



79/10/63
TAPM 050, 954 52
S11 Y

THE YEMEN

By B. W. SEAGER, C.M.G., O.B.E.

Report of a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on Wednesday, April 6th, 1955, Group Captain H. St. Clair Smallwood, O.B.E., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege today to introduce to you Mr. Seager from the West Aden Protectorate. He is going to speak to us about the Yemen and, judging by the number present, I realize how topical his subject is at this moment. Only yesterday we were told that the ruler had decided to abdicate, but today the news is that his abdication is over; he is back in power. In the absence of newspapers, to have something direct from the Yemen by word of Mr. Seager is an advantage on which we can congratulate ourselves. Without further ado, I ask Mr. Seager to address you.

I HAVE been asked to speak to you today about the Yemen, that independent Moslem State in South-West Arabia.

Little is known of this country, because its rulers, who are by nature xenophobic, have elected to deny foreigners easy access to it. Its people have had an extremely turbulent past. In the whole of its history the country has been under the rigid control of a strong central government for about twenty-five years. Prior to 1930 the country was never ruled or administered, as we understand these words. The Ottoman Turks were the sovereign power for over 400 years, on and off, but they were never able to get to close grips with the population.

Before the Turkish domination the country had been conquered by invaders. This had its effect on the people, making them fanatically intolerant of outside interference. It has been said that the peculiar geographical configuration of the Yemen has been the prime factor in determining its fortunes. I think that there is a lot of truth in this. Thousands of square miles of the country are mountainous, with natural barriers dividing clan from clan and tribe from tribe. Blood feuds, which raged for centuries, were certainly prompted and nourished by enforced confinement behind these barriers. Today the people are still intensely suspicious of outsiders, Christians in particular; ignorance and fear of the outside world have combined to engender an anti-foreign bias. In their minds a foreigner can never be up to any good at any time. When I was a guest of the Yemeni Government in San'a—and I was a constant visitor—the Guard of the Guest House obviously had orders to intrude on my privacy at unexpected moments. After a time I got used to having my bedroom door flung open without warning and being subjected to a careful scrutiny by the Guard Commander. His superiors, with their ingrained suspicion, felt impelled to find out whether the curious foreigner was up to any mischief.

The Yemen's superficial area is about 80,000 square miles, and its population—now all Moslem—does not exceed 3,000,000. This figure is approximate; there has been no census in the Yemen, and no statistics are available. The country is bounded on the north by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the west by the Red Sea, where it has a coastline of about 260

214



Library

IAS, Shimla

TMP 050.954 52 S11 Y



00016318

PRESENTED TO THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SIMLA

BY



miles, on the south by the Aden Protectorate, and on the east by the Rub al Khali, or Empty Quarter. The Moslem population is divided into two sects. The Shafais, or orthodox Moslems, form two-thirds of the total population, and the Zeidis, a branch of Shiism, form the remainder.

It is still difficult to trace Yemeni history with any accuracy. For hundreds of years at a time there have been blanks which to this day remain obscure.

The early Egyptians were greatly interested in the south Arabian spice route, and their voyages are recorded far back before the Christian era. Queen Hatsheput, of the eighteenth dynasty, about 1500 B.C., sent an expedition down to the Red Sea to bring back myrrh. It is likely that this expedition touched at some Yemeni port. Towards the end of the third century B.C. the Egyptians under Ptolemy did a lot of exploring in the Red Sea, and it is fairly certain that they visited the Yemen.

The earliest recorded State in the Yemen was that of the Minæans at Main in Jauf in the South-East Yemen. It rose to power in 1000 B.C. and flourished until 600 B.C. The Minæans were merchants of repute. Another well-known Yemeni State was that of Saba (from 950 B.C. to 115 B.C.). Its capital was also in the south-east. Incidentally, no concrete evidence is as yet available from inscriptions of the existence of the Queen of Sheba, although it is not impossible that she did exist. There have been other female rulers in Arabian history. Another Yemeni State was that of Qataban, said to have arisen at an early date before Christ; but it was absorbed by the Himyarite Kingdom in the Christian era.

The Himyarites came into being in the second century B.C., and continued until early in the sixth century. They were overthrown in A.D. 525 by the Abyssinians. The Himyarites absorbed the Kingdom of Qataban and Saba, and at one time claimed that they were overlords of what we now know as the Hadramaut. It is interesting to relate that a section of a tribe in the Eastern Aden Protectorate is today known as the Beni Himyar.

South-West Arabian history from the seventh to the sixteenth century remains confused. Tradition has it the conversion of the Yemen to Islam was the work of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law. In the Ali mosque in San'a there is said to be a Quran written by him and stained with the blood of the children of the Governor appointed by him.

In the tenth century we hear of the Zeidi sect for the first time. This sect takes its name from Zeid, a grandson of Ali. Zeid never lived in the Yemen; he was killed in Iraq, and became a martyr. We next hear of two Zeidi colonies, the first on the shores of the Caspian and the other at Sada in Northern Yemen. Here the line of the Imams of the Yemen was founded by Al Hadi Yahya Arrasi, a descendant of Ali and Fatma, daughter of the Prophet. It is certain, therefore, that the present Imam is a descendant of the Prophet and that his house is that of the Rassid dynasty. The succession has not always passed from father to son, but the Imamate has continued in the Rassid dynasty for at least 900 years. After being defeated by the Rasulids (successors of Selaheddin's governors) at Taiz (which is now the temporary capital of the Yemen and residence of the Imam Ahmed) in the thirteenth century, the Zeidi Imams retired into obscurity until the Turkish conquest in the sixteenth century. In spite of

its ups and downs and even disappearance for long periods, the Rassid dynasty has been remarkable for its persistence, and it has always come out on top.

The Turks first established themselves in the Yemen in the sixteenth century, and until forced to leave it, after World War I, had a hard time. There were continuous rebellions and revolts; sometimes they had the upper hand, sometimes they were powerless. In the seventeenth century they completely lost control over the lowlands, which were ruled by local Sheikhs under the nominal suzerainty of the Imams. A war of independence started with the accession of the Imam Al Mansur Billah Al Qasim in 1597, but he failed to drive the Turks out. His successor, Al Muayad Billah Muhammed, however, drove them to take refuge on Kamaran Island, in the Red Sea. After 1635 the rule of the Imams was not seriously challenged, though in 1727 they lost control of the parts of what is now the Aden Protectorate. In the nineteenth century the Turks reasserted themselves, and there was a resumption of Turkish rule. Revolts and disturbances continued, and in 1891, and again in 1904, there were general risings.

The father of the present Imam, Imam Yahya Hamid ud din al Mutawwkil ibn Muhammed al Mansur ibn Yahya Hamid ud din was born about 1868. He succeeded to the Imamate in 1904. At that time relations with the Turks were again very bad. He marched south from Sada and took San'a, the capital, putting the Turks to flight. A new Turkish expeditionary force, under Ahmed Feizi Pasha, returned in strength and retook San'a. So it went on. In 1911, Izzet Pasha, the Turkish Governor-General, thought it wise to seek a *rapprochement* with the Imam Yahya. The latter met him half-way, on account of hostile action by the Italians against Yemeni Red Sea ports. In 1913, Izzet Pasha, with great difficulty, obtained an imperial firman from the Sultan of Turkey which proclaimed a mediatized State, or *entente*, with the Imam. Relations with the Turks improved out of all recognition. In 1915, with the concurrence of the Imam Yahya, Ali Said Pasha, the Turkish commander in the Southern Yemen, invaded the Aden Protectorate and tried to take the colony but without success. In 1918 the Turks had to evacuate the Yemen altogether as a result of the 1918 Armistice terms.

The Government of the Yemen is centred in the Imam, or King—the head of the Zeidi sect and Commander of the Faithful. He and his predecessors claim to be direct descendants of the Himyarite Princes. It was in Himyaritic times that the Romans made an attempt to open up South-West Arabia and to incorporate it in the Roman Empire. In 24 B.C. Ælus Gallus, the Prefect of Egypt under Augustus, landed with an army at Yenbo on the Red Sea coast, north of Jeddah, marching south-eastwards for about 900 miles, suffered abominably from sickness and thirst, but in spite of this reached Mariba in Aulaqi country about 170 miles north-east of Aden. The Arab sheikh of this region recently asked us to help him restore the system of aqueducts which he said an occupying force from the north had destroyed prior to their withdrawal. When told that no British army had ever been there, he still insisted that a Frankish people from the north had damaged the irrigation system. It is likely that he

was repeating a tale passed on to him by his father and the latter's ancestors before him.

As you are no doubt aware, the descendants of the Prophet are known as Seiyids (plural: Sada). From these Seiyids the Imams of the Yemen are selected. Any Seiyid may be a candidate for the Imamate. The new Imam should be elected by the Zeidi Ulema, or learned men, immediately after the death of his predecessor. It is likely that the Ulema find it convenient to elect as the new Imam the most powerful Seiyid in the country likely to be able to reward them for the brilliance of their choice. The late Imam Yahya was the first Imam in history to break with tradition and nominate a Crown Prince in his own lifetime. This Crown Prince, the eldest son of Imam Yahya, rules today. Imam Yahya's action created a storm at the time, but he was powerful enough to weather it.

The Seiyids in the Yemen are the privileged class and the country is run by them, but under the Imam, who ultimately controls everything. No decision is taken without reference to him. Once in 1937 I ran short of petrol. When I was enquiring how I could replenish my stock I was advised to write personally to the Imam. This I did, and in due course the order to supply me arrived, signed by His Majesty. In the same way, if schoolmasters want chalk or dusters, or doctors require drugs or dressings, Imamic approval has to be obtained in writing.

While the Imam is the absolute head of the state and handles all its affairs personally, he has the assistance of, shall we call it, a Cabinet (for want of a better word). Some of his many brothers are Ministers and look after various departments, such as Health, Communications, Education, Justice, etc. The present Yemeni Foreign Minister, for instance, is Seif al Islam Abdullah, a brother of the Imam. There is also a Grand Council, or Majlis, composed of leading personalities, who are summoned when important matters are to be discussed. This Majlis has no executive function; it is purely advisory. For the main part, the Imam and his secretaries do all the work, and they have a lot to do.

There are two systems or sets of laws, the Civil Law, administered by the Governor or Sub-Governor, and the Quranic Law, or Ahqam Shariya, administered by the Hākim, or local Judge. In civil cases, appeal goes as high as the Imam himself. In Sharia cases there is a right of appeal to another Hākim, and from him there is a final appeal to the Istinaf, which is the highest court of appeal in San'a. Punishment under Sharia Law is severe. It has to be, as the people are tough and undisciplined. For theft the thief loses his right hand; for adultery the punishment is stoning to death. Wine-drinking is punishable by flogging.

Taxation in the Yemen is heavy, though not so crippling as in the United Kingdom. The Quran proscribes almsgiving, and the Yemeni Government has reduced it to an art. All taxes go to the Treasury, or Beit al Mal. There is the "zakat," a fortieth of a man's capital ($2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.); "ashur," or a tenth tithe, on crops; there is "fitra," a poll tax which works out at less than a shilling a head at the end of the fasting month of Ramadhan. The last tax is the "idda," which amounts to about one dollar (say, six shillings) on every twenty sheep owned. The bane of the Yemeni farmer is the tax assessor, or Muthemmir, who comes round

annually to assess the crops. He is arbitrary, usually oppressive, and what he says goes. I once ventured to bring this to the notice of the late Imam, Yahya, who said he was well aware of the abuses and did all he could to punish offenders.

The Yemeni Government controls the country rigidly by the Hostage system, "Rahina" (plural: Rahayin). Nearly all the tribes furnish hostages for their good behaviour. The naughtier the tribe, the more the hostages. They range in age from four to fifty years. I should say at least 2,000 hostages are held in various administrative centres and rural prisons. The system is a harsh but effective one. The tribes live in savage, inhospitable country in fort-like dwellings; they are a wild and turbulent people, and ordinary democratic laws would be quite useless to check their excesses. If the Imam were to abandon this system he would have to double his security forces. The tribes do not like furnishing hostages, but they are well aware that their behaviour merits such a system. Sometimes a hostage gets away, but he is always brought back by his sheikh in due course. There is trouble if he isn't. A tribe, when called upon to furnish a hostage, is not allowed to send just anyone they like; he must be the sheikh's son, nephew or first cousin. If the tribe in question is behaving itself well, the hostage or hostages will be allowed to go home on holidays and feast days. A hostage does not remain a hostage for life; he is changed every year or two unless the tribe is being really tiresome.

Education is not far advanced. There are hundreds of Quranic schools, but only two secondary schools. There is sufficient education for the sons of the great houses, who will be the leaders of the future. There is an orphanage in San'a and a university at 'Ibb, where theology is taught. There is a move to extend education, but it has not gone very far as yet.

Currency in the Yemen is the Maria-Theresa dollar, or riyal, a very large silver coin weighing one ounce. It is still manufactured in Europe, some by the Royal Mint.

The people of the Yemen vary a great deal in type from district to district, owing partly to differences in origin and partly to climatic influences.

In the Tihama, or lowlands, the people are dark and slightly built and betray a negroid slave element. In the highlands we find the true mountaineer, taller and bigger limbed; here there is no negroid taint.

There are roughly four social classes: (1) the Seiyid (plural: Sada), or the descendant of the Prophet. This is the privileged class, and everyone does their bidding. If they are not landowners they are senior or junior officials and are held in high esteem. (2) The next is the tribesman, or "kabilli," who forms the bulk of the population, (3) After the tribesman comes the "subject-cum-citizen," or "rawi" (plural: "raya"). This class includes traders, merchants, artisans, those farmers who are not tribesmen, and others lower in the social scale. Lastly there is the "khadim" (plural: "akhdam"), who is probably the descendant of slaves imported during the Abyssinian domination of the sixth century A.D.

The dress of the women varies considerably. The tribeswoman or peasant wears trousers which are a cross between Jodhpurs and the baggy "shalvas" of the Ottoman Turks. In San'a the outdoor dress of the more

leisured classes is startling. The whole body is covered in a long, brightly coloured printed or embroidered shawl. Beneath this the head is shrouded in a long blue veil printed with diamond-shaped rectangles, each having a white inner and a black outer border. Anyone seeing them for the first time might easily imagine that they were members of a secret society in full regalia. My wife tells me that, in the privacy of the harem, the dresses worn are gay and diverse, and fashion varies from place to place; thus, in San'a, small coronets (made of rolls of paper covered in material) are worn on the head to hold the veil in place. Much intricately designed silver-gilt jewellery is worn, though this may now have become rare, as it was all made by the Jews. Amber and other semi-precious stones found in the country are used a great deal for necklaces, set in heavy silver mountings.

Until 1948 there must have been close on 40,000 Jews in the Yemen. They lived mostly in the towns, but there were a few rural communities. The Jews themselves hold that the Yemeni Jews, the very oldest Jewish community outside Israel, arrived in the Yemen forty-two years before the destruction of the Temple. Seventy-five thousand of them are said to have left Jerusalem when the Prophet Jeremiah declared, "He that goeth forth from this city shall save his soul, and live." Many crossed the Jordan, turned southwards towards the deserts, and finally reached the Yemen. They were of the warrior class and made themselves masters of the area in which they settled. In the third century A.D. the Yemeni Jews sent their important dead to be buried in the Holy Land. Inscriptions discovered in Lower Galilee prove this.

On my many journeys to San'a before 1948 I saw quite a lot of the Jews. In that year there must have been not less than 20,000 of them in San'a alone. Here they lived in their own quarter, the Haret al Yahud, surrounded by a high wall, and were the artisans and craftsmen of the country—jewellers, glaziers, leather workers, builders, etc.

At one time these Jews in San'a could live anywhere in the city. One of the Imams, however, expelled them to the Taiz area, over 150 miles to the south, where they were badly treated. At that time in Taiz lived a renowned Jewish scholar and philosopher named Shepezi, whose representations to the Imam prevailed, and in due course all the expelled Jews returned to San'a; but this time they were confined to one quarter, where their descendants lived until 1948.

Shepezi's tomb is in Taiz, and Jews from all over the world have made pilgrimages to it.

Over the years prior to 1948 only a few thousand Jews managed to reach Palestine. They left secretly in twos and threes, as the Imam did not like to see them go, not wishing to lose his artisans. In 1948, however, the call to Israel was insistent, and all the Jews in the Yemen trekked painfully southwards to Aden, whence they were flown by four-engined aircraft direct to Israel, 150 at a time. It was a remarkable sight to see them arrive in Aden, some on foot, some on camel-back, many on lorries. Most had never seen a car or lorry, let alone an aircraft; and of course they had never seen the sea. The Aden Government established a transit camp for them; at one time the camp must have held at least four thousand. As fast as they were flown away others arrived to take their place.

The State of Israel should be grateful to the Imam Ahmed for putting no obstacles in the way of the Yemeni Jews mass exodus. I know that Yemeni governors had explicit orders to expedite them on their way. I think I am right in saying that not a single Jew was attacked or molested on his way southwards. Some must have trekked over 600 miles through Arab territory. It is true that they had to pay a lot of money on the way, but the important thing is that they got through, though inevitably many of the sick and elderly fell by the wayside.

The Yemeni Jews were extremely strict in the observance of their religion. I once passed a remote Jewish village which was surrounded, at intervals of about ten yards, by strips of mud walls four feet high by four feet long. When I enquired the reason for the walls, I was told that no Jew must go beyond these barriers between sunset on Friday and sunset on Saturday, in case he might be tempted to go for a walk or to play a game.

It is a popular conception that Arabia is a hot land, and for the most part it is so, the peninsula being practically bisected by the Tropic of Cancer; but the height of the western half greatly lowers its temperature, so that in the winter the weather can be very cold, with night frosts.

On the whole, the Yemen enjoys a climate superior to, and entirely different from, that prevailing in other parts of Arabia, because it is dominated by high mountains, except on the coast. Inwards from the coast the desert extends up to twenty-five miles. Here rain is rare, but there is mist and drizzle.

The Yemen is an agricultural community. For 4,000 years at least a dry farming system has been developed which is based on the conservation of soil and moisture. In the highlands, only by very hard work and amazing skill have the inhabitants made intensive farming possible. The soil in the mountains is conserved by an elaborate terracing system which has to be seen to be believed. The fields depend on rain and on the collection of water streaming off the slopes, carrying with it fertilizing agents derived from the excreta of animals. On steep slopes the terraces are so narrow that they can only be cultivated by hand, some being only three feet long by two feet wide at the tops of slopes. On the middle slopes the terraces are broader and are supported by massive stone walls. Water is led to these fields by an intricate system of channels, descending from terrace to terrace. It is courting death for a farmer to move a single stone from the channel of one of his neighbours; each channel is guarded jealously in the rainy season: In the valleys and wadi-beds the cultivators rely on controlled flood water. Deflectors made of sand are built diagonally across wadi-beds. After rain or thunderstorms the farmers gather at these deflectors. As the flood waters rush down the wadi and reach the first barrier the water is deflected by it and is made to irrigate the quota of land for which it was constructed. When this has been completed, the deflector is breached and the water races down to the next one, where the same thing happens, and so on.

The main crops are millet or corn (dhurra), bulrush millet (dukhn), wheat (burr), barley (shair) and maize (hind). Wheat and barley are grown to a height above the middle altitudes. Some cotton is grown in the lowlands.

There is plenty of fruit—quinces, plums, apricots, peaches, pears, pomegranates, figs (introduced by the Turks), mangoes, tamarind, pawpaws, bananas, sweet-limes, custard apples, and a great variety of grapes. In the highlands round San'a twenty-five different kinds of the latter are grown. My favourite was the "bayadh," a small, sweet, stoneless grape. There are date-palms in the lowlands and at 4,000 feet; this crop is not exported, but consumed locally.

There are no manufacturing industries in the Yemen, only local handicrafts, the textile industry being an old-established one.

There is dhow building on the sea coast. The wood used is the Yemeni acacia, which is very hard and enduring. As there is no planned afforestation, South-West Arabia is gradually being denuded of trees, largely in order to produce charcoal, which is the principal fuel used.

The Yemen's most important export is coffee—coffee "Arabica," which I believe is the only kind grown in Arabia. It flourishes at high altitudes, usually from 4,500 to 8,000 feet. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century most of the Yemeni coffee was either exported through the port of Mocha on the Red Sea coast, or was picked up by camel caravans that came from far and wide in search of it. These caravans also brought merchandise from the Middle East and Europe and sold it in Mocha. There is a record of a caravan of a thousand camels which actually brought goods from as far away as Hungary and Venice. After 1850 Mocha declined, and today it is a pitiable and depressing sight.

Apart from coffee, the only other Yemeni exports are hides and skins, some ghi (or semin) and a limited amount of cereal. And, of course, qāt . . .

It is quite impossible to talk about the Yemen without mentioning qāt.

The habit of chewing young leaves of this shrub is a noxious form of drug-addiction which has taken possession of the people of South-West Arabia, but particularly of the Yemen, where the practice is almost universal. The shrub, said to have been introduced from Abyssinia, is cultivated in small plantations, on terraced fields or in walled gardens. It flourishes at altitudes between 4,000 and 8,000 feet. Every house has at least one qāt chewing-room, and very often two—one for the women as well as one for the men. Wealthy people hold large qāt parties, often repeated day after day among the same group of friends. These parties generally begin after lunch and may last well on into the evening.

Anything from twenty to forty people may gather in one ill-ventilated room, where they sit round the walls, each with his bundle of qāt and a spittoon in front of him. When a man has chewed for some time, swallowing only the juice of the plant, his cheeks become uncomfortably distended with the paste of chewed leaves, which is then ejected into the spittoon with the aid of a finger. He then drinks water noisily, swilling out the mouth preparatory to another chew.

There is little or no conversation during a chewing session. A feeling of contentment and well-being is said to be experienced, though not drowsiness. In fact, most people will tell you that it produces wakefulness and mental alertness.

I have chewed it myself and found the taste bitter but not unpleasant.

It did not make me feel particularly happy or contented; in fact, at the time the effect on me seemed to be nil, but I did find, later, that it kept me from sleeping, rather in the same way that a high altitude will keep one wakeful and alert.

The social results of qāt-chewing are very considerable, because, apart from any physical ills it may produce, it is such a waste of time, money and land—the latter because the qāt trade is so profitable that ground formerly devoted to the production of coffee or vines is very often given up to the shrub, which can produce as many as three crops a year.

By way of explaining my presence in South-West Arabia, I must go into a little personal history. In 1933 I was serving in the British Legation in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia; at the end of that year I was seconded for three months to Aden to assist indirectly in the treaty negotiations in San'a. I returned to Jeddah at the end of my secondment, but joined the Colonial Administrative Service in Aden in September 1934, as a direct result of that treaty, as I will explain.

During the negotiations in San'a it emerged that the Yemeni Government were not then prepared to consent to the exchange of diplomatic representatives. It was agreed, however, that in order to regulate frontier affairs the Aden Government should appoint a Political Officer to act as their representative at frontier discussions with the Yemeni authorities. I had the good fortune to be appointed to this post, and acted as Frontier Officer from 1934 until 1942, and continued to carry out this duty on my promotion to British Agent.

Frontier work was extremely interesting, if at times hazardous. I will give, briefly, an example or two of the kind of work I had to do. One assignment, lasting three months, was to study the *status quo* line in the west-north-west sector of the frontier and settle disputes as we went along. This was an excellent idea in theory, but we soon found out that it was an entirely different matter in practice. One decision we had to make was whether a certain house was inside or outside Protectorate boundaries. On the day of the examination of this sector I was amazed to find nearly 1,000 Protectorate tribesmen, armed to the teeth, awaiting my arrival. Shortly afterwards I heard a great commotion—the blowing of bugles and the rattle of musketry; it heralded the arrival of my Yemeni colleague, with a following of over 600 Yemeni tribesmen, also armed to the teeth. He and I climbed up to the house in question—it was high up on a spur—and I asked its owner whether he considered the house to be outside or inside the Protectorate. He replied that without a shadow of doubt it was inside. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than I heard the loud rattling of rifle bolts. I looked round, and, sure enough, about 100 Yemenis (near neighbours of my informant) had loaded their rifles and were looking menacingly at the house-owner and his friends. The next development was an even louder rattling as over a hundred Protectorate tribesmen loaded their rifles and looked daggers at the Yemenis. Other tribesmen started to back away, and I felt exactly like a customer in the bar of a Wild West film when the villain and the hero are about to shoot it out. I appealed to the mob to disperse, but I might have been threatening the moon for all the good it did. The tribesmen of both sides were screaming

and gesticulating at each other and saying all sorts of unprintable things; rifles were brandished in the air, and some of them had their hands on their daggers. Among other things, both tribes were at blood-feud with each other, and it was obvious that no argument would stop a battle. With the wholehearted consent of my Yemeni colleague, I announced that no decision would be taken that day. So with an ill grace we departed from the scene, each in his own direction, taking our unwelcome following with us. That day we learnt a valuable lesson: that in cases of this sort it was sheer folly to announce the date and time of our arrival in advance.

The commonest cases we had to handle were those concerned with tribal killings and lootings. A Yemeni tribe, for instance, might cross the border, loot a number of camels, and in the inevitable fight that ensued blood would be spilt. To stop retaliatory raids we would at once arrange for the return of the loot, and insist on the payment of "dia," or blood-money. The amount of blood-money varies in South-West Arabia. We usually worked on a tariff of 777 dollars (about £230) per male killed, and half that for a woman. If an important man were killed, such as a sheikh's son, it was customary to impose a heavier "dia"—twice or three times the ordinary amount. Besides "dia," a fine known as "hashem," or "lom," was payable in most cases. The translation of these words is difficult. The nearest I can get to it is "honour money" or "face-saving money." This payment varied considerably; it could be anything from fifty to a thousand dollars. If, for instance, there was a killing during the period of a truce (and this happened not infrequently), "hashem," or "lom," would be insisted upon, and my colleague and I had to fix the amount. If a sheikh were killed, the immediate payment of "lom" was imperative. In many cases, relatives of the deceased refused to accept blood-money, the reason being that the acceptance of the money would imply that the victim had been a man of no consequence. In such cases we would bind the tribes to a short-term truce (to be enforced by both Governments if there should be a breach), and when tempers had cooled (sometimes months or even years later) arrange for the payment of the blood-money.

When we held sessions to settle such disputes, we invited the interested parties, who would always insist on bringing supporters with them. We learnt soon enough that if we did not limit the number of supporters, hundreds would turn up, and a battle be fought outside the council chamber. We would therefore state arbitrarily that each side could bring, say, ten supporters, and that any over that number would be sent away. As the rival parties entered the council chamber, guards at the door would remove each man's rifle and dagger, as it was courting disaster to allow anyone to have a weapon. During these meetings the parties would storm and rage and quite often, in the heat of the moment, their hands would automatically seek their daggers; on finding the empty sheath, they would dash their hands on the ground in rage, swearing that sooner or later they would kill each other. Others would get so excited and carried away that they would fling themselves out of the council chamber until their tempers had cooled; if this happened just when we were on the point of settling a

dispute, I or my colleague, or one of our advisers, would jump to his feet and drag the man back again. Sometimes a tug-of-war would ensue, but usually the man could be persuaded to sit down again. There was never a dull moment, but one had to be infinitely patient.

H.M.: Ahmed bin Yahya Hamid ud din succeeded to the Imamate early in 1948, after the assassination of his father. Following the assassination, and as a result of a *coup d'état* engineered by elements led by Seiyid Abdullah ibn Al Wazir, who was subsequently beheaded, there was civil war for some weeks. In the end the Imam Ahmed prevailed, but not before San'a, the capital, had been looted from end to end.

I had the honour of meeting the present Imam for the first time in Taiz early in 1939. He was then Seif al Islam Ahmed, Governor-General of the Taiz Province, which has a contiguous frontier with the Aden Protectorate. Imam Ahmed is short in stature, with immensely broad shoulders and a large head. He has a wide, gold-toothed smile and huge protruding eyes. He is, in my opinion, by far the strongest personality in the Royal Family, and is renowned as a poet and a soldier. He is an absolute Ruler and, like his father before him, attends to every little detail in State and other matters.

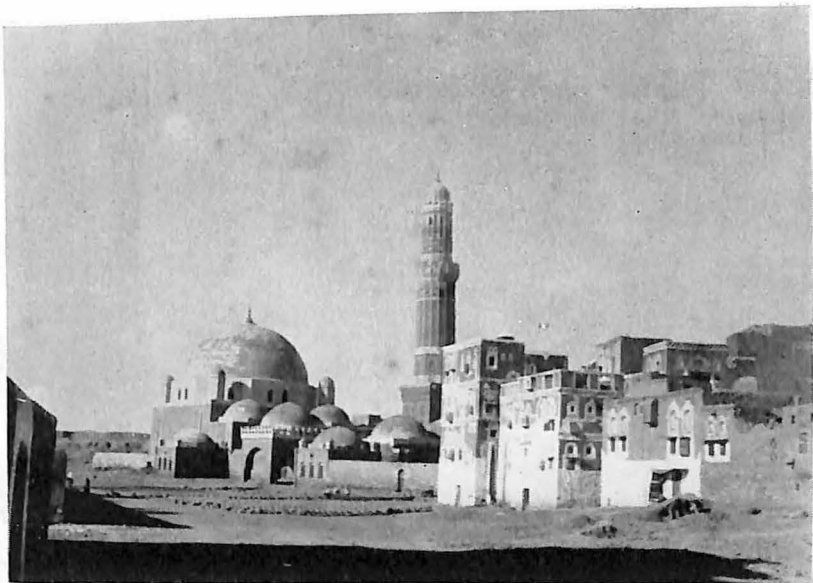
His Majesty, though endowed with a powerful constitution, has not been really well for years. His many indispositions have affected him mentally as well as physically. Unlike his father, Imam Ahmed is imbued with a desire to introduce reforms and to modernize the Yemen. But at the same time he is the captive of Zeidi conservatism, and though he has the urge to go full speed ahead, caution and suspicion cause him to apply the brakes.

Since succeeding to the Imamate he has started a salt industry, introduced electricity in some towns, employed engineers to study the possibilities of new harbours, opened up new tracks and built roads, introduced aircraft, and generally made beginnings in the right direction; but he has not yet launched a major project which would benefit the country as a whole, and the country badly needs development.

The Yemen has vast possibilities. Its agricultural potential alone is immense. In the Tihama, on the Red Sea littoral, 200,000 acres could be put under cotton, with success practically assured from the outset, since water is there in abundance and the land is fertile. In that area, after rain, you merely have to drop a seed in the sand and in a twinkling it starts growing like a beanstalk. It has to be seen to be believed.

The Imam is much feared and he is not popular; there are many enemies of the régime, and he rules with an iron hand. Nevertheless whatever his shortcomings, deep within themselves, and often in spite of themselves, most South-West Arabians hold him in veneration.

After the Imam there are at present only three leading personalities. Seif al Islam Hassan, the Prime Minister, who, as a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, is opposed to all modernization; Al Bad'r, the Imam's eldest son, who at one time was his father's bitter political opponent; and another brother of the Imam, Seif al Islam Abdulla, who is the Foreign Minister. It is likely that one of these three will succeed to the Imamate in due course; but this is by no means assured, as any descendant of the Prophet is eligible



A CORNER OF THE YEMENI CAPITAL



RIDHA: A PROVINCIAL CAPITAL



MUHAMMED AL BADR, CROWN PRINCE
AND PRIME MINISTER



YEMENI SOLDIERS



ZEIDI WOMEN IN EVERYDAY OUTDOOR DRESS



YEMENI SOLDIERS QAT CHEWING



YEMENI LOWLANDERS FROM THE TINAMA OR COASTAL BELT



ZEIDI YEMENIS. NOTE TWO JEWS WITH CORKSCREW CURLS

to submit his candidature. It is possible that Ahmed's immediate successor will be the person who can first lay his hands on the State Treasury, or Beit al Mal, using the funds to pave his way to office. (See postscript.)

I will divide the subject of Anglo-Yemeni relations under three heads or, rather, into three periods of time.

Firstly, 1918 to 1934. As a result of the Armistice terms at the end of World War I, the Ottoman Turks had to leave the Yemen. With their departure in 1918 the late Imam Yahya (who was assassinated in 1948) started to consolidate his hold on the country. His task was a tough one, and there were many revolts and rebellions before he succeeded in imposing his will on his independent-minded countrymen. In the time of the Turks the people elected their own tribal sheikhs and had a measure of local autonomy. The Imam's policy was to weaken the cohesion of the tribes, and to this end he himself nominated the sheikhs, either directly or through his Governors in the provinces. Centralization was his aim; and the tribes, used to years, if not centuries, of semi-independence, objected forcibly to this revolutionary policy. There were many bloody encounters, but the Imam won in the end. During this period of consolidation Imamic forces crossed the Anglo-Yemeni frontier at more than one sector in the Western Aden Protectorate. In spite of protests on our part, and in some cases the use of air and land forces, Imamic troops did not withdraw entirely until February 1934, just before the signature of the Anglo-Yemeni Treaty of Friendship. In spite of these differences, Anglo-Yemeni relations were seldom badly strained, and at no time were they bitter.

From 1934 to 1952 relations were on the whole friendly. We had many differences, of course, and at times had to enforce the sanctity of the Protectorate borders by air operations. During this period I spent a lot of time walking about the Southern Yemen, and frequently found myself better acquainted with it than were the Yemeni officials, since they did not tour very much. At a session with the Imam in San'a in 1939, I jestingly remarked that if he ever wanted to know anything about the Southern Yemen he would do well to consult me. He thought this a huge joke, but I had obviously been tactless; his entourage were not at all amused by the remark. During this period the Yemeni Government afforded me every facility, and I remain grateful for their many kindnesses.

In 1952-1953, however, the Yemeni attitude began to change for the worse, although it was not at once apparent except to the closest observers. Things started to go wrong, and real hostility was manifested by officials, although my personal relations with them remained cordial. When I remonstrated with my opposite number, the Yemeni Frontier Officer, he retorted by saying that we had no right to be in the Western Aden Protectorate at all; it was an Arab country, and times had changed, and if we did not appreciate this fact we would have to learn the hard way. After August 1953 there were dozens of frontier incidents, which still remain unsettled. Relations went from bad to worse, and at the end of 1954 the Governor of Aden visited the Imam in Taiz in an attempt to solve outstanding differences. The peoples of the Aden Protectorate have been much shaken by these events, and they have caused certain dissident elements to defy the Aden Administration. It is possible that this defiance

may lessen as our relations with the Yemen improve, or if the Yemen believes that we will not proceed with the federation of the South-West Arabian States.

In order to explain the reasons for the deterioration in Anglo-Yemeni relations, I have to go back to the Anglo-Yemeni Treaty of 1934, Article III, the second half of which reads, "Pending . . . the high contracting parties agree to maintain the situation existing in regard to the frontier on the date of the signature of the Treaty . . ."

When the Anglo-Yemeni Treaty was signed in 1934 the Aden Administration in the Protectorate consisted of a Political Secretary and one Political Officer, to look after an area larger than England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is more than likely that the Imam Yahya assumed at the time that the size of the Administration would continue to remain the same, and that things would proceed as heretofore. It could not have entered his head—we did not know it ourselves—that the Aden Government, in consultation with the Protectorate Chiefs, would embark on a forward policy designed to improve the lot of the Protectorate peoples. But this is just what happened. The Protectorate administrative and technical staffs were increased 3,000 per cent. over the years following the signing of the Treaty, and anyone who had known the place in 1934 could not have recognized it in 1953, so vast were the changes. There is no doubt at all that the Imam was startled, and he must have viewed with consternation the improvement in the lot of the Protectorate peoples as compared with the continued stagnation in his own country. But there was worse to follow. The Protectorate Chiefs recently agreed in principle to federate their States. Whereas in the past each petty ruler had been an independent chief, usually at loggerheads with his neighbours, here now was a movement to join them all together and form a single federated State.

To return to Article III of the Treaty which I have just read to you. The Aden Government interpreted this article to mean what it said—namely, that we had agreed to maintain the situation existing in regard to the frontier as it was on the date of the signature of the Treaty. In other words, we interpreted "frontier" to mean "frontier" or, at the most, frontier area. Quite suddenly the Yemeni Government insisted, and still insists, that in that article we had not only bound ourselves to maintain the *status quo* on the frontier, but *inside the Aden Protectorate as well*. This, in effect, meant that any changes we made after the signature of the Anglo-Yemeni Treaty in 1934 in the set-up of the Protectorate constituted a breach of Article III.

The Yemenis supported their contention by saying that the Arabic version of Article III (as distinct from the English version) meant what they said it meant. The word for frontier in Arabic is "hadd" (plural "hudud"), and the plural was used in the article in question. They say that in this context "hudud" means the whole of the Protectorate and not just the frontier areas. Over the years, in casual conversation with Arabs, I have heard them refer loosely to countries in this way; but I am sure when the negotiators of the treaty drafted this article it did not enter their heads that anything but the *frontier* was being referred to. In any case, it

is illogical and unreasonable to assume that any contracting party to a treaty could, or would, tie itself down in advance to make no changes of any kind in a territory for which it was responsible. It just does not make sense at all.

However, the Yemenis hold to their contention and stated not long ago that as we had repeatedly and consistently violated the Treaty, they considered themselves free to do the same thing. Today they claim that the Western Aden Protectorate is an integral part of the Yemen and, this being the case, that we are unlawfully colonizing it.

It is true to say, therefore, that an impasse has been reached in Anglo-Yemeni relations.

The Yemenis have exacerbated the situation by encouraging dissident elements in the Aden Protectorate. This has been the main feature of their policy in the past two years. Curiously enough, we have helped them to further this policy by drawing up a complicated plan to federate the many South-West Arabian States. While the rulers of these States are not unwilling, in principle, to associate themselves more closely with one another, the very complexities of the federal plan have frightened some of them and their followers, for the simple reason that they do not really understand its implications. This has made them wary, and Yemeni propaganda and Arabic broadcasts from the Middle East have made them suspicious.

Basically, Yemeni objections to the federal plan go beyond the interpretation of Article 111 of the 1934 Treaty. It will be recalled that nearly two-thirds of the Yemeni population is Shafai and that the minority is Zeidi, the ruling class. All the people of the Aden Protectorate are Shafais, and so are the greater majority of Arabs in the Crown Colony of Aden. The Imam of the Yemen therefore views a federated Protectorate with real alarm, since certain repercussions in his own country could bring about an attempt by his Shafai subjects to link up with the Protectorate Shafais, and possibly assure the downfall, if not the total extinction, of the Rassid dynasty.

The present impasse in Anglo-Yemeni relations suits the Yemenis only so long as the morale of the Protectorate Chiefs remains low, and as long as the Administration remains poor, and the country inadequately developed.

The Imamic succession may convulse the Yemen in due course, but such a convulsion will not last indefinitely. A new ruler, undoubtedly a Zeidi, will emerge, and will continue by all means—fair or foul—to try to unite all Arabs in South-West Arabia. In the coming years no self-respecting Arab ruler could do otherwise.

It is interesting to recall at this stage the views of the late Colonel Jacob, who was, in his day, the authority on the Yemen. He was a senior official in the Aden Government, having served there for over twenty-three years. This is what he wrote in 1923:

“We made our inland Treaties, *i.e.* with the Protectorate Chiefs, in the face of an expanding Turkey. The Turks have left, and the *raison d'être* of these Treaties no longer holds. An Arab King has come forward [he was referring to the late Imam Yahya] and claims these Arabs as his

ancestral heritage. He [the Imam] spoke truly when he asserted that for the sake of greed these folk [he refers to the Protectorate Chiefs] have leaned to outsiders [meaning Britain] but this fact would not bar their return to the fold when times had changed and Arab ascendancy was once more revived. . . . Their end will be happier than their position under the surveillance of a foreign power, even if that power be England. To quote my favourite saw: 'the hand is still thy hand, be it ever so leprous.' It is the call of Arab to Arab. The Shafais, by their own admission, cannot combine. They have no leader. I believe that we cannot be justly charged with a breach of faith if we let these go over to the Imam. Too much has been written of the hostility of the creeds [he means Zeidi and Shafai] but all will flock to a strong Arab protector. Our interests in the country can best be conserved by consolidating our position in Aden, and letting the interior develop on Arab lines. It is by trade that we can prosper. If we require a buffer state to bring into relief the blessings of British rule, let us draw a line a little above Lahej, and cut the rest. . . ."

Although times have changed considerably since Colonel Jacob wrote those words, I quote them because they could have been written by any responsible Zeidi Yemeni official today.

DISCUSSION

Mr. LANGE: I have always understood that San'a was the capital of the Yemen, but a few days ago I heard a B.B.C. announcer say that our present diplomatic representative was located at Taiz. Has the capital been diverted from San'a to this other place?

Mr. SEAGER: San'a is still the capital of the Yemen, but in 1948, when the Imam succeeded, he elected to make Taiz his temporary capital.

Sir RONALD STORRS: Is there yet any Communist penetration into the Yemen?

Mr. SEAGER: None whatsoever, and I do not think there is any likelihood of it, because the method of dealing with people in South-West Arabia who have not the same political views as the ruler is quite effective.

Mr. GORDON WATERFIELD: What is the present position in regard to federation with the Aden Protectorate?

Mr. SEAGER: The present situation in regard to federation is, as I think I said, that the rulers wish to associate themselves more closely with each other, but that they have been rather frightened by the complicated federal plan, which they do not understand. It seems that the Aden Administration is at the present moment marking time. I could add a good deal more in regard to Federation, but it would not be judicious to do so at this moment.

Sir RONALD STORRS: Is Sultan Abdul Karim still going strong?

Mr. SEAGER: He died about eight years ago and was succeeded by his son Fadhil, who was mentally unstable and had to abdicate. Ali, who now rules in Lahej and was recently awarded the K.B.E., is a younger son of the famous Sultan Abdul Karim.

Asked what was the effect of the exodus of 40,000 Jews from the Yemen, they being the principal artisans,

Mr. SEAGER replied: When the Imam realized that in course of time all the Jews would be leaving, they were told to teach their trades to the Arabs. I do not say that they taught them very well, but they certainly taught many of them. Strange to relate, the Yemen does not seem to have suffered very much as a result of the exodus.

Mr. WHITTERON: There are rumours that some Germans have been granted oil and mineral rights in the Yemen.

Mr. SEAGER: Maybe there are some German technologists in the Yemen at present looking for oil; in fact, there have been in the past all kinds of technicians wandering about and writing lengthy reports, with no result. As far as I know, no Germans have been granted any exclusive rights to do mining in the Yemen, but I confess I am some months out of date. If that has happened during the last twenty months, I would not know about it.

Mrs. KINGDON WARD: Is Great Britain diplomatically represented in the Yemen?

Mr. SEAGER: Diplomatic representation commenced in 1951, when a Chargé d'Affairs was sent out.

Mr. KINGDON WARD: I was told by Colonel Meinertzhagen that he found an iris growing at 8,000 feet in the Yemen. Has the lecturer heard of that?

Mr. SEAGER: I met Colonel Meinertzhagen in Taiz, but I do not know what flowers he found.

Colonel ROUTH: What is the future of the Yemen? Where does the country go from now on?

Mr. SEAGER: A German engineer who spent ten years in the Yemen said that if the country was adequately developed it could easily take a population of 25,000,000. As I said earlier, it has not now more than 3,000,000 inhabitants; it has a tremendous potential. A British Director of Agriculture who went through the coastal strip some years ago said if he had that area to deal with he would put a vast acreage under cotton forthwith. Therefore, to answer the question, if the rulers of the Yemen ever agree to have the country developed it could become one of the richest Arab states in the Middle East.

Professor TRITTEN: The lecturer told us that there are only two sects in the Yemen. Have the Ismailis entirely disappeared?

Mr. SEAGER: Entirely disappeared, I think.

Mrs. St. JOHN COOK: Is there any prospect of oil ever being found in the Yemen?

Mr. SEAGER: As I have said, many people have wandered round the country looking for oil, but I have been told that the Yemen is not likely to yield any because the configuration of the ground shelves away to the east. Nevertheless, the Yemen Government is always hoping to find oil. They will not yet allow a major company to do a proper job.

Mr. DAVID SCOTT: What is the proportion of Zeidi to Shafi?

Mr. SEAGER: One-third Zeidi and two-thirds Shafi. The Zeidi is the highlander, the Shafi the lowlander.

Mrs. KINGDON WARD: What precisely is the qāt to which the lecturer referred?

Mr. SEAGER: It is the equivalent of the British spindle tree. The botanical name is *Catha edulis*.

The CHAIRMAN: I feel now that I must thank Mr. Seager on your behalf for his intensely interesting lecture. It is always a joy to listen to one who is a complete master of his subject and you, I feel sure, agree that our lecturer has proved himself to be that. We should all offer him a word of sympathy in that he has had to try to concentrate his many years' service in such interesting countries into the few short minutes which are available to him here. We do all thank you very much indeed, Mr. Seager. (Applause.)

POSTSCRIPT

When this lecture was delivered the Yemen was in the throes of a civil war. It has since transpired that the Foreign Minister, Seif Al Islam Abdullah, made a bid for power and compelled Imam Ahmed to sign an instrument of abdication. Subsequently, Al Badr, Imam Ahmed's son, rallied loyalist forces whose action resulted in the reinstatement of his father, the arrest of his uncles Abdullah and Abbas, and their execution for high treason. It is likely that Seif Al Islam Hasan, the Yemeni Prime Minister, was a party to the plot, but he was in Cairo when the *coup d'état* took place. Hasan, Abdullah and Abbas were united in their dislike of their nephew, Al Badr, since they feared that the Imam had marked him out as his successor.

It is of importance to record that Al Badr (now Crown Prince and Prime Minister) is the only member of the Hamid ud din royal family who has a following among the Shafais, who have always persisted in their hatred of his family and their rule. If he should succeed to the Imamate, his accession may have a profound effect in British South-West Arabia, since most Shafais, for the first time in their history, may be favourably disposed towards a Zeidi Imam of the Rassid Dynasty, and may even seek a general union with the Yemen.



