

content to be as helpful as possible. One day he arrested some gold smugglers, and proudly exhibited their loot in his office until requested to return it because the smugglers were influential. 'Majid is all right,' says Tariq. 'He is not corrupt in the normal way.'

Tariq, the brightest, has a Turkish mother and was educated in Turkey and at Heidelberg University. In the Second World War he served in the Indian Army, good training for battling against the rebels in Dhofar when, equipped with two retainers carrying his personal Bren gun, he followed troops on manoeuvres. Unfortunately, Sa'id kept him so short of money that every Christmas he had to present himself at Salalah to be given a cash gift. This became increasingly niggardly, so he bought a couple of broken-down army lorries and set up as a contractor, eventually moving to Germany after a series of disagreements. He enjoys music, but his main loves are bridge and gambling – to such an extent that one of his friends alleges he put his last £1000 on a single number at roulette. It came up, giving him £35 000 profit.

He had never met his nephew Qaboos, and was alarmed to discover that they trusted each other slightly less than they trusted the British. Qaboos refused to let him have access to any financial details, because, he said, the oil concession was in the name of the Sultan personally. So they both sanctioned projects, without consultation, Tariq spending vast amounts in an unsuccessful attempt to force Qaboos to reveal how much was available. When Tariq resigned in December 1971, a number of companies realized why they had not received written confirmation of oral agreements. Tariq left hundreds of letters unopened and wrote to no one because he did not even have a secretary.

The rift between uncle and nephew did not last and Tariq, who now calls himself the *éminence grise*, was made chairman of the Central Bank and his daughter married Qaboos. The former putative, or actual, father-in-law is under house arrest in Salalah.

In spite of initial problems, the Sultan was determined to create a proper government, and he began to make all the appointments that a Bedfordshire County Council course would

presumably consider necessary. He asked an oil company executive to be minister of social services and labour.

'What are social services?' asked the aspirant minister.

The Sultan thought for a moment and then replied, 'I don't know. No one has ever asked me that before.'

At least he tried, and in some ways the country is more liberal and progressive than its neighbours. An ecological balance in the south which has not been disturbed for two thousand years is being preserved. Ministers are often young and enthusiastic. Alcohol is allowed, although it is controlled by means of a police permit which costs £15 a month.

But the most noticeable difference between Oman and other Arab countries in the money rush, except Iraq, is female emancipation. Less than a decade ago Omani women were as shut-off as their Saudi counterparts are today. Colonel Smiley, former head of the Sultan's army, recalls, 'On one of my visits to Sohar I had to bring back in my aeroplane a fourteen-year-old girl with the face of an angel who had been shot in the stomach by her brother "for looking at a man". She lay silent and uncomplaining on her stretcher and died before we landed. Her brother went unpunished.'

Anomalies still exist - a girl traditionally 'belongs' to the son of the father's brother and he must give permission if she wishes to marry someone else - but prejudices are being obliterated within a generation, and working women are accepted and encouraged. Lyutha Sultan al Mugheri, a thirty-year-old television and radio director, says, 'We couldn't suppress women here now because everyone is needed to help develop the country. I have a lot of men working for me, and they are proud that there is a woman who can actually do something.'

Most Omani women are unveiled, and take part in normal life, frequently becoming senior to men. They are provided with sex advice columns in local newspapers which would make Saudis froth with indignation. 'Shy wife and happy sex,' says one headline. 'A thirty-two-year-old woman, mother of two children aged thirteen and ten, came to me with a strange problem. She confided that she had lost all sexual desire. Her husband felt her emancipation was the cause of their sexual



disharmony.' There are pictures of women's football teams with a promise that soon such wanton entertainment will be a normal part of Omani life. 'The day is not far off when in every country women will work and play side by side with males as equal members of society.'

The Sultan's wife still appears veiled in public. He says 'She is new on the scene. I am sure she will do things in her own time. There are no obstacles to women's progress. I think we should let things take their natural course without shouting about it too much. That might create different attitudes, and perhaps make it more difficult.'

The pressures caused by dramatic change in a society like Oman produce inevitable contradictions, and there is a likeable simplicity which can be harmless if it is not disillusioned too soon. Ahmed Ghazali, the thirty-year-old minister of education, emanates optimism with all the energy of an idealistic young schoolmaster. His family left Oman for Zanzibar when he was nine, and he has only just returned.

'As we are modernized we are in danger of throwing away our traditions so I am trying to make students understand that to be modern and educated does not necessarily mean they have to overthrow. Many of our students think they have to wear trousers, drink, and smoke in order to become modern. In our schools, they must wear the *dishdasha*, even foreigners. There is nothing wrong with traditional clothes.

'Education isn't everything, and who says it gives you a good life? In England over half a million well educated people are unemployed. What is the point of education if that happens? In this office, for instance, I could get a computer and do things quicker and cheaper. But I would throw three hundred people out of work. Where would they go? When people are unemployed they sit and think, and what do you expect them to do? They destroy things.

'We can't protect our students from the bad side of modern life. You can't stop movies or television, but we can make them work in a helpful way and we can choose what we show. There are good American detective films, taken from police records, which can help. So much Western material is unrealistic. You see, for instance, a man walking down a street. He meets a girl,

and two days later they marry. These things never really happen, do they? I don't like to see kissing in the streets. I was in Paris, and saw a boy and girl kissing at traffic lights. It's terrible. It's not the place and it doesn't have the mood. I try to be strict in making our students behave well. It's better to be ignorant and polite than educated with no manners.

'I hope the mistakes we make will be new ones of our own, because we are trying to experiment for ourselves. We are building a new generation to take our place and we know that the pen can lead them to a prison or a palace. It is for them to choose and if we don't make them right then one day they will destroy us. I am sure of that.'

The money rush nearly did. It hit Oman as the country was struggling to develop, and seemed like a miraculous remedy for every bottleneck and delay. Income rose from \$226 million in 1973 to \$1.02 billion the following year, most paid direct to the Sultan who distributed it to ministries according to his own preferences. Oil revenues are still paid direct to him, and the amount is a closely guarded secret. In 1978 he received about \$1.5 billion.

The bonanza was followed by massive overspending and uncontrolled extravagance as ministers realized that the way to increase their budget was to tempt the Sultan with a prestige project and promise it could be finished as a birthday present by National Day. A television system was introduced in 1974 at far greater cost than necessary, although the TV station in Muscat remains a source of great pride and is a ritual stop for state visitors (the German engineers disappear to the background during these occasions, and Omanis are seen to be in control). Pipeline worth \$50 million was ordered, and left to rust because there was no available project and no one could decide what to do with it. A desalination plant estimated at \$57 million was rushed through on the promise that it would be ready for National Day 1975 and would provide the Sultan's garden at Sib with a million gallons of water a day. Eventually the cost was \$300 million, it had to be closed down for technical reasons, and water and power in Oman cost about five times