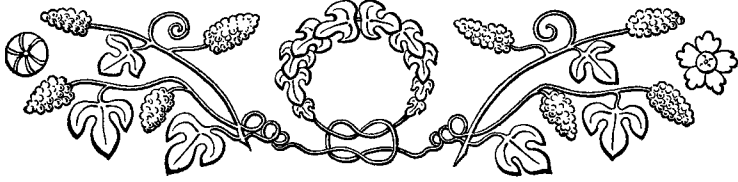


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Excerpt

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CHAPTER I.

THE PERAEA; AMMON AND MOAB.

The Haj, or Mecca pilgrimage, in Damascus. The pilgrim camp in the wilderness at Muzeyrib. The setting forth. Hermon. The first station. The pilgrimage way, or Derb el-Haj. Geraza. The Ageyl. Bashan. Umm Jemâl. Bosra. Jabbok, or the Zerka. Shebib ibn Tubbai. Ancient strong towers in the desert. Punishment of a caravan thief. Aspect of the Peraean plains. The Beduins. Beny Sôkhr. Beny Seleyta. Wêlad Aly. Gilead. The Belka. Whether this fresh country were good for colonists? Rabbath Ammon. Heshbon. Umm Rosâs. The pilgrim-encampment raised by night. The brook Arnon. Lejûn. The high plains of Moab. Ruined sites. Dat Ras. Rabbath Moab. Kir Moab. "Heaps in the furrows of the field." The old giants. Agaba tribe. The land wasted by Israel. The ancient people were stone-builders. Kerak visited. Beny Hameydy tribe. Memorial heaped stones in the wilderness. Wady el-Hâsy. The deep limestone valleys descending to the Dead Sea. Sheykh Hajellan.

A NEW voice hailed me of an old friend when, first returned from the Peninsula, I paced again in that long street of Damascus which is called Straight; and suddenly taking me wondering by the hand "Tell me (said he), since thou art here again in the peace and assurance of Ullah, and whilst we walk, as in the former years, toward the new blossoming orchards, full of the sweet spring as the garden of God, what moved thee, or how couldst thou take such journeys into the fanatic Arabia?"

* * *

It was at the latest hour, when in the same day, and after troubled days of endeavours, I had supposed it impossible. At first I had asked of the *Wâly*, Governor of Syria, his license to accompany the *Haj* caravan to the distance of *Medâin Sâlih*. The *Wâly* then privately questioned the British Consulate, an office which is of high regard in these countries. The Consul answered, that his was no charge in any such matter; he had as much regard of me, would I take such dangerous ways, as of his old hat. This was a man that, in time past, had proffered to

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show me a good turn in my travels, who now told me it was his duty to take no cognisance of my Arabian journey, lest he might hear any word of blame, if I miscarried. Thus by the Turkish officers it was understood that my life, forsaken by mine own Consulate, would not be required of them in this adventure. There is a merry saying of Sir Henry Wotton, for which he nearly lost his credit with his sovereign, "An ambassador is a man who is sent to lie abroad for his country;" to this might be added, "A Consul is a man who is sent to play the Turk abroad, to his own countrymen."

That untimely Turkishness was the source to me of nearly all the mischiefs of these travels in Arabia. And what wonder, none fearing a reckoning, that I should many times come nigh to be foully murdered! whereas the informal benevolent word, in the beginning, of a Frankish Consulate might have procured me regard of the great Haj officers, and their letters of commendation, in departing from them, to the Emirs of Arabia. Thus rejected by the British Consulate, I dreaded to be turned back altogether if I should visit now certain great personages of Damascus, as the noble Algerian prince *Abd el-Kâder*; for whose only word, which I am well assured he would have given, I had been welcome in all the Haj-road towers occupied by Moorish garrisons, and my life had not been well-nigh lost amongst them later at Medâin Sâlih.

I went only to the Kurdish Pasha of the Haj, Mohammed Saïd, who two years before had known me a traveller in the Lands beyond Jordan, and took me for a well-affected man that did nothing covertly. It was a time of cholera and the Christians had fled from the city, when I visited him formerly in Damascus to prefer the same request, that I might go down with the Pilgrimage to Medâin Sâlih. He had recommended me then to bring a firmân of the Sultan, saying, 'The *hajjâj* (pilgrims) were a mixed multitude, and if aught befel me, the harm might be laid at his door, since I was the subject of a foreign government:' but now, he said, 'Well! would I needs go thither? it might be with the *Jurdy*;' that is the flying provision-train which since ancient times is sent down from Syria to relieve the returning pilgrimage at Medâin Sâlih; but commonly lying there only three days, the time would not have sufficed me.

I thought the stars were so disposed that I should not go to Arabia; but, said my Moslem friends, 'the Pasha himself could not forbid any taking this journey with the caravan; and though I were a *Nasrâny*, what hindered! when I went not down to the *Harameyn* (two sacred cities), but to Medâin Sâlih; how! I an honest person might not go, when there went down

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MOSLEM FRIENDS.

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every year with the Haj all the desperate cutters of the town ; nay the most dangerous ribalds of Damascus were already at Muzeýrib, to kill and to spoil upon the skirts of the caravan journeying in the wilderness.' Also they said 'it was but a few years since Christian masons (there are no Moslems of the craft in Damascus) had been sent with the Haj to repair the water-tower or kella and cistern at the same Medáin Sâlih.'

There is every year a new stirring of this goodly Oriental city in the days before the Haj ; so many strangers are passing in the bazaars, of outlandish speech and clothing from far provinces. The more part are of Asia Minor, many of them bearing over-great white turbans that might weigh more than their heads: the most are poor folk of a solemn countenance, which wander in the streets seeking the bakers' stalls, and I saw that many of the Damascenes could answer them in their own language. The town is moved in the departure of the great Pilgrimage of the Religion and again at the home-coming, which is made a public spectacle; almost every Moslem household has some one of their kindred in the caravan. In the markets there is much taking up in haste of wares for the road. The tent-makers are most busy in their street, overlooking and renewing the old canvas of hundreds of tents, of tilts and the curtains for litters; the curriers in their bazaar are selling apace the water-skins and leathern buckets and saddle-bottles, *matara* or *zemzemâeh*; the carpenters' craft are labouring in all haste for the Haj, the most of them mending litter-frames. In the *Peracan* outlying quarter, *el-Medân*, is cheapening and delivery of grain, a provision by the way for the Haj cattle. Already there come by the streets, passing daily forth, the *akkâms* with the swagging litters mounted high upon the tall pilgrim-camels. They are the Haj caravan drivers, and upon the silent great shuffle-footed beasts, they hold insolently their path through the narrow bazaars; commonly ferocious young men, whose mouths are full of horrible cursings: and whoso is not of this stomach, him they think unmeet for the road. The *Mukowwems* or Haj camel-masters have called in their cattle (all are strong males) from the wilderness to the camel-yards in Damascus, where their serving-men are busy stuffing pillows under the pack-saddle frames, and lapping, first over all the camels' chines, thick blanket-felts of Aleppo, that they should not be galled; the gear is not lifted till their return after four months, if they may return alive, from so great a voyage. The mukowwems are sturdy, weathered men of the road, that can hold the mastery over their often

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mutinous crews; it is written in their hard faces that they are overcomers of the evil by the evil, and able to deal in the long desert way with the perfidy of the elvish Beduins. It is the custom in these caravan countries that all who are to set forth, meet together in some common place without the city. The assembling of the pilgrim multitude is always by the lake of Muzeyrîb in the high steppes beyond Jordan, two journeys from Damascus. Here the hajjies who have taken the field are encamped, and lie a week or ten days in the desert before their long voyage. The Haj Pasha, his affairs despatched with the government in Damascus, arrives the third day before their departure, to discharge all first payments to the Beduw and to agree with the water-carriers, (which are Beduins,) for the military service.

The open ways of Damascus upon that side, lately encumbered with the daily passage of hundreds of litters, and all that, to our eyes, strange and motley train, of the oriental pilgrimage, were again void and silent; the Haj had departed from among us. A little money is caught at as great gain in these lands long vexed by a criminal government: the hope of silver immediately brought me five or six poorer persons, saying all with great By-Gods they would set their seals to a paper to carry me safely to Medâin Sâlih, whether I would ride upon pack-horses, upon mules, asses, dromedaries, barely upon camel-back, or in a litter. I agreed with a Persian, mukowwem to those of his nation which come every year about from the East by Bagdad, Aleppo, Damascus, to "see the cities"; and there they join themselves with the great Ottoman Haj caravan. This poor rich man was well content, for a few pounds in his hand which helped him to reckon with his corn-chandler, to convey me to Medâin Sâlih. It was a last moment, the Pasha was departed two days since, and this man must make after with great journeys. I was presently clothed as a Syrian of simple fortune, and ready with store of caravan biscuit to ride along with him; mingled with the Persians in the Haj journey I should be the less noted whether by Persians or Arabs. This mukowwem's servants and his gear were already eight days at Muzeyrîb camp.

It was afternoon when a few Arab friends bade me God-speed, and mounted with my camel bags upon a mule I came riding through Damascus with the Persian, Mohammed Aga, and a small company. As we turned from the long city street, that which in Paul's days was called "The Straight," to go up through the Medân to the *Boâbat-Ullah*, some of the bystanders at the corner, setting upon me their eyes, said to each other

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DEPARTURE FROM DAMASCUS.

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“Who is this? Eigh!” Another answered him half jestingly, “It is some one belonging to the *Ajamy*” (Persian). From the Boábat (great gate of) Ullah, so named of the passing forth of the holy pilgrimage thereat, the high desert lies before us those hundreds of leagues to the Harameyn; at first a waste plain of gravel and loam upon limestone, for ten or twelve days, and always rising, to *Maan* in “the mountain of Edom” near to Petra. Twenty-six marches from *Muzeyrib* is el-Medina, the prophet’s city (*Medinat on Néby*, in old time *Yathrib*); at forty marches is Mecca. There were none now in all the road, by which the last hajjies had passed five days before us. The sun setting, we came to the little outlying village *Kesmîh*: by the road was showed me a white cupola, the sleeping station of the commander of the pilgrimage, *Emir el-Haj*, in the evening of his solemn setting forth from Damascus. We came by a beaten way over the wilderness, paved of old at the crossing of winter stream-beds for the safe passage of the Haj camels, which have no foothold in sliding ground; by some other are seen ruinous bridges—as all is now ruinous in the Ottoman Empire. There is a block drift strewed over this wilderness; the like is found, much to our amazement, under all climates of the world.

We had sorry night quarters at *Kesmîh*, to lie out, with falling weather, in a filthy field, nor very long to repose. At three hours past midnight we were again riding. There were come along with us some few other, late and last poor foot wanderers, of the Persian’s acquaintance and nation; blithely they addressed themselves to this sacred voyage, and as the sun began to spring and smile with warmth upon the earth, like awakening birds, they began to warble the sweet bird-like Persian airs. Marching with most alacrity was a yellow-haired young dervish, the best minstrel of them all; with the rest of his breath he laughed and cracked and would hail me cheerfully in the best Arabic that he could. They comforted themselves by the way with tobacco, and there was none, said they, better in the whole world than this sweet leaf of their own country. There arose the high train of Hermon aloft before us, hoar-headed with the first snows and as it were a white cloud hanging in the element, but the autumn in the plain was yet light and warm. At twenty miles we passed before *Salâmen*, an old ruined place with towers and inhabited ruins, such as those seen in the *Hauran*: five miles further another ruined site. Some of my companions were suspicious of a stranger, because I enquired the names. We alighted first at afternoon by a cistern of foul water *Keteyby*, where a guard was set of two ruffian

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troopers, and when coming there very thirsty I refused to drink, "Oho! who is here?" cries one of them with an ill countenance, "it is I guess some Nasrâny; auh, is this one, I say, who should go with the Haj?" Nine miles from thence we passed before a village, *Meskîn*: faring by the way, we overtook a costard-monger driving his ass with swagging chests of the half-rotted autumn grapes, to sell his cheap wares to the poor pilgrims for dear money at Muzeyrîb: whilst I bought of his cool bunches, this fellow, full of gibes of the road, had descried me and "Art thou going, cried he, to Mecca? Ha! he is not one to go with the Haj! and you that come along with him, what is this for an hajjy?" At foot pace we came to the camp at Muzeyrîb after eight o'clock, by dark night; the forced march was sixteen hours. We had yet to do, shouting for the Aga's people, by their names, to find our tents, but not much, for after the hundreds of years of the pilgrimage all the Haj service is well ordered. The mukowwems know their own places, and these voices were presently answered by some of his servants who led us to their lodging. The morrow was one of preparation, the day after we should depart. The Aga counselled me not to go abroad from our lodging. The gun would be fired two days earlier this year for the pilgrims' departure, because the season was lateward. We had ten marches through the northern highlands, and the first rains might fall upon us ere we descended to Arabia: in this soil mixed with loam the loaded camels slide, in rainy weather, and cannot safely pass. There was a great stillness in all their camp; these were the last hours of repose. As it was night there came the waits, of young camp-followers with links; who saluting every pavilion were last at the Persians' lodgings, (their place, as they are strangers and schismatics, doubtless for the avoiding of strifes, is appointed in the rear of all the great caravan) with the refrain *bes-salaamy bes-salaamy, Ullah yetow-wel ummr-hu, hy el-âdy, hy el-âdy, Mohammed Aga!* "go in peace, good speed, heigho the largess! We keep this custom, the Lord give long life to him;" and the Persian, who durst not break the usage, found his penny with a sorry countenance.

The new dawn appearing we removed not yet. The day risen the tents were dismantled, the camels led in ready to their companies, and halted beside their loads. We waited to hear the cannon shot which should open that year's pilgrimage. It was near ten o'clock when we heard the signal gun fired, and then, without any disorder, litters were suddenly heaved and braced upon the bearing beasts, their charges laid upon the kneeling camels, and the thousands of riders, all born in the caravan countries, mounted in silence. As all is up, the

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drivers are left standing upon their feet, or sit to rest out the latest moments on their heels: they with other camp and tent servants must ride those three hundred leagues upon their bare soles, although they faint; and are to measure the ground again upward with their weary feet from the holy places. At the second gun, fired a few moments after, the Pasha's litter advances and after him goes the head of the caravan column: other fifteen or twenty minutes we, who have places in the rear, must halt, that is until the long train is unfolded before us; then we strike our camels and the great pilgrimage is moving. There go commonly three or four camels abreast and seldom five: the length of the slow-footed multitude of men and cattle is near two miles, and the width some hundred yards in the open plains. The hajjaj were this year by their account (which may be above the truth) 6000 persons; of these more than half are serving men on foot; and 10,000 of all kinds of cattle, the most camels, then mules, hackneys, asses and a few dromedaries of Arabians returning in security of the great convoy to their own districts. We march in an empty waste, a plain of gravel, where nothing appeared and never a road before us. Hermon, now to the backward, with his mighty shoulders of snows closes the northern horizon; to the nomads of the East a noble landmark of Syria, they name it *Towil éth-Thalj* 'the height of snow' (of which they have small experience in the rainless sunstricken land of Arabia). It was a Sunday, when this pilgrimage began, and holiday weather, the summer azure light was not all faded from the Syrian heaven; the 13th of November 1876; and after twelve miles way, (a little, which seemed long in the beginning,) we came to the second desert station, where the tents which we had left behind us at Muzeyrib, stood already pitched in white ranks before us in the open wilderness. Thus every day the light tent-servants' train outwent our heavy march, in which, as every company has obtained their place from the first remove, this they observe continually until their journey's end. Arriving we ride apart, every company to their proper lodgings: this encampment is named *Ramta*.

It is their caravan prudence, that in the beginning of a long way, the first shall be a short journey: the beasts feel their burdens, the passengers have fallen in that to their riding in the field. Of a few sticks (gathered hastily by the way), of the desert bushes, cooking fires are soon kindled before all the tents; and since here are no stones at hand to set under the pots as Beduins use, the pilgrim hearth is a scraped out hole, so that their vessels may stand, with the brands put under, upon the

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two brinks, and with very little fuel they make ready their poor messes. The small military tents of the Haj escort of troopers and armed dromedary riders, *Ageyl*, (the most *Nejd* men), are pitched round about the great caravan encampment, at sixty and sixty paces: in each tent fellowship the watches are kept till the day dawning. A paper lantern after sunset is hung before every one to burn all night, where a sentinel stands with his musket, and they suffer none to pass their lines unchallenged. Great is all townsmen's dread of the Beduw, as if they were the demons of this wild waste earth, ever ready to assail the Haj passengers; and there is no Beduwy durst chop logic in the dark with these often ferocious shooters, that might answer him with lead and who are heard from time to time, firing backward into the desert all night; and at every instant crying down the line *kerakó kerakó* (sentinel!) the next and the next men thereto answering with *haderân* (ready). I saw not that any officer went the rounds. So busy is the first watch, whilst the camp is waking. These crickets begin to lose their voices about midnight, when for aught I could see the most of their lights were out; and it is likely the unpaid men spare their allowance: those poor soldiers sell their candles privily in the Haj market.

In the first evening hour there is some merrymake of drum-beating and soft fluting, and Arcadian sweetness of the Persians singing in the tents about us; in others they chant together some piece of their devotion. In all the pilgrims' lodgings are paper lanterns with candles burning; but the camp is weary and all is soon at rest. The hajjies lie down in their clothes the few night hours till the morrow gun-fire; then to rise suddenly for the march, and not knowing how early they may hear it, but this is as the rest, after the Pasha's good pleasure and the weather.

At half past five o'clock was the warning shot for the second journey. The night sky was dark and showery when we removed, and cressets of iron cages set upon poles were borne to light the way, upon serving men's shoulders, in all the companies. The dawn discovered the same barren upland before us, of shallow gravel and clay ground upon limestone.

The *Derb el-Haj* is no made road, but here a multitude of cattle-paths beaten hollow by the camels' tread, in the marching thus once in the year, of so many generations of the motley pilgrimage, over this waste. Such many equal paths lying together one of the ancient Arabian poets has compared to the bars of the rayed Arabic mantle. Commonly a shot is heard near mid-day, the signal to halt; we have then a short resting-

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WATER BY THE WAY.

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while, but the beasts are not unloaded and remain standing. Men alight and the more devout bow down their faces to say the canonical prayer towards Mecca. Our halt is twenty minutes; some days it is less or even omitted, as the Pasha has deemed expedient, and in easy marches may be lengthened to forty minutes. "The Pasha (say the caravaners) is our *Sooltán*." Having marched twenty miles at our left hand appeared *Mafrak*, the second Haj road tower, after the great *kellá* at *Muzeyrib*. but it is ruinous and as are some other towers abandoned. The *kellas* are fortified water stations weakly garrisoned; they may have been built two or three centuries, and are of good masonry. The well is in the midst of a *kella*; the water, raised by a simple machine of drum and buckets, whose shaft is turned by a mule's labour, flows forth to fill a cistern or *birket* without the walls. Gear and mules must be fetched down with the Haj from Damascus upon all the desert road, to *Medáin Sálíh*. The cisterns are jealously guarded; as in them is the life of the great caravan. No Aarab (nomads) are suffered to draw of that water; the garrisons would shoot out upon them from the tower, in which, closed with an iron-plated door, they are sheltered themselves all the year from the insolence of the nomads. The *kellas* stand alone, as it were ships, in the immensity of the desert; they are not built at distances of camps, but according to the opportunity of water; it is more often two or even three marches between them. The most difficult passage of the pilgrim road before Medina, is that four or five marches in high ground next above *Medáin Sálíh*; where are neither wells nor springs, but two ruined *kellas* with their great *birkets* to be filled only by torrent water, so that some years, in a nearly rainless country, they lie dry. A *nejjáb* or post, who is a Beduin dromedary-rider, is therefore sent up every year from *Medáin Sálíh*, bringing word to Damascus, in *ramathan* before the pilgrimage, whether there be water run in the *birket* at *Dár el-Hamra*, and reporting likewise of the state of the next waters. This year he was a messenger of good tidings, (showers and freshets in the mountains had filled the *birket*) and returned with the Pasha's commandment in his mouth, (since in the garrisons there are few or none lettered) to set a guard over the water. But in years when the *birket* is empty, some 1500 *girbies* are taken up in Damascus by the Haj administration, to furnish a public supplement of five days water for all the caravan: these water-skins are loaded betwixt the distant waterings, at the government cost, by Beduin carriers.

The caravaners pass the ruined and abandoned *kellás* with curses between their teeth, which they cast, I know not how justly,

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at the Haj officers and say "all the birkets leak and there is no water for the hajjaj; every year there is money paid out of the treasury that should be for the maintenance of the buildings; these embezzling pashas swallow the public silver; we may hardly draw now of any cistern before *Maan*, but after the long marches must send far to seek it, and that we may find is not good to drink." Turkish peculation is notorious in all the Haj service, which somewhat to abate certain Greek Christians, Syrians, are always bursars in Damascus of the great Moham-medan pilgrimage:—this is the law of the road, that all look through their fingers. The decay of the road is also, because much less of the public treasure is now spent for the Haj service. The impoverished Ottoman government has withdrawn the not long established camp at Maan, and greatly diminished the kella allowances; but the yearly cost of the Haj road is said to be yet £50,000, levied from the province of Syria, where the Christians cry out, it is tyranny that they too must pay from their slender purses, for this seeking hallows of the Moslemín. A yearly loss to the empire is the *surra* or "bundles of money" to buy a peaceful passage of the abhorred Beduins: the half part of Western Arabia is fed thereby, and yet it were of more cost, for the military escort, to pass "by the sword." The destitute Beduins will abate nothing of their yearly pension; that which was paid to their fathers, they believe should be always due to them out of the treasures of the 'Sooltan,' and if any less be proffered them they would say "The unfaithful pashas have devoured it!" the pilgrimage should not pass, and none might persuade them, although the *Dowla* (Sultan's Empire) were perishing. It were news to them that the Sultan of Islam is but a Turk and of strange blood: they take him to be as the personage of a prophet, king of the world by the divine will, unto whom all owe obedience. Malcontent, as has been often seen, they would assault the Haj march or set upon some corner of the camp by night, hoping to drive off a booty of camels: in warfare they beset the strait places, where the firing down of a hundred beggarly matchlocks upon the thick multitude must cost many lives; so an Egyptian army of Ibrahím Pasha was defeated in the south country by *Harb* Beduins.

Few hours westward of our march is Geraza, now *Jerash*, where I had seen formerly stupendous Roman ruins; and for Mohammedans there is a grave of their prophet *Hád*, who lies buried in more places of Arabia. By five in the afternoon, having journeyed thirty miles, we had sight again of our white encampment pitched before us. The Haj alighting, there come