ORIENTAL SECRETARY

Edited excerpts from Chapter 6 of
Diverse Times, Sundry Places
by Donald Maitland
The Alpha Press, 1996
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AS OUR AIRCRAFT taxied towards the passenger terminal, the purser welcomed us to Baghdad. “Local time is 16:25 hours,” he announced, “and the outside temperature is 114 degrees Fahrenheit, 45 degrees Centigrade.” When the cabin door opened we were hit by a blast as from an oven. An embassy car took us to the house of Humphrey and Peggie Trevelyan. The following day Jean succumbed to heatstroke. Her temperature rose alarmingly and she developed a severe headache. One aspect of the treatment — applying ice to her body until her temperature was under control —was more unpleasant than the condition, but it was effective. Within two days she had recovered and we were able to begin the process of absorbing our new surroundings.

The Trevelyans’ house was as comfortable as any in the city. In the early 1950s air-conditioning in Iraq was rare. Water-fed air coolers, ceiling and desk fans were the usual means of providing relief from the heat and working practices were adapted to the conditions. Office hours in Baghdad during the summer months were usually from seven-thirty in the morning until half past one. In the afternoon shutters were closed and curtains drawn while Baghdad slept for four hours. Traditional houses had special cellars, known as *sirdab*, to which the whole family would retreat during these oppressive hours.

We were soon installed in a well-built house in the Karradat Miriam quarter about a mile south of the embassy compound. Our neighbour on one side was the first secretary in the Spanish legation, who regarded the welfare of the several Spanish dancers in the Baghdad night-clubs as one of his special responsibilities. In the early hours we were frequently wakened as he summoned his servant with his car horn to open the garage door. On the other side was an Iraqi family who kept themselves and their assorted livestock to themselves. Karradat Miriam was almost a rural village. On summer nights we slept in an insect-proof cage on the roof lulled by the cooing of doves — a familiar Baghdad sound.

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With the advent of cooler weather in October, political life in Baghdad resumed. My immediate chief, the oriental counsellor, was John Richmond, who had taken part in a number of archaeological expeditions in the 1930s and served with the army in the Middle East during the war. He left the department of antiquities in the Palestine government to join the Foreign Service in 1947. Baghdad was his first diplomatic post.

Our main tasks were to monitor and advise on the domestic political scene in Iraq in the light of British interests, to draft the ambassador’s political despatches and to keep the staff of the Air Officer Commanding RAF Habbaniya abreast of political developments. Gertrude Bell had been the first oriental secretary. This was in 1920 when Sir Percy Cox, the Civil Commissioner, tried to devise a new status for the territory which the British had acquired with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Captain Vivian Holt had held the post more recently and had won the admiration of Mr Jacob, the embassy's translator, who lost no opportunity to compare him favourably with his successors. Others in the political section of the embassy were occupied with a variety of tasks, including the provision of technical assistance to Iraqi government departments and services; they worked closely with the commercial and consular sections. The information section, the military attaché, the administration, registry, communications section and typists completed the expatriate staff.

The ambassador, Sir Henry Mack, returned from home leave in October. His insistence on strict observance of protocol was well known. Each member of the embassy invited to a reception he also attended had to make a point of wishing him a good evening. This posed no particular problem, but he added a refinement: he insisted that they should arrive before him and leave after him. Easy enough when there was only one reception, but frequently there were two. On such occasions this taxed our ingenuity, so we sought alternative entrances to and exits from our hosts' house or garden as well as traffic-free short cuts from one to another. We had a useful ally in the ambassador's driver who drove at a suitably low speed, gave way to all traffic and spurned short cuts.

Every morning Henry Mack toured the extensive embassy grounds with Khan Sahib, an Indian émigré, who had performed the role of major-domo for longer than anyone could remember and held sway over the locally recruited messengers and domestic staff. This daily ritual had a soothing effect on the ambassador.

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Iraq was an independent state formed from three former Ottoman provinces — Basra at the head of the Gulf, Baghdad in the centre and Mosul, which included the great Kirkuk oilfield, in the north. The fledgling state had established reasonable relations with Turkey and Iran, its neighbours to the east and north. Ever since the Hashemites, the traditional guardians of the holy places in Arabia, had been driven from the Hejaz by the Saudis and had found alternative roles in Iraq and Transjordan, relations between the two dynasties had been strained. In 1930 the British promoted a meeting between King Faisal of Iraq and King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud when they resolved outstanding problems. The Anglo-Iraqi treaty was signed in the same year but did not come into force until Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations as an independent state in 1932. Under this treaty Britain was allowed to establish air bases at Habbaniya in the desert west of Baghdad and at Shu'aiba near Basra, with the right to move troops and supplies across Iraqi territory. This was invoked in 1941, at a moment of great danger to the British presence in the Middle East, when a revolt under the pro-Nazi Iraqi Rashid Ali al-Gailani was crushed. Succeeding governments in Baghdad had supported the alliance.

By any standards the treaty of 1930 was a remarkable achievement. The Ottomans had found their three south-eastern provinces more than usually troublesome; the facts that the population was predominantly tribal, that a high proportion especially in the south were Shia and that communications were minimal, made effective administration virtually impossible.

In his study of the early years of Arab nationalism, *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius attributed the success of British efforts to build up a viable state in Iraq to two circumstances. First, the British as mandatory power soon discovered that they had acquired a hornet's nest rather than the garden of Eden and had to choose between abandoning the country to its fate or enabling it to stand on its own feet. But, just as important in George Antonius' view was the calibre of the British officials to whom it fell to reconstruct the country after the first world war. These were the revered figures of whom Sheikh Muhammad al Araibi had spoken with such warmth when I visited him in the spring – Percy Cox, Henry Dobbs, Kinahan Cornwallis and Gertrude Bell.

Iraq's problems twenty years later stemmed from the opportunities which had been missed since those days. Once the Ottomans had left, the majority Shia population of some five million were no longer second-class citizens. Higher education and the most senior posts in the administration were open to all and the younger generation took full advantage of these opportunities. However, while a new educated class was being created, the membership of successive governments continued to be drawn from a narrow band of professional politicians, merchants and landowners, and the majority of the members of the Chamber of Deputies belonged to the same clique. This meant that, with rare exceptions, members of the new generation were effectively excluded from political power.

In 1950 three figures dominated:

> Nuri Said, formerly one of the leaders of al-Ahd (the Covenant), a group of dissident Arab officers in the Ottoman army who had defected to the British in the first world war and played a prominent role in the Arab Revolt. He had already served as prime or foreign minister in several post-independence governments and acquired the stature which enabled him from time to time to play an international role as mediator. Among British politicians he was rightly regarded as a loyal friend of Britain, but not in the sense conveyed by Stewart Perowne, John Richmond's predecessor, in his witty glossary of diplomatic terms. In this he defined 'loyal' as 'one who puts the interests of Great Britain before those of his own country'.
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> Saleh Jabr, a Shia equally attached to the principle of the alliance with Britain, who suffered a setback when the revised treaty he had negotiated with Ernest Bevin at Portsmouth in 1948 was rejected in Iraq by an alliance of left- and right-wing extremists. Nonetheless, his wisdom and moderation were widely admired and he remained the most plausible alternative to Nuri Said.
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> Prince Abdulillah. Ghazi, the son of the first King Faisal, had been killed in a motor accident in 1939, and his son, also called Faisal and still only a child, became king. Young Faisal's uncle, Prince Abdulillah, had acted as Regent since then, but he lacked the strength of personality to play the role of impresario in which the first King Faisal had distinguished himself.

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Before long I found my days were full. I had calls to pay on officials in the foreign ministry and other government departments, including the ministry of the interior where I met the remarkable Major Ditchburn, the last survivor of the team of officers who had created the administrative structure in Iraq under the direction of Percy Cox and Henry Dobbs. 'Ditch' carried the title of adviser in the ministry and this exactly described what he did. He had a deeper knowledge of personalities in the south than any Iraqi and successive directors-general and ministers knew that his judgments would be impartial and his discretion absolute. He was due to retire within a year of our arrival and was already withdrawing from social life. When we met he said enough to confirm my supposition that he had been kept fully informed about my activities [earlier that year] in Amara and the Muntafiq.

The senior official in the foreign ministry was Yusuf al-Gailani, the head of the leading family of Sunni notables in Baghdad. The modesty and courtesy of Sayid Yusuf and his wife and cousin, Mas'uda, belied their position in the aristocracy of Iraq. He arranged for me to see the treasures in the splendid Gailani mosque, of which his family were custodians. And later, Mas'uda presented us with our first cat, a magnificent Persian whom we named Almas, after the white diamond-shaped patch on her breast.

Thanks to my six uncomfortable months in Amara before my official posting, I was familiar with Iraqi Arabic and Jean and I were able to experience Iraqi hospitality. Unfortunately, she contracted infective hepatitis, or jaundice, shortly before our first Christmas and was confined to bed for several weeks. It was nearly a year before she regained her strength. Her spirits were raised by an unexpected visit. The stationmaster at Ur junction, whom I had met on my way to Nasiriya a year earlier, called with a wedding present — a four thousand year-old brick. Barbara Parker who spent part of the winter in Baghdad with Professor Max Mallowan and his wife, Agatha Christie, at the School of Archaeology, read the inscription for us. This proclaimed the achievements of Bur-Sin, one of the kings of the third Sumerian dynasty who ruled Ur between 2210 and 2100 BC.

Our Iraqi friends were solicitous. For the most part they were either in politics, government, or the professions. But they also included tribal leaders, one or two of whom were members of the Iraqi parliament. I soon realised that the dissatisfaction with the government expressed by the educated Iraqis I had met in Amara and Nasiriya was shared by many of my new contacts. Extreme opposition to the government of Nuri Said came from the Istiqlal (Independence) party, whose newspaper sustained a daily barrage against the alliance with Britain. However, its impact was deadened by its predictability. More serious opposition came from those within the political establishment who, while unhappy that they were for the time being out of office, genuinely wanted a wider distribution of political responsibility. While the ambassador had fairly frequent opportunities to meet the Regent and Nuri Said, it was with these members of the parliamentary opposition and the supporters of Saleh Jabr that John Richmond and I sought to maintain contact.

At that time the stability of Iraq was an important British interest. The Soviet threat and resentment over the establishment of Israel put this stability at risk. Wealth was unequally divided and ordinary people had seen no benefit from the immense royalties the country earned from the activities of the Iraq Petroleum Company in the north and its sister company, the Basra Petroleum Company, in the south. Maintaining the RAF presence at Habbaniya and the flow of oil were particular concerns, especially following

Dr Mossadegh's dismissal of British technicians from the great Anglo-Iranian refinery at Abadan in October 1951.

There was desultory talk about revision of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty but little more. Kuwait, however, was a troublesome issue. I inherited two fat files. The first dealt with the problem of certain date gardens belonging to the Sheikh of Kuwait at Fao. For many years these had been managed and cropped by local Iraqis and, under Iraqi law, anyone who had enjoyed continuous usufruct of the date palms for ten years became their owner. This was a lawyer's dream and a diplomat's nightmare. The second file concerned an encounter between a member of the ruling Sabah family and a member of the Iraqi Sa'adun tribe, which had ended in murder. The Iraqi government occasionally raised these two cases as pinpricks, but in 1951 they went further and revived their claim to Kuwait – the "fifteenth province of Iraq". When the ambassador, on instructions from London, protested on the grounds that this was a breach of a clear understanding, Taufiq Suwaidi, the notoriously devious foreign minister, retorted: "That, your excellency, is precisely what I told my cabinet colleagues when we discussed this."

Many ordinary Iraqis believed that the British still wielded critical influence and held us responsible for perpetuating what they regarded as the injustices of the political system. This was a view which some of the less competent or scrupulous ministers in the government of the day found it convenient to encourage, especially when something they had been handling went wrong.

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Sir John Troutbeck succeeded Henry Mack in early 1951. He had headed the British Middle East Office in Cairo. He responded at once to the friendly atmosphere he found. Apart from the antiquities, of which few had survived in Baghdad, there was little art or culture on offer, so conversation was the principal intellectual and social activity. I had learned in Amara how articulate Iraqis are and that they need little encouragement to air their views. This characteristic was useful to the diplomat monitoring the domestic scene and hospitality exchanged between members of the diplomatic corps, other expatriates and Baghdad society provided ample opportunities. Although many politicians and senior officials had received their higher education in Europe or the United States and were thoroughly western in outlook, many others were at ease only in Arabic. But despite, or perhaps because of this, John Richmond and I found them helpfully forthcoming.

In 1951 we moved to a single-storey house on the west bank of the Tigris – except in the month of May, when it was in the Tigris. A balcony ran along the river side and when the snows in Kurdistan and Turkey melted and the level of the Tigris began to rise, this provided a base for a wall of sandbags which kept out most of the flood water. White Lodge had been occupied by the head of the British Council. It had many advantages: it was close to the embassy and the city centre; and it had an extensive garden, ideal for summer entertaining. Our domestic staff consisted of Khalaf, the butler, John Lobo, another Indian émigré who was our cook and an occasional gardener called Abbas. Khalaf was a devout Muslim. He took time off during the first ten days of Muharram, when the Shia lament the death of Hussain and Abbas at the battle of Kerbala in the year 680 AD. On this occasion he would join countless others at the magnificent twin-domed mosque at Kadhimain, a few miles north west of Baghdad, where the seventh and ninth Imams are buried.

Evening receptions and dinner parties were the preferred form of hospitality. Iraqis did not like to drink after a meal and it was often as late as ten o'clock before food was served. In the late summer, when the level of the Tigris fell and mud flats appeared in the middle of the river, those who had not escaped to Europe or Lebanon were able to enjoy a special pleasure. On a bright moonlit evening we would board a river boat and set off downstream towing a number of so-called Tigris salmon caught earlier in the day. Eventually we would land on one of the temporary sandbanks where a brushwood fire would be lit and a flattened fish prepared for a traditional 'masgouf'.

Our hosts on one of these river excursions were Fadhil al-Jamali, the foreign minister, and his American wife. Jamali was an unusual Arab politician. He had one of the largest collections of gramophone records in Baghdad and his knowledge of classical music was encyclopaedic. His defence against the frequent charge that he was anti-Jewish was to play Mendelssohn. Soon after we cast off on our trip downstream, he took me aside and asked how I saw the prospects for his country's future. Given the occasion I thought it right to speak frankly about my misgivings. He nodded and throughout the rest of the trip he held my hand in a firm grip. He expected me to understand that this was his reply.

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As often as we could Jean and I visited other centres in Iraq. Our purpose was not merely to deepen our knowledge of the country and its people but also to identify their aspirations and understand their anxieties.

Sheikh Abbud al-Haimus, the head of a tribe in the province of Hilla, a member of the chamber of deputies and a frequent visitor to White Lodge abetted us in achieving these aims. At his house at Shomali he ensured that we heard a variety of opinions about the prospects for the province and the state of the country. He was also on hand to protect Jean when, on a black partridge shoot on his estate, a family of wild boar emerged from a clump of reeds a few yards in front of her. Sheikh Ghazi Ali Kuraiyim, with whom we stayed at Samarra on the Tigris north of Baghdad, was equally keen for us to see what he called 'the real Iraq'. He showed us what he was doing to improve the standards of his own people and then, perhaps as a cautionary tale, he took us round the ruins of the ancient city of Samarra — the ninth century capital city which briefly displaced Baghdad.

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Common interest encouraged close working and social relationships with members of other embassies. The Americans had a substantial presence in Baghdad. Their ambassador, Edward Savage Crocker, had a passion — bridge. Dinner parties he attended were held up until the rubber had been completed. He travelled for three days by river boat from Baghdad to Basra 'to see the country', and never left the bridge table.

His embassy staff were of high calibre. Philip Ireland, the deputy head of mission, was a noted student of modern Iraqi history. Equally distinguished was David Newsom, who was in charge of their information department. David and his wife were lunching with us when a riot broke out in protest against a statement in Washington construed as pro-Israel. The information office in downtown Baghdad was set on fire and from our terrace we watched as hundreds of sheets of paper were carried aloft in the smoke and flames. David remained calm. "I suppose," he said, "that this is the widest distribution our material has ever achieved." Our paths were to cross again.

David Newsom also had dealings with my colleague, Robert Belgrave. He had come to Baghdad from Belgium, his first post, and frequently claimed, when colleagues protested about the recklessness of some Iraqi drivers, that in this respect Baghdad was less hazardous than Brussels. One morning the news spread quickly that a wing of Robert's estate car was severely dented. When curious colleagues went to the car park to inspect the damage, Robert said, in answer to the inevitable question: "You'll never guess who. It was the Belgian chargé d'affaires."

Belgrave was closely concerned with the work of the Development Board, the Iraqi government's somewhat belated response to the need to distribute the benefits of the country's oil wealth. The board's mandate was to invest the income received from the oil companies to the nation's advantage. A veteran political figure, Arshad al-Umari, was appointed president of the board. Arshad was the wise owl of Iraqi politics and had a gift for the apt phrase. Once, when I commented on the virtual absence from the Iraqi calendar of spring and autumn, he said: "*Yaum lift, yaum dundurma*" — "One day turnips, the next ice-cream." In the depths of winter for a few pence the people of the streets could buy enough boiled turnips to keep body and soul together from itinerant vendors in the souks.

In an astute move, the government invited Sir Edington Miller, a recently retired senior official in the Sudan Political Service, to be secretary general — in practice the chief executive — of the Development Board. An impartial figure of this stature would reassure the public that the highest standards would be applied to the work of the board. Belgrave helped Miller find experts with appropriate qualifications and experience to draw up specifications for some of the major projects. Flood control was given high priority; the Habbaniya Lake scheme was designed to end the periodical destruction caused by the overflow of the Euphrates, and the dam at Wadi Tharthar was intended to serve a similar purpose with the waters of the Tigris. The preparatory work on these projects brought to my mind the river trip in the spring of 1950 with the irrigation engineer at Amara when for a few moments we had shared a vision of a golden future for the country.

However, not all the news was good. Iraqi Jews, who had played a valuable role in the administration and in commerce, were having a hard time and in the end arrangements were made to deport them to Israel. They were flown out at a rate of over 13,000 each month and in all over 100,000 left. A tragic incident occurred early in 1951 when an explosion at Mashuda Shentob Synagogue, where Jews were assembling for the journey to the airport, killed two and injured another twenty.

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A demonstration in Baghdad in January 1952 on the anniversary of the Portsmouth Treaty signalled the beginning of an uneasy period. A serious rift opened between Nuri Said and Saleh Jabr, whose new party, the Popular Socialist Party founded in July 1951, had attracted considerable support. In July 1952 Nuri Said resigned as prime minister, more out of fatigue and exasperation than as a contribution to the political process. He was replaced by another veteran, Mustafa al-Umari. Nuri had told Harold Beeley, Trevelyan's successor as counsellor, that governing Iraq was easy: "Give this man a nut, that man a banana." Nuri may have thought this a *bon mot,* but to my mind it betrayed the extent to which he was out of touch with opinion. The message I received in conversations day after day was unchanged; popular disquiet at the extent to which power was concentrated in a few hands was widespread.

It was our turn for home leave. When we returned we found that Nuri's departure had done nothing to reduce tension. On 22 November 1952 rioting broke out in Baghdad. Police posts were overrun by the mob and their occupants brutally murdered. At this time Jean and I were sheltering Michael and Norah Errock who had been evacuated from Tehran with all the other members of the British embassy staff when diplomatic relations were broken off earlier in the month. I was in my office at the embassy and Michael happened to be in our garden when a crowd tried to break down the entrance. Jean told me later that he brandished a pistol, which neither of us knew he had with him. This act could have had either of two consequences: it could have frightened the mob, or infuriated them. On this occasion the mob opted to be frightened. Martial law was declared later in the day and, from then on, we had a police guard at our gate.

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Health was an important consideration for all expatriates. Fevers of the type known in the wartime army as 'NYD' – 'not yet diagnosed' – were common. So was dysentery – in one form or another – but methods of prevention and treatment were improving steadily. There were other scourges. Robert Belgrave was struck down by poliomyelitis and rushed to the RAF hospital at Habbaniya. His wife, Susan, drove the hundred and ten miles to Habbaniya and back every day for several weeks encouraging Robert's fightback. Her devotion, the skill of the medical staff and Robert's determination enabled him to recover the use of almost all his muscles. This was, of course, several years before Salk developed his vaccine.

John Troutbeck's warm personality not only endeared him to his staff and the diplomatic corps in general, but also won him the regard of the Iraqis. The state of his health could have political implications. For some time Guy Clarke, the consul in Kirkuk, had been pressing the ambassador to visit the north of Iraq to meet some of the Kurdish sheikhs who, having heard of other visits he had paid to centres in southern Iraq, were beginning to feel neglected. A programme was drawn up, but John Troutbeck fell ill a week before we were due to set out and he was strongly advised to postpone the visit. When this news was conveyed to his prospective hosts they were dismayed.

Clarke suggested that the sheikhs might be persuaded to shed their misconception if I would receive a deputation. Two days later half a dozen Kurdish sheikhs came to my office, accompanied by a young man imperfectly dressed in western clothes. He was the Kurdish interpreter. The spokesman for the sheikhs began by expressing their hopes for the ambassador's full and speedy recovery, which I acknowledged on his behalf. For the next half an hour they tried to provoke me into saying that the postponement of the visit had causes other than the ambassador's illness. Time and again I promised that the visit would be reinstated as soon as possible, but I felt they preferred their version of the facts. Eventually they gave up the struggle. When they rose to leave, I asked the interpreter to stay behind as there was something I wanted to say to him personally. He eagerly helped the sheikhs on their way out of my office. When we were alone I said: "I have something to say which, like everything else I have said, is true and you can prove it. Your buttons are undone." The ambassador's subsequent visits to the provinces of Mosul, Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya in the early summer of 1952 were highly successful.

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That same year — 1952 — was a landmark for Jean and me. Our son, Colin, was born at Habbaniya in December. She could hear the distant howling of jackals as she held him in her arms for the first time. We were taken aback by the pleasure his birth gave to our Iraqi friends. For the first-born to be a boy was considered a special blessing. Although he did not realise it, Colin undertook his first great journey at the height of the summer of 1953. We took a week of local leave and, together with Mary Steele-Perkins, who had joined us from England to help look after Colin, a few embassy colleagues, an American visitor and Adnan al-Qadhi, an Iraqi lawyer friend who made many of the arrangements, we set off for a climb in Kurdistan.

There was no metalled road to the north from Baghdad and, to reach Kirkuk and Erbil, one travelled east from Baghdad along the main road to Iran and then turned north into the desert following a line of oildrums marking the track. In places, through wind erosion, the surface of this desert track was corrugated and one had to find an optimum speed to reduce vibration. We reached Kirkuk in time for lunch and dined in Erbil. The following day we entered Iraqi Kurdistan, passed through the precipitous Rowanduz gorge and reached Hajji Umran on the frontier with Iran in time for dinner at the rest house. The next day was devoted to acclimatisation and lunch with the sheikh of the local tribe. The following morning we drove to a nearby village where we lunched with another Kurdish sheikh and then picked up our police escort, loaded our kit into mule packs and selected our riding mules and ponies.

Before we set out from Baghdad we had had a basketwork cot made for Colin. This was supported by two sacks attached to either side of the horse's saddle, to which the cot was securely strapped. Behind the cot sat the rider, a watchful Kurdish policeman, who crooned lullabies as we made our way towards Halgurd. His repertoire seemed inexhaustible. At just over 12,000 feet, Halgurd was the highest mountain in Iraq. The track zigzagged up the slope of a valley through mud-brick villages half-hidden under mats of vines, and groves of mulberry trees. Out in the full glare of the sun, we seemed to be heading towards a mountain wall. The ascent became tricky and too difficult for our horses and mules. When we dismounted, we found it was hard enough for us to find footholds and we had to urge the animals to greater efforts. Over the crest a grassy meadow cut in two by a narrow rushing stream fell away before us, and half a mile ahead was our camp for the night. This consisted of a bell-tent and a large goat-hair marquee with walls of rush matting and woven carpets on the ground. The water in the stream was ice-cold and as soon as the sun set the temperature plummeted. The extra clothing we had brought with us just about kept us warm, but we were all eager to slip into our sleeping bags as soon as the evening meal was over.

The following day we climbed on foot in separate parties to the summit, Colin meanwhile revelling in the cool weather in the camp. After a second night we descended the way we had come, lunched in the colourful town of Galala and dined in Shaqlawa, where we stayed overnight. The next day we spent with the Khoshnau tribe before going on to Kirkuk. We left at 5.30 in the morning to avoid the worst of the heat and were back at White Lodge, hot and dusty but relaxed, within five hours.

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The major event in 1953 was the coming of age and accession of King Faisal. The then Duke of Gloucester represented The Queen and among the guests was one of the young king's British friends from his days at Harrow. Jean and I found it difficult to share the confidence in the country's future expressed on this special occasion. By the time we left Baghdad to return to London at the end of that year, we had visited every district of every province in Iraq. The provincial governors, district commissioners, businessmen, professionals and tribal chiefs we met had given us an insight into life in one corner of the Arab world. We felt that these people deserved better from their government and we left Baghdad concerned that, unless power and prosperity were more widely shared, discontent could undermine the fabric of the state the British had created a generation earlier. London, however, was preoccupied with the Soviet threat to the Middle East, and the survival of a pro-Western regime in Iraq, insensitive though it might be to popular opinion, was the more important consideration in the short and medium term.