

That King Across the Jordan

He Gets Along With Two Wives

When He Could Have Four . . .

And Though He Lives in a Desert Palace,
He Still Does Business in a Goat's Hair Tent
Where He Bossed His Bedouins Before England
Put Him on the Payroll for \$60,000 a Year

By JAMES JAMESON

AMMAN, TRANSJORDAN.

IT is a veritable palace, in which Emir Abdullah, the regent of Transjordan and his large household reside, and into which I was ushered by his youthful and smooth Grand Chamberlain Hamid Pasha Elwardi.

The moment was somewhat inopportune, for it had not been quite a week since the treaty between the British government and Transjordan was signed which recognized the Emir's title to the regency of the country, a treaty which has not ceased to be the topic of discussion in all the British press and which continues to be the subject of attacks and fierce condemnation by what little remains of public opinion in a desert land which has never enjoyed even one little independent newspaper of its own.

There was but little chance for a real interview to be obtained, for correspondents from all the most important newspapers in England, some of them especially sent from there for the purpose of interviewing the Emir, were roaming about the palace, waiting to be received by him.

But the good Lord Chamberlain needed little persuasion to ascertain that I was but little interested in the main topic of discussion, that the extraction of the Emir's political views on the treaty and on other outstanding topics of the moment, was, to me, secondary. I was more anxious to know something about the private life of the occupant of the palace and that of his two wives, the twelve negro slaves who serve them and the large retinue of officials who reside in that one-horse town destined, however, to become the capital of a prosperous and thrifty state.

As I waited to be announced, I had ample opportunity to admire the luxurious residence of the Emir, to which he had moved not quite two years ago from a humble tent of goat skin.

That tent is still there, a few hundred yards away from the palace of splendor and, furnished with unusually precious Persian carpets, it serves as the temporary reception room for the numerous guests who call on the Emir—chieftains of tribes, heads of clans, all waiting to be entertained on a lavish scale, on that high standard which has made Arab hospitality, and especially Bedouin hospitality, a byword for blind generosity and lavishness.

It is in this tent that most blood feuds are settled by the Emir to this day; it is there that broiled meat and rice is offered to guests and parties in lawsuits, and it stands in refreshing contrast to the palace close by.

THE palace is a beautiful piece of architecture, designed by a famous Egyptian artist, Mohammed El Matri, who was bent on putting into the edifice what he likes to call the true and unpolished spirit of the desert. Half Spanish and half desert architecture, the palace strikes one as matching harmoniously the dreary sand hills, yet not without a ready responsiveness to the ruins of the old Roman amphitheater which overlooks the palace.

There is, of course, a distinctive Arabic style about the interior and every feature in almost every room—every door and every window—is designed to make a harmonious entity with the structure as a whole.

But it is on the large reception room that the artist seems to have lavished all his skill. The ceilings of gold, the oak pillars, the great glass doors, all combine into a picture of unperturbed harmony and produce a picture of genuine Arab architecture such as one reads about in the tales of the Arabian Nights.

That the Emir lives in such great luxury, when even his brother, King Feisal of Mesopotamia, content himself with a comparatively humble palace in Baghdad and when his aristocratic brother Ali, the ex-king of Hejaz, lives as a farmer in his estates in Iraq, might strike one as unnecessary lavishness on the part of a ruler in a poor country.

It is, no doubt, an enormous burden upon the finances of a poor country, a burden not much mitigated by the fact that the Emir's civil list is received directly from the pockets of the British taxpayers.

But the British, who guide the Emir and his government and who control the least of their doings rather closely, think otherwise. For in eastern countries a ruler's prestige is measured by the pomp that he can manage, by the splendor of his hospitality and by his generosity.

Time was when the Emir went a little too far in his lavishness, so far that his British "advisors" were forced to call his heedless attention to what seemed to them an unwarranted squandering of public funds.

Wedding presents of automobiles costing thousands of dollars threatened to take the place of the traditional camel gifts worth but a handful of gold pounds, while his closest friends—and they were numerous—boasted of being able to "mitch" their boss as they pleased.

But those days are no more. The civil list of the Emir, which has lately been reduced from a fabulous sum to the

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El Salt, one of the picturesque cities in Emir Abdullah's domain stretches over the heights of Gilead.

"small" sum of \$60,000 a year, is strictly controlled by the financial officers of the British resident who ask and obtain vouchers for all sums expended, and the Emir and his staff are very much curbed as to statements of a political nature.

They are not so reticent, however, in conversation as to the family affairs of the Emirate. The Lord Chamberlain would tell you that the Emir, while entitled to four wives by the Koran, has but two wives, who live apart in regal and truly Mohammedan seclusion; that the first, a woman of not quite forty, is the Emir's cousin, a true princess of the Hejaz, who claims direct descent from the Prophet himself and is the mother of Prince Tajal, who has been sent to Oxford for some modern education; that the second wife who had previously served the first as a slave, is a beautiful Turkish maiden hailing from Constantinople and was married with the express consent of the Emir's first wife.

THIS scant number of women is attributed to the Emir's rather modern outlook on matrimony. Yet, the wives rarely show themselves in public and never without a veil.

They are served by 12 black slaves brought by the Emir from the Sudan, and they have become full-fledged members of the household.

There are two young daughters of marriageable age who, it was secretly stated, went to Jerusalem to have their hair bobbed. Though it is somewhat premature to think of appropriate matches for the two desert heiresses, it was nevertheless known in court quarters that the question of their future husbands is preoccupying their parents, even perturbing them.

I was busily engaged in conversation with the amiable Lord Chamberlain, who is ever ready to give what information is available about the family life of his master, when a black servant entered the room to announce that the Emir would be ready in a minute. He added, however, that the visit was to be very brief. A man in the early forties, with a full but not at all weak face, and the inevitable deep eyes of the leader

of the desert, the Emir Abdullah lacks every bit the nobility that he really is. There is, it is true, a not inappreciable difference between his features and those of his brothers, King Feisal, and especially of ex-King Ali, the true aristocrat and scholar of the Hashimite family.

King Feisal strikes you as a widely traveled and well-read gentleman, familiar, it is true, with the art of ruling, yet having many other interests or hobbies besides.

As one time he was said to have had a great interest in painting.

Not so the Emir Abdullah, whose portion and international prestige are somewhat lower than those of his royal brother. With the exception of chess he would appear to have few hobbies. His is a passion for ruling his wild and nomadic tribes, and never is he more satisfied than when he can convince you that the tribes under his rule are enjoying great prosperity.

He himself feels quite contented under what amounts to British domination. He worries no more over the curtailment of his allowance, which at one time threatened to bring him to the verge of starvation—at least he thought so for a time.

habs who, the Emir declared, "has enthroned himself in Mecca without anybody delegating him there. For he was appointed neither by a duly accredited body nor by the Hashimite king, nor indeed by anybody else. That he could style himself Ruler of Mecca was sheer impudence, that impudence which has been characteristic of him ever since he posed as king of those heretic Wahabites, who call themselves fanatical Moslems and who are indeed merely wild and ignorant animals."

Now it was not the purpose of my visit to enter into arguments with the amiable Emir, nor indeed to explain to him that there were at least two aspects to every question.

The Wahabites may have their vices, certainly they are not as "cultured," in the desert conception of the word, as were those who followed the Hejazian armies, and Ibn Saud's claim to the Caliphate is indeed very feeble and his title to Mecca questionable. But it is certain that he has acquired himself rather excellently and has won the esteem of the whole world which has come to see in him the true statesman of Arabia.

Yet the wrath of the Emir at the sheer mention of King Ibn Saud was unmistakable. If there are two bitter personal enemies in the world they are Emir Abdullah and the King of the Wahabites. They are frank in their hatred.

"There raids of the Wahabites, for which the Europeans think King Ibn Saud is not responsible," continued the Emir, "are organized by him, and by him only. Only the naive European rulers can believe what he says. He has been a long career of bloodshed disguised under the allegedly holy, but truly inhuman principles of Wahabism."

I LEFT the palace of Emir Abdullah with mixed impressions. They are, no doubt, an ambitious and fairly serious lot, these Arabian princes who have found

such a wonderful chronicler and portrait painter in Colonel Lawrence of Arabian fame. They are out to do the best for their countries. But they are still living in a somewhat primitive age, in the age of royal grants reluctantly given by an overburdened British exchequer. And they have had to pay a dear price for those munificent grants—the price of the full independence of those people they are called upon to rule and, therefore, their own independence.

There is little doubt that they chafe under this Anglo-Saxon domination, though they appear tractable.

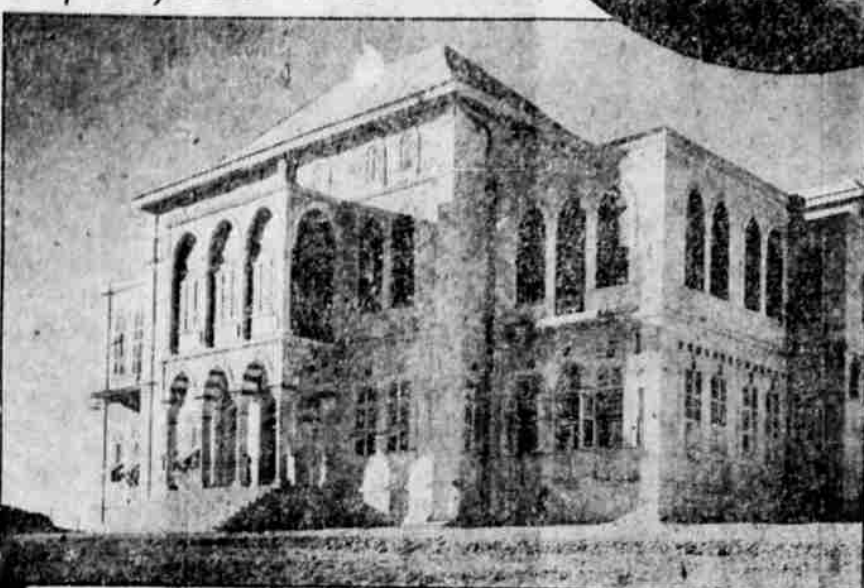
Princes in captivity, chained Emirs in palaces, their power curtailed to the minimum, their rule under control, they had little to choose between a defeat by their Arabian enemies, the Wahabites, and a luxurious captivity under the benevolent guidance of their British masters who have raised them from obscurity.

Who heard of them before the war? Who was interested in their doings, their intrigues and their raids? They were all, at best, of strictly local import.

But what they say and do has far-flung echoes, and reaches wide audiences. The millions of Moslem subjects in Asia, though not fully awakened, are nevertheless responsive to the call of these rulers-by-grace, and the world has not settled its accounts yet with the rising force of Mohammedanism.



His Highness, Emir Abdullah . . . lacks the desert nobility he is, delights to rule his wild tribes . . . gives away no more expensive automobiles.



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Real sheiks—bold chieftains of desert clans . . . pay frequent homage to the king of Transjordan at his palace in the sand.

What worries he has are really of a personal nature, not unshared, however, with political considerations. The fate of his old father, who has been in exile in the island of Cyprus, has been worrying him considerably. From a position of great majesty, of Caliph of all Moslems and King of the Hejaz, the wealthy King Hussein had to descend to a position of humiliation.

Then there is his scholarly brother, Ali, who cut a tragic figure both as a king and as the royal farmer he became. He was unfamiliar with the petty intrigues of diplomacy and did his best to avoid being involved in them, but with very scant success.

He was dragged into them and the result was that he had to till that large plot of land which was given him by the government of Iraq rather than rule and collect taxes.

THESE questions about the fate and welfare of his father and brother could not help bringing the Emir into a discussion of politics.

There suddenly emerged to the members of the Hussein family the sinister figure of Sultan Ibn Saud, the ruler of the Wa-