

The Sons of HM King Ibn Saud

1.	Turki	1900-19	
2.	Saud	1902-69	former king
3.	Khalid	1903-03	
4.	Faisal	1904-75	former king
5.	Fahd	1905-19	
6.	Mohammed	1910-	
7.	Khalid	1912-	present king
8.	Sa'ad	1914-19	
9.	Nasir	1920-	
10.	Sa'ad	1920-	
11.	*Fahd	1921-	Crown prince
12.	Mansur	1922-51	
13.	Abdullah	1923-	Commander, National Guard
14.	Bandar	1923-	
15.	Musa'id	1923-	
16.	Abdulmuhsin	1925-	Governor of Medina
17.	Misha'al	1926-	
18.	*Sultan	1926-	Minister of Defence
19.	*Abdulrahman	1927-	
20.	Mit'ab	1928-	Minister of Housing
21.	Talal	1930-31	
22.	Badr	1931-31	
23.	Talal	1931-	
24.	Mishari	1932-	
25.	Badr.	1933-	Deputy Commander, National Guard
26.	*Turki	1933-	Deputy Minister of Defence
27.	*Naif	1934-	Minister of Interior
28.	Nawwaf	1934-	
29.	Fawwaz	1934-	Governor of Mecca
30.	Majid	1934-40	
31.	Abdulillah	1935-	
32.	*Salman	1936-	Governor of Riyadh
33.	Majid	1937-	Minister of Municipalities

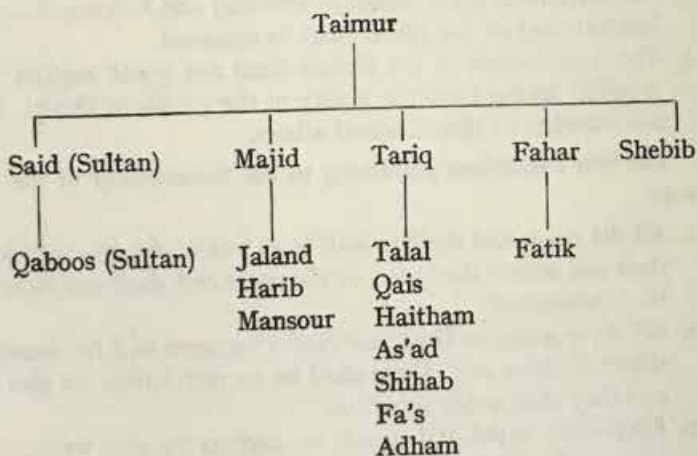
364 *Appendices*

34. Thamir	1937-	
35. *Ahmad	1940-	Deputy Minister of Interior
36. Mamduh	1940-	
37. Abdulmajid	1940-	
38. Abdulsalam	1941-	
39. Hidhlul	1941-	
40. Sattam	1941-	Deputy Governor of Riyadh
41. Mashhur	1942-	
42. Miqrin	1943-	
43. Hamud	1947-	

*Sons of Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi.

The Al bu Said Dynasty

- | | | |
|-----|-----------|--------------------|
| 1. | 1749-83 | Ahmed bin Said |
| 2. | 1783-4 | Said bin Ahmed |
| 3. | 1784-92 | Hamad bin Said |
| 4. | 1792-1804 | Sultan bin Ahmed |
| 5. | 1804-6 | Badar bin Seif |
| 6. | 1806-56 | Said bin Sultan |
| 7. | 1856-66 | Thwaini bin Saud |
| 8. | 1866-8 | Salam bin Thwaini |
| 9. | 1868-71 | Azzan bin Qais |
| 10. | 1871-88 | Turki bin Said |
| 11. | 1888-1913 | Feisal bin Turki |
| 12. | 1913-32 | Taimur bin Feisal* |
| 13. | 1932-1970 | Sa'id bin Taimur |
| 14. | 1970- | Qaboos bin Said |



* From Taimur.

Hedging Bets on the Family Farm

'The hand you cannot bite, kiss it.'

Bedou saying

'Last night, in bed, I was twice bitten by a marauding mouse.'

British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, in a letter to The Times, 11 November 1977

The Jockey Club in Riyadh is not one of the most elegant settings for the sport of kings, but it is an essential location for money-rush supplicants. International protocol insists that state guests are entertained at some form of spectator sport, and it would be indelicate to invite them to a public stoning or mutilation. As there are no facilities for opera, ballet, and theatre, the choice is limited to soccer or horse-racing. On balance, in spite of the millions being spent on creating a national football team, horse-racing is likely to be the less boring.

Today, King Khalid's guest is the Sultan of Oman, ruler of the second largest country on the Arabian peninsula, and guardian of what is in effect Britain's last colonial outpost in the Middle East.

It is a meeting of some piquancy, as if an aristocratic spendthrift down on his luck was obliged to seek money from the village idiot who had accidentally stumbled on a fortune. Omanis consider themselves, not without justification, to be the patricians of the Arab world. Their royal family stretches back two hundred years and, although the country is little known,

they feel they have developed an attitude to life based on the civilized virtues of old Britain.

Unfortunately, their oil is limited, and the Sultan is extravagant, building himself lavish palaces and giving generous gifts to foreign advisers. One is said to have received a Christmas present of £1 million in cash. Now, alas, the country is running out of money, which is why His Majesty is in Saudi Arabia (and why I was to see him a few weeks later in Iran) – apart, naturally, from the official reason: to congratulate King Khalid on his remarkable recovery from an operation in London.

In the recent past the Saudis, with American help, have tried to claim land which the Omanis, with British backing, say is theirs. Taking advantage of this delicate dispute between two Western powers, and capitalizing on dissatisfaction within Oman, the Chinese and Cubans backed a ten-year-long civil war in the country. The Sultan, whose army has been controlled by the British Ministry of Defence, sought help from other Arab countries and Iran. The Shah immediately saw the possibility of extending his influence in Arabia, as well as providing his troops with invaluable battle experience, and sent 3000 of them. At first they made the distressing mistake of shooting each other rather more frequently than the enemy, but they improved, even though they are still known to the British as 'Geraniums' because of their sensitive attitude towards the more rigorous aspects of fighting. The civil war ended officially in 1977, but embers smoulder.

The Arab states, except Jordan, did little to help. It took them several years to realize the dangerous implications of a strong Iranian presence in Oman. Now they are worried. And there is another problem. Oman controls the Arab side of the Straits of Hormuz, the potentially vulnerable 25-mile-wide gap between the Gulf and the Indian Ocean through which most of the world's oil is transported. The Sultan has to be supported. So today he is an honoured client, and the Saudi élite sit in rows on the clubhouse balcony awaiting his arrival.

En masse, dressed alike in their gold-threaded *thobes*, they look indistinguishable. The faces have a podgy, effete petulance, accentuated by the head-dress, and are reminiscent of eighteenth-century European aristocrats – before the deluge. It is

not surprising they look the same. The majority are the result of one man's remarkable virility and uninhibited use of *droit de seigneur*, a man who had forty-four sons (see Appendix) and an unknown number of daughters, and admitted to marrying 135 virgins and 'hundreds of others'. Perhaps understandably, he still thought the world was flat when he died in 1953.

King Abdul Aziz bin Abdulrahman al-Faisal al-Saud – known to the world as Ibn Saud and to his own people as Abdul Aziz – united the country which takes his family name by a combination of ruthlessness and religion which his sons and grandsons now emulate in trying to control the impenetrable problems of the money rush.

Their success is limited, but they do at least influence the world. As Prince Sattam, fortieth son, aged thirty-seven, deputy governor of Riyadh, told me that morning, 'Anything that affects us will be felt in New York, Moscow, and London. But we have only just started. I remember when we had one road and two schools. Now look at the changes, and imagine what is happening to us. It is something else.'

Like most of the younger princes, he was educated in the United States and acquired a smattering of vernacular although it is not accompanied – as with Iranian students – by an American attitude towards democracy.

'What is democracy? It is a way of saying you have a vote and a parliament. But in England and America you can buy votes. Politicians say what people want to hear – not what they *should* be told.

'Foreigners find it difficult to understand, but we have a proper democracy here. There is no difference between a prince and a bedouin, rich and poor. Anyone can see me without an appointment. They don't use my title. They shout 'Sattam' or 'Son of Abdul Aziz'. I shout back at them. Even the name of royalty comes from abroad. We don't have a king. We have a ruler.

'Now that we also have money, we use it to help others. All right, some of the people to whom we give think we are stupid, and people here complain we are too generous. But should we be like the Americans? Look what they do. They have all kinds of food, and then they throw away wheat at the

same time as thousands of people in India are naked, starving. They are dying. Why does that happen?

'We think of the best for human beings wherever they are – even in Israel. It is the Americans and Russians who don't really want to solve the problems in the Middle East. They need to keep everyone busy – as in Vietnam. They went in there to test their weapons, and had to continue from an economic point of view. We can use our money to try to prevent it happening here, but if we carry on like this for much longer we are going to have a war.

'Of course we are also concerned about the problems in Saudi Arabia. We have everything, including drunken driving, but we have much less crime than anywhere else in the world.'

'That,' I said, 'is because your punishments are medieval.'

'You say we are savage. Well, what do you do if someone comes to your house and kills your children? You say he's crazy and put him in hospital. That's not good. We have proved here that you are more secure in your house than anywhere else in the world. When we kill one person, we do it on purpose so that a million others will be thinking not to murder.

'If someone steals, we cut off his hand. It is not barbaric. He has to steal three, four times, it depends. If he is hungry and steals food, we don't cut. But if he comes to a bank, breaks down the door, and takes the money, we do cut. That will continue for ever, I hope.

'There will be changes, though. We need more people – 1200000 for projects on which we are working over the next five years – so we cannot close our doors. Everyone must come to see us, and that makes difficulties. They are not coming for a holiday. They want to make money, and they bring their problems from A to Z – traffic, residence, security. But the biggest problem is they have a lack of understanding about us. People won't tell the facts about our religion, our history, our way of life...'

It is, indeed, easy to mock the progeny of Ibn Saud¹ as they sit twiddling their worry-beads awaiting their guest and greeting members of the clan – cousin, uncle, brother, son, who knows? Who knows, too, if they can survive the unimaginable changes taking place around them? They realize, perhaps too

late, that patriarchy is dangerously outmoded, that a country can no longer be run like a family farm. They sip their orange juice and look vacantly into the distance, thinking perhaps of London hookers and other daydreams made possible by the money rush.

'People won't tell the facts...'

But where are the facts? Nobody bothered to write them down because few thought them important. The story of how the sons of Ibn Saud became pawnbrokers to the world is a classic of muddle, ignorance, and farce.

There is time, before the King arrives, to start with Round One.

Round One

Ibn Saud was born, for official purposes, on 26 November 1880. No accurate date can be ascertained because records were not kept, his mother was illiterate, and he was one of many children born into a family in decline.

A hundred years previously, the al-Saud were one of the most powerful tribes in the unprepossessing semi-pagan Nedj area of central Arabia. In about 1740, their leader Mohammad had been convinced by a preacher, Mohammad ibn Abdu Wahhab, that it was necessary for Arabs to return to a literal interpretation of the Koran and rid themselves of idolatry and the influence of foreigners like the Ottoman Turks. Together, they attempted to bludgeon others into the same belief and had a few successes. Eventually, in February 1807, their followers reached Mecca.

'At the sight of this torrent of armed and naked men, everyone fled in order to leave them the street, which they filled completely,' wrote a contemporary traveller.² 'I watched a column march past which seemed to be composed of five or six thousand men. As they marched, some gave shouts of holy joy, others in a loud voice confusedly recited prayers, each one in his own way.

'Tumult succeeded confusion. One saw them at last, like a swarm of bees moving without order around the Ka'aba, and in their tumultuous fervour smashing with muskets, which they

carried on their shoulders, all the glass lamps which surrounded the House of God.

'They destroyed all the mosques consecrated to the memory of the Prophet and those in his family; also the tombs of saints and heroes held in veneration. Constables for the punctuality of prayers were ordered to shout, to scold, and to drag people by the shoulders to force them to take part in public prayers five times a day.'

Such purity may have had its reward in heaven, but on earth the al-Sauds were defeated. They eventually had to seek exile in what is now Kuwait, in order to escape from their rivals for control of the Nedj, the Rashid family.

It was from there, in 1902, that Ibn Saud, financed by the Emir of Kuwait, led a raiding party of forty men against Riyadh which the Rashid family had made their headquarters. They attacked at night, capturing the harem, and waited until the following morning for the head of the family to return from the fort where he deposited himself overnight for safety.

Ibn Saud described what happened. 'I struck him first on the leg, and disabled him; quickly after that I struck at the neck; the head fell to one side - the blood spurted up like a fountain. The third blow was at the heart. I saw the heart, which was cut in two, palpitate like that.' He illustrated with a shiver of his hand. 'It was a joyous moment. I kissed the sword.'

After the battle, he began to convert the numerous wild tribes of Arabia by sending missionaries, called *ikhwan* (brotherhood), to develop an agricultural policy and spread the word of wahhabism. Their slogan was 'Back to the Koran and the Land', and Ibn Saud managed with some subtlety not to arouse the jealousy of either the tribes or the *ulema* (priests). 'You owe nothing to me,' he said. 'I am like you, one of you. But I am appointed to direct the affairs of our people in accordance with the Book of Allah. Our first duty is to Allah and to those who teach the Book of Allah, the *ulemas*. I am but an instrument of command in their hand. Obedience to God means obedience to them.'

When subtlety failed, executions were substituted, as they are today, without trial or any possibility of an appeal and

became memorable events, 'the talk of caravans hundreds of miles away'. Philby witnessed several. 'In a matter of seconds after the three men had been placed in position, the first head was off, rolling in the dust, while the body fell forward with blood spouting from the neck. The second man instinctively turned his head to meet the coming blow, with the result that the sword just failed to sever the head from the trunk as the victim toppled over. Then a few rapid steps and a back-handed sweep of the executioner's sword did their work so cleanly that the headless corpse of the third criminal remained on its knees spouting blood upwards. The execution was over, and the police proceeded to lash the three corpses, each with its head by its side, to the railings. The proceedings had been rapid and efficient, without fuss or noise, and it was only the curious goggling crowd of pushing, jostling sightseers that created a slight feeling of nausea. Faisal (Ibn Saud's son) remained seated for a few moments after it was all over, till the executioner came up to report the completion of his task. "God bless you," said Faisal simply, adding for my benefit, "It is as well to commend them for doing their duty, so that they may do it better next time."'

There was one additional method of persuasion, more diplomatic and presumably less hazardous, which Ibn Saud used to consolidate his influence: marriage. He started with the Rashids, marrying the widow, and later granddaughter, of the defeated leader. But he did not break God's law. He never had more than four wives at a time, and restricted himself to two new ones a year as he became older.

Each wife had a house of her own, which he visited in rotation. His own home was run by four favourite concubines, and he also slept with four slave girls, on different days, as well as numerous others (sometimes not even removing their veils), who were then passed on to privileged courtiers.

'He has Christian girls, also. Ask him for one. He will present one to you,' a visitor, Ameen Rihani, was told. His finance minister recalled, 'He once presented me with a Georgian girl. She was brought to him from Buraidah, and after he had entered her - one night only - he gave her to me. Never in my life have I seen or heard of such august beauty.'

'Her skin – white as alabaster. Her hair – like cataracts of melted gold. Her lips – red as pomegranate seed. Her forehead – lofty and glowing like the dawn. I sat before that image of beauty, like a child, and I felt shame upon me. I was ashamed to touch her. I got up and walked out of the room. And on the following day, I sold her to a man from Kuwait for 400 riyals. Only 400.'

(The finance minister did not always receive such perks. One day, when he was in his sixties, he made an error over some trivial matter. Ibn Saud ordered him to walk barefoot from Riyadh to the east coast, a distance of 200 kilometres. The minister was away for two days before he was rescued and brought back to Riyadh.)

Ibn Saud was a good-looking, tall, impressive man, much given to dousing himself with perfume, with a virility confirmed by the numbers of his children but perhaps exaggerated by stories that he had a different woman every night from the age of 11 until he died in 1953.

None the less, at least one visitor claims he could set his watch by the mounting anxiety as harem hour approached. At four o'clock (equivalent to nine p.m. – he was on Muslim sun time), Ibn Saud would finish whatever he was doing and depart for the house of one of his wives. 'What do you folk know about love, who take one wife and then sleep in different beds? Why, the longest winter night is all too short for me. Even when I settle down to rest, I wake from time to time to embrace my companion. And sometimes I do it in my sleep,' he boasted.

His interest in women being uniquely pelvic-oriented, he allowed himself to be shocked by Western morality – dancing, adultery, even dining in mixed company. For years he never saw a woman eat or drink, including his own mother, and although Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, established a notable precedent in 1938 when she attended a state banquet in Jidda, his sons and grandsons remain much influenced by his attitude. 'When a technocratic minister invites you to dinner, you meet his wife and can pretend you are in a civilized country,' says a diplomat in Jidda, 'but the royal princes hardly ever bring their wives.'

Their father had strong ideas. 'It is permissible for women

to read the Koran and scriptural literature,' he declared, 'but ordinary reading, and especially writing, is an accomplishment regarded as unsuitable in a woman, although not forbidden.'

As a devout Muslim he looked forward to Paradise where, he believed, God normally allowed each man seventy whores and up to four wives. He wanted to take six, and told friends that he thought God might allow this dispensation in view of his rather unusual marital status. His first wife, Bint al Fiqri, who died within six months of their marriage when Ibn Saud was fifteen years old, remained a fond memory throughout his life. But his most powerful liaison was with Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi whose seven sons (see Appendix) provide the most influential clique in Saudi Arabia.

During his lifetime, Ibn Saud allowed few of his sons any authority, and he treated them like children even when they were well into their thirties. As the country became more wealthy, they had little to do but indulge themselves, and it is not surprising that a family of such diverse cross-breeding sustains more sexual and social quirks than the average two-child household.

It contains within it extremes from the late voluptuary King Saud to the priggish vice-minister for the interior, Prince Ahmad, but the most powerful member is Crown Prince Fahd, the senior Sudairi, and effective ruler of the country. His chief rival is Prince Abdullah, commander of the National Guard, whose mother was from the Al-Saud's traditional enemies, the Shammar tribe. Now, too, the eight sons of King Faisal (in particular, the foreign minister Prince Saud), and some of King Saud's estimated fifty-two sons, begin to clamour for attention. As the leader is chosen in family conclave, and is not automatically the eldest son, these antagonisms, temporarily swamped by the money rush, provide seeds for future conflict. They have already made the ailing Khalid a compromise king.

Time out to pay respects as he arrives at the races.

Outside the Jockey Club, soldiers of the National Guard stand to attention as a black Rolls-Royce glides to the door. There is polite applause, but little excitement, as the King and his guest

disembark and go through the clubhouse on to the balcony.

The King is stooped, and walks with the aid of a stick. He looks more frail than usual standing next to the tall, full-bearded Sultan who is elegantly turbaned and accompanied by a swarm of young aides and a few smooth-looking Lebanese gentlemen, dressed in Savile Row suits, who clutch black Samsonite briefcases. Some of the younger Omanis carry paper bags and boxes, which they hide discreetly under their chairs. They look as if they have just visited the January sales in Oxford Street.

In front of the clubhouse there are a few pieces of wispy grass, but the race-track itself is of hard sand which, when loosened, drifts with the wind into the stand, caressing everyone with a film of dust. The King and his guest sit together at a wooden table on which is placed a silver cup and a massive pair of binoculars which they use from time to time. An endless tide of liquid refreshment is brought forth – tea, water, orange juice, and more tea. The King sips water.

As there is no betting, emotions are muted, and the finer qualities of racing are admired. The King has banned the import of foreign horses, believing the local variety to be superior, and indeed every thoroughbred racehorse in the world is descended from one of three Arab stallions imported into Europe between 1687 and 1729.³

Today one of the King's horses is running. It will win. More proof, he thinks, that Arab horses are still best. He is in for a shock.

Round Two

In the early years of the century, Ibn Saud carried his family's revenue in the saddlebag of his camel. It soon became insufficient to provide for the wives, mistresses, and children he gathered with immodest haste as one tribe after another succumbed to his *ikhwan*. Moreover, the Rashids were being financed by the Turks and the feud with them was rekindled.

At the start of the First World War he was virtually bankrupt and, therefore, gladly signed an agreement with the British to remain neutral in return for £60,000 a year, four machine

guns and three thousand old rifles. One of his enemies, the Sherif of Mecca, Hussein, became more actively involved. Promised support for an independent Arab state after the war, Hussein fought against the Turks (helped, of course, by his liaison officer, T. E. Lawrence). He did not know that the British and the French had already agreed a secret post-war carve-up of the Middle East which would suit their own ambitions and rivalries regardless of traditional Arab aspirations, and would be the basis for suspicions which today determine the results of the money rush. Ibn Saud's domain was left independent because no one really wanted it.

His battles with the tribes continued, culminating in victory after which he proclaimed himself King of the Hijaz. On 23 September 1932 the new nation of Saudi Arabia was declared. He still had no money, but now he had potential and could aspire to become less of a client and more of a partner to the Western nations who had been competing for his as yet unrecognized favours.

British and French tactics after the First World War seemed to indicate an attitude of post-colonial aggrandizement which irritated and alarmed America, so the world's first energy crisis was manufactured. In January 1920, a United States geological survey reported that the situation 'can best be characterized as precarious', and claimed that within five years America would be totally dependent upon Britain for oil supplies.

Although this was not true, the British eventually agreed to split up the Turkish Petroleum Company, formed in 1914 by Armenian financier Calouste Gulbenkian. In a new consortium renamed Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), Gulbenkian retained his famous five per cent, Esso (now known as Exxon), Mobil and Gulf had a 23.75 per cent share, as did Compagnie Française de Pétroles. Anglo-Persian and Royal Dutch Shell kept 47.5 per cent. There was one condition. The British and Gulbenkian insisted the partners should not compete against each other anywhere within the Ottoman Empire.

But where was the Ottoman Empire?

It had been broken up by the First World War, and simple oilmen could not be expected to understand the complexities of

international boundaries. They met to discuss the problem, and spent hours in inconclusive bickering until Gulbenkian produced a red pencil, drew a circle round most of the Middle East including Saudi Arabia, and announced, 'That was the Ottoman Empire which I knew in 1914, and I ought to know. I was born in it, lived in it, and served in it. If anyone knows better, carry on.'

Thus the major oil companies excluded themselves from the world's largest bonanza, although neither they nor Ibn Saud realized it for many years.

In 1922 Ibn Saud was in a tent at Al-Hasa, an uncomfortable oasis in the east of his territories, awaiting the arrival of the British high commissioner to Baghdad, Sir Percy Cox. Sir Percy brought money, but he was already three days late. A lavish tent, away from the Arab encampment, had been provided for him, equipped with a bathroom, Johnnie Walker whisky, cigars, and other luxuries which Ibn Saud thought a gentleman might require. 'Let us have a little civilization,' he suggested mockingly as he waited, and ordered tea with milk to be served in large cups rather than black coffee in small bowls as was his custom.

'This is civilized tea and the English drink it not as we drink our coffee, like this,' he said, slurping, 'but without noise, like this.' And he sipped gently. 'You see, we are not very far from civilization - a few steps only.'

Sir Percy arrived at last, and behaved in fine colonial fashion, dressing in a tuxedo for dinner (he had an excuse - the dining-room was furnished with elaborate decorations from Bombay, London, Paris, and Havana), and scribbling notes in pencil to Ibn Saud demanding a written guarantee of 'friendship' in return for the annual £60,000.

'We have had too much civilization,' said a disgusted Ibn Saud to Ameen Rihani one evening as he left Sir Percy's tent. 'Who are the Arabs? We are the Arabs. The trouble with the Arab is that he will not do anything in which his own interest is not paramount. We have discovered treachery among the closest of our allies. Two fundamental things are essential to our state and our people: religion, and the rights inherited from our fathers.'

'People think we are receiving large sums of money from the English, but they have only paid small sums considering our services on their behalf. What we have done for them during and after the war, no other Arab could do. And yet, see what they have done to me. They spin nets for me.

'When the English want something, they get it. When we want something, we have to fight for it. I will put my seal if Great Britain says, "You must". But I will strike when I can, not in betrayal, but in self-defence. When I cede my rights under force, I will get back when I have sufficient force, *insha'allah*.'⁴

Ironically, the man who was to be an indirect agent of revenge was only a few yards away. Major Frank Holmes, a rough New Zealander posing as a butterfly collector, had in fact been sent by a London syndicate to acquire oil concessions in Arabia, and arrived a few days after Sir Percy. The high commissioner was appalled that such a man dared to intrude on Britain's chaps in the desert. It was like a tramp entering one's club and making a pass at the hat-check girl. He warned Ibn Saud that any agreement with Holmes was a breach of contract and the subsidy would stop. But Ibn Saud, taunted that he was being blackmailed by the British government, humiliated by the haughtiness of Sir Percy, and determined not to lose any more of his coveted independence, sold Holmes the concession anyway – for £2000 a year, a fair price for what he considered to be a useless 60000 square miles of sand.

At first, it seemed he was correct. Holmes found no oil, was unable to sell his concession to any of the American companies, stopped paying the rental, and left for the island of Bahrain twelve miles off the Saudi coast. There he was more successful. He found some indication of oil, and sold the concession to Gulf for \$50000 (after it had been turned down by Exxon). Gulf, however, could do nothing on their own because Bahrain was within the 'Red Line' drawn by Gulbenkian, and Anglo-Persian refused to participate because their geologist did not consider it a feasible risk. So, in 1928, Gulf sold out to the Standard Oil Company of California (SoCal) which had turned frantically to the Middle East after losing millions of dollars in

unsuccessful prospecting in Ecuador, Alaska, Venezuela, and Mexico.

No one warned SoCal that Bahrain was yet another British sphere of influence, and only British companies were allowed to operate there. It took nearly two years to overcome this problem by registering a subsidiary in Canada (BAPCO – the Bahrain Petroleum Company), setting up an office in London, and appointing a British, albeit a colonial, representative in Bahrain: Major Frank Holmes.

Ibn Saud, meanwhile, was increasingly debt-ridden and frustrated. Although he had used the fanaticism of the *ulemas* to help establish his own authority, he found their missionary fervour tiresome. They made Riyadh, his capital, into a morgue where it was hazardous for ordinary people to walk down the street looking happy for fear of being harassed by religious police. Their power over superstitious nomads was absolute – which is why he had used them himself – but now he needed to progress, and to do that he employed tricks.

The introduction of the telephone was his first opportunity. The *ulemas* naturally opposed it because telephones were not mentioned in the Koran. 'Do you think,' he asked them, 'that the devil would carry the words of God?'

Of course not, they replied.

'Very well, then, I will read some verses from the Koran over the telephone.'

After that, they had to accept grudgingly a network of wireless stations on which the King spent large amounts of money, as he did on water supplies and his even more elaborate personal household. He bought motor-cars by the dozen, although he could hardly use them because of lack of petrol, and he still had to bribe enemies and placate the poor. 'As the long returning procession of cars approached the palace, the road on either side was lined with black-veiled women and children, old men, and cripples from the town and neighbouring villages, all hopeful of royal bounty,' wrote Philby. 'One of the two body-guard slaves, always in attendance on the King in his outings, and standing on the running-boards of the car, would leap to the ground as the car slowed down and receive the sack of

silver from the royal hands for distribution of its contents among the waiting suppliants.'

The pilgrimage trade was declining because of a world slump and the British would not increase their handout, his only other source of income, without considerable restraints and rigorous conditions. There was only one practical source for new income: Russia. The Soviet government had been first to recognize the Wahhabis in 1926, thinking them a progressive regime in a backward area. They upgraded the consulate and sent a Muslim minister to Jidda. Ibn Saud was not keen on Russians because, he had been told, they slept with their mothers and sisters. But now, in 1931, he had to accept their offers of aid. His debts had risen to £400000, he had stopped paying bills, delayed the salaries of officials, and declared 'If anyone would offer me a million pounds, I would give him all the concessions he wanted.'

It was, at the time, an absurdly inflated hope. The major companies had far too much oil, and their lack of interest in discovering any more was so complete that Ibn Saud had to rely on the generosity of an American philanthropist, Charles Crane, who visited Jidda in February 1931. Mr Crane, who had previously been in the area studying date culture, inherited a fortune from his family's sanitary-fitting business and spent his life trying to promote peace and understanding between Arab nations and the West. He agreed to pay for a geologist, Karl Twitchell, to examine the country's mineral resources. Ibn Saud, delighted, presented Crane with two pedigree stallions. Crane, equally delighted, gave Ibn Saud the most exotic and unusual gift he could imagine: a \$1 box of Californian dates.

Twitchell saw immediately the high potential of Saudi Arabia, and tried unsuccessfully to involve the major oil companies before he was approached by SoCal, whose discoveries in Bahrain encouraged them to look towards the mainland. SoCal also hired Philby, whose commitments, although less ostentatious than the King's, were causing financial hardship at a time when his income from a Ford dealership was static. His son, Kim, at Cambridge, and three daughters had to be supported. He signed a secret agreement with SoCal which paid \$1000 a month for advice, \$10000 if SoCal won the

concession, and \$25 000 if oil was found in commercial quantities. At the same time, he contacted the opposition, writing to a friend in Anglo-Persian. 'Financial stringency is beginning to open the doors of Arabia to industrial exploitation,' he said, and implied that he might represent them.

Anglo-Persian decided, instead, to send their own man, Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, to battle with SoCal's Californian lawyer, Lloyd Hamilton, who arrived in Jidda in February 1933. Philby acted as intermediary between them and Ibn Saud who insisted, at first, on a down payment of £100 000 in gold.

This was twenty times more than Longrigg was authorized to pay and, he confided to Philby, the company did not really want the concession. They were more concerned in keeping out the Americans. After some persuasion, Anglo-Persian increased their offer to £10 000, but payment could not be in gold – that would suggest the pound was unreliable. From then on, Anglo-Persian were out of the race.

Hamilton, who had brought his wife on what he assumed would be a quick business trip, is the first recorded Western victim of the IBM syndrome. Talks dragged on until 20 April, when it was finally agreed that SoCal would pay £30 000 immediately, a further £20 000 in eighteen months, and £5 000 a year rent. Payment would be in gold.

That day, in the United States, President Roosevelt banned the export of gold without Treasury permission because there had been a series of bank failures. In Jidda, frantic bargaining resumed, whilst SoCal requested an export licence for gold worth \$170 327.50, and Washington bureaucrats took time to study and ponder the issue. The delay seemed endless. Ibn Saud became restless, and pressed for payment within three months of signing an agreement on 29 May.

Finally, in July, a desperate SoCal representative went to London, bought 35 000 gold sovereigns illegally, and transported them to Saudi Arabia by ship where they were counted and accepted by Finance Minister Shaikh Abdullah Sulaiman. Two days later, SoCal at last received a reply from the US Treasury, signed by under-secretary Dean Acheson. It regretted that they could not have an export licence for gold.

By now, though, the Americans had won the round, in spite of punching in the wrong direction and being almost tripped by their own supporters in the closing seconds. The pace was quickening, and the next round would see international duplicity of a more spectacular kind.

In the interval after the fourth race, one of King Khalid's aides handed boxes to the Sultan and members of his entourage who were sitting in the front row of the balcony. Hurriedly, the Sultan's young men reached under their seats for the plastic bags from which they took several small leather boxes. These were passed reverently to King Khalid and senior members of his government amidst much applause and apparent delight, although the ritual exchange of gold commemorative medallions on every conceivable occasion must by now benefit only Western jewellers with an aptitude for such work.

Spontaneous generosity is endearing when not overdone, but the Saudi's reputation is such that some Western guests now sit waiting, in the expectation that every meeting with a Prince will end with a Piaget. That used to be almost true, but the gifts are now more restricted to wandering statesmen or visiting ambassadors and their wives, causing unexpected financial anguish on return home. Ambassadors are not required to pay Customs duty on such gifts, which can sometimes mount up to thousands of pounds, but their wives are. Many a London jeweller has watches sold to him by the wives of ambassadors who could not afford the duty.

But . . . to the racing. The King's horse is running, a fine specimen which duly wins against competition from European thoroughbreds, much to his delight. 'There you are,' he tells friends. 'We can do it.' It is the first time he looks happy that afternoon.

'Of course, of course,' say those around him, smiling and clapping.

It takes a brave man to tell him, later that evening, that his horse, a present from a member of the family, is imported from France. But nothing is ever as it seems in Saudi Arabia, as so many people are discovering.

Round Three

SoCal drilled nine dry holes in the next five years, and had almost decided that the expense, already \$30 million, was too great for further exploration when they returned to a previous well in the rocky hills overlooking the Gulf port of Dammam. They drilled deeper and, on 4 March 1938, struck oil at what became known as Dammam Number 7. The foundations of the Saudi Arabian money rush were irrevocably set, although again it did not seem so at the time.

A year later, Ibn Saud pressed a valve on a pipeline, was presented with another car, and his country had begun oil exporting – only to find it limited a few months later when World War Two broke out. At the same time there was another drop in pilgrimage traffic, a drought killed crops and dried up the water supply, and Ibn Saud – once more broke – asked SoCal for a loan.

'We believe that unless this is done, and soon, this independent kingdom and perhaps the entire Arab world, will be thrown into chaos,' the company wrote to Roosevelt in an attempt to have Saudi Arabia included in the lend-lease programme.

But there was no legal loophole to allow this, so the American government prevaricated – what were a few desert Arabs in relation to their own war preparations? – and Roosevelt asked his federal loan administrator, Jesse Jones, to 'tell the British I hope they can take care of the King of Saudi Arabia. This is a little too far afield for us!'⁵ The British, although gentlemen, can be devious when self-interest is involved, and it took the Americans two years to realize they were being duped. Almost \$33 million of their money, given in the form of lend-lease, was used by the British to buy popularity with Ibn Saud.⁶ At the same time, a 500-strong geological expedition from London, disguised as a locust control squad, investigated the oil potential.

'It's one of the few things you can be sure,' fumed Navy Secretary James Forrestal, in a telephone call to the President. 'You can say today it is one of the great, important stakes for this country. . . . That stack of oil is something this country

damn well ought to have, and we've lost a good deal of our position with this shaikh - Eben Sihudo, whatever his name is - and we are losing more every day.'

Roosevelt decided, 'I hereby find the defence of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defence of the United States,' and began to lend money direct - \$28 million in the next two years, which was frittered away on extravagances - and sent his personal representative, Patrick Hurley, to see Ibn Saud. 'I found many manifestations of [his] confidence in America,' reported Hurley, 'and of his eagerness that American interests rather than those of any other foreign power, so often instrumentalities for political penetration, should assist the Saudi Arabian government in the development of the natural resources of the country.'

Now the two Western leaders, Churchill and Roosevelt, pre-occupied though they were with everyday death and destruction, began to shadow-box in preparation for the future.

'There is apprehension in some quarters here that the United States has a desire to deprive us of our oil assets in the Middle East on which among other things, the whole supply of our navy depends,' Churchill cabled Roosevelt.

Roosevelt replied, 'I am disturbed about the rumour that the British wish to horn in on Saudi Arabian oil reserves.'

After further 'friendly' exchanges Churchill added, 'Thank you very much for your assurances about no sheep's eyes at *our* (!) oilfields in Iran and Iraq. Let me reciprocate by giving you fullest assurance that we have no thought to trying to horn in upon your interests in Saudi Arabia. My position in this as in all matters is that Great Britain seeks no advantage, territorial or otherwise, as a result of the war. On the other hand she will not be deprived of anything which rightly belongs to her after having given her best services to the good cause - at least not so long as your humble servant is entrusted with the conduct of her affairs.'

American diplomats now felt it was time to stop the British habit of tying innocent undeveloped countries to contracts and treaties which made them dependent for ever. On the last day of the Yalta conference in December 1944, President Roosevelt said casually he would see Ibn Saud before returning to the United States, an announcement which infuriated Churchill

and caused him to 'burn up all the wires' in vain attempts to arrange a prior meeting, according to US minister in Jidda, Colonel William Eddy.⁷

The King left Riyadh in magisterial fashion, with two hundred cars carrying his harem and members of the court, for Jidda where the US destroyer *Murphy* was waiting to take him to the meeting at the Great Bitter Lake just below Suez. The *Murphy's* captain, horrified at the sight of such a retinue, said he could accommodate only the King, four advisers, and eight servants. A compromise was reached: forty-eight men altogether.

On board, the Saudis erected a tent and set up a throne. They refused the ship's distilled water, sent ashore for a local brand, and then asked permission for eighty-six live sheep to come on board so that food could be prepared according to Moslem rites. Another compromise: ten sheep were allowed.

President Roosevelt, sick, tired, and dying, was less demanding of his own traditional comforts when the two leaders met on board the *Quincy*. A chain-smoker, he restricted himself to a few puffs in the ship's elevator so as not to offend his guest with even a hint of tobacco smoke. The men had an immediate rapport. Roosevelt discussed farming, as he had with the Shah, and gave Ibn Saud his spare wheelchair after the King, arthritic from battle wounds, admired it. He cherished the gift, although it was too small for him, as he did the official present of a DC-3 Dakota which became the foundations of Saudi Arabia's somewhat chaotic national airline, *Saudia*.

In their discussions, Roosevelt promised to do nothing which could be considered hostile to Arab interests. Two months later he was dead and Ibn Saud, who did not understand the realities of American democracy, was about to feel hoodwinked again.

After meeting Roosevelt the King was driven incognito through Egypt, via Cairo (the first large city he had ever seen), to a hastily evacuated Hôtel du Lac in Rayum where Churchill awaited him. It was an inauspicious occasion. 'A number of social problems arose. I had been told that neither smoking nor alcoholic beverages were allowed in the Royal Presence,' wrote Churchill.⁸ 'As I was host at luncheon I raised the matter at once, and said if it was the religion of His Majesty to deprive

himself of smoking and alcohol I must point out that my rule of life prescribed as an absolutely sacred rite smoking cigars and also drinking of alcohol before, after, and if need be during all meals and in the intervals between them. The King graciously accepted the position. His own cup-bearer from Mecca offered me a glass of water, from its sacred well, the most delicious that I have ever tasted.'

The exchange of presents was also embarrassing, and left a niggardly impression after Roosevelt's generosity. Churchill gave Ibn Saud £100-worth of perfume bought in Cairo. The King reciprocated with diamond-encrusted gold swords and a large box of jewels which he presented to Sarah Churchill 'for your womenfolk'.

'It appeared that we were rather outclassed in gifts,' said Churchill, 'so I told the King, "What we bring are but tokens. His Majesty's government have [*sic*] decided to present you with the finest motor-car in the world, with every comfort for peace and every security against hostile action".'

An armour-plated Rolls-Royce was duly delivered, but it was right-hand drive and remained unused because the King liked to travel in the front and would not demean himself by sitting on the left side of a chauffeur. There is one consolation for the British taxpayer. Under government rules, gifts received at a state occasion have to be given to the Treasury. Money raised by selling the jewels 'for your womenfolk' paid for the Rolls.

America's domination of Saudi Arabia was consolidated after the war, in spite of vigorous competition from British and French arms firms and help given to the National Guard by soldiers seconded from the British Army. Everything was done to satisfy the increasingly profligate and rapidly multiplying members of the ruling family. Oil royalties were sent direct to Ibn Saud himself - \$38 million in 1949 - and when he complained it was not enough and that ARAMCO paid more in US tax, accountants devised a new system whereby part of the tax went instead to the King. This satisfied everyone, except perhaps American taxpayers who increasingly subsidized Saudi Arabia. But they were not told.

By now Ibn Saud was in decline. His life had spanned too many changes, too rapidly, for him to comprehend the complex

manoeuvrings of the post-war world. It was a traumatic journey from hacking off a rival's head with a jewelled sword to defending himself against ruthlessly competitive arms salesmen; from swapping dirty jokes with cronies in the desert to discussing the finer points of oligocene-miocene formations with buttoned-down Ivy League geologists; from bullying by the British to sycophancy from international con men.

He sank into a shell, ignoring the excesses of many of his sons who, released from the danger of his frightening displeasure, turned every night and day into party time, with imported whores (some of whom still live in Riyadh unseen and forgotten), alcohol, and coloured electric light-bulbs to add final twinkling touches to the vulgarity of their gimcrack palaces.

Their father, depressed and disillusioned, dyed his hair with henna to ward off visible signs of age, but could do nothing about the famed tumescence now activated only by the sight of a fresh young virgin. On one of his few overseas visits – to see King Farouk in Egypt – he murmured wistfully one night, 'There are some nice girls in this country. I wouldn't mind picking a bunch of them to take back to Arabia, say £100,000 worth of the beauties.' A sad man now, ripped off by relatives, deceived by advisers, let down finally by his own body. His genius had been to create a united country from a group of traditional enemies. It was for others to build a nation, to provide schools, hospitals, and homes for a poverty-ridden peasant society. He died of a heart attack on 9 November 1953, and was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Saud, who built himself a homestead suitably in keeping with this new honour: the \$25-million al-Nassariyah compound which included a palace for each of his four wives and thirty-two mansions for concubines. Half of Riyadh's electricity supply was used on its air-conditioning system.

His epic debauchery was manipulated skilfully by the CIA, who provided him with boys and girls, and overlooked by ARAMCO – now a consortium of SoCal, Texaco, Exxon, and Mobil – who created an isolated, American-style encampment near the oilfields in Dhahran. They understood the perils of becoming involved in ideological arguments with the King –

they would be thrown out of the country – and their programme of building schools, hospitals and a railway link between Dhahran and Riyadh was described several years later by Management Developments director, Mel Lafrenz, as ‘simply a realistic appraisal of what we ought to do to stay here as long as we could. We did not do this to be Big Daddy’.⁹ The British said that every time the King sneezed, ARAMCO built a new hospital.

In 1972, the Saudi government bought a 25 per cent holding in the company for \$500 million, and later increased their holding to 60 per cent in preparation for total nationalization. Americans still hold 3500 of the 22000 jobs, but will become less active as tax laws make working abroad uneconomic. ‘An American would not leave home for the sort of money you can pay the British,’ says an ARAMCO director. ‘Also they won’t come here on bachelor status which the British will.’ The company continues to initiate progress, sometimes unlawfully, as I was to discover later, but in the early years caution was essential.

King Saud was fortunate. Although the money rush which was to give new agility to Saudi Arabia’s apologists had not yet begun, he lived in an era of paranoid anti-communism. As President Eisenhower proclaimed in 1957, before inviting him on a state visit, ‘the existing vacuum in the Middle East must be filled by the United States before it is filled by Russia’.

For altruistic reasons, of course.

At the time, Saud was receiving \$350 million a year, and still managed to run up debts of \$500 million. It was clear to members of the family that he would have to be deposed but such action was anathema to his chosen successor, Faisal, as religious as his brother was riotous, who insisted on sanction from the *ulemas*. When this was forthcoming, Saud was paid off with a \$3 million a year pension, and exiled. A new era in the short, seesaw history of Saudi Arabia began.

‘We are a simple family,’ explained Faisal to the credulous, as he declined exotic trappings and drove to work in a Chrysler. He married four times (one dead: two divorced) but lived with his favourite, Iffat, for forty-two years (four daughters, five sons). After the excesses of his brother, honest banality was a

welcome change, and he illustrated his vaunted simplicity with a remark about the twin devils, communists and Jews: 'Never forget Karl Marx was a Jew.' But at least he pushed the country forward although it needed, and still does, a shove.

He abolished slavery by buying nearly two thousand slaves from the shaikhs for £1000 each and setting them free. Against strong *ulema* opposition, he introduced girls' education in 1960 and television two years later, innovations which may seem modest in the West but caused uproar in a country where women are biological playthings, and Koranic interpretation of idolatry is so fundamental that heads are removed from human figures on imported road-crossing signs. The ensuing riots ended in deaths, and indirectly, his own assassination.

On 25 March 1975, Prince Faisal bin Musa'id, a twenty-six-year-old nephew, walked into the King's *majlis* and shot him three times in the head. At first, it was thought this could be a plot by other Arab countries – Libya? Yemen? – to foment revolt. In fact, though, Prince Faisal was brother of one of the men shot by police during the television station riots, and he was seeking traditional bedouin revenge.

The feudal farm has many shareholders, and those who understand families will realize why that alone is enough cause for the Al-Sauds to be nervous, the Americans to be protective, the Russians to be covetous, and the Iranians amused. 'If I was in Saudi Arabia, Billy would be crown prince,' President Carter joked in Washington, an observation which brought a wan response from Crown Prince Fahd. He has quite enough *nouveau-riche* nincompoops in the family.

All that, without the additional perplexities of power they did not seek, authority they do not deserve, and a money rush with which they cannot cope.

Camels are now racing at Riyadh Jockey Club, lurching around the track in an ungainly way, a young Saudi perched behind the hump looking as if he might fall off at any moment and thrashing the beast with a stick in gallant but hopeless attempts to make it trot faster. The scene recalls grandmothers in an egg-and-spoon race: no one denies they can do it, but the

aesthetic, intellectual, or even veterinary fascination is not immediately obvious. Perhaps it is an acquired taste, like cricket.

The sons of Ibn Saud, and their sons, and their cousins, watch the visitor from Oman stony-faced. How much has he been given this time, and how long will the King scatter money to buy off the greedy, inept and politically vulnerable? Saudi Arabia donates at least one-seventh of its income in aid, forty times more than the proportion given by the United States.¹⁰ There is financial support for most Arab countries, the PLO, and a variety of miscellaneous items ranging from mosques in Regent's Park and Geneva to a \$15-million sports stadium in Bahrain, \$500 million for Jordan's Hawk missiles (the cash is sent direct to Washington, lest it be dissolved by King Hussein's enthusiastic overspending on non-military projects). Sometimes the generosity has unexpected results. Many Yemenis, who provide more than a million of the labour force, returned home when Saudi money enabled their own countries to develop.

North and South Yemen, with their opposing political loyalties and strategic location at the entrance to the Red Sea, are particular targets for Saudi blandishments. Historically, the Yemens are one country, but they have rarely been united. South Yemen, known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDYR), was the British colony of Aden for over a century until 1967 when it began to become the first Marxist state and Russian foothold in Arabia. In order to discourage its support of an uprising in neighbouring Oman, Saudi offered £400 million 'aid', a gesture which led indirectly in July 1978 to the execution of moderate president Salem Robei Ali and his replacement by a stronger pro-Soviet regime. The increasing build-up of Cuban soldiers and East German civil service 'advisers' is a problem which can no longer be solved with money.

North Yemen, also known as the Yemen Arab Republic, is more susceptible. It received a down payment of £300 million and a continuing commitment of at least £50 million a year to thwart Russian influence. But it remains one of the world's least stable countries with tribal and religious differences making a perfect target for 'destabilization' and close ties with

Saudi Arabia do not provide adequate life insurance for its leaders. Two presidents were murdered in nine months.

Charity has another price, too. 'Everyone becomes very religious in the presence of a Saudi,' explains a diplomat in Jidda. 'When King Khalid went to Kuwait in 1976, he told them they must do away with pork and porn. Go back now and see how easy it is to buy bacon and a tit magazine. The thing is, you don't pick your nose in front of your rich aunt. You wait until she is round the corner and not watching.'

Also you try to pay an annual visit to demonstrate your affection. Pilgrims, so important to Ibn Saud, are roused in their millions by the money rush (nearly two million in 1978), so that a fifth of Mecca will soon be covered with parking lots and roads. Jidda, the world's fastest-growing city, has increased its budget 270 times since 1971. A few years ago, it had no proper roads and no piped water. Now it has a Dior boutique, jewellery shops, Henry Moore sculptures, Italian street lamps, decorative gardens, and such high rents that a property owner recoups his investment in two years. The road from the airport to the centre of town has not changed for centuries, however: it still sells high-priced junk, with mediocre Persian carpets a speciality. Whenever the grandsons of Ibn Saud return from studying abroad (one out of every thousand Saudis is educated in the United States), they see physical changes undreamed of only five years ago, but the old taboos remain the same. Prince Faisal bin Abdullah at twenty-nine was a student at Stanford and bought a 264-acre ranch in the Portola Valley. He spends six months there, and six months in Riyadh. 'I miss the freedoms when I return home, but I really do believe that at the heart of it, there is a lot of superficiality in the West.'

'In our world money is the name of the game, and you can destroy life with it. We have to ask ourselves why we are doing things, and where we are going. The main thing that worries me is the concept that people who have come from nothing are going to act too grand because of a stroke of luck. Sometimes I really pity ourselves.'

Surprisingly, nearly all the students do return. Unlike Iranians, half of whom stay abroad according to estimates made privately by former Prime Minister Amouzegar, the

soldiers, caught off guard, stumble and fall over each other, cursing the driver whose look of intense determination is turning to bewilderment. 'Perhaps he thought it was a camel,' says an onlooker.

Never mind. It has been a good day's racing and Sultan Qaboos is well pleased. He has been given \$100 million for 'civil development' in Oman, a final lurking-place of the British Raj, where changes in the last few years have been even more rapid than in Saudi Arabia. Yet there is worry on the family farm that their indigent neighbour may be the first serious Arab casualty of the money rush.