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Charles Montagu Doughty

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I.

*Curious questioning of the townspeople. A Moor hakim had visited Hâyil. He cast out demons. The jins. Superstitious fears of the Arabs. Exorcists. A counterfeit Christian vaccinator cut off in the desert. Advantage of the profession of medicine. Hamûd sends his sick infant son to the Nasrâny hakim, who cures also Hamûd's wife. Diseases at Hâyil. The great Kasr. The guest-chambers. Hâyil house-building. Wards of the town. Artificers. Visit to S'weyfy. The mâkbara has swallowed up the inhabitants. Deaf and dumb man-at-arms of the Emir. Mâjid shooting with ball. English gunpowder. Gulf words heard at Hâyil. Palms and a gum-mastic tree in Ajja. 'The coming of Mohammed foretold in the Enjil.' Hamûd's tolerant urbanity. Another audience. The princely family of Ibn Rashîd. Telâl a slayer of himself. Metaab succeeded him. His nephews, Telâl's sons, conspire to kill him. Metaab dies by their shot. Bunder prince. Mohammed who fled to er-Riâth returns upon assurance of peace. He is again conductor of the Bagdad pilgrims. He comes again to Hâyil with the yearly convoy of temmn for the public kitchen. Bunder rides forth with his brother Bedr and Hamûd to meet him. Mohammed slays (his nephew) Bunder. Hamûd's speech to the people. Tragedies in the Castle. Mohammed's speech in the Méshab. He sits down as Muhafûth. Bedr taken and slain. Mohammed slays the slayer. Hamûd's nature. Mohammed the Emir is childless. His moderation and severity. The princely bounty. The Shammar state. Villages and hamlets. The public dues and taxes and expense of government. The Pr.ince's horses sold in India. His forces. Ibn Rashîd's forays. He "weakens" the Aarab. The Shammar principality.*

WHEN I returned in the afternoon from the ascent of the Sumrâ I found it was already a matter of talk in the town. The first persons met with approached to ask me, "What have you found there—anything? tell us! certainly you went to see something yonder,—and else wherefore had the Nasrâny climbed upon those high rocks, and paid pence for an ass?" As I passed by the sùk tradesmen beckoned to me from the shops, they too would speak with me of the adventure.

My former friends durst no more be seen openly in the

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[More information](#)

Nasrâny's company; it might be laid to their charge, that they also favoured the kafir. As I walked on the morrow in the town, one of the young patricians of those daily about the Emir came to question me:—the most of these complacent young gallants, as I might perceive them, through their silken shining petticoats, are some of the vilest spirits in Hâyil. With many shallow impatient gestures, and plucking my mantle, "Khalîl, said he, what dost thou here, so far from the sùk? Why wander round about? what brings thee into this place? what seekest, what seest thou? Is Hâyil a good town? the air, is it well?—and when wilt thou depart?" As I came again a Beduwy who sat in the upper end of the Mésheb saluted me friendly, he was of the Wélad Aly sheykhs, and had seen the Nasrâny at el-Héjr. We sat down together, and another came to me of those effeminate young silken Arabs, masking in the insolent confidence of the Emir. The cockerel disdainfully breaking our talk, I cut him off with—"Pass on, young man, my ears ache of thy ignorance and malevolent speech." The young man left us in anger, and as he was gone, "Khalîl, said the friendly Beduwy, I speak it of 'fellowship, deal not so plainly with this townspeople; believe me they will take up thy words, he also that you now sent away will not cease to hate thee extremely; and billah the young man is of their principal houses, and one nigh to the Emir.—Ay! here is another manner of life, than that to which thou hast been wont in the desert, and we are not here in the desert, neither be these the Beduw:—and himself, a messenger from the rebellious tribe, he seemed somewhat to be daunted in the tyrannical shadow of the place.

Some friendly persons coming to visit me, after I had flitted from my old beyt to the next makhzan, said, "Khalîl is the second hakim we have seen in this lodging."—"Who was the hakim in this chamber before me?"—"A Moghreby, a doctor indeed, [better than Khalîl,] there was none like him to write hijâbs, and upon every one he received three reals:—why, Khalîl, write you no hijâbs? Write, man, and the whole town will be at thy door, and every one with two dollars, or three, in his hand. Thou mightest be enriched soon, that now never canst thrive in this selling of medicines, the Arabs desire no medicines.—But the Moghreby, wellah, holding his hijâbs a moment in the smoke, delivered them to those who paid him reals, and the people found them very availing. If such were the Moghreby's hijâbs, is not Khalîl a Nasrâny, and therefore one who might write even better than he?—Ah! how that man was

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## A MOGHREBY HAKÍM.

3

powerful in his 'reading' (spells)! He cast out the demons of possessed persons, and he bound the jân, wellah, in yonder corner."—"What bound he in that corner?"—"Ahl el-aard, (the demon-folk, which inhabit under the earth,) they make men sick, and the possessed beat themselves, or they fall down, raging and foaming."

Aly el-Aÿid, my neighbour in the next houses, who was beholden to me for some faithful (medical) service, brought me a lamp of tallow, saying, 'He would not have a friend sleep here in the darkness, the demons might affray me;' and, looking round, "This makhzan, he said, is full of jân (since the Moghreby's casting out so many), I myself durst not sleep in this place."—"But tell me, who has seen these jân, and what is their likeness?"—"I have seen them, Khalîl, some tall, and some be of little stature, their looks are very horrible; certain of them have but one eye in the midst of their faces; other jins' visages be drawn awry in fearful manner, or their face is short and round, and the lips of many jins hang down to their middles." Aly el-Aÿid came early on the morrow to my beyt to know how I fared, and seeing not an hour of his tallow burned, he called me foolhardy to sleep without light. But pointing upward, he showed me a worse case, the great beam was half broken in the midst! the load of the earthen heaped ceiling threatened ruin and destruction, and therefore they had lodged none here of late:—but even that abandoned makhzan Hamûd had conceded to the Nasrâny unwillingly. The wavering branches of a palm which grew in Hamûd's orchard-grounds, sliding ghostly in the open casement by night, might, I thought, be the jân of their unquiet consciences. By day little chirping sparrows of the Méshab were my guests, and more than other, amiable company.

I found professors of exorcism (as before said) at Hâyil: they were two vile and counterfeit persons. One of them was a man growing into years; I had seen him at Abeyd's kahwa, and by certain of his answers he surprised me, and by his knowledge of letters: this person was a foreigner from East Nejd, but now he dwelt at Gofar. He seemed afraid in that presence to answer me; perhaps he durst not speak frankly, or much above his breath. That other was a young man of Hâyil, and he came secretly to my makhzan, to learn some mastery in the art, from the Nasrâny. He asked me, 'what were my manner to lay strong constraint upon the demons, and the words of my powerful spells, *kerreya*. 'He had a book too written full of very strong *readings* at home, and he sped very well by it, for he could cast out the jins more than any person besides.'

1—2

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

This was a smooth fellow, Nature had favoured him in all, and for his sweet voice the shrew was sometimes called in (he boasted) to sing before the Emir.

That Moghreby, with his blind arts, lived at Hâyil in the popular favour, and he had won much silver: also to the lone man they lent a pretty widow to wife,—“wherefore should he live without housewifery?” Abdullah, a slave of the Emir, came to the Nasrâny upon a day with a like proffer, and Mâjid showed me a pleasant Galla maiden of his father’s household, saying, that did I consent, she should be mine. The poor girl was gentle and modest, and without unwillingness; but because I would not lead my life thus, they ascribed it to the integrity of the Christian faith, and had the more tolerance of me in the rest. Word that ‘the Princes suffered at Hâyil, and even favoured the Nasrâny’ was spread by Beduins returning from the capital, into all the next parts of Arabia; and afterward I came nowhither in Nejd, until I arrived at the Kasîm villages, where they had not heard of the wandering Nasrâny, and by the signs they all knew me. They told me also of a Nasrâny (some Syrian by likelihood or Mesopotamian), who years before, coming to Hâyil, had taken the people’s money for pretended vaccination. “But Ullah, they said, cut him off, for he was met with and slain in the desert by the Aarab.”

Little was my practice of medicine, yet this name procured me entrance amongst them, and the surest friends. A man of medicine is not found in Nejd; but commonly they see some Ajamy hakîm, once a year, at Hâyil amongst the Persian pilgrims. I was called to visit suffering persons; yet because they would not leave with me the smallest pledge of their good faith, I remained with hardly any daily patients. Hamûd now sent to me an infant son, *Feysal*, that seemed to be of a very good disposition, and was sick of fever and dysentery. The child whom they brought to me, languishing and likely to die, I left, when I departed from Hâyil, nearly restored to health. I was called also to Hamûd’s wife in his family house. I found her clad as other Arabian women in a simple calico smock dyed in indigo, her face was blotted out with the heathenish veil-clout; I gave her a medicine and she in a few days recovered. Of all their ailings most common (we have seen already) are eye-diseases,—it is the poorer, that is the misdieted people, who are the sooner affected—then diseases of the intestines, agues, old rheumatism; and men, the ignominy of the Meccaw’s religion, too often complain of inability. The morbus gallicus is common at Hâyil,

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## MALADIES.

5

and in the neighbourhood; I saw many hypochondriacs [they are a third of all the Arabians]. There were brought to me cases of a sudden kind of leprosy; the skin was discoloured in whitish spots, rising in the space of two or three days in the breast and neck. Cancer was not uncommon, and partial paralysis with atrophy of the lower limbs.

I enquired when was the Kasr founded?—which though clay-built is of a certain noble aspect. The wall is near eight feet in thickness at the ground, and more than forty in height, and seems to be carried about a great space. Upon the public place, I measured this castle building, one hundred and ten paces, with two towers. The doorway of the Kasr, under the tower in the midst, is shut at evening by a rude gate of heavy timber, in which is a little wicket, only to be entered stooping—and that before dark is put-to. The wall and foundation of the huge clay building is from old times and was laid by some of the former sheykhs (surely men of ambitious mind) at Hâyil, before Abdullah. The Més hab in front is twenty-five paces over, and the makhzans built in face of the castle are nine in number. [*v. the fig., Vol. I. p. 587.*] To every makhzan is a door with a wooden lock opening into a little court, and beyond is the guest-chamber without door, square and dark, some fifteen feet by twelve feet. If any rubba would have fuel in the cold winter days, they must ask it of the Emir sitting in the public mejlis. Telâl built the makhzans, and the great mesjid; his father Abdullah had ended the building of the Kasr, only one year before his decease. The clay of the house-building at Hâyil is disposed in thick layers, in which are bedded, as we saw at Møgug, flat brick-blocks, long dried in the sunny air, set leaning wise, and very heavy, of great strength and endurance. The copes of the house-walling at Hâyil, and the sills of their casements, are often finished above with a singular stepped pinnacle (*fig., Vol. I. p. 106*), which resembles the strange sculptured cornice of the Petra and Héjr frontispices.

Their streets—I came in then from living long in the wilderness—I thought well set out; the rows are here of one-storied houses. There is no seeming of decay, but rather of newness, and thriving and spending: their capital village is seen, as her inhabitants, well arrayed. Hâyil is divided into eleven wards, a twelfth is S'weyfy. All the settlements in nomad Arabia, even the smallest hamlets, with the incorrupt desert about them, have a certain freshness and decent aspect above that which the traveller arriving from the West may

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

have seen in Syria. The village Arabians—come of the nomad blood—are happy (where God's peace is not marred by striving factions) under the mild and just government of their home-born sheykhs; and in their green palm islands, they have much of the free-born and civil mind of the desert. At Hâyil, and Teyma, the stranger's eye may mark certain little close frames set high upon the front walling of many dârs, and having the form of right-angled triangles; he will see them to be timbered above the doorways. These are shooting sconces (like the machicolations of our old fortresses), for defence of the door of the household.

As for the administration of the town, there are no dues at Hâyil for maintenance of ways or public lighting,—which is unknown even at Damascus—nor so much as for watchmen: yet the streets are clean, and draffe is cast out into certain pits and side places. Irrigation water drawn by camel labour from their deep wells, though not of the best, is at hand in sebîls and conduits; to these common pools the town housewives resort to fill their pans and their girbies, and for the household washing. Dogs are not seen by day in any Nejd villages, but some lost hounds which remain without the most oases, will prowl by their streets in the night-time. Of household animals, there are in nearly all the settlements small kine for their sweet milk and as light plough-beasts, asses for riding and carriage, cats to quit them of vermin, besides poultry.

The artificers in Hâyil are few and of the smiths' caste, workers in metal and wood, in which there are some who turn small and brittle ethelware bowls. Their thelûl saddle here is other than that of Teyma and westwards, in which the pillars are set upright. There is a petty industry among women of sewing and embroidering, with silk and metal thread, the mantles which are brought down (in the piece) from Jauf and Bagdad,—none are made here. I saw in the sùk fine skein-silks, folded in printed papers, and such the shopkeepers oft-times put in my hands to read for them;—but the language was English! and when I found the title it was *THE BOMBAY GAZETTE*. Their hareem plait the common house-matting of the tender springing palm-leaf, as in all the oases. There are besides a few men of builders' and carpenters' craft, rude workers, nearly without tools, and pargeters in jiss or *jips*, a gypsum-stone which is brought from the mountain, and found clotted together, like mortar, in the desert sand. The *jips*, broken and ground to a flour-like powder, they mix with water, and spread it for the border and lining-walls of hearth-pits:



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Excerpt

[More information](#)*S'WEYFLY; A PLAGUE-STRICKEN VILLAGE.* 7

this dries quickly to a hard white crust, shining like marble, that will bear the fire. The wood and hay gatherers who go far out into the wilderness, are *Kusmán*, laborious foreigners from el-Kasím; the nomad-spirited townspeople of Jebel Shammar are not good for such drudging labour.

I went out of Háyl another day towards S'weyfly. Beyond Wásit I walked by fields where men were labouring, and one threw clods at the Nasrány, but the rest withheld him; I went on between the two Samras, and beside the wide seyl bed, being there half a stone-cast over. The soil is now good loam, no more that sharp granite grit of Háyl; the dates are good, they are the best of the country.—The first houses I found to be but waste walls and roofless, and the plantations about them forsaken; the languishing palm-stems showed but a dying crown of rusty leaves. I had not perceived a living person in these fields, that were once husbanded upon both sides of the large-bedded torrent. The pest, which destroyed the Jebel villages, came upon them after a year of dearth, when the date harvest had failed, and the price of corn (three sahs to the real) was risen more than twofold. Strange it seems to us, used to public remedies, that in none of the merchants, more than in cattle, nor in the Prince himself, was there any readiness of mind to bring in grain from a distance:—the Moslem religion ever makes numbness and death in some part of the human understanding. The wába being come upon them there died in two months in this small village two hundred persons. The few which remained at S'weyfly were feeble even now, and had lost their health, so that it was said of them "They might hardly bear the weight of their mantles." The cruel disease seized upon men sooner than women and children.

At length I came where a few persons were loitering abroad; I saluted them in passing, and asked "Who has here a coffee-house, and where are the inhabitants?" They saw he was a stranger who enquired this of them and responded with a desolate irony, "They lie in yonder mákbara!" I went forward where I heard the shrilling of a suány. A woman (since the men were dead) was driving that camel-team at the well. It is eight fathoms here to water; all their wells are brackish, and sweet water to drink must be fetched from Háyl 'for money'. Brackish water in a sweet soil is best for the palm irrigation; but if the palms be rooted in any saltish or bitter earth, as at Kheybar, they have need of a fresh irrigation water: and always for some little saltiness in the soil or water palm-plants thrive the better. Such water to drink is very unwholesome in these

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

climates, and was a cause they think of so many dying here in the pestilence. In old time, they say, when S'weyfly was ancient Hâyil, the wells in this part were sweet, that is until the new planting above them had spent the vein of good water. One led the stranger in hospitable manner to the best house which remained, to drink coffee. We entered a poor clay room, long unswept, and in the sun a swarming place of flies; this was their kahwa. The three or four ghastly looking and weakly speaking men who followed us in to drink were those that survived in the neighbourhood; and it seemed as if the nightmare lay yet upon them. Kindly they received the guest, and a tray was presently set before me of their excellent dates. The S'weyfly villagers, for this hospitable and gentle humour, are said to resemble rather the Beduw than Hâyil townspeople. Enough it seemed to them that the stranger was the hakîm, they would not cavil with a guest or question of his religion.

Whilst I sat with them at the coffee, there entered, with his sword, a deaf and dumb young man, whom I knew in Hâyil, one of the Prince's armed rajajil: and with vehement signs and maffling cries he showed us he was come out from Hâyil to seek me. The poor fellow had always a regard of me in the town, and would suffer none to trouble me. I have seen him threaten even Mâjid in my chamber with angry looks, and shake his stick at the princeling boy, who too much, he thought, molested me. He now made them signs—drawing the first finger across his throat—that he feared for me so far abroad. All the way homeward the poor man blamed me, as if he would say “Why adventure so far alone, and thou art in danger to be waylaid?” I made him signs I went to visit sick people, that were in need of medicines. Lower where we passed he showed me smiling a few palm trees and a field which were his own. I heard he was a stranger (as are so many of the Emir's men) from el-Aruth. At my first arriving at Hâyil, when they beckoned to him that I was not of their religion, he quickly signified his friendly counsel that ‘I should pray as the rest’. The poor Speechless uttered his soul in a single syllable, *Ppahppah*; that is nearly the first voice in children and dumb creatures, beginning in M-, B-, W-, which is all one. This P is not found in all the large Arabic alphabet, but any foreign taken-up words having in them that initial letter they must pronounce with F- or else with B-. All his meaning was now very well understood by the people of Hâyil; they made him kindly answers with movement of the lips, as in speaking, and of his wistful life-



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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## SHOOTING AT A MARK.

9

long comparison, he could guess again their minds: but if any mocked, with great bursting forth of *Ppahs* and chattering, and furious eyes, and laying hand upon his sword, he threatened their lives, or suddenly he drew it forth rattling, to the half, in the scabbard. Of his long sufferance of the malice of the world might be this singular resolution in him, to safeguard another manner of deaf and dumb person. He rode in the band upon his *thelûl*, and served very well, they said, in the Prince's *ghrazzus*.

As I returned to town I met with Mâjid and his company carrying guns in the fields, his uncle Fâhd was with them. Thus they went out daily, shooting with ball at a white paper set up in an orchard wall at a hundred and twenty paces. I sat down with Fâhd to see the practice; their shots from the long Arabic matchlocks struck at few fingers' distance all round the sheet, but rarely fell within it. The best was Ghrânim, when he was one amongst them, for looking through spectacles, he would send his ball justly at the first shot into the midst of the white;—this firing with the match does not unsettle the aim. They shot with 'powder Engleysy', of a tin flask, whereupon I read in a kind of stupor, HALL, DART-FORD! There are many sea-borne wares of the Gulf-trade seen at Hâyil, and the people take as little thought from whence they come to them, as our country people of China tea-chests; European are many things of their most necessary use, as the husbandmen's spades and crowbars, pigs of lead with the English stamp, iron and tinning metal; their clothing is calico of Manchester and Bombay. All their dealings are in foreign money; reals of Spain, Maria Theresa dollars, and Turkish mejidy crowns; gold money is known more than seen among them. They call *doubloon* the piece of 5 Turkish pounds, English sovereigns *ginniyât* or *bintu*, and the 20 fr. piece *lira fransdwy*. For small silver in the Hâyil sùk they have Austrian sixpences, and certain little gross Persian coins, struck awry, and that for the goodly simplicity of the workmanship resemble the stamps of the old Greek world. With the love of novelty which is natural even to Semitic souls, they are also importers with their foreign merchandise of some Gulf words, especially from the Persian, as they will say for a dromedary *shitr*, rather than of their own wealth in the current Arabic, (*hajîn*,) *thelûl*, *rikâb*, (*hadûj*), *mâtîyah*, *rohûl*, *hâshy*, *hurra*.

Mâjid invited me, if I stayed till winter, to take part in their hunting expeditions in Ajja. Then the young franklins and men of Hâyil, and even the Princes, go out to the mountain to shoot at the *bedûn*, driving asses with them to carry their

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

water: they commonly stay out a week thus and trust to shooting the game for their supper. In many small wadies of Ajja are wild palms watered by springs, or growing with their roots in the seyl ground. The owners are Beduin families which come thither only in the time of the date gathering: the date is smaller than the fruit of trees which are husbanded. There grows a tree in Ajja, named *el-arâr*, from which flows a sort of gum-mastica, "it resembles the tamarisk." Ajja is greater, and a score of miles longer, than the sister mountain Selma.

Hamûd I saw daily; I went to dine with him again, and as we sat in the evening, he said to me, "Is there not something written in the Enjil, of Mohammed?"—"Nay, nothing, and I know of it every word."—"But is there not mentioned that a prophet, by name *Hamed*, should come after;—and that is Mohammed?" I answered shortly again: "No, there *is not*." Hamûd startled, he believed me, his humanity persuaded him that I could not intend any offence—and that were without remission—towards the religion. I said further: "If such were found in the Enjil, I would be a Mosleman; do you read this word in the koran!" Hamûd did not answer, he sat on gravely musing. It was an enigma to me what they might mean by a prediction of Hamed or Mohammed (which is one) in the Christian scriptures.—We read in the sixth verset of the koran chapter 61, "*And said Îsa-bin-Miriam, O Beny Israel, I am the apostle of Ullah, to confirm the Tourât (Mosaic Scriptures) and to show unto you the coming of an apostle,—his name shall be Ahmed*" (The Glorious). To such Ahmed or Glorious One responds in the tongue of the New or Hellenic Scriptures the word *Περικλυτός*, 'very illustrious.' Therefore their barbaric doctors bray that the malicious Nasâra have miswritten *Παράκλητος*, 'COMFORTER' [which word is but four times found, and namely, in the last testament of Christ, from the xiv. to the xvi. chapters of St John].

Hamûd took pleasure to question, and commune with me of our religion; he smiled with pious admiration to hear the Nasrâny stranger repeat after him some part of their canonical prayers, and say 'he held them thus far for godly,' as the *fâtiha*, commonly said in the beginning of their devotion, which sounds in their full and ripe Nejd utterance of a certain surprising beauty and solemnity: the sense of the text is this: "In the name of the God of the Bowels of Mercies. The praise be unto God, the Lord of all worlds [creatures], the God of the Bowels and Mercies, Sovereign of the day of doom; we adore Thee, we for help do cry unto Thee. Lead us in