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A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca (Classic Reprint)

Arthur John Byng Wavell

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Excerpt from A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca

When I was President of the Royal Geographical Society a traveller asked to see me concerning a proposed exploration in the wilds of Arabia. There entered my room a young man, rather below the middle height, evidently very light in weight, with dark hair and a much-tanned complexion; and he began discussing the matter in hand - the loan by the Society of some instruments, if I remember rightly - with no assurance of manner and with apparent diffidence. As the conversation proceeded, the doubt entered my mind whether I ought not to utter some words of advice concerning the nerve required for an expedition such as that contemplated; when luckily for me he drove out of my mind all idea of giving any such utterly inappropriate warning by quietly remarking, as if the words were forced out of him by the necessities of the case, "I have already been at Mecca and Medina in disguise." Ever after that interview I watched the career of Arthur Wavell with the greatest interest, for I felt that I had been in contact with an exceptional personality.

This modern pilgrim to Mecca, who was only induced to publish an account of his pilgrimage some time after his return, was not a man easy to get to know by one much older than himself; for he was shy and disinclined to talk, especially in general company.

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