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### **‘The Sherif [Shereef] of Mecca.’**

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#### **About this record**

Printed copy of a secret memorandum, subtitled ‘(Communicated by Sir Reginald Wingate G.C.V.O., &c., &c.)’, written on 19 July 1915 at Erkowit in Sudan, by Captain George Stewart Symes, then Private Secretary to the Governor General. The memorandum is a statement, given by an anonymous source, about the Sherif [Shereef] of Mecca, Hussein Ibn Ali [Ḥusayn bin ‘Alī]. The statement describes: the Sharif’s origins, character, political views; his attitude to and standing amongst Arabs, Turks, and Europeans; his household, including his sons; his enemies at Mecca, including Sayed El Idrissi. Symes’s introductory note describes the extent of correspondence in political views between Ḥusayn bin ‘Alī and his son, Ali bin Hussein [‘Alī bin Ḥusayn].

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SECRET.

B. 211.

The Sherif of Mecca.

(Communicated by Sir Reginald Wingate, G.C.V.O., &c., &c.).

The subjoined account of the present Sherif (Hussein) of Mecca is given by a well-educated and intelligent member of a famous (Sherifan) family who left Mecca some seven months ago. Informant is a man of some 50 years of age, a *soi-disant* Turco phobe and an associate of Sherif Abdalla, the son of Sherif Hussein.

According to this informant—and his statements in this and other respects are corroborated from other sources—Sherif Abdalla is in a very great measure the "power behind the throne" of the Sherif of Mecca, and the former's ambitious and forceful character brings him occasionally into conflict with his father's more cautious and restrained diplomacy, although the personal relations between them are most cordial.

How far Sherif Hussein identifies himself with the secret aspirations of his son in regard to the assumption of the Khalifate the informant professes to be uncertain. While it is reported on every side that the Sherif is anti-Turkish his present position at Mecca is, in certain respects, analogous to that of the Pope at Rome, and demands extreme caution, more especially in view of his urgent lack of money, arms and ammunition. Supplies of grain, &c., for which the population of the Hedjaz are largely dependent on Syria, are another important consideration.

Sherif Abdalla is said to be confident of the necessity to obtain the territorial independence of the Hedjaz as an essential preliminary to his larger schemes, and to have been promised the support of Ibn Rashid to this end. Territorial independence—and probably the support of other Arabian chieftians—are, however, contingent on the defeat or withdrawal of the Turkish forces in the Hedjaz. This consummation, in Sherif Abdalla's opinion, can only be brought about by force of arms which, informant states, the Sherif would gladly accept secretly at the hands of His Majesty's Government, to whom the cost would eventually be refunded.

Informant expressed the opinion that Sherif Hussein is in general agreement with his son's designs in respect of the independence of the Hedjaz; but before taking any active or open steps in the further, and far more important, matter of the assumption of the Khalifate, wishes to be assured of the complete downfall of the Turkish temporal power, consequent on the defeat of the Germanic powers, and also to ascertain the general trend of Moslem opinion outside the Turkish Empire in regard to his claims.

It is noteworthy that informant while confirming the accuracy of reports, previously received in Khartoum, of the Sherif's jealousy and distrust of the Idrisi of Asir, also corroborates the reports that secret communications between the Sherif of Mecca and other chiefs of the Arabian peninsula have already paved the way to a general repudiation by them of the Ottoman Khalifa, whose slight claim to Arabian Moslem support is almost solely based on his, hitherto generally credited, ability to defend their lands from Christian or other foreign aggression.

(Signed) G. S. SYMES,  
Captain,  
Private Secretary.

Erkowitz,  
19th July 1915.

STATEMENT.

The present Sherif of Mecca is named Sherif Hussein Ibn Ali, and is a member of the Imara family at Mecca. He is a brother of Sherif "Aun," whose name is well known throughout the East.

He was born at Mecca, and when of age went to Constantinople, where he remained for a period of 25 years.

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When the first revolution took place at Constantinople, to force the hand of the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, and make him consent to give constitution to the country, he was nominated to be the Sherif of Mecca. He is now about 60 years old.

Sherif Hussein is described to be of a very mild and generous character. He is well educated and is of exceptional ability in religious matters and Mohammedan literature.

His long stay at Constantinople has given him special knowledge of politics, especially as he was always in contact with great politicians and good thinkers.

He is very generous, kind-hearted and liberal, and he has never shown any signs of pride in consideration of the feelings of others, no matter how low they might be on the scale of civilization. He does not refrain from stretching out his hand to salute a rough-looking and dirty Arab who puts his sandals round his wrists and holds out his hand to shake the hand of the Sherif, saying "El salaam ya El Hussein Ibn Ali."

When a visitor comes to see him, and Sherif Hussein remarks that the visitor shows any signs of timidity, the Sherif speaks to him most kindly and reassures him by saying that he was only an Arab, like his visitor, and a brother. If his visitor happened to be a young man he would tell him that he was only a grey-headed man like his father.

He is very just and merciful, and the Arabs prefer him to all his predecessors of the Ashraf who ruled Mecca, and greatly respect him.

*Sherif's Political Views.*

The Sherif has great ambitions and hopes and wishes to become independent of the Turks, in the rule of El Hedjaz. It is only his incapacity to take the initiative and act which has kept him silent until now. He stands in need of arms, ammunition and money. If he could only succeed in getting some help, like El Idrissi and Imam Yehia, he would not hesitate to declare his independence.

The Arabs are very fond of the Sherif and will be ready to assist him and take his side against the Turks. The Sherif and the Turks are great enemies, and it is beyond doubt that his views in political matters never agree with theirs. Had it not been for his strong party and the assistance of the Arabs, the Turks would have put the Sherif under arrest some time ago.

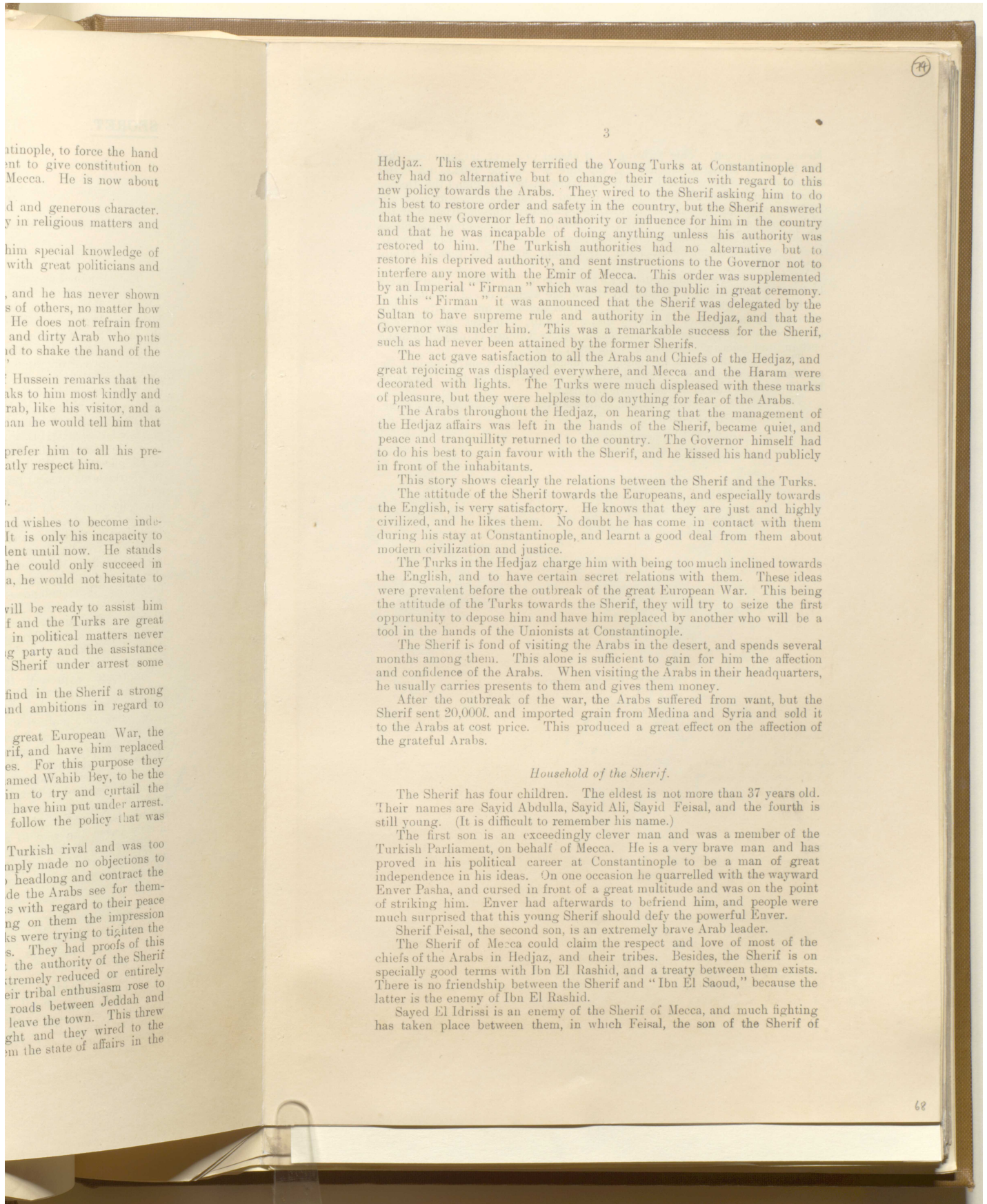
The Turkish party of Union and Progress find in the Sherif a strong obstacle in the promulgation of their schemes and ambitions in regard to the Arabs.

A short time before the declaration of the great European War, the Unionists decided to dismiss and remove the Sherif, and have him replaced by another who would accede to their wishes. For this purpose they appointed an important member of their party, named Wahib Bey, to be the "Vali" of the Hedjaz, and commissioned him to try and curtail the authority of the Sherif and thus pave the way to have him put under arrest. Wahib Bey, on his arrival at Mecca, started to follow the policy that was designed for him.

The Sherif was more than a match for his Turkish rival and was too careful to fall into the trap set for him. He simply made no objections to this new policy and allowed the Governor to go headlong and contract the hatred of the Arabs. On the other hand he made the Arabs see for themselves the new policy adopted by the new Turks with regard to their peace and semi-independence. He succeeded in making on them the impression he wanted, and the Arabs realized that the Turks were trying to tighten the rope round their necks and make them slaves. They had proofs of this before their own eyes, because they found that the authority of the Sherif with regard to the Arab and local affairs was extremely reduced or entirely suppressed. This displeased the Arabs, and their tribal enthusiasm rose to a high pitch. Their first act was to cut the roads between Jeddah and Medina, and it became extremely dangerous to leave the town. This threw the people of Mecca into a state of great fright and they wired to the authorities at Constantinople, explaining to them the state of affairs in the



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Hedjaz. This extremely terrified the Young Turks at Constantinople and they had no alternative but to change their tactics with regard to this new policy towards the Arabs. They wired to the Sherif asking him to do his best to restore order and safety in the country, but the Sherif answered that the new Governor left no authority or influence for him in the country and that he was incapable of doing anything unless his authority was restored to him. The Turkish authorities had no alternative but to restore his deprived authority, and sent instructions to the Governor not to interfere any more with the Emir of Mecca. This order was supplemented by an Imperial "Firman" which was read to the public in great ceremony. In this "Firman" it was announced that the Sherif was delegated by the Sultan to have supreme rule and authority in the Hedjaz, and that the Governor was under him. This was a remarkable success for the Sherif, such as had never been attained by the former Sherifs.

The act gave satisfaction to all the Arabs and Chiefs of the Hedjaz, and great rejoicing was displayed everywhere, and Mecca and the Haram were decorated with lights. The Turks were much displeased with these marks of pleasure, but they were helpless to do anything for fear of the Arabs.

The Arabs throughout the Hedjaz, on hearing that the management of the Hedjaz affairs was left in the hands of the Sherif, became quiet, and peace and tranquillity returned to the country. The Governor himself had to do his best to gain favour with the Sherif, and he kissed his hand publicly in front of the inhabitants.

This story shows clearly the relations between the Sherif and the Turks. The attitude of the Sherif towards the Europeans, and especially towards the English, is very satisfactory. He knows that they are just and highly civilized, and he likes them. No doubt he has come in contact with them during his stay at Constantinople, and learnt a good deal from them about modern civilization and justice.

The Turks in the Hedjaz charge him with being too much inclined towards the English, and to have certain secret relations with them. These ideas were prevalent before the outbreak of the great European War. This being the attitude of the Turks towards the Sherif, they will try to seize the first opportunity to depose him and have him replaced by another who will be a tool in the hands of the Unionists at Constantinople.

The Sherif is fond of visiting the Arabs in the desert, and spends several months among them. This alone is sufficient to gain for him the affection and confidence of the Arabs. When visiting the Arabs in their headquarters, he usually carries presents to them and gives them money.

After the outbreak of the war, the Arabs suffered from want, but the Sherif sent 20,000L. and imported grain from Medina and Syria and sold it to the Arabs at cost price. This produced a great effect on the affection of the grateful Arabs.

*Household of the Sherif.*

The Sherif has four children. The eldest is not more than 37 years old. Their names are Sayid Abdulla, Sayid Ali, Sayid Feisal, and the fourth is still young. (It is difficult to remember his name.)

The first son is an exceedingly clever man and was a member of the Turkish Parliament, on behalf of Mecca. He is a very brave man and has proved in his political career at Constantinople to be a man of great independence in his ideas. On one occasion he quarrelled with the wayward Enver Pasha, and cursed in front of a great multitude and was on the point of striking him. Enver had afterwards to befriend him, and people were much surprised that this young Sherif should defy the powerful Enver.

Sherif Feisal, the second son, is an extremely brave Arab leader. The Sherif of Mecca could claim the respect and love of most of the chiefs of the Arabs in Hedjaz, and their tribes. Besides, the Sherif is on specially good terms with Ibn El Rashid, and a treaty between them exists. There is no friendship between the Sherif and "Ibn El Saoud," because the latter is the enemy of Ibn El Rashid.

Sayed El Idrissi is an enemy of the Sherif of Mecca, and much fighting has taken place between them, in which Feisal, the son of the Sherif of



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Mecca, was present. This fighting, to a casual observer, might mean that the Sherif of Mecca was defending the interests of the Turks, but better informed people know that the Sherif of Mecca wished to defend the Hedjaz from the ambitious El Idrissi, who wanted to capture the whole of the Hedjaz, including Mecca and Medina, and proclaim himself Khalifa of the Mohammedan world. If he found a difficulty in proclaiming himself as Khalifa, he had the intention to pretend that he was El Mahdi El Muntazar, because one of the first conditions of the coming Mahdi was that he should appear in Mecca.

El Idrissi is known in his district by the title of "El Hadi." Very likely he is using this title as a preliminary step to the higher title of "Mahdi."

El Idrissi is known to be a man of doubtful character and he often relies on improper means, such as sorcery and witchcraft, to impress his people of his supernatural powers. He has special agents who are employed to make certain impressions on the Arabs of his great power.

The Sherif of Mecca in reality is defending his country against an ambitious man, and not directly defending the interests of the Turks who have to support him in his wars with El Idrissi.

The relations between El Imam Yehia and the Sherif are not very clear, but, so far, they are cordial.