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Till the End of Time

'Your master is the Sultan. But if he should give you any order contrary to British interests, you have the right to appeal to me, and through me to the Foreign Office.'

SIR BERNARD BURROWS

Political Resident in the Gulf, advising Colonel David Smiley on his appointment as commander of the Sultan's armed forces in 1958

'If we were in trouble before, we could say "the Royal Air Force will come". That is not true any more.'

SULTAN QABOOS

explaining to the author why he spends so much on weapons

When the money rush began it was assumed that Oman had always been closed and poverty-ridden, an impression not discouraged by successive British administrators, many of whom did far too little for a country they were 'helping'. In fact Oman once had the largest empire in Arabia and in 1833 became the first Arab country to have diplomatic representation in the United States. It is their historical achievement, so often aborted but now, by the grace of God and the money rush, being rekindled, which makes Omanis feel more grand than other Arabs.

In the early centuries AD the country was part of the Persian empire. It became one of the first to adopt Islam, providing a refuge for former supporters of Muhammud's son-in-law, Ali.

They fought the Persians for mastery and after a number of uneasy compromises their leader, called an Imam, controlled the interior (known as Oman), and the Persians held the coastal towns around Muscat.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, rival European powers realized the strategic importance of the country to trading routes and in 1507 the Portuguese explorer Affonso da Albuquerque invaded Muscat, destroying all the ships in port and ensuring the discipline of his prisoners by slicing off their ears and noses. The Portuguese remained in control for over a hundred years until retaliation began in 1622 with the British East India Company evicting them from Hormuz. A few years later, in 1659, the British tried to arrange a treaty with Oman for a naval base but their negotiator, a commercial traveller called Colonel Rainsford, died before it could be signed.

For Oman it was a relief, and the next hundred years provided their greatest achievements. They built the strongest non-European fleet in the Indian Ocean and conquered Portuguese territory on the East African coast from Mogadishu to Cape Delgado and Zanzibar. For a time they even held Bahrain, to the north, and as a bonus they attacked and defeated British ships, consigning the crews to slavery. Gradually, though, the country disintegrated under the pressure of internal jealousies until Ahmed bin Sa'id, founder of the present Sultan's dynasty, made himself influential by playing off the British against the French – particularly as Napoleon needed his support for a planned invasion of India. Eventually the British won and formalized the victory in an agreement signed on 12 October 1798, between the Sultan, 'whose grandeur be eternal', and the British East India Company, 'whose greatness be perpetuated', which stated: 'Whereas frequent applications have been made, and are still making, by the French and Dutch people for a Factory, i.e. to seat themselves either in Maskat or Goombroom [now Bandar Abbas], or at other ports, it is written that whilst warfare shall continue between the British company and them, never shall, from respect to the Company's friendship, be given to them throughout all my territories a place to fix or seat themselves in, nor shall they even get ground to stand upon within this State.' Two years later on 18 January 1800, an even

more pro-British treaty was signed in order that 'no opportunity may be offered to designing men, who are ever eager to promote dissensions, and that the friendship of the two states may remain unshook till the end of time, and till the sun and moon have finished their revolving career.'

The British now controlled Oman, although it was never given the official status of a colony for fear of antagonizing the French, and there was another period of stability and prosperity until 1856 when Said bin Sultan died after a fifty-year reign and his two sons quarrelled over the inheritance. The British mediated and one son, Thwaini (who was to be assassinated ten years later by his son), kept Muscat; the other, Majid, took Zanzibar and agreed to pay his brother compensation of 40000 Maria Theresa dollars a year. When he failed to pay, the British took over responsibility under the Canning Award of 1861, and paid the equivalent £6500 in sterling every year until 1970.

Family dissension coincided with other events which further destroyed Oman's position. British ambitions in Africa inhibited Omani expansion, the slave-trade basis of her wealth was suppressed, the opening of the Suez Canal made the country less indispensable, Muscat's population fell from 55000 to 8000, and the medievalism and dependence from which it had raised itself were reimposed. It was not very British. One Sultan had two cages at the door of his palace. First offenders were kept in one, and a lion in the other. Recidivists were put in with the lion at feeding-time.

There was the occasional viceregal visit, performed with the ceremonial perfection only to be expected. Lord Curzon for his appearance in 1903 had a red carpet laid on the sand from the water's edge to the steps of the imposing consulate building, bought thirteen years earlier for 5000 Maria Theresa dollars (about £800). To prevent his feet getting wet he was carried from boat to carpet on a sedan fashioned from a kitchen chair. It was most proper, and Curzon complimented Oman on being like a 'royal feudatory of the British Crown rather than that of an independent sovereign'. The whole coast, he added, had been saved from extinction. 'We have not destroyed your independence but preserved it. We are not now going to throw

this away this century of costly and triumphal enterprise; we shall not wipe out the most unselfish page in history. Your independence will continue to be upheld, and the influence of the British Government will remain supreme.' (See Appendix.)

The following year, realizing the importance of the Straits of Hormuz, Curzon insisted that three flagstaffs be erected on its narrower part at the Musandum Peninsula in order to deter Russian advances. But which flag should fly? Not the Union Jack because the land was not legally British. The Foreign Office suggested the blue ensign of the Royal Indian Marine. But, explained the horrified Admiralty, we might have to defend it. Unthinkable, said the Committee for Imperial Defence. So the flagstaffs were removed. No one in Whitehall realized that they could not be seen from the sea anyway, and the inhabitants of Musandum would not be too impressed either. They were the Shihuh tribe of troglodytes who communicated by making barking noises, had the curious habit of standing on one leg, and were known for their savage unfriendliness.

In Muscat, meanwhile, successive Sultans tried to raise money by levying taxes on tribes in the interior. In retaliation the tribes reinstated the title of Imam, dormant for many years, and elected a leader to oppose the Sultan's power. The British sent a gunboat to prevent an uprising and see fair play between tribal leaders lobbing cannon balls at each other from one Portuguese fort to another, and then bribed the Sultan with 100000 rupees to sign an agreement banning the import of arms. The tribes were furious because gun-running to India provided a large part of their income. Finally, in 1920, with the British political agent in the Gulf as chief negotiator, the treaty of Sib was signed, and kept secret for fifty years for no apparent reason other than endemic melodrama (see Appendix).

By the time the present Sultan's father succeeded, aged twenty-one, in 1932 (*his* father was 'encouraged' by the British to abdicate, and went to live in Bombay) the country was bankrupt and had a total budget of £50000 a year. Sa'id bin Taimur resolved never to get into debt and to keep his country as independent as possible in spite of the British. His first test began in 1949 when Saudi Arabia, supported by the American government, who wanted to reduce British influence in the area, and

ARAMCO, who were prospecting with enthusiasm, claimed nine villages of the Buraimi oasis lying between Oman and the Gulf which were administered jointly by Abu Dhabi and Oman. Before oil was discovered there had been no necessity for internationally defined borders but now it became a critical issue. Britain was asked to negotiate and after talks had dragged on inconclusively for three years the Saudis attacked on 31 August 1952, with arms and transport supplied by ARAMCO.

The Sultan mobilized an army of 8000 tribesmen and prepared to defend. He was joined by a slightly bewildered British soldier, Colin Maxwell, then thirty-six, formerly of the Palestinian police and British Army. 'I wanted to get back to Arabia, and the FO mentioned a job in Oman,' he told me.

'It sounded exciting, so out I came. I arrived at Sohar where the Sultan was encamped. It was real Lawrence of Arabia stuff, terribly exciting. They were all on camels about to go off to fight the Saudis. We waited five days while the British and Americans tried to defuse it.'

The British were worried because, as a diplomat later explained, 'The Americans were so mixed up in it all. Suppose the Sultan had gone in under our auspices and some idiotic American geologist had got himself killed: there'd have been hell to pay. It just wasn't worth the risk. We couldn't let them do it.'[1] So the consul general was dispatched from Muscat. He arrived at Sohar, stiff with cramp, and told the Sultan and his tribesmen to go home.

The dispute went to international arbitration in Geneva, where talks began in September 1955 but broke down when the British accused the Saudis of trying to bribe anyone with influence. The Americans retorted that the British were annoyed because they knew they were about to lose. It was, according to foreign secretary Harold Macmillan, 'a new and irritating problem which required immediate attention. The Buraimi oasis was vital to our oil interests. Our only course was to support the local ruler, whose rights were accepted, and to occupy the area by force. In all the circumstances, I thought it wiser not to consult the United States or even the old Commonwealth territories about our decision. This operation was successfully carried out on the morning of 16 October and the

House of Commons duly informed. When I told Dulles what had happened, he did not seem unduly disturbed, although a day or two later he complained that the State Department was upset because they had no prior warning. I explained that this was due to anxiety to avoid involving him in any accusation of complicity, and with this explanation he appeared satisfied. The charge of bribery was fully justified, for when we occupied the area a Saudi police detachment was found in possession of sums of money far in excess of their requirements.'[2]

There was uneasy peace for two years, and then the Saudis encouraged the Imam to form a breakaway government with offices in Cairo. The Imamate issued its own passports and sold stamps, printed in London, which showed flowers, nude women, and various sporting activities. They eventually became a collector's item. Harold Macmillan, now prime minister, was asked again for help by the Sultan. 'We had a moral duty,' he said this time.[3] 'Since British friendship and support had been afforded to the Sultan for more than a century, to have withheld our assistance at this critical moment would have involved a grave loss of confidence. Moreover, although no oil had yet been proved, two companies were actively carrying out exploration throughout this area . . . yet for the British government after the events of 1956 [Suez] to embark single-handed upon a further military enterprise seemed at first to some of my colleagues hazardous and even foolhardy.'

Nevertheless the RAF, the Cameronian Highlanders, the Trucial Oman Scouts, and a squadron of SAS flown in from Malaya managed to defeat the rebels whilst the Americans behaved 'outrageously' and 'once again we had to operate without full American assistance', according to Macmillan. It was the last Anglo-American war, and the Buraimi dispute is still not settled.

For Colin Maxwell 'it was rather a risky enterprise, coming so soon after Suez', but he has stayed in Oman, becoming a brigadier and deputy commander of the army. He plans to retire there and write a book about the history of the Sultan's armed forces. When people reminisce today about the British Empire – its triumphs and deceits, its achievements and exaggerations – it is fashionable to ridicule characteristics

which were considered admirable: unquestioning obedience to authority, abstemious stiff-upper-lip commitment, pugnacity. Often these qualities hide a sentimental and genuine philanthropy, a lively imagination pruned by duty at a British public school so that it finds satisfaction in deserts or jungles rather than boardrooms or fleshpots. It is cruel to suggest that it is unnecessary, even harmful, to try to pin such elusive ideals on people who really don't need them, don't understand them, and would perhaps be far happier muddling along in their own un-British way. Those who try are easy to mock, but behind the caricature real people emerge, with genuine idealism and courage like Colin Maxwell.

His life has been threatened on many occasions, and he has faced death with aplomb and imagination. When commanding the Sultan's forces against rebels it was rumoured he would be assassinated by a man dressed as a woman. One afternoon, whilst swimming naked in a remote lake he noticed a black shrouded woman approaching slowly and with apparent menace. He jumped from the water, exposing himself on the assumption that a genuine woman would be so horrified by the sight that she would run off. The figure came nearer and passed by. She was a woman. But blind.

Brigadier Maxwell, a pink-cheeked bachelor whose clipped military moustache adds sternness to an otherwise jovial face, has seen the world into which he was born disappear, and only the faint echoes remain in Oman. 'I was at school in England of course – Radley and Cambridge. I came out here on spec., but in a very short time decided it was where I was going to stay. I am fascinated by the country, its environment, and its people. It is magnificent. It has a mountain range down the middle, and the people all have different characteristics. It's extraordinary how nostalgic we become about Oman. It's the people, the terrain, and the extraordinarily happy life we have had here.

'I like soldiering, and we've had quite a lot of skirmishing. It has been some of the most wonderful old-fashioned soldiering in the world. The Omanis are now battle-hardened, and they have gained a lot by their training.

'The only threat to this area is communism. It has always surprised me that the Arabs, who are not particularly in favour

of communist doctrine, can be attracted and become indoctrinated to be pretty hard communists. We know that some of our students go to Libya and do rebel training. I suppose they are well paid, but they don't go in sufficient numbers to worry about yet.'

Each year he returns 'home' to England for a month's holiday with his sister. 'I see some signs of decline in the country, I must admit,' he says wistfully. 'I blame a lot of it on the present government.'

After the 1958 trouble, Harold Macmillan sent his under-secretary of state for war, Julian Amery, to Oman to help the Sultan organize more reliable armed forces. Amery in turn contacted Colonel David Smiley, an old friend, who was planning to retire to farm in Kenya. 'Sit down, David, I have a job for you,' said Amery, producing a large folder. 'You can read all about it in there.'[4]

'What is this job? And where?' asked Smiley.

'I want you to command the Sultan's armed forces in Muscat. We give him help. We sometimes give him advice. But –' and here Amery gave a knowing smile – 'we do not give him orders.'

The message was clear. The Sultan had to do as he was told if he wanted British money. The British, meanwhile, could disown any responsibility for the brutality and backwardness of the country because it was 'independent'.

Trouble between Oman (as the interior was called) and Muscat continued, and the Sultan retired to his palace at Salalah, in the Dhofar region, eight hundred kilometres to the south. Every so often, the RAF transported him and a few slaves to London for a holiday at the Dorchester, but at home opposition grew in the form of the Dhofar Liberation Front and culminated in an assassination attempt on 28 April 1966. One of his bodyguards shot at him from a few yards, and missed. The Sultan, publicly emulating the nonchalance of his advisers, went to the nearest army headquarters and told the British officer, 'We seem to be having a little trouble down at the palace. I wonder if you would be so good as to come down.' Privately, he was terrified, and for the next four years he stayed inside his palace which he equipped like a madman's fortress with thirty-three tons of weapons worth £1500000: machine guns, brens,

mortars, anti-tank guns, CS gas, 2000 Lee Enfield rifles with 600000 rounds of ammunition. He had five hundred slaves (upon whom he practised his markmanship by making them swim in the sea whilst he fired at nearby fish), and 150 women who were hidden in rooms no one knew existed.

At the instigation of the British, his only legitimate son, Qaboos, whose mother is a Dhofari, was sent to Sandhurst when he was eighteen. His room-mate, Tim Landon, became a close friend and has risen subsequently to remarkable heights (brigadier) and wealth (houses in London and Athens) in the Oman army. Qaboos did a course in local government with Bedfordshire County Council, spent a year with the Cameronians in Germany, developed a taste for Gilbert and Sullivan, travelled round the world, and returned to Oman where he was immediately put under house arrest by his father and engaged, sight unseen, to the daughter of one of the family's traditional rivals, Shaikh Ahmad bin Mohammed al-Harthi.

But even without imagined rivalry from his son, Sa'id bin Taimur could not withstand the first rumbles of the money rush which were combined in Oman with stirrings of Arab nationalism stoked by communist support from South Yemen. 'The communists chose Oman as their route to the Gulf's oil wells, and a starting base for future control of the region,' said Sultan Qaboos later. 'Communist control of Oman would inevitably lead to control of oil resources without which Western industry and civilization cannot survive.' The Dhofar Liberation Front went through several name changes, including PFLOAG (Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf) before becoming simply the PFLO (Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman), and a colonial war smouldered with British 'advisers' often killed in action.

'Just think what I can do for my people when we have oil,' said the Sultan to a penniless American explorer, Wendell Phillips, as he gave him the concessions.[5] And when oil was discovered, in 1967, he showed his delight in a sometimes surprising way. Julian Amery recalls an occasion in Salalah when the Sultan rang a bell 'and to my surprise a servant brought in three decanters. I wondered what on earth had happened – because the Sultan never offered alcohol to guests. He said,

"Give me your hand." I did so, and he poured the contents of one of the decanters over my hand. It was the colour of whisky, but it was in fact oil.'

'I just wanted you to know,' said the Sultan, 'that we now have it.'

For about half an hour the two men sat there, rubbing their hands in three different grades of oil which the decanters contained.

But in fact the Sultan was unable to use the wealth brought by the oil. Parsimony was so ingrained in his nature that he hoarded the royalties and did little for the country. By 1970 the situation was so bad that the British government made it clear to the Sultan's 'advisers' that a take-over would not be opposed, particularly as they planned to withdraw from the rest of the Gulf in 1971 and any upheaval in Oman could be a tiresome incitement to rebellion elsewhere.

Accordingly, on the afternoon of Thursday, 23 July 1970, Shaikh Braik bin Mamud bin Hamid al-Ghafari went into the Sultan's study and asked him to abdicate peacefully. Sa'id's answer was immediate. He took a pistol from his desk drawer and shot Shaikh Braik, wounding him. The Sultan himself was shot in the leg and buttock, but refused to surrender except to a British officer. This done, he was put on a RAF plane for Bahrain and then England. Three days later the Omanis were told what had happened.

'It was a most tear-jerking experience,' said Colonel Hugh Oldman, the defence secretary. 'There was incredible happiness. There was overt joy and sheer jubilation.' Some of the former Sultan's slaves were paraded for the press. 'Some had been forced, under pain of beating, not to speak. As a result they had become mutes. Others stood with their heads bowed and eyes fixed on the ground, their necks paralysed. The slightest glance sideways resulted in a severe beating or imprisonment. Others had incurred physical deformity from similar cruelty.'[6]

A trembling twenty-nine-year-old Qaboos was flown to Muscat, the capital he had never seen, where an exultant welcome was arranged by British officers. He had few Omani friends and none he could trust. All his compatriots who hoped for a future had left to study and work abroad. He took over a

'We share the same interests as Iran, and perhaps look at things in the same way. It is wholly right that we should help each other. Financial help from Saudi Arabia is very much welcomed, and there are no ties attached. It is like a brother who helps a brother.'

That is an unusual occurrence in Arab history which is replete with stories of brothers killing each other, of family feuds which span generations. The Sultan himself was put under house arrest by his own father, whom he called 'headstrong and bigoted', and eventually overthrew in 1970 with the help of the British.

'That was a big decision, of course. But there are two kinds of loyalty – loyalty to a father, and loyalty to the country. I had been brought up to believe loyalty to your religion and your people is greater than to family, and that loyalty should prevail. My relationship with my father was very formal. It was the Sultan and the prince. I had to call him "Your Majesty".'

Sultan Sa'id bin Taimur was a man of strong convictions intent on ignoring the twentieth century in the hope, largely realized, that it would ignore him. He forbade his people to play music, wear sunglasses, carry dolls (a religious prohibition against idols), use gas cookers or buy tractors. This last regulation may have been a sensible precaution. In the early days of the money rush, several combine harvesters were sold to *nouveau-riche* desert-living Arabs. Omanis were not allowed to leave their village, repair their houses, or buy a car without written permission from the Sultan. Those caught smoking were given a public lashing. There were no newspapers, telephones, television, radio or hospitals, and only three elementary schools. 'The British lost India because they educated the people,' he explained. Theoretically Omanis could be educated in Britain, but only with the Sultan's permission which he, naturally, never gave. Some went to Russia, and many more to Egypt and the Omani possession of Zanzibar.

Medical care was practically nonexistent. 'We do not need hospitals here,' said the Sultan. 'This is a very poor country which can only support a small population. At the present, many children die in infancy, and so the population does not increase. If we build clinics many more will survive – but for what? To

starve?'[5] Some causes of infant mortality, which still exist, were horrifying according to a missionary, Beth Thoms, who worked in Oman during the 1950s. She described a condition known as atresia where normal vaginal muscles become inelastic scar tissue. 'When this condition exists the child cannot be born. The woman in labour suffers agony, for in her body the irresistible force of birth contractions propels the foetus against the immovable barrier of rigid scar tissue, which has closed the birth canal like a purse-string. Suddenly everything rips open.

'How was the scar tissue formed? The answer is that it results from the packing of rock salt into the vagina after the birth of the first baby to contract the vagina, lest the husband, not deriving the satisfaction from his wife which he experienced before delivery, should divorce her.'

The Sultan ruled without benefit of secretaries or clerical staff, simply giving orders on his radio telephone (the only such device allowed in the country) to his expatriate British officials. He lived most of the time in Salalah, the green, monsoon-swept southern part of the country famous for its frankincense, and not in his capital Muscat. As he told the commander of his armed forces, Colonel David Smiley, 'If I go to Muscat I will be surrounded by suppliants all asking for money. I have no money to give them, and so they will go away discontented. Therefore it is better if I stay here in Salalah.'

Officials occasionally made an appointment with him to discuss one abuse or another, and they found he would chat amiably about cricket scores, quote from Shakespeare, ask about contemporary events in London – and ignore the purpose of the visit. Sir Hugh Boustead, the archetypal colonial appointee of impeccable rectitude, whom I was to meet later in his desert hideaway, was sent to administer a development programme to which the British contributed £250000 (military aid at the same time was between £1 million and £2 million). He recalls, 'It was the Sultan's habit to call me down to Salalah periodically to discuss plans which were in hand. We would sit on the sofa together in his very charmingly appointed drawing-room in front of a low table, and I would go through all our points. It shook me to find that letters sent to him asking for an early

decision had not even been opened. I always felt he was not really interested in development.

'One of the earliest health centres had to wait for over a year and a half while the Sultan and the Treasury discussed who was to pay for the builder. The Sultan, of course, won and the Treasury paid. I used to wonder greatly over all these matters since I know that only recently the state of Gwadar in Pakistan, which had belonged to Oman, had been sold by the Sultan to the Pakistan government for £3 million, the interest of which was accumulated in Swiss and American banks.'[6]

Another adviser, complaining to the Sultan that his judges were corrupt, was at least given an honest answer, 'I know they take bribes,' he said. 'But if I stopped them I would have to pay them more.'[7] He used torture, including the rack, and prisoners were thrown into a dank Portuguese fort, Jalali, without trial and until he remembered to release them. 'It was horrible,' says Colonel Smiley describing one of his visits. 'Prisoners were shackled, the fetters around their ankles connected by a heavy iron bar. When any of them had to go outside to relieve himself, he lifted the bar by a piece of cord to take some of the weight off his feet: but most of the time they lay on the hard stone floors of their long barrack rooms, without mattresses or even straw to rest on. Worse than the discomfort and the miserable diet was their lack of water, which the black-hearted governor deliberately withheld from them; whenever I visited them – a regular part of my duties – they would crowd round me, trailing their shackles and gasping piteously, "Water, sahib, water".

'Among the prisoners there was at least one who should never have been there – a harmless old lunatic. He would spring to attention, as smartly as his fetters allowed, whenever I appeared, and shout "God save the King!" with a pathetic attempt at a salute. In any civilized country he would have been at large.'

Having been educated at the British-run College of Princes in Ajmar, India, the Sultan learned early the niceties of political reality and appreciated the importance placed by career colonials on 'honour' and 'duty', not to mention subservience to the titled, however spurious the honour and however barmy

the holder. 'There is no doubt he was thoroughly deceitful, and used us,' says a British diplomat still working in the Middle East. 'I remember there was a religious uprising in Tanuf, a village behind Nizwah, that could have been difficult. It was in about 1956. Well, our boys went in and blew up the place for him.'

He paid almost manic attention to his own security, and had parts of his Salalah palace designed independently by several firms of British architects so no one but he would know its exact design.

Spies were everywhere. The late Sir William Luce told me of an occasion when, as British political resident in the Gulf, he visited the Sultan for a two-day meeting. 'I was a very heavy smoker at the time, but managed to last twenty-four hours before I found it essential to have a cigarette. I crept to my room locked the door, shut myself in the toilet, drew the curtains, and had a hurried, reviving puff. Carefully I put the ash down the toilet, followed by the cigarette, and flushed it twice.

'Two minutes later, and I swear it wasn't more, there was a knock on the door and one of the Sultan's slaves was standing there. He said simply, "A cigarette has appeared"; and then he went away. I didn't know what was going to happen. I could not understand how they found out unless there was a chap permanently posted at the end of the pipe to see what came out.

'That evening I had dinner with the Sultan. He did not mention it directly but we eventually got on to the subject of smoking. He had a very quiet voice, and he said, "You know, if we find people smoking here in the streets we flog them. Oh, yes, we have to flog them." He left it at that.'

country in the middle of a civil war with no plans, no government, and very little money. But a new era was beginning. He was a young man untarnished by scandal, uncompromised by family jealousies. The money rush was about to provide an unparalleled opportunity and challenge to create from nothing in a few years an Arab society which was also a modern state. It could be done. The omens were good.

The first thing Sultan Qaboos did was offer an amnesty to those who fought against his father. He paid former rebels £150 a month, gave them a rifle, and formed them into vigilante patrols called *firqats*.

The second thing he did was run the country so near bankruptcy that international banks declared his credit no longer acceptable.

Now what he might do inadvertently is to make Oman a stepping-stone for the disintegration of the money rush.

Treaty of Sib

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

This is the peace agreed upon between the Government of the Sultan, Taimur bin Feisal, and Sheikh Isa ibn Salih ibn Ali on behalf of the people of Oman, whose names are signed hereto, through the mediation of Mr Wingate, ICS, political agent and consul for Great Britain in Muscat, who is empowered by his Government in this respect and to be an intermediary between them. Of the conditions set forth below, four pertain to the Government of the Sultan and four pertain to the people of Oman.

Those pertaining to the people of Oman are:

1. Not more than 5 per cent shall be taken from anyone, no matter what his race, coming from Oman to Muscat or Muttrah or Sur or the rest of the towns of the coast.
2. All the people of Oman shall enjoy security and freedom in all the towns of the coast.
3. All restrictions upon everyone entering and leaving Muscat and Muttrah and all the towns shall be removed.
4. The Government of the Sultan shall not grant asylum to any criminal fleeing from the justice of the people of Oman. It shall not interfere in their internal affairs.

The four conditions pertaining to the Government of the Sultan are:

1. All the tribes and sheikhs shall be at peace with the Sultan. They shall not attack the towns of the coast and shall not interfere in his Government.
2. All those going to Oman on lawful business and for commercial affairs shall be free. There shall be no restrictions on commerce, and they shall enjoy security.
3. They shall expel and grant no asylum to any wrongdoer or criminal fleeing to them.
4. The claims of merchants and others against the people of Oman shall be heard and decided on the basis of justice according to the law of Islam.

Written on 11 Muharram, corresponding to 25 September 1920.