavourable for geographical observation. The first, a Finnish professor, proceeded in 1848, as a Mussulman divine, from the coast of the Red Sea to Hail and thence to the Euphrates. The account of his journey, given in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, is unfortunately meagre, and I understand that, though one more detailed was published in his own language, he did not live long enough to record the whole body of his information. The second, Guarmani, a Levantine of Italian origin, penetrated in disguise to Jebel Shammar, commissioned by the French Government to procure them horses from Nejd; and he communicated a lively and most interesting account of his adventures to the "Société de Géographie" in 1865. He too went as a Turkish mussulman, and, being rather an Oriental than a European, collected a mass of valuable information relating chiefly to the Desert Tribes through which he passed. It is difficult, however, to understand the route maps with which his account is illustrated, and, though he crossed the Nefûd at more than one point, he is silent as to its singular physical features. Guarmani started from Jerusalem in 1863 and visited Teyma, Kheybar, Aneyzeh, Bereydah, and Hail, returning thence to

Syria by Jôf and the Wady Sirhán. Mr. Palgrave's journey is better known. A Jesuit missionary and an accomplished Arabic scholar, he was entrusted with a secret political mission by Napoleon III. and executed it with the permission of his superiors. He entered Nejd, disguised as a Syrian merchant, from Maan, and passing through Hail in 1864 reached Riad, the capital of the Wahhabi kingdom, and eventually the Persian Gulf at Katif. His account of Central Arabia is by far the most complete and life-like that has been published, and in all matters of town life and manners may be depended upon as accurate. But his faculty of observation seems chiefly adapted to a study of society, and the nature he describes is human nature only. He is too little in sympathy with the desert to take accurate note of its details, and the circumstances of his journey precluded him from observing it geographically. He travelled in the heat of summer and mostly by night, and was besides in no position, owing to his assumed character and the doubtful company in which he was often compelled to travel, to examine at leisure what he saw. Mr. Palgrave's account of the physical features of the Nefûd, and of Jebel Shammar, the only one hitherto published, bears very little resemblance to the reality; and our own obser-

vations, taken quietly in the clear atmosphere of an Arabian winter, are therefore the first of the kind which have reached Europe. By taking continuous note of the variations of the barometer while we travelled, we have been able to prove that the plateau of Hail is nearly twice the height supposed for it above the sea, while the granite range of Jebel Shammar exceeds this plateau by about 2000 feet. Again, the great pilgrim-road from the Euphrates, though well-known by report to geographers, had never before been travelled by an European, and on this, as on other parts of our route, we have corrected previous maps. The map of Northern Arabia appended to the first volume of our work may be now depended upon as within its limits substantially accurate.

In geology, though possessing a superficial knowledge only of our subject, we have, I believe, been able to correct a few mistakes, and to clear up a doubt, much argued by Professor Wetzstein, as to the rock formation of Jebel Aja ; while a short memoir I have appended, on the physical conformation of the great sand desert, will contain original—possibly valuable—matter. The sketches, above all, which illustrate these volumes, may be relied on as conscientious representations of the chief physical features of Central Arabia.

Botanists and zoologists will be disappointed in the meagre accounts of plants and animals I am able to give. But the existence now proved of the white antelope (*Oryx Beatrix*) in Nejd is, I believe, a fact new to science, as may be that of the *Webber*, a small climbing quadruped allied to the marmots.

A more important contribution to knowledge will, I hope, be recognised in a description of the political system to which I have just alluded under the name of Shepherd rule, and which is now once more found in Central Arabia. I do not know that it has ever previously been noticed by writers on Arabia. Neither Niebuhr nor Burckhardt seem to have come across it in its pure form, and Mr. Palgrave misunderstood it altogether in his contempt of Bedouin as contrasted with town life. Yet it is probably the oldest form of government existing in Arabia, and the one best suited for the country's needs. In connection with this matter too, the recent history of Nejd, with an account of the downfall of the Ibn Saouds, for which I am mainly indebted to Colonel Ross, British Resident at Bushire, and the decay of Wahhabism in Arabia, will prove of interest, as may in a lesser degree the imperfect picture given in the second volume of the extreme results produced in Persia by despotic rule, and the iniquitous annexa-

tion of Hasa by the Turks. The value, however, of these "discoveries" I leave to our readers to determine, premising only that they are here pointed out less on account of their own importance, than as an excuse in matter for the manner of the narrative.

With regard to the sequel of our Arabian journey, the further journey from Bagdad to Bushire, I should not intrude it on the notice of the public, but that it serves as an additional proof, if such be wanting, of the folly of those schemes which, under the name of "Euphrates Valley" and "Indo-Mediterranean" railway companies, have from time to time been dangled before the eyes of speculators. A country more absolutely unsuited for railway enterprise than that between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, has probably never been selected for such operations; and, if the recital of our passage through the uninhabited tracts, which form nine tenths of the whole region, shall deter my countrymen from embarking their capital in an enterprise financially absurd, I feel that its publication will not have been in vain.

One word before I end my Preface. It was objected to me at the Royal Geographical Society's meeting, where I read a paper on this "Visit to Nejd," that though we had crossed the Great Sand

Desert, and visited Jebel Shammar, we had after all not been to Nejd. Nejd, I was told on the "best authority," was a term applicable only to that district of Central Arabia which is bounded by the Jebel Toweykh and the lesser Nefûds, neither Jebel Shammar nor Kasim being included in it. Strange as this statement sounded to ears fresh from the country itself, I was unable at the time to fortify my refusal to believe by any more special argument than that the inhabitants of the districts in question had always called them so,—an argument "*quod semper et ab omnibus*" which to some seemed insufficient. I have therefore taken pains to examine the grounds of the objection raised, and to give a reason for the belief which is still strong within me that Hail is not only an integral part of Nejd, but Nejd *par excellence*.

First then, to repeat the argument "*quod ab omnibus*," I state emphatically that according to the Arabs themselves of every tribe and town I have visited, Nejd is held to include the lands which lie within the Nefûds. It is a geographical expression including three principal sub-districts, Jebel Shammar and Kasim in the North, and Aared in the South. The only doubt I have ever heard expressed was as to the Nefûds themselves, whether they were included or not in the term. The

Bedouins certainly so consider them, for they are the only part of Nejd which they habitually inhabit, the stony plateaux of the centre being unfit for pastoral life. Jôf is considered outside the limit northwards, as are Kheybar and Teyma to the north-west, while Jobba and Harik are doubtful, being towns of the Nefûd.

Secondly, I plead written authority :—1. Abulfeda and Edrisi, quoted by Colonel Ross in his memorandum, include in the term Nejd all those lands lying between Yemen, Hejaz, and Irak. 2. Yakut, an Arabian geographer of the thirteenth century, quoted by Wetzstein, expressly mentions Aja as being in Nejd. 3. Merasid confirms Yakut in his geographical lexicon. 4. Sheykh Hamid of Kasim, also quoted by Wetzstein, says, “Nejd in its widest sense is the whole of Central Arabia ;—in its narrowest and according to modern usage, only the Shammar Mountains and the Land of Kasim, with the Great Desert bordering it to the South.” 5. Niebuhr, the oldest and most respectable of European writers, enumerating the towns of Nejd, says, “Le mont Schamer n’est qu’à dix journées de Bagdad ; il comprend Hail, Monkek, Kafar, et Bokà. L’on place *aussi* dans le Nejdsjed une contrée montagneuse nommée Djof-al-Sirhan entre le mont Schâmer et Shâm (la Syrie),” &c. ; thus



showing that all, and more than all I claim, were in Niebuhr's day accounted Nejd. 6. Chesney, in his map of Arabia, published in 1838, includes Kasim and Jebel Shammar within the boundary of Nejd, and gives a second boundary besides, still further north, including districts "sometimes counted to Nejd." 7. Wallin defines Nejd as the whole district where the *ghada* grows, a definition taken doubtless from the Bedouins with whom he travelled, and which would include not only Jebel Shammar, but the Nefûds and even the Southern half of the Wady Sirhán. 8. In Kazimirski's dictionary, 1860, I find, "*Ahlu'lghada*, surnom donné aux habitants de la frontière de Nejd où la plante *ghada* croit en abondance." Finally, Guarmani gives the following as the result of his inquiries in the country itself: "Le Gebel est la province la plus septentrionale du Neged. C'est, comme disent les Arabes, un des sept Negged;" and on the authority of Zamil, Sheykh of Aneyzeh, explains these seven to be Aared, Hasa, and Harik, in the south, Woshem in the centre, and Jebel Shammar, Kasim, and Sudeyr, in the north.

Opposed to this mass of testimony, we find among travellers a single competent authority, Mr. Palgrave; and even his opinion is much qualified. After explaining that the name Nejed signifies

“highland,” in contradistinction to the coast and the outlying provinces of lesser elevation, he sums up his opinion thus: “The denomination ‘Nejed’ is commonly enough applied to the whole space included between Djebel Shomer on the north, and the great desert to the south, from the extreme range of Jebel Toweyk on the east to the neighbourhood of the Turkish pilgrim-road or Derb-el-Hajj on the west. However, this central district, forming a huge parallelogram, placed almost diagonally across the midmost of Arabia from north-east-by-east to south-west-by-west, as a glance at the map may show, is again subdivided by the natives of the country into the Nejed-el-aala or Upper Nejed, and the Nejed-el-owta or Lower Nejed, a distinction of which more hereafter, while Djebel Shomer is generally considered as a sort of appendage to Nejed, rather than as belonging to that district itself. But the Djowf is always excluded by the Arabs from the catalogue of upland provinces, though strangers sometimes admit it also to the title of Nejed, by an error on their part, since it is a solitary oasis, and a door to highland or inner Arabia, not in any strict sense a portion of it.”

The exact truth of the matter I take, then, to be this. Nejd, in its original and popular sense of

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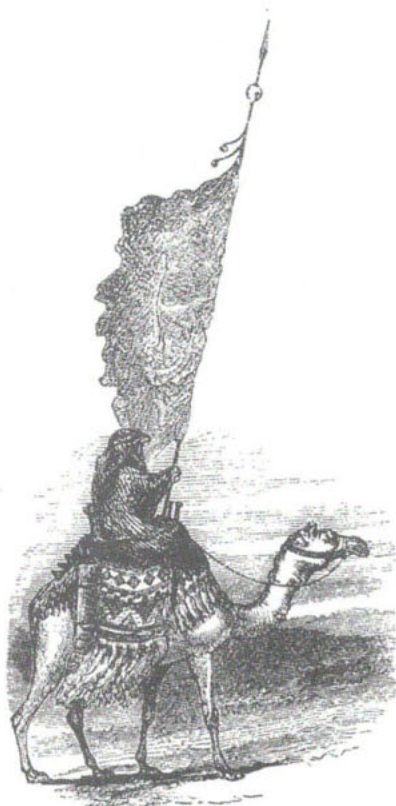
“Highlands,” was a term of physical geography, and necessarily embraced Jebel Shammar, the most elevated district of all, as well as Kasim, which lay between it and Aared ; and so it was doubtless considered in Niebuhr’s time, and is still considered by the Bedouins of the North, whose recollections date from an age previous to Niebuhr’s. With the foundation, however, of the Wahhabi Empire of Nejd, the term from a geographical became a political one, and has since followed the fluctuating fortunes of the Wahhabi State. In this way it once embraced not only the upland plateaux, but Jôf and Hasa ; the latter, though a low-lying district on the coast, retaining in Turkish official nomenclature its political name of Nejd to the present day. At the time of Mr. Palgrave’s visit, the Wahhabis, from whom doubtless his information was acquired, considered Jebel Shammar no longer an integral part of their State, but, as he expresses it, an appendage. It was already politically independent, and had ceased in their eyes to be Nejd. But since his day the Nejd State has seen a still further disruption. Kasim has regained its independence, and Hasa has been annexed to the Turkish Empire. Nejd has therefore become once more what it was before the Empire of Nejd arose, a term of physical geography only, and one

pretty nearly co-extensive with our term Central Arabia.

I hold, then, to the correctness of our title, though in this matter, as in the rest, craving indulgence of the learned.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT.

CRABBET PARK,  
*August 1, 1880.*



PILGRIM BANNER.

## CONTENTS TO VOL. I.



### CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
The charm of Asia—A return to old friends—Desert News—The Palmyrene colony at Damascus—New horses and camels—Mrs. Digby and her husband Mijuel the Mizrab—A blood feud—Abd el-Kader's life—Midhat Pasha discourses on canals and tramways—He raises a loan . . . . .	1

### CHAPTER II.

Brotherly offices—We prepare for a campaign—Mohammed Dukhi comes to court—A night robber—We start for Nejd—Tale of a penitent—The duty of revenge—We are entertained by poor relations—The fair at Mezarib . . . . .	21
--	----

### CHAPTER III.

Beating about—Bozra—We leave the Turkish dominions—Mohammed vows to kill a sheep—The citadel of Salkhad and the independent Druses—We are received by a Druse chieftain—Historical notice of the Hauran . . . . .	46
---	----

### CHAPTER IV.

We start in earnest—The Harra—A theory of Mirage—Camp of the Beni Sokkhr—Wady er Rajel—A Christmas Dinner in the Desert—Sand-storm—We reach Kâf . . . . .	64
---	----

## CHAPTER V.

	PAGE
Kâf and Itheri—More relations—The Wady Sirhan—Locust hunting—Hanna sits down to die—Tales of robbery and violence—We are surprised by a ghazu and made prisoners—Sherarat statistics—Jôf . . . . .	84

## CHAPTER VI.

The Jôf oasis—We are entertained by Ibn Rashid's lieutenant—A haunch of wild cow—Dancing in the castle—Prayers—We go on to Meskakeh . . . . .	113
---	-----

## CHAPTER VII.

The Ibn Aruks of Jôf—Mohammed contracts a matrimonial alliance—Leah and Rachel—We cheapen the bride's dower—A negro governor and his suite—A thunder-storm . . . . .	129
--	-----

## CHAPTER VIII.

Mohammed in love—We enter the red sand desert—Geology of the Nefûd—Radi—The great well of Shakik—Old acquaintance—Tales of the Nefûd—The soldiers who perished of thirst—The lovers—We nearly remain in the sand—Land at last . . .	150
---	-----

## CHAPTER IX.

Jobba—an unpleasant dream—We hear strange tales of Ibn Rashid—Romping in the Nefûd—A last night there—The Zodiacal light—We enter Nejd—The granite range of Jebel Shammar .	187
---	-----

---

CHAPTER X.

	PAGE
Hail—The Emir Mohammed Ibn Rashid—His menagerie—His horses—His courtiers—His wives—Amusements of the ladies of Hail—Their domestic life—an evening at the castle—The telephone . . . . .	213

CHAPTER XI.

Political and historical—Shepherd rule in Arabia—An hereditary policy—The army—The Law—Taxation—The finances of Jebel Shammar—Ibn Rashid's ambition . . . . .	257
---	-----





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS TO VOL. I.



PORTRAIT OF LADY ANNE BLUNT IN HER ARAB COSTUME (BY MOLONY) . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
PILGRIM BANNER . . . . .	xxvi
SALKHAD . . . . .	45
RUN TO EARTH . . . . .	63
SAND-STORM IN THE WADY ER-RAJEL . . . . .	to face 80
KÂF . . . . .	83
GHAZÚ IN THE WADY SIRHÂN . . . . .	to face 104
CASTLE OF JÔF . . . . .	112
THE OASIS OF JÔF . . . . .	to face 120
A NEJD SHEEP . . . . .	149
THE NEFÛD OR GREAT RED SAND DESERT OF ARABIA . . . . .	to face 160
A DELÚL RIDER . . . . .	186
RECEPTION AT HAÏL . . . . .	212
THE GREAT KAHWAH . . . . .	to face 214
IRN RASHID'S STABLES AT HAÏL . . . . .	to face 250
EVENING WITH THE EMIR . . . . .	256
OUR HOUSE AT HAÏL . . . . .	273
MAP OF NEJD . . . . .	<i>At the End.</i>