

The  
AGA  
KHANS

**WILLI FRISCHAUER**

# THE AGA KHANS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Twilight in Vienna*

*The Nazis at War*

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*Himmler*

*The Navy's Here*

(written with Robert Jackson)

*The Man Who Came Back*

*European Commuter*

*Grand Hotels of Europe*

*Onassis*

FRONTISPIECE

Taken in the spacious drawing-room of his Paris château in the Ile de la Cité, overlooking the Seine, this rare photograph shows the Aga Khan with his whole family. Seated from left to right are Princess Andrée, third wife of the late Aga Khan, Princess Joan Aly Khan, the Aga Khan's mother, Prince Karim, the Aga Khan, Princess Salima, his wife, Princess Mohammed Shah, the fourth and last wife of the late Aga Khan, and Princess Yasmin, daughter of Aly Khan and Rita Hayworth and half-sister to the Aga Khan. Standing, on the left, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, High Commissioner for Refugees in the United Nations, son of Princess Andrée and the late Aga Khan and uncle of Prince Karim, and Prince Aryn, brother of Prince Karim, who works with him in his Geneva headquarters.



WILLI FRISCHAUER

# The Aga Khans



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHEN I first told Prince Karim Aga Khan that I proposed to write his life story against the background of his family, his ancestors and the Ismaili community of which he is the spiritual head, he suggested that, before talking to him, I should spend a year or two reading the literature on the subject. He was not far out. Before I went much further, I met a Muslim scholar in East Africa who was working on an Ismaili bibliography, had so far listed some two hundred and sixty volumes and was still going strong. In Karachi, Vazir Sherali Alidina's 'Dr Alidina Memorial Library' was stacked to the ceiling with works on Ismaili history, ancient and contemporary. The Aga Khan himself drew my attention to several learned tomes on related and relevant topics.

Every single phase of the colourful Ismaili story from the first Ali (A.D. 600-661), Mohammed's son-in-law, to the better known last Aly (1911-1960), the Aga Khan's father, had found a more or less loyal chronicler. The quarrel between the Prophet's daughter and his child bride, his grandson, 'the Great Divorcer', the turbulent reign of the Fatimids in Egypt, the Ismaili 'underground', the notorious (or much maligned) Assassins, the first Aga Khan, who helped the British to conquer Sind, the third Aga Khan, Prince Karim's grandfather and predecessor as Imam of the Ismailis (and five-time winner of the English Derby), have provided historians and diarists with ample material for narratives. But, although his name is a household word that figures even in pop songs, little is known of Karim Aga Khan except what has appeared in the gossip columns of western newspapers.

What seemed lacking, however, was one comprehensive account spanning the whole scintillating rainbow from Mohammed to Karim, and this is what I set out to produce. History, religion, war, women, politics, racing and big business are some of the raw material I have used. My aim was to trace the story from the very beginning but with growing emphasis on the last three of the line, the old Aga Khan, Aly Khan and Karim Aga Khan, whose life takes on a

new meaning in the context of his religious and dynastic antecedents.

While it was impracticable for me to visit every outpost of the Aga Khan's spiritual Ismaili empire (his religious subjects in China, Soviet Russia and other parts are 'out of touch'), I spent some time at Ismaili centres in East Africa and Pakistan, and owe Ismaili dignitaries and councillors much enlightenment. What I saw of Ismaili educational, medical and social work was so impressive, I had to restrain my enthusiasm because my purpose was not to write Ismaili social history but a treble biography. I have talked at length with the Aga Khan and with members of his brains-trust who have answered many of my questions though by no means all. While I am grateful for the time they have given me, I have, of course, tried to fill the gaps from other sources. Though Ismailis no longer practise *taqiya* (disguise, dissimulation), they are reluctant to talk about many aspects of their highly esoteric religion, and even well educated Ismailis of the technological age continue the ancient tradition of secrecy. No secrecy attached to the Ismaili Constitution, of which copies were freely available.

Little of this emerges from the many works I have consulted though they have been of invaluable assistance in other respects. Professor Philip Hitti's 'History of the Arabs' was an indispensable introduction to the scene, Professor Bernard Lewis's 'Assassins' made fascinating and instructive reading. Without the (old) Aga Khan's *Memoirs*, discreet and reticent though they are, one could not have flavoured the story with his own reaction to many controversial incidents in his life.

Inevitably, I have soaked up a large measure of information from the biographies of the old Aga Khan by my friends, Stanley Jackson (particularly good on the racing activities of this prince of the British turf) and Harry Greenwall. Prince Aly Khan was such a flamboyant figure of our time, he obviously stimulated his biographers. British author and journalist Gordon Young, with his intimate knowledge of Aly's social environment, has followed his course closely, and, more recently, the American Leonard Slater has published a special study of Aly's love life. The French model Bettina, who might have become Aly's third wife had he lived longer, has written memoirs and elucidated many points for me in personal conversation.

The lives of my three principal characters have almost become public property. Press, newsreels and television attended at many spectacular occasions and have contributed vivid eye-witness accounts. As a newspaperman, I make no apology for consulting the files of editorial offices in Africa and on the Indian sub-continent, in Britain, France, Germany and the United States. A number of people, Ismailis and non-Ismailis, who supplied me with information have stipulated that they should remain anonymous. Their help was appreciated for all that.

Those who have helped me are altogether too numerous for individual enumeration. Librarians in four continents have been generous with their time and advice. I was going to conclude this list of grateful acknowledgements with the usual reference to 'my wife's invaluable help, etc. etc.'. This would be grossly inadequate. Without her assistance in every department of a writer's endeavour, this book could not have been attempted; it would certainly not have been completed.

WILLI FRISCHAUER

London, 1970

## CHAPTER I

FOR Dar-es-Salaam, October 19, 1957, was a public holiday. Houses were decorated, streamers with messages of welcome spanned the streets, front page reports described the scene. The city was in a festive mood. Indigenous East Africans as well as Asians joined in the celebrations. The Muslims of the world-wide, influential, prosperous Shia Ismaili Community, some 20,000 of them from all over Tanganyika, were in town to acclaim their new spiritual leader. They were attending the *Takht Nishini*, the ceremonial installation of His Highness Prince Aga Khan IV Shah Karim al-Huseini, twenty-year-old direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed and the late Aga Khan's grandson and successor, as Imam-e-Zaman (Imam of the Present Time), forty-ninth in the line which started with Caliph and Imam Hazrat Mowla Murtaza Ali, husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima.

From early morning people made their way to the Upanga ceremonial area which was soon packed to bursting point. Exhausted but excited, one group—a thousand men, women and children—tumbled from twenty lorries which had taken three days and three nights to bring them from the Southern Province to Dar-es-Salaam. Nothing short of disaster would have kept them away and they were only just in time to join in the shouts of '*Nalle Tagbir ! Nalle Tagbir !*'—May Allah bless you—which greeted the arrival of the young Imam. Dressed in a white, high-necked *sherwani*, black trousers and astrakhan hat, the slim new leader mounted the dais and settled himself in the heavy ornamental chair. His fixed smile barely disguised the tension and the deep emotion in his eyes as the waves of applause welled up to him.

The Dar-es-Salaam *Takht Nishini*, first of a number of similar

ceremonies to be held in East Africa and the Indian sub-continent, was a public pageant, a social occasion but, above all, a religious service which emphasised the living Imam's link with the Prophet and Hazrat Ali: unlike other Shia Muslims, Ismailis believe in a living, hereditary Imam as the vicar of Allah on earth. Devout Muslims, theirs is an esoteric but progressive, enlightened philosophy, a combination of deep spiritual fervour with a highly developed business sense. They rely on the guidance of a divinely inspired Imam in close touch with modern developments in every sphere of human endeavour whom they follow and obey without demur.

The new Imam was deeply conscious of the reason why, to the surprise of many, his grandfather had chosen him as his successor by *nass* (divine ordination, absolute will). As the old Aga Khan had said in his Will: 'In view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world in the very recent years due to the great changes which have taken place, including the discoveries of atomic science, I am convinced that it is in the interest of the Shia Muslim Ismaili community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up . . . in the midst of the new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam.' Already the descendant of the Prophet was being hailed as the Imam of the Atomic Age.

Nothing could have been further from the atomic age than Dar-es-Salaam at this moment. Thousands of Ismailis who could find no seats squatted on the sandy ground. Babies slept soundly in their mothers' arms while bigger children played hide-and-seek among the crowd. In the gaily festooned grandstands, leaders of the Ismaili community in their high turbans and crimson robes looked as colourful as their womenfolk in flowing saris of a hundred shades, lavishly embroidered with gold and silver thread and sparkling diamanté. The gowns of European women brought a whiff of Paris haute couture to the Upanga Road. For the British government, the Colonial Secretary, Mr Alan Lennox-Boyd (now Lord Boyd), was there to pay his respects to the new Aga Khan; the Governor of Tanganyika and his lady headed a large official party. Prince Seyyid Abdulla, bringing the felicitations of his father, the Sultan of Zanzibar, was one of the many African nobles present.

Many eyes wandered from the solemn and lonely figure on the

dais to the grandstand and the small group of the Imam's relatives who included the Mata Salamat, Ismaili title of Yvette Blanche Labrousse, the late Aga Khan's stately French-born Begum, and Karim's parents, Prince Aly Khan and Princess Joan, a daughter of Lord Churston who had adopted the Ismaili name of Tajudowleh. The sophisticated, elegant trio gave no hint of the strains—personal, religious, constitutional—which tested their nerves. Nothing was allowed to dim the glory of the new Imam in this great hour. Presently the noise subsided and the recitation from the Koran was intoned. Everybody rose—including the Imam—and listened intently, after which the leaders of the community approached to play their part in the ceremonial investiture, an ancient ritual of historic symbolism which signified the succession.

As the Imam held out his hand, a signet ring was placed on his finger. Throughout Ismaili history the ring's large engraved stone served as a seal of communication from Imams to their followers, particularly between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries and whenever they were forced to live in concealment. But even in recent times it has been used to testify to the Imam's authority among followers in Afghanistan, Turkistan and other countries who were not prepared to rely on the Imam's signature without additional proof of authenticity. In the next stage of the ceremony, the Robe was placed on the shoulders of Prince Karim—it was the same his grandfather had worn at the Diamond Jubilee in 1946. The *Pagrina* (turban) was put on his head and the historic Chain was draped around his neck, each of its forty-nine links representing one Imam, the last bearing his own crest. Finally, he was handed the same curved Sword of Justice which had already symbolised the installation of his predecessor in 1885 as the authentic 'Defender of the Faith'.

The spiritual successor of his ancestor, the Prophet, His Highness Aga Khan IV was now truly installed. As he said on one occasion: 'Since my grandfather, the late Aga Khan, died, I have been the bearer of the *Noor*, which means Light and has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet.' He was the Imam of the Ismailis.

\* \* \*

## The Imam of the Ismailis!

Tradition, history, geography invest the office of the Imam with a significance beyond anything the western mind can easily accept. To hundreds of thousands, to millions the Imam is King, High Priest, Supreme Judge. Not even royalty is subjected to such uninhibited adoration as the Imam. A collection of 'significant utterances and writings' of the previous Aga Khan is introduced with a panel which says:

### THE AGA KHAN

Direct descendant of the Prophet of Allah, Imam and dictator de facto, whose word is Law to many millions of Muslims . . . A Prince and a Lawgiver.

Writing in 'The Fatimid Theory of State', P. J. Vatikiotis, a student of Ismaili history, says: 'The Imam is not a mere temporal executive enforcing the sacred law among the Community of believers and adjudicating their disputes. He is rather an heir to the Prophet's "ministry" and a proof of God on earth. As the rightful heir to the prophetic mission, he possesses and knows the esoteric meaning of the "Book" and its interpretation. Thus, the Imam rules and guides in the name of God . . . the Imam has prophetic attributes which are transmitted to his lawful heir and successor . . . All Imams in succession are the Light of God.'

Bernard Lewis, Professor of the History of the Near and Middle East at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, writes about the cult of holy men and Imams who were believed to possess miraculous powers: 'The Imam is central to the Ismaili system—of doctrine and of organisation, of loyalty and of action. The Imams . . . descendants of Ali and Fatima through Isma'il were divinely inspired and infallible—in a sense indeed themselves divine . . . fountainheads of knowledge and authority—of the esoteric truths that were hidden from the uninformed and of commands that required total and unquestioning obedience.'

To his followers, Prince Karim is 'Hazar Imam' (Imam who is Present, Imam of our Time) or 'Imam-e-Zaman'. Some address him as 'Mowlana' (My Lord) or 'Khudavind' which means the same. Others call him 'Hazar Jomejo Dhani' (Present Holder of the

Mantle), 'Dhani Salamat Dani' (The Master who is Alive), 'Shah Pir' (Great Lord).

'My duties are wider than those of the Pope', the previous Aga Khan said when he was asked how his position compared with that of the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Church: 'The Pope is only concerned with the spiritual welfare of his flock, the Imam looks after his Community's temporal and spiritual interests.' I asked Prince Karim Aga Khan for an authentic definition: 'It is difficult to define the position of the Imam,' he answered, 'and I have never done so in public.' He thought a while and went on: 'You look after the Community's spiritual and temporal interests—after their temporal interests only as far as you are capable. But a member of the Community need not accept temporal guidance if he does not wish to. It is not an obligation. If he turns to the Imam for assistance, it will be given as far as possible but if the Imam's advice on temporal matters is rejected, no religious sanctions follow.' His advice is sought on many personal matters and no loyal Ismaili would dream of disregarding it. That the Imam's 'Holy Firman' (Formal Pronouncement) on any subject should be disobeyed is inconceivable.

When Prince Karim's predecessor was asked where the Aga Khan's followers were to be found he smiled and replied: 'Everywhere, except Dozakh'—everywhere except Hell.

They number some twenty million and, apart from their strongholds in Pakistan, India and East Africa, live in such remote places as the peaks of the Pamirs and the plains of China and Russia. The ruler of the mountain state of Hunza and most of his people are Ismailis. In Syria, Ismailis form a strong minority, in Persia they are known as Aga Khanis, in Afghanistan as Alillahis, in Central Asia as Maulais and in Indo-Pakistan as Khojas, Shamsis, Naosaris and Guptis. Burma, Japan and Madagascar also have Ismailis. Some live in Britain, France and the United States.

To invoke the name of the Imam is common usage: 'With the Imam's guidance . . .' Ismailis say frequently. But I have also heard immensely wealthy and sophisticated Ismaili industrialists in Africa, India and Pakistan say humbly and sincerely: 'What I have I owe to the help and guidance from Imam-e-Zaman'. Many Ismailis, including those educated in the West, implore the Aga Khan to



accept a share in their business because they are convinced that they will prosper if the Imam supports them—and they usually do. A young Ismaili graduate in an important position in a Commonwealth organisation whom I asked to tell the Aga Khan of our conversation replied: ‘Of course, of course—but, being the Imam, he will know anyway.’

\* \* \*

The Aga Khan’s Paris house by the Seine, a converted old monastery on the Ile de la Cité, stands in a narrow street which runs alongside the Quai aux Fleurs but on a much lower level. From the Quai a few steps go down to the street below and on the other side, a few steep steps up, is the ornate wooden door. Strong and solid, as if hewn out of rock, the building once belonged to the Notre-Dame complex and was later occupied by a Count Orsini from whom the street takes its name. It is like a medieval castle behind a protective moat but the butler in the white coat who answers the bell restores a sense of the twentieth century. The hall is gloomy, daylight hardly penetrates the small windows, and no more than a hint of the sun percolates to the courtyard, with the flower beds around an ancient fountain. Except for the distant murmur of a few words in Urdu, the silence is unbroken and the spiral stone staircase seems to wind its way up into another world.

Instead it leads to the Aga Khan’s study, Gobelins on the walls, a desk at the far end, a table covered with documents, copies of East African newspapers (his own) on the windowsill, large easy chairs. A fortnight later, the desk is missing, the furniture has been rearranged, the documents have disappeared: ‘Things are changed around frequently’ says an associate. When the Aga Khan enters, it is with a burst of youthful but well-controlled energy. He wears a sober dark suit, white shirt and an unobtrusive tie. He looks elegant whatever he wears, rather like an English squire who sports his shabbiest jacket during weekends on his estate. His mother says that it is a job to get him to buy a new suit, and friends have noticed holes in the soles of his shoes. One of them says: ‘The Aga Khan wears a French smile and English socks’—not a bad combination.

When he talks, expressive hands underline his words, idiomatic

French phraseology supplements a rich English vocabulary which sometimes betrays a Harvard flavour. Without sounding too harsh, he is precise and definite like someone who is not accustomed to being contradicted. The dark eyes in his oval face are questing, attentive and sympathetic when he listens but sometimes narrow into a distant look which almost removes him from immediate reach. He laughs easily and has gleaming white teeth which show up against the slightly swarthy skin, the only physical evidence of his oriental extraction. The receding hairline adds years to his appearance.

At thirty-two, he is much more handsome than his famous grandfather who made the name Aga Khan an international household word. Child of a less picturesque era he disdains old-fashioned flamboyance, is studious, serious-minded, dedicated; neither does he exude the infectious dare-devil *joie de vivre*—on horseback, behind the wheel, on the dance floor—which, even in his middle age, endeared his father Prince Aly Khan as much to western socialites as to the Bedouins of the Syrian mountains. Prince Karim shuns the limelight and belongs to the age of anonymous technocrats and accountants into which he was born. His restraint and reticent manner owe something to his Anglo-Saxon heritage.

The impression he creates is inevitably coloured by the implications of his direct descent from the Prophet and his complicated genealogy which combines the Syrian, Egyptian, Persian and Indian blood of his male ancestors with the varying background of their consorts—high-born oriental women, slave girls of Christian or Jewish descent, widows of conquered foes, Middle Eastern, North African, Spanish. He has inherited the contemporary European element from his Italian grandmother and from his mother whose line goes back to the English King Edward III (1327-1377).

Following the precedent set by Queen Victoria, who honoured his grandfather, Queen Elizabeth II of England conferred the style of 'Highness' on the young Aga Khan, and this is how most people address him. Among themselves, his collaborators refer to him as 'H.H.' (His Highness) or 'The Prince'. East of Suez, as a descendant of the Persian Kajar dynasty, he is invariably addressed as 'Royal Highness'. Prince Karim enjoys the nationalities of three

countries, Britain, Iran and, of course, Pakistan, which counts his grandfather among its founders.

More than any Habsburg archduke, Hohenzollern prince or Bourbon pretender I know—and their roots go back almost as far in history—this scion of an august tribe remains linked to his origin. It is difficult to define. The closer one is to him the more apparent it becomes. Not long ago in Nairobi I compared notes with Michael Curtis, the former London editor who served the Aga Khan as an aide in 1957 and ran a multi-million East African publishing enterprise controlled by him: 'He mystifies me as much now,' Curtis confessed, 'as he did when I first met him more than ten years ago. He is not English, not American'—a reference to the Aga Khan's years at Harvard University. 'More than with any other member of his family, there is about him an element of the East . . .'

His complex personality is not easy to penetrate. He is proud and humble, friendly and magisterial at the same time. As a religious leader, he is not unlike Billy Graham with his streamlined sermonising. Privately, he has a combination of qualities rare in a very rich young man—he is intelligent, erudite, moral and charming. From the study he takes me across the landing to the spacious drawing-room with the antique chess table by the door, deep settees and high fireplace. Only a meticulous, pedantically rigid schedule enables the Aga Khan to cope with the constant stream of people who are anxious to see him, leaders of the Ismaili community from Asia and Africa whose appointments were fixed many months earlier, industrial and finance executives from half a dozen countries and legal experts who deal with his international interests.

One delegation from Karachi waiting to be admitted has come to consult him on a major educational project he has initiated in Pakistan, one of the numerous colleges, schools and orphanages which he sponsors wherever Ismailis dwell. They are voluntary workers and make the trip to Europe at their own expense. The Aga Khan greets 'his spiritual children' (many of them twice his age), accepts their homage, quickly puts them at ease with the trained monarch's knack of remembering names and circumstances of his flock. With the help of an *aide mémoire* which has reached him ahead of the delegation's arrival he discusses the problem, and

presently gives proof of his astonishing versatility when, an hour later, the Pakistani Ismailis are followed by architects who have come to discuss highly technical plans for a big new housing project in East Africa.

In the last two years matters requiring his personal attention have become so numerous that it was physically no longer possible to deal with them in his private residence. He took offices near by where one English and two French secretaries deal with the voluminous correspondence. For secretarial work immediately connected with the Ismaili community he largely relies on Guli Noorali who is Ismaili and is married to Monsieur Robert Muller, who manages his French stud farms (Lassy, Marly la Ville, Saint Crespin and Bonneval) with Madame J. J. Vuillier, widow of the old Aga Khan's racing expert.

\* \* \*

The engine of the Aga Khan's private *Mystère* jet (since replaced by a Grumman Gulfstream which has a longer range) started with a low whine which rose to a penetrating scream as it took off to carry him to England. With him was Robert Muller. Their destination was the English racing town of Newmarket where Major Cyril Hall joined the party—Major Hall manages the Aga Khan's Irish studs, Giltown, Sallymount, Sheshoon and Ballymannny. Four top-class stallions and some eighty equally prestigious brood mares add up to a formidable establishment.

In 1960, the death of his father Prince Aly Khan, whose chief hobby in life was racing and horses, left Prince Karim in control of the studs about which he knew very little and did not seem to care much. As a boy he used to stay frequently with his father on one of the Irish farms: 'The first time my father put me on a horse I fell off,' he recalled, 'and I haven't been much interested in horses since.' But those who thought that he would quickly liquidate the famous racing empire did not realise his loyalty to the old family tradition which started with his great-great-grandfather. The first Aga Khan owned three hundred fine horses but it was the third Aga Khan who made his name and horse-racing virtually synonymous and became the English turf's most prominent figure in the

inter-war years. The only man to win the English Derby five times, he headed the list of winning owners in England seven times. Karim would not in any case bring such a rare success story to a sudden end but, while he was contemplating what to do with the horses, one of them, Charlottesville, won two major prizes of the French turf, the Jockey Club and the Grand Prix de Paris at Longchamps, the latter worth 404,814 New Francs (about 85,000 dollars).

It was like a sign from heaven. The Aga Khan decided to carry on and began to acquaint himself thoroughly with the intricacies of racing and breeding. In 1965 he engaged François Mathet, a strict disciplinarian and probably the best trainer in Europe: 'I made up my mind to run the studs and the racing not as a hobby but as a business,' the Aga Khan told me shortly after the Newmarket expedition. He devoted himself to the task with his usual thoroughness, reorganised the administration of the whole establishment, introduced modern accountancy methods, and difficult as it was to reconcile his methodical approach with a sport with so many imponderables, has kept a wary eye on the balance sheets ever since.

From this point of view his trip to Newmarket was a most satisfying experience. The Newmarket December Sales are a major event in the racing world and 1968 promised to surpass the record turnover of 1964 when over two million guineas (over 5 million dollars) changed hands at the public auction. Although the biggest names in racing were present, many eyes were on the Aga Khan and his advisers. As usual, he was on the look-out for suitable horses to buy but everybody else was more interested in what the Aga Khan had to sell. He prunes his studs four times a year to make room for new foals, and so four times a year his surplus horses are offered for sale. This time, the most useful of his batch was Atrevida, a ten-year-old grey mare, bred under Colonel Vuillier's unique points system from an ancestry which included Blenheim, the old Aga's 1930 Derby winner. Atrevida, in foal to his stallion Silver Shark, the descendant of his grandfather's 1936 Derby winner Mahmoud, fetched 31,000 guineas (78,500 dollars) to become the highest priced brood mare of the whole Sale. The nine mares and fillies which the Aga Khan brought to Newmarket realised a grand total of 106,700 guineas (268,900 dollars). Sales from the studs bring the Aga Khan nearly half a million pounds sterling a year but some-

times he has qualms about the cost of his private aircraft: 'I wonder whether it is not too spectacular,' he said. Considering that his racing establishment alone is worth around £3 million and represents only a fraction of his investments which keep him travelling all over the world, the question, though sincerely put, answers itself.

\* \* \*

'Merimont', next door to the famous Château Voltaire, is a charming little villa in its own grounds on the outskirts of Geneva, and looks like a rich man's retreat. The lovingly tended gardens, the parquet floors, the elegant staircase reinforce the impression which is only corrected by the big baize-covered conference table in the ground-floor drawing-room. Known as 'Le Bureau du Dr Hengel' (after the German industrial expert who presides over it), 'Merimont' is the nerve centre of the Aga Khan's industrial empire, a unique head office which does not serve a corporation or a holding company but is adapted to the peculiar position of the Aga Khan as head of a religious community and independent millionaire industrialist.

One characteristic common to most of his ventures is that he rarely concerns himself with enterprises which have no social purpose and from which the Ismaili community does not benefit either directly or indirectly. The emphasis is on tourism and half a dozen related enterprises, industrial promotion in seven or eight largely underdeveloped countries (cotton, jute, textiles, marble, ceramics, cosmetics, pharmaceutical products, clothes, household utensils), real estate in Europe and overseas, publishing in East Africa, banks, finance, investment, insurance institutes and co-operatives in Africa and on the Indian sub-continent. With the community schools, hospitals, health centres and religious institutions they add up to an empire believed to be worth 300 million dollars which is under the control but not necessarily wholly owned by the Aga Khan.

Sitting in his ground-floor office at 'Merimont' with the bamboo-rimmed desk, the big green plants and the huge glass frontage, the Aga Khan looks out on the lawn, the bed of tulips—and Mont Blanc in the distance. His small flat upstairs is discreetly furnished but has a rather spectacular bathroom: 'Not really his style,' says an

aide, 'it was already here when the house was acquired in the early sixties.' The Aga Khan's brains-trust working in these civilised surroundings and assisted by a dozen multi-lingual secretaries includes two Swiss experts on hotels, tourism and technical projects, two British (finance and marketing), and two Germans (one engineer, one economist). Italians, Frenchmen, others are co-opted as the need arises. Towards the end of 1968, they were joined by the Aga Khan's younger brother Prince Aynn (Harvard 1964, United Nations) whose first assignments were to deal with the big new tourist projects in East Africa and to arrange for an investigation into agricultural opportunities for Ismailis. As a member of the family, Prince Aynn is an invaluable link between the Imam and Ismaili leaders.

Because of his many industrial interests and his preoccupation with the education, housing and health of the Community involving major projects which depend on organization, technology and finance, the Aga Khan sometimes seems more like a business tycoon than a religious leader. He is aware of this but explains: 'Islam is concerned with the whole life of the faithful, not only their religion . . . The Prophet, too, was a business man.'

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'Ski-ing,' says the Aga Khan, 'is ideal for taking one's mind off affairs.' Total concentration on the sport is what attracts him. A winter sports enthusiast of Olympic standards, he spends the winter months in the Swiss Alps. He used to own a house in Gstaad (where he went to school at the famous Le Rosay college) but sold it in 1968 and rented a chalet in St Moritz from the Greek shipowner Stavros Niarchos while making up his mind to build a house of his own. His staff is with him and associates come for meetings but Ismaili leaders, by silent agreement, try not to burden their Imam with community affairs during the month of February which gives him a respite but doubles his work in the following month.

Last winter, rising early, he was out on the stiffest ski runs every morning between eight and eleven and when his half-sister Yasmin (daughter of Aly Khan and Rita Hayworth) came on a visit took her out ski-ing for an hour or so after that whenever the weather per-

mitted. Back in Paris for a few days, he made one of his rare visits to a night-club, taking Yasmin and a small party of friends dining and dancing. Work and sport added up to a very full life. The Aga Khan recalled what his grandfather once told him: 'Life is a wonderful mission which you should not shy away from. Do not refuse to accept the joys or the responsibilities!' Prince Karim said he tried to apply this philosophy with a certain integrity but on closer acquaintance it seems that he inclines more towards the responsibilities than the joys.

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In or out of season, the Aga Khan is liable to make a flying visit to Sardinia almost any time of the year. It is no secret—on the contrary: it has been well publicised—that he is associated with the development of the Costa Smeralda as an élite holiday resort comparable with the Côte d'Azur, and is manifestly succeeding. Until 1969, there were no landing facilities for his *Mystère* on the Costa Smeralda and he had to break the journey in Corsica where he transferred to his helicopter for the last stage of the trip. Now Olbia airport has been extended to take the biggest aircraft, a new airport is being built and he can fly straight to his own strip of coast.

While he is there, his white villa overlooking the sea at Porto Cervo becomes the centre of a great deal of activity, a suite in the Hotel Cervo serves him as an office and the secretaries with their bundles of correspondence are never far away. But he is more relaxed in Sardinia than in almost any other place and in the summer months entertains friends—Britain's Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon among them—while others have bought villas forming the nucleus of an international Aga Khan set.

A typical pre-season visit in 1969 was to attend a week's intensive conferences of the Costa Smeralda Comitato Directivo, consisting of himself, Maître Ardoin and Dr Hengel—Ardoin and Hengel also own villas on the Costa Smeralda. About 9 a.m. each morning, the Aga Khan, in slacks and short-sleeved shirt, walked from his villa across the piazza to the conference room in one of the new buildings. (Over longer distances he often drives himself in his small red Volkswagen.) After listening to the reports of his fellow directors—



his symmetric, harmonious doodles reflect his orderly mind—he asked questions, checked and counter-checked facts and figures. As usual he was thorough, interested in details, persistent and difficult to convince but quick to approve once he saw the merits of a scheme. With short breaks for lunch the committee usually worked till 7 p.m., reviewed an urban master plan for the Costa Smeralda prepared by an American expert, examined a new Mediterranean villa design with twenty-six variations and checked the budget of the Port of Porto Cervo corporation and the records of their tile factory in Olbia.

More diverting was their inspection of the new eighteen-hole golf-course designed by U.S. golf-architect Trent Jones which stretches from sea to sea across the neck of Sardinia. Back in their conference room the Aga Khan and his two fellow directors dealt with the inquiries in response to their international advertising campaign for the sale of plots which promised flourishing business. They were talking about structural changes in the hotels and a new heated swimming pool when a telex message from East Africa required their immediate attention. Their Sardinian business was once more interrupted when a high executive of the International Finance Corporation was flown in from Milan for discussions on another proposition.

As he crossed the square at Porto Cervo, the Aga Khan was recognised by tourists who take a possessive interest in his activities. They remarked how well he looked and what a wonderful time he must be having.

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Because of his extreme reticence few people are aware of the Aga Khan's world-wide activities. He is on friendly terms with many royal rulers and heads of state, particularly the Shah of Persia who is a Shia Muslim like him. He has been received by United States Presidents and frequently meets leaders of the British Commonwealth. He enjoys the fatherly friendship and respect of Kenya's President Yomo Kenyatta to whom he gave the fine Aga Khan Bungalow in Nairobi in which he, Prince Karim, spent his childhood during the Second World War.

Unobtrusively and almost unnoticed, he flew into London in mid-January 1969 while the Commonwealth Conference was in session to discuss the difficulties of Asians in East Africa with African delegates. As the Aga Khan had instructed Ismailis of Asian origin in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda—in all emergent states—to adopt the nationality of the country in which they lived (a policy inaugurated by his grandfather), his followers were the least affected by xenophobic measures in East Africa, while Asians with British passports were deprived of their livelihood and yet refused admission to Britain.

A few months before attending the Mahatma Gandhi centenary celebrations in India in March of the same year, the Aga Khan presented Yarovda Palace in Poona, jointly owned by him, his brother and his half-sister, to the Indian nation as a gesture of goodwill. Said to be worth about £1 million (2.4 million dollars) it was built by his grandfather in 1897 to provide work for starving Indians during the famine and to relieve distress caused by the plague. In 1942, it was put at the disposal of Mahatma Gandhi when the British authorities decided to detain him, and the Mahatma, his wife, his secretary (and his goats) were held there instead of being sent to near-by Yarovda prison. Mrs Gandhi died while under detention in the palace and to avoid a public funeral which might have sparked off serious unrest was committed to the pyre and the ashes buried in the grounds: 'The Yarovda Palace,' the Aga Khan said, 'is now, as it should be, a national monument in memory of one of the great citizens of the world.'

The crisis in Pakistan, aggravated by the dissatisfaction in the East with a government rooted in the wealthier but less populous western wing of the country, created problems for the Aga Khan's followers who are prominent in the business community, but Pakistan, too, was a good example of his astonishingly far-sighted policies. From the beginning he had supported industrial development in East Pakistan and backed it with considerable personal funds.

As always, it was difficult to keep track of his movements. Apart from commuting between Paris, Geneva, St Moritz and Sardinia (with a wary eye on the repercussions of recurrent financial crises in Europe), the Aga Khan visited the United States twice that year

and came to London several times to attend business conferences—and the Derby. In London, until recently, he occupied an apartment in his mother's residence—his line drawings on the wall and a head sculpted by him testify to an unsuspected talent. He also maintains homes in St Crespin and in the South of France, on his Irish stud farms and in Karachi. The houses of wealthy followers in Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Kampala, in Egypt and Iran, wherever they are, are available to him at any time. His legal residence is Switzerland.

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Not many years before his death, the grandfather of the present Aga Khan seriously considered the possibility of acquiring enough land to restore territorial autonomy to his family. Although eventually abandoned, the idea serves as a dramatic flashback to the amazing history of his ancestors over the past thirteen centuries, to the very beginning of Islam where his forebear, the Prophet Mohammed, conquered the minds of men with his teaching and laid the foundation of a state based on the religion of Islam; to the rise and fall of the illustrious Fatimid caliphs who founded Cairo and ruled over a powerful empire stretching from the River Oxus in the East across North Africa and Morocco in the West.

Visions of the legendary 'Old Man of the Mountain' and his 'Assassins' who struck terror—and daggers—into the hearts of their foes are followed by glimpses of the period when Imams and their followers lived behind the mask of *taqiya*, denying or disguising their true religious beliefs. Presently they emerge as Persian noblemen and here, quite recently in history, is the first Aga Khan in close liaison with the ruling house of Persia. Through triumph and tribulation, in victory and defeat, millions of Ismailis remained loyal to the Imam of the time, paying *zakat*, their voluntary offering. (According to one account members of an Ismaili community out of touch with Imam still wrap their offerings in handkerchiefs every month and throw them into the Oxus but the Aga Khan says the story is not true.)

This great line is rich in eminent men who have left their mark on the history of their time but when I asked the Aga Khan with which of his ancestors he felt the strongest communion his answer

was prompt: 'The life of the Prophet,' he said, 'is my main inspiration. One can study it all one's life and never grasp the full extent even though the guide lines of his life are fundamental. The same applies to Hazrat Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and founder of the Shia branch . . .' And what might he have in common with Ali? 'It is the personal approach to the practice of Islam, the degree of personal involvement which is of fundamental significance for Shia Islam. The Prophet and Hazrat Ali gave a spiritualistic approach to Islam which tends to involve the Shia more intimately.'

In the setting of the elegant drawing-room of his house on the Ile de la Cité in Paris, His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shah Karim al-Huseini, Hazar Imam and highest religious authority of twenty million Muslims of the Shia Ismaili community, went back to the origin of the faith of which he is the living symbol. With an intensity which mostly remains below the surface and is hardly suspected by his western associates, he conjured up the world of the Prophet Mohammed and Hazrat Ali, the two great historic figures whose blood flows in his veins.

## CHAPTER II

‘Everything connected with Ismailism seems to be enveloped in a cloud of mystery and secrecy.’

Asaf A. A. Fyzee

THE story of the Aga Khan and his Ismailis starts in the sixth century of the Christian era in the desolate Bedouin country of al-Hijaz by the Red Sea which was only sparsely inhabited by Yemenite and Jewish tribes and a few Christians. Trading caravans trundling through the desert along the ‘spice route’ to Syria deposited seeds of Byzantine, Aramaean and Persian influences in this lonely land whose main population centres were the cities of Makkah (Mecca) where Mohammed was born around A.D. 571 and Yathrib which, when he moved there, became al-Madinah (Medina), the City of the Prophet.

The early history of Islam is a family affair, though not a happy one, a power struggle of closely related contenders. The Quraysh, Mecca’s leading family, were the guardians of Ka’bah, shrine of the pagan idols; Mohammed’s father Abdullah belonged to the Hashim, a minor branch of the tribe. The Umayyads and Abbasides who emerged as temporal rulers of the Muslim empire all spring from the same source.

Mohammed, who lost father and mother when still very young, was brought up by his grandfather and later his uncle abu-Talib whose son Ali became his closest companion and earliest follower. Ali is the hero of the Aga Khan’s Muslim sect. Young Mohammed accompanied his uncle’s caravans to Syria, then went to work for Khadija, a wealthy Quraysh widow, and looked after her business and her caravans so well that she offered him her hand in marriage. She was forty and he was twenty-five but their married life was

happy and while she lived Mohammed looked at no other woman. They had three sons who died in infancy, and four daughters, one of whom, Fatima, survived, married cousin Ali and entered the pages of history. It is through Fatima that the Aga Khan traces his descent to the Prophet of Islam.

While continuing to trade, Mohammed spent many hours in meditation in a cave on a hill near Mecca where, in A.D. 610, he had the first of the revelations of 'God's scriptures dictated by Archangel Gabriel as guidance to men'. This was the 'Night of Power', the birth of Islam, and from then on, Muslims believe, the voice of Allah continued to speak through the Prophet. The result was the Koran which did for Mohammed (through his own words) what the Bible did for Christ but which is supplemented by *hadith* (tradition) handed down by word of mouth.

Like Jesus Christ in his time, the Prophet inveighed against false pagan idols, preached belief in One God, in Resurrection, in the Last Judgement and in Paradise. But the essence of his teaching was Surrender to the Will of God—the word 'Islam' derived from *aslama* which means 'to submit'. Like Jesus Christ he was violently attacked by the establishment. The Quraysh saw in him a threat to their vested interests in Mecca as a centre of pagan worship, persecuted his followers and drove many of them into exile.

Mohammed's closest associates rallied around him, foremost among them Ali, his son-in-law, and abu-Bakr, a prosperous merchant, Umar, a late convert who became known as the 'St Paul of Islam' and Uthman, a member of the Umayyad family. For a time the Prophet weathered the storm but soon after his wife Khadija died he left the city of his birth and took the road to Medina. The date was September 24, A.D. 622, the celebrated *Hijra* (Hegira) which has been translated as 'flight' but was a well prepared migration. The 'Year of the Farewell' was later adopted as the beginning of the Muslim era, Anno *Hijra* (A.H.).

For Mohammed and his Muslims it was a watershed because Medina acknowledged him not only as a religious leader but as head of their community. As a statesman the Prophet earned a reputation for his wisdom, humanity and kindness, but he and his Muslims entered upon a period in which Mecca and Medina, Muslims and pagan Arabs, Muslims and Jews were locked in one

unending battle. Reports of the Prophet's bloody wars and victories alternate with accounts of his inspired preaching and the new morality he laid down for his followers.

He built mosques and homes for the Muslims who joined him in Medina and his own house was surrounded by quarters for his ten or twelve wives. His favourite wife was abu-Bakr's daughter A'isha who was only eight or nine years old at the time of their marriage and took her dolls with her to the marital home.

In the many clashes with the Meccans and pagan tribes, Ali fought by the side of the Prophet with great courage, is said to have killed 523 men in one day and, on another occasion, to have put thirty-seven to death with his sabre. He was capable of severing a horseman's rump from the rest of his body with one stroke of the sword, the lower part remaining on the horse. Victory in one battle ('with the help of Allah') was followed by defeat in another in which the Prophet was wounded.

While the Muslim warriors battled in the field, their women fought among themselves. A'isha supported her father's claim to be first among the Prophet's Companions (as the Mecca emigrants and their Medinese supporters were called). Fatima championed the cause of her husband. The two factions were on bad terms and when Ali accused A'isha of having deceived the Prophet with another man, the rift deepened. A'isha retaliated and missed no opportunity to denigrate Ali and Fatima. Talking about these early conflicts the Aga Khan said simply: 'The quarrel between Fatima and A'isha is a historical fact.' In effect it gave rise to the branch of Islam of which he is the head.

Mohammed extended the frontiers of Islam, subjugated many tribes, converted them or forced them to pay tribute. Others sent delegations to swear allegiance to the great leaders who changed the tribal society into which he was born into a state built on religion. Returning to Mecca, he smashed the pagan idols and preached the famous sermon: 'Know ye that every Muslim is a brother unto every Muslim, and that ye are now one brotherhood'—the Muslim Brotherhood is still a political force in the Middle East. He put the Ka'bah out of bounds to unbelievers and in the thirteen centuries that have passed only a handful of non-Muslims has visited it—and lived. 'I shall soon be called back to heaven,' the Prophet told his

followers, adding, 'I leave amongst you two important things . . . the Koran and my family.' The Muslims had heard him say that 'He, whose master I am, has also Ali for his master,' which Ismailis take to mean that he wanted Ali to become his successor. But when he fell ill and was too weak to lead the *salat* (prayers) he delegated the honour to abu-Bakr which was interpreted as a sign that abu-Bakr was his choice as deputy (*khalifa*) and successor. On June 8, A.D. 632 (A.H. 10), the Prophet of Allah reached the end of his road on earth and died leaving the succession in doubt.

It was at once fiercely contested by two factions, one favouring the staid, conservative abu-Bakr—and a caliphate based on the elective principle—the other rooting for Ali as the legitimate heir entitled to the succession as a member of the 'House of the Prophet' (his own description)—Mohammed, Fatima and Ali and their two sons, Hasan and Huseyn. The Companions opted for abu-Bakr who became the first of the 'orthodox caliphs' whose followers are described as Sunnis (for 'custom', 'dogma'). Ali's partisans, the legitimists, opposed the choice and formed the Shi'atu-Ali, Ali's Party, or 'Shia' for short, which developed into a political pressure group for the 'great society' envisaged by the Prophet and against the Muslim establishment of greed, privilege and injustice.

From this first split in Islam, Ali emerged as the leader of the Shias and the champion of the under-privileged. Today some twenty per cent of all Muslims are Shias; 'Sunnis and Shias do not differ about the basic tenets of Islam,' the Aga Khan explained when I mentioned the split but one does not have to study early Muslim history much further before it becomes complicated by dissensions among the Shias themselves from the first of which the Aga Khan's followers emerged as a separate sect.

Caliph abu-Bakr continued in the Prophet's footsteps and brought the whole of Arabia under the rule of Islam. His reign was brief. He was poisoned and died in the year A.D. 634. His successor, Caliph Umar, extended the Muslim dominion over Syria, Iraq and Persia in the north, Egypt and Tripoli in the west. He was only fifty-three when he fell to the dagger of a Christian who acted—certainties are hard to come by in this period—either in protest against high taxation or at the instigation of Companions who were tired of Umar's tyrannical régime.



Ali's followers pressed his claim of succession but a committee chose Uthman, the Umayyad, who made further conquests but could not control the provinces under his rule. He was accused of nepotism and of feathering his family's nest. There was a general uprising, angry opponents demanded his resignation and stormed his house. He was slain, it is said, by a son of abu-Bakr.

Uthman's murder marked the beginning of the internecine struggles which rent Islam for centuries but at long last opened the way for Ali. The Prophet's own family, the Aga Khan's ancestors, came into their own. In Sunni history, Ali ranks as the fourth caliph. Shias hail him as the first legitimate successor of the Prophet. The Caliph to whom the young Aga Khan feels such a strong affinity was a deeply pious and saintly man who frequently inflicted mortifications on himself. He was corpulent, short and bald but with a long white beard which he sometimes dyed red, had a handsome face, dark complexion and prominent eyes which looked disdainfully at the world: 'Whoever wants part of it,' he said, 'must be satisfied to live with dogs!' His thoughts were on Paradise, which awaits the devout Muslim: 'Blessed are those,' he said, 'who have renounced this world and only aspire to the world to come.'

Ali was so modest that he only reluctantly assumed his office as Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Armies) and Imam al-Moslemin (Leader of the Prayers). His dynamic, progressive view of Islam, his support for the underdog and unswerving loyalty to the ideas of the Prophet were challenged by rivals who set out to destroy him. At Basra, they fought the 'Battle of the Camel', A'isha making common cause with Ali's enemies and riding into battle with them on a camel. Ali won, captured A'isha and sent her back to Medina with an escort of forty noble women. His defeated enemies were killed but buried with military honours.

The victorious Caliph never returned to the City of the Prophet. He made al-Kufa by the Euphrates his capital city. The Umayyads accused him of complicity in the murder of Uthman and went to war against him and defeated him with a trick. He was deserted by many of his followers but might have prevailed, had he not been attacked by a rebel with a poisoned sword which penetrated his brain. The 'Wali Allah' (Friend of God) died on January 24, 661. Imam, warrior and saint he lives in Shia memory as the God-like,

ideal Muslim—a Yemenite Jew is thought to have been the first to acclaim him with the words: 'Thou art God.' Ali was buried at Kufa which became the Holy City of the Shias, who still flock to it on the anniversary of his death.

After Ali's death, his empire crumbled. Egypt was lost to his supporters but Iraq remained loyal and proclaimed his son Hasan, elder of the Prophet's beloved grandsons, as Caliph. If his followers hoped that Imam Hasan would continue the struggle against the Umayyads they were disappointed. Ali's son preferred the pleasures of the harem to the rigours of battle, made and unmade a hundred marriages and earned himself the epithet of 'the great divorcer'. He abdicated and died in Medina—Sunnis say of consumption, but Shias believe he was the victim of an Umayyad plot and mourn him as a *shadid* (martyr). He remains under a historical cloud and Ismaili records of the forty-nine Imams from Ali to Karim do not include his name. His younger brother Huseyn succeeded him as Imam and Caliph of Iraq.

The battle with the Umayyads flared up again. Hoping for popular support, Huseyn crossed the desert with a small band of relatives but was cut off without access to the water of the Euphrates. At Kerbela, Imam Huseyn and his men were massacred. The date of the tragedy was 10th Muharram in the sixtieth year of the *Hijra*, a day of deep mourning for all Shias. They lost more than their Imam. With him they forfeited their political power and did not regain it for centuries. Fanatical Shias still celebrate the memory by flogging themselves with chains until their blood flows and attend a passion play commemorating his martyrdom.

Imam Huseyn's son, Ali Zayn al-Abedin who escaped unharmed from the death trap of Kerbela went to live in Medina where he was greatly respected as a religious leader. He and his successor were popular with the growing number of Muslims who opposed the ruling Umayyads. In A.D. 732, Jafar al-Sadiq became Imam and during his tenure Arab history—and the history of the Aga Khan's ancestors—took a dramatic turn. The rule of the Umayyads came to an end and a new dynasty assumed power. The Abbasides (descendants of al-Abbas, a brother of both Mohammed's and Ali's fathers) were, alas, no less hostile to Ali's heirs. Shias were cruelly persecuted and Jafar Sadiq's life was in constant danger.

To keep the line of the Imam unbroken and protect his eldest son and heir Ismail, Jafar Sadiq smuggled him out of the country spreading a rumour that Ismail had died and even staged a mock funeral. It caused a lot of confusion and when Jafar Sadiq was killed he left a new succession tangle behind. Ismail's younger brother Musa Kazim claimed to be the new Imam. Shias were in two minds. Some argued that Ismail was the rightful successor and swore allegiance to him. Others took the view that Ismail had died during his father's lifetime and accepted Musa Kazim as their new Imam.

The Shia community was split right down the middle. Musa Kazim functioned as Imam and his Imamate came down in succession to his son and grandson until the twelfth in line, Mohammed Mahdi, who is said to have gone into concealment and for whose reappearance the *Ithna Ashari* ('Twelver Shias') are still waiting. This branch of the Shia faith became the official religion of Persia where the Shah is revered as the deputy of the Mahdi whose return is awaited.

Those who remained loyal to Ismail—'Ismailis'—were persecuted from all sides. Their support for Ismail was not only heresy in the eyes of the orthodox Sunni Muslims—it was also regarded as high treason. Their fellow Shias who supported Musa Kazim were no more kindly inclined towards them.

Driven underground, they practised their faith in secret, starting a tradition of secrecy which became second nature to all Ismailis and has survived to this day. Hiding their religious conviction—*taqiya* which means dissimulation or disguise—became a matter of life and death and permissible as a perfectly honourable practice. They even pretended to be orthodox Sunni Muslims. Imams themselves sometimes adopted the colouring of their mortal foes. Ismaili manuscripts were hidden away; when discovered, they were seized and destroyed by their opponents.

It was a long time before evidence in support of Ismaili claims came to the surface. But as new sources were uncovered, references to Ismail in old manuscripts showed that he survived his father by at least twenty years. He turned up in Basra where he was noticed because of his extraordinary powers to cure the sick. Hotly pursued by the Abbaside Caliph, he fled to Syria and escaped death only

because the Governor of Damascus refused to arrest him and became his loyal follower.

In contrast with the 'Twelvers', Ismailis are frequently described as 'Seveners' (*Sabiya*) on the assumption that Ismail was the seventh Imam but authentic Ismaili records omit Imam Hasan from the list and the Ismailis never refer to themselves as 'Seveners'. The split between Ithna Ashari and Sabiya had not been healed but the two main Shia branches are no longer hostile and their leaders, the Aga Khan, heir to Ismail's Imamate, and the Shah of Persia whose subjects are 'Twelvers', are on the friendliest terms.

Ismail himself remained in hiding throughout his Imamate (A.D. 765-775) and neither he nor his successors could defend themselves against false accusations some of which are still in currency. According to Professor W. Ivanow, greatest western authority on Ismaili history, Sunni scholars recounted only what was derogatory about the hated Ismaili 'heretics' and claimed that Ismailism was a swindle on a grand scale and a malicious intrigue for the subversion of Islam.

This view has long lost all credibility. Ismailis, of course, believe that they are on the highest level of religious comprehension which is called *haqiqat*. Professor Bernard Lewis praises the unity and discipline which were forged in their secret work. Ismaili loyalty to the tradition and law of Islam, he says, was from the beginning allied to a philosophical interpretation of the faith and a strong, highly emotional approach. With great self-sacrifice Ismaili leaders championed the under-privileged and challenged the establishment.

Their followers met in secret lodges, novices were obliged to swear an oath of secrecy, initiation was by seven stages—the number seven acquired sacred importance—but the esoteric truth which reposed in the living Imam, descendant of the Prophet and God-inspired leader, was inaccessible to the ordinary man. When the Crusaders came in touch with Ismailis, they adopted the idea which gave birth to many religious and secular secret societies in Europe. The Knights Templar with their system of Grand Masters and religious devotees and degrees of initiation are reminiscent of Ismaili practices. Ismaili historians find analogies even with the Society of Jesus and its unsurpassed spirit of sacrifice and devotion. The Freemasons copied Ismaili lodges and initiation.

From Salamiyya in Syria where they settled, Ismaili Imams sent their *dais* (clerics) and missionaries to spread propaganda in distant lands. They became known as Fatimids, after the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Without revealing themselves as Imams, Ismail's successors secretly organised rebellions and struck at the Abbasides wherever they could. Their influence reached far into North Africa where they made contact with discontented elements and built up a well-organised Ismaili underground whose members recognised the Imam as undisputed leader and contributed to his exchequer in line with the practice of paying *zakat* (offerings, tithes) which dates back to the Prophet's *baitulmal* (treasury), figures in the Koran and, in a more sophisticated form, survives to this day.

These were the times of Harun al-Raschid, the Abbaside Caliph of the Arabian Nights, but romance and glamour took second place to bloody wars. The Abbasides harassed Jews, Christians and Shias alike, and razed Huseyn's mausoleum at Kerbela to the ground, but the Ismaili flame continued to burn and Fatimid propaganda made tremendous headway in North Africa. When Ubaydullah, the eleventh Imam of the Ismailis, followed in his missionaries' footsteps he was received as the long awaited Mahdi, adopted the name of Mahdi Mohammed and was proclaimed Caliph at Qayrawan. The descendants of Ali and Fatima, the forebears of the Aga Khan, were out of the shadows and in power once more entering the most glorious period in their history.

The enemies of the Ismailis were not inactive either and, to undermine the Caliph's authority, spread rumours which still find an echo in Sunni history books. It was suggested that he was descended from a Jew, and was not the real Imam at all. This is a recurring feature in the Aga Khan's genealogy. However, responsible historians acknowledge Mahdi Mohammed as the founder of the Fatimid empire, biggest of all Islamic kingdoms, which eventually included Morocco, Algeria, the whole of northern Africa and the greater part of Somaliland. It stretched to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Sind in India. Fatimids ruled Sicily, Calabria and gained a foothold in Sardinia to which the young Aga Khan returned as the head of his tourist consortium.

Mahdi Mohammed's successors had their eyes on Egypt and built a formidable fleet. Fatimid admirals developed the techniques of

attacking enemy ships with fire throwers which, Ismaili historians claim, the English employed five hundred years later when they routed the Spanish Armada. In A.D. 969 the Fatimid Caliph and Imam abu-Tamin Ma'add al-Moizz sent the commander of his forces, General Ghazi Jawarhar al-Siquilli (the Sicilian), to launch an attack on Egypt by land and by sea. Alexandria surrendered quickly but Fustat, the capital, refused to yield and Caliph Moizz instructed his General to build a new capital. Working from a sketch provided by Moizz himself, Jawarhar ordered a square of 1,200 yards to be pegged off with ropes to which bells were attached, and kept men with spades in readiness to begin work as soon as the signs were favourable, when the bells would be rung. But a raven settling on one of the ropes set the bells ringing and work on the city was started just when Mars (Al-Kahir) was in the ascendant. The city which rose was named Al-Kahira, city of Mars, which later became El-Cairo or Cairo.

Caliph Moizz, the Aga Khan's most imposing ancestor, entered his new capital in state and took up residence in a palace which accommodated all the members of his family, slaves, eunuchs and servants, numbering over twenty thousand. Moizz studied the world with the help of a map made of solid gold. One of his daughters was said to own 12,000 dresses and another five sacks of emeralds, vast quantities of other precious stones and many works of art. But amid all this splendour he ruled justly and introduced great reforms such as a system of land administration which curbed the powers and profits of the collectors. His right-hand man, Yakub b Killis, a Jewish convert to the Ismaili faith, survived him and founded the University of al-Azhar which is still the greatest seat of Islamic learning. Al-Azhar means 'the luminous', masculine version of the name by which Fatima was known.

Controversy blurs the history of Moizz's successors. Hakim was only eleven when he came to the throne, was said to be under the influence of the extremist Druzes and is blamed for provoking the Crusades. His enemies called him the 'Mad Caliph' but he enhanced Cairo's reputation as a centre of civilisation. Said Syeed Ali, 'When Europe was still in the dark ages, Ismailis had already built colleges and public libraries throughout their empire.' The gowns worn in English universities are copies of the Arabic Khala, first introduced

in Fatimid colleges. In this period Ibn Yunis invented the pendulum, whilst other scholars greatly advanced medicine and other sciences. Hakim was murdered in A.D. 1020 but the Druzes believe that he will reappear one day.

His grandson, al-Mustansir, was only seven years when he assumed the mantle of the Caliph. No Imam in Ismaili history reigned as long as he—from 1035 to 1095—until nearly a thousand years later when the Aga Khan's grandfather improved on the record. In the wake of al-Mustansir's death, the succession was again disputed. The military opposed his elder son, Nizar, and supported the younger brother, Mustealli, whom the late Imam was said to have chosen by *nass* with his dying breath. Nizar was forced to flee but was captured by Mustealli's men who took him back to Cairo where he died in prison. It was put about that he left no heir, and one group of Shias, the Bohras, recognised Mustealli as Imam. They remained loyal to the line until his grandson became another 'last living Imam' whom the Bohras believe to be in concealment.

The main body of Ismailis acknowledged Nizar as their nineteenth Imam. Nizar's son Hadi, Ismaili sources have since shown, was arrested with his father but escaped and was hidden in Iraq—whereby hangs the tale of Hasan-i-Sabbah, one of the most fascinating figures of the epoch. Son of a Twelver Shi'ite from Kufa, Hasan was born around A.D. 1050, brought up at Rayy (Teheran) and became a convert to Ismailism. Around the time when William the Conqueror fought the Battle of Hastings, Hasan swore allegiance to the Imam of the Ismailis and decided to discover the Koran's innermost meaning at the fountainhead of Ismaili knowledge.

One of his fellow students was Omar Khayyám, another Nizam al-Mulk who fell out with him and produced a malicious account of his life and activities which Edward Fitzgerald quotes in the preface of his translation of *The Rubá'iyát*. Hasan was supposed to have become 'the head of the Persian sect of Ismailians, a party of fanatics who had long murmured in obscurity but rose to an evil eminence under the guidance of his strong and evil will', and to have seized the Castle of Alamut in the Province of Rudbar south of the Caspian Sea. Known to the Crusaders as 'The Old Man of the Mountain', Hasan was said to have spread terror through the Mohammedan world and left behind the word 'Assassin' as his dark memorial—it

is supposed to be derived either from hashish (opiate of hemp leaf, the Indian *bhang*) with which his followers maddened themselves to a sullen pitch of oriental desperation, or from Hasan's name.

No Ismaili would accept this story. Hasan-i-Sabah was neither the head of the Ismailis nor was he an Imam. After completing his studies he went out to spread a purist version of Fatimid philosophy in Persia and Syria, recruiting many followers. He finally chose the mountain-top fortress of Alamut ('Eagle's Nest') as a base and in the thirty-five years which remained of his life never set foot outside Alamut. Much of his time was devoted to study in his library, a treasure house of contemporary knowledge. He wrote several works, some of which have survived, but was not only one of the most erudite men of his time but a forceful guardian of Ismaili security and stern upholder of the religious laws whose missionaries made many converts and whose troops established a network of mountain fortresses controlling the whole region. Sunni caliphs and Seljuq sultans tried to break his hold in a protracted struggle in which so many of his men were imprisoned and executed, mutilated and massacred, that towers were built of Ismaili skulls. The Grand Master of Alamut retaliated no less ferociously, earning a reputation for severity and stealth which descended to his successors and rubbed off on all Ismailis.

Because he could not match his enemies in numbers, Hasan-i-Sabbah employed the dagger against the sword relying on a small force of self-sacrificing, death-defying *fiḍa'is* (devotees). Although Muslims were not permitted to take alcohol, his enemies said that Hasan recruited his devotees with the help of intoxicating liquor and drugs which induced hallucinations of Paradise, and is supposed to have promised them that, if they lost their lives in his service, the pleasures of Paradise would be theirs for ever. They became known as *hashishiyyum*, hashish-takers or 'assassins', and the evil association still clings to Ismailis.

In Hasan's time fear of the Assassins was fully justified. So totally did he command the loyalty of the *fiḍa'is* that, to demonstrate it to a visiting foreign potentate, he ordered two of them to jump from a high rock. They obeyed and jumped to their death. The first victim of a *fiḍa'i's* dagger was Nizam al-Mulk, who was killed on his way back from the palace to the quarters of his women. Using the threat



of assassination as a psychological weapon, Hasan instructed a *fida'i* to enter an enemy commander's tent under cover of night and stick a dagger into the ground near where he slept. A message attached to the dagger told the enemy leader that he would be dead had the Grand Master of Alamut willed it. Next day the enemy withdrew.

Assassination developed into a highly effective instrument of war and the harvest of lives Hasan's men gathered was rich in quality and quantity. His successors continued the practice. It was into this siege atmosphere of fanatical Ismaili devotees that the new Imam was said to have been taken after Nizar's death. But records are confused and it is uncertain whether Imam Hadi, whom Ismailis regard as Nizar's successor, was his son or his grandson. One account speaks of a pregnant wife of Nizar's son who reached Alamut where she gave birth to the new Imam.

Controversy over this incident has never quite died down. According to one theory the direct line of succession from the Prophet and Hazrat Ali was broken at this stage, and Hasan i-Sabbah became the new Imam of the Ismailis, which would make the current Aga Khan his descendant. An Austrian historian, J. von Hammer-Purgstall, referred to the 'hereditary' Grand Master of Alamut, but Marco Polo who passed through the region on his return from China described the 'Old Man of the Mountain' as an 'elected chief' and seems to be borne out by the story of Hasan ordering the execution of his two sons—one for drinking wine, the other for disobedience—to prove that his rule was not inspired by selfish motives or dynastic plans.

Indeed, when he died at the age of ninety, he left no natural heir and was succeeded by Kiya Buzurg-Umnid, one of his military commanders. Eventually, Buzurg's heir, Mohammed, became the Grand Master of Alamut while Hadi, Nizar's successor as Ismaili Imam, was succeeded by his son, who in turn handed the Imamate down to his son, Hasan Zakaresalam, who became Imam Number Twenty-Three and the central figure in a new argument about the Aga Khan's genealogy.

According to one account Hasan's father made his position clear and said: 'I am not the Imam but one of his *dais*.' He punished those who accepted his son Hasan Zakaresalam as Imam but, after

his death in 1162, Hasan succeeded him. It so happens that 1162 was also the year of the Imam's death and Ismaili records show that Hasan Zakaresalam's Imamatus started in 1162. Professor Bernard Lewis quotes him as saying that he was outwardly known as the grandson of Buzurg-Umid but in esoteric reality was the Imam, the son of the previous Imam of the line of Nizar: 'It is possible,' says Professor Lewis, 'that, as some have argued, Hasan was not claiming physical descent from Nizar . . . but a kind of spiritual filiation.'

The issue was publicly ventilated in 1866 in the High Court of Bombay in the famous 'Khoja Case' in which the descent of Aga Khan I was the central issue. In his summing up the Judge, Sir Joseph Arnould, said he would not attempt to clear up the obscurity of an Asiatic pedigree, a task which even Gibbon gave up as hopeless. Ismaili scholars simply say that Hadi was Imam Nizar's son and that he and his successors lived and worked in Alamut as Imams until Imam Zakaresalam also became Grand Master. Claims by outsiders to be the 'Imam of the time' were frequent and the confusion on this and other occasions was probably deliberately created by orthodox Sunnis to damage the Ismaili cause. Ismailis have no doubt that the Aga Khan's family tree remained intact.

The line became easier to follow although allegiances and policies continued to change frequently. First, the liberal trend was reversed and one Imam was said to have made contact with the hated Caliphs of Baghdad, to have removed Ismaili tracts from Alamut and burnt them, but he may well have practised *taqiya*. Another Imam assumed office at the age of nine and Sunni historians liken him to the Mad Caliph: 'This child,' wrote Juvayni, 'was overcome with the disease of melancholia. Theft, highway robbery and assault were daily occurrences in his kingdom. And when these things had passed all bounds, his life, wife, children, home, kingdom and wealth were forfeited to that madness and insanity.'

Yet Alamut, like Cairo under the Fatimids, was a centre of learning and attracted many foreign scholars. Alas, the time was fast approaching when neither dagger nor learning could save the 'Eagle's Nest' from disaster. One Imam was poisoned by his chief adviser in 1255, and his son, Ruknuddin Khurshah, became the last Ismaili Imam to wield territorial as well as spiritual power in

his own right. The Mongols under Genghis Khan's grandson, Hulegu, attacked the Ismaili strongholds and, though the Imam tried to rally all Muslims and come to terms with the enemy, Alamut was occupied by the Mongols who burnt down the castle and razed the ruins to the ground. Devout Ismailis rescued as many of the precious old books and manuscripts as they could carry away but the bulk of the library was destroyed. Thousands of Ismailis were massacred and the Imam only just succeeded in sending his son to safety with relatives in Persia before he, too, was murdered.

The temporal power of the Ismailis was broken but, sustained by their faith in God's guidance through their Imam, they managed to survive as a religious community. The Mongols moved on and sacked Baghdad and killed the Caliph with some eighty thousand of his people. After five hundred years the rule of the Abbasides was broken at the same time as the rule of the Ismailis whom they had fought throughout. Alamut has been a heap of ruins ever since: 'Although by this utter overthrow,' said the Judge in the Khoja Case, 'in which men, women and children were unsparingly put to the edge of the sword, the Assassins of Alamut ceased to be a terror to Asia, yet the race of the Ismailis still survives in Persia and the hereditary succession of their unrevealed Imams is traced in unbroken line down to the Aga Khan.'

In a fiercely hostile world *taqiya* disguised Ismaili activities and hid the identity of the Imams even though, in the sixteenth century, the Shia faith became Persia's official religion and persecution of the Ismailis ceased. Without revealing their position as spiritual leaders of the Ismailis, Imams became prominent in Persian affairs. Ismaili records lift a little of the secrecy. They trace one Imam to Anjudan in Kashan, a hundred miles south of Teheran. Like his successors, against all odds and even while practising dissimulation, he continued to proselytise and send out *dais* to spread the faith.

The missionaries' technique was to 'accept' the creed of the people they wanted to convert and to master their languages—some of the finest Ismaili poetry was written by missionaries in their adopted tongues—before proceeding to break down rival beliefs and to substitute, step by step, their own credo. Considering the circumstances, they were amazingly successful. Under Imam Shah Islam Shah (1370-1424)—eighteen generations ahead of Karim Aga

Khan—the great *dais* Pir Sadruddin went to India where he converted several Hindu tribes to the Ismaili faith. The new Ismailis called themselves Khojas or 'honourable converts'.

A jealously guarded Ismaili book in Gujerati records details of the life and work of the Imams who led a double existence as clandestine religious leaders of a secret sect and prominent personalities in the existing social order. In the meantime the Shia faith was gaining ground in Persia and in the eighteenth century we find the Aga Khan's ancestors once more without disguise or camouflage on the stage of history.

### CHAPTER III

*Taqiya* played havoc with the recorded history of Ismaili Imams and their followers, and outsiders never knew who was who. One of the Aga Khan's ancestors, Imam Nizar Ali Shah (1585-1629), seems to have carried the practice farther than most when he joined forces with Nadir Shah of Persia who was Turkish by race and a Sunni and hostile to the 'Shia heresy'. They fought side by side in many campaigns. By 1730, Ismaili Imams were firmly established as members of the Persian hierarchy. One, Abul Hasan Ali, was Viceroy of Kirman Province and Governor of Kuhk and later retired to his huge estates at Mahallat from which he and his descendants took the title 'Lords of Mahallat'.

His son Khalilullah, who was close to Fath-Ali Shah, second Kajar Sultan of Persia, established his Darkhana (current residence) at Yezd and followers came from the Ganges and the Indus to get his blessing and pay their religious dues. When Khalilullah was murdered by a fanatical mullah, the Shah, mindful of the Ismaili reputation, did not want to be held responsible. He punished the assailants severely and conferred large possessions on the murdered man's son, Shah Hasan Ali Shah, who became the next Imam. He even gave him the hand of his daughter in marriage. The house of the Prophet of Islam was joined with the Persian dynasty which went on to rule until 1925.

A wealthy, charming and impressive young man, his handsome face framed in a full black beard, the Imam became his royal father-in-law's favourite but aroused a good deal of jealousy at court. He was known by the pet name of Aga Khan (Great Chief) which he adopted as his hereditary title. In the civil war which broke out after Shah Fath-Ali's death in 1834—few oriental rulers died with-

out causing a war of succession—Aga Khan sided with the old Shah's grandson Muhammad who ascended the throne and appointed him commander-in-chief. He liberated Kirman which had gone over to a rival claimant, and the Persian government promised to refund the cost of the campaign. Then he returned to his estates to lead the life of a wealthy prince, entertaining and hunting in grand style. But he was very much the Imam of the Ismailis.

For the privilege of setting eyes on him or kissing his hands, no sacrifice was too great for loyal followers who travelled thousands of miles by sea and land to his Darkhana. In 1829, a hundred or more Khojas from India spent £500 a head—a fantastic sum at the time—on the trip but had the satisfaction of seeing the Imam twelve times in a few weeks while they camped in the grounds of his palace. He conferred titles on deserving Ismailis and his successors have continued the practice and created a religious hierarchy of *kamariis* (treasurers) and *mukhis* (clerics), *aitmadis* (counsellors) and *vazirs* (in East Africa, *vazir*, and count).

Little was heard of him until the year 1838 when an officer of lowly origin, encouraged by Shah Muhammad's Prime Minister, demanded his daughter, Shah Fath-Ali's grand-daughter, as wife for his son. It was a preposterous idea and a wounding personal insult. Since the Prime Minister also refused to pay the money owing for the Kirman campaign, the Aga Khan decided to avenge the insult and get his money at the same time. According to a contemporary account, he 'raised the standard of revolt', proclaimed an independent government at Kirman and marched his men against the capital.

Before he could get very far, he was captured and taken to Teheran where he might have languished in prison for life had his wife not sent their young son—the great-grandfather of Karim Aga Khan—to court to recite poems in praise of forgiveness before the Shah who was so moved that he set the Aga Khan free. But the Prime Minister soon provoked him into another open rebellion and sent another army against him. Narrowly escaping capture for a second time, a rearguard action took the Aga Khan across the border into Afghanistan which was still at war with Britain.

He offered his services to the British who accepted and promised to help him regain his Persian possessions. The records speak

highly of the heroism and diplomatic skill of the 'Persian Prince'. A mutiny of native troops—the Aga Khan dealt with the situation. British officers held prisoner—the Aga Khan's men smuggled letters in and out of prison. The city of Herat in danger—the Aga Khan to the rescue. The Mirs suspicious—the Aga Khan establishing contact with the British.

The British General Sir Charles Napier was fulsome in his praise: 'I have sent the Persian Prince Aga Khan to Jarrack, on the right bank of the Indus,' he wrote on one occasion—Jarrack was the Aga Khan's first Darkhana on the sub-continent and the scene of his first encounter with the Baluchis who killed seventy-two of his followers including the *mukhi* who died saving their leader's life. 'His influence is great,' General Napier continued, 'and he will with his own followers secure our communications with Karachi.' In a private letter, some time later, General Napier explained: 'The old Persian Prince is my great crony here, living not under my care but paid by me £2,000 a year. He is a God . . . I speak truly when saying that his followers do not and dare not refuse him any favour . . . he could kill me if he pleased, has only to say the word and one of his people can do the job in a twinkling and go straight to heaven for the same. He is too shrewd a man for that, however.'

The Aga Khan was gratified when his help in the Afghan war was recognised: 'As a reward for my services,' he wrote, 'the General gave me presents. He further assigned to me the territory of Moola Rusheed yielding an income of forty thousand rupees.' When the British attacked Sind, the Aga Khan led his own cavalry regiment in the field by their side. The campaign ended with the conquest of Sind and the Viceroy, Lord Ellenborough, sent his famous punning telegram to Whitehall: 'Peccavi' (I have sinned).

Fighting Britain's battles, however gallantly, did not take the Aga Khan closer to recovering his Persian rights and properties. On the contrary, the wheels of history turned, Persia and Britain resolved their quarrel, and the Aga Khan was left in the lurch. The Persians promptly reminded London of an agreement dating back to 1814 and providing for the extradition of Persians hostile to the Persian government which looked like a ready-made noose for the Aga Khan's neck. London seemed impervious to the fate of this loyal ally.

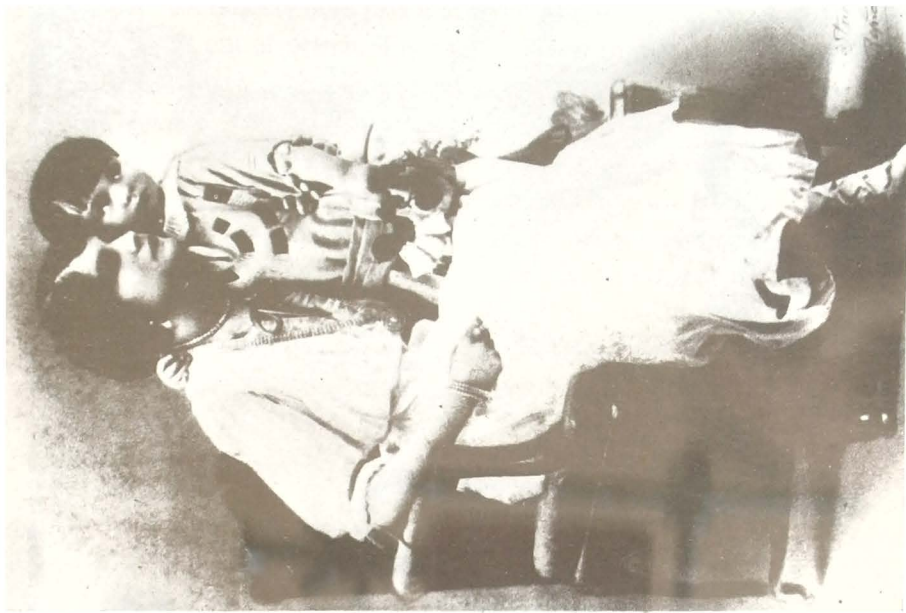


His Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Mahommed Shah, Aga Khan (centre), at the age of eight, when he was installed on the throne of the Imamate in Bombay after being proclaimed as Hazar Imam. (Keystone)





A portrait of the young Aga Khan III.  
(Keystone)



Prince Aly Khan with his mother, Teresa  
Magliano, Aga Khan III's second wife.  
(Keystone)

For the Aga Khan the problem now was how to escape extradition. He wrote innumerable petitions but all they achieved was a British-Persian arrangement to remove him from easy access to Persia. Calcutta was suggested as a safe exile but he protested that he would be alone and without friends and followers. When the British government threatened to stop his pension if he refused to go, he made his way to Bombay where he arrived in 1845 at the head of an imposing regiment of some eight hundred fiery horsemen. Rumour which was probably not far wrong had it that they were all—all eight hundred of them—the Aga Khan's natural sons. A refugee in a foreign land, he was yet received with the homage due to the spiritual head of the strong Khoja community, but if he had hoped to stay he had not reckoned with his Persian enemies.

They were not happy to see him residing at a port from which he could easily cross to Persia and persuaded the British authorities to force him to go to Calcutta. The Superintendent of Mysore Princes was instructed to take him under his care: 'Aga Khan Mahallati is a nobleman of high rank and allied to the royal family of Persia. He is in receipt of a British allowance of 3,000 rupees . . . The President in Council request that you engage provisionally a suitable house for his use . . . His position as regards the Persian government makes it inexpedient to show him any marked distinction but . . . he should be treated with the utmost courtesy and consideration.'

The Aga Khan spent an unhappy time in Calcutta but in 1848 Muhammad Ali Shah died and, though even Lord Palmerston's intervention failed to secure his admission to Persia, he was permitted to return to Bombay which became his main base. With a taste for oriental splendour, he established an imposing residence on Malabar Hill overlooking the sea and installed his family in equally sumptuous and costly houses around him. The affairs of the Khoja community were conducted from Aga Hall, a magnificent palace with separate library and staff quarters, set in fine parkland and enclosed by a high wall. The Aga Khan's Bombay realm occupied an area about half the size of London's Mayfair or a slice of Paris between the Madeleine, the Opéra and Porte d'Iéna. A similar complex came into being in Poona where the family spent part of the year, and in Bangalore.

Apart from his three wives, three sons and three daughters, the Aga Khan also looked after a thousand or more relatives and retainers who had come with him from Persia, married Indian wives and produced children. These devoured a tremendous amount of money but although he complained bitterly about the loss of his Persian estates (and some £20,000 of which he said the Baluchis had robbed him) he was by no means short of funds. As their fathers and fathers' fathers before them, his followers paid *zakat* which was collected by the mukhi and the kamaria. A few years later, the amount he received in this way was stated to be approximately £10,000 a year.

The Aga Khan took his religious duties very seriously, visited the *jamatkhana*, the Ismaili religious centre, on all holy days and led the community in prayer on the anniversary of Hazrat Huseyn's martyrdom, presiding over the ritual distribution of water mixed with the holy dust of Kerbeia. On Saturdays, the community came to kiss hands—it was a united community of small traders with some very rich men among them, strictly organised and observing their own birth, marriage and death ceremonies.

They could also be troublesome. About this time one group of Khojas, some three hundred families, refused to pay *zakat*, an outrageous offence among Ismailis who usually insisted on pressing their contributions on the Imam in the hope of reward in Paradise. The recalcitrant Khojas were expelled from the community, applied for readmission and promised to pay up but defaulted a second time and were again expelled. In the meantime an English court confirmed that the Aga Khan was entitled to *zakat* by precedent and by Muslim law. The conflict caused a lot of bitterness. In the *jamatkhana* of Mahim in 1850, the rival factions clashed and four Khojas died. Nineteen were tried for murder and four of them sentenced to death and hanged.

Such violent interludes cast a rare shadow over the Imam's illustrious establishment. His family travelled widely and his eldest son, Aga Ali Shah, spent much time in Baghdad and Kerbela making up the old family quarrel with the Persian ruling house. A highly intelligent young man, the Aga Khan's heir diligently prepared himself for his future as Imam. Persian and Arab mullahs taught him oriental languages, literature and metaphysics and instructed

him in the esoteric secrets of the Ismaili faith. He passed much of his knowledge to the community and pioneered its educational institutions. A commission on which he worked brought the sect's confusing religious law up to date. Tragedy struck his two sons by his first wife, one of whom died of a chest complaint and the other as a result of fatal injuries when he was thrown by a horse. Their father married a second time but lost his wife and took a third, Nawab Aalia Shamsul Muluk, a grand-daughter of Fath-Ali Shah and daughter of a one-time Persian Minister who spent the last years of his life in meditation.

An intrepid horseman and hunter, Aga Ali Shah was a legend in his own lifetime, the only prince in India who pursued tigers on foot and such a deadly shot that he bagged at least forty in this unorthodox fashion. When the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, came to Aga Hall during his visit to India he could not hear enough about this sensational hunting technique. Pointing to his considerable embonpoint, Aga Ali Shah confessed that it was difficult for him to climb on to a high platform. The Prince of Wales was not much slimmer and understood. He admired Aga Ali Shah's hunting trophies and the Aga Khan's many cups won on the Indian turf.

It was in Bombay that the first Aga Khan started the tradition of racing and breeding which made his grandson, the third Aga Khan, a household word and is carried on by Prince Karim. The earlier Aga Khan's stables housed the world's finest Arabian blood and the stud in the valley of Nejd produced superb animals. No expense was too great to improve the bloodstock; leading trainers and jockeys, mostly English, were engaged. Bombay racecourse was one of the few public places where he showed himself—the stand from which he watched his horses was preserved by Bombay's leading club.

Once more the tranquillity of the community was disturbed by Khojas who claimed to be Sunnis and refused to pay up. The community was so widely dispersed that it was difficult to ascertain who acknowledged the Aga Khan as spiritual leader and who did not, who was paying *zakat* and who was not. In predominantly Sunni areas, Ismailis still practised *taqiya* and it was well-nigh impossible to tell Sunni from Shia. To clear the air the Aga Khan

ordered his followers everywhere to reveal themselves openly as Shia Imami Ismailis. Officially this was the end of *taqiya*. He sent open lists to all communities and asked members to sign their names: ‘. . . so that I may know them.’

The overwhelming majority signed and declared unswerving support for the Imam but the so-called Khoja Reform Party challenged the Aga Khan’s claim to religious leadership and took their case to court. In February 1866, Sir Joseph Arnould began to hear the *cause célèbre* which became known as the Khoja Case. High principles and big amounts were at stake. The Aga Khan’s religious empire was on trial. If he did not cherish washing the community’s dirty linen in public he welcomed the opportunity to put an end to the whispers which caused dissent.

The Khojas asked the court to order the chief defendant, Mohammed Huseyn Husseini, otherwise called Aga Khan, and his two principal fellow defendants (chief *mukhi* and chief *kamaria*) to hand over the property of the Khoja community and vacate their offices. They wanted him to be restrained from interfering in the management of the community and demanded a declaration that he was not entitled to excommunicate them. Their argument was that they were Sunnis and they rejected the Aga Khan’s right to *zakat*. Many side issues were raised and many historical and religious assumptions paraded.

The proceedings lasted twenty-five days after which the Judge settled down to study the mountain of evidence and seek enlightenment in history—in the history of the Aga Khan and the Khojas. When giving his verdict in November 1866, he started out by saying that the crucial points in the case were the Khojas’ spiritual and temporal relations with the ancestors of the Aga Khan and the Aga Khan’s claim that they had, in the long line of hereditary descent, successively been the spiritual chiefs of the Shia Imami Ismailis. The cardinal question was whether the Khojas in their origin as a separate religious community were Sunnis or non-Sunnis, that is Shia Imami Ismailis.

The verdict unequivocally confirmed the Aga Khan as the spiritual head of the Khoja community. Sir Joseph Arnould took the view that their ancestors had been converted to the Ismaili faith, had throughout abided by it, had always been and still were bound by

ties of spiritual allegiance to the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis: 'Mohammed Huseyn Husseini,' the Judge said, 'otherwise Aga Khan, or, as he is more formally styled in official documents, His Highness Aga Khan Mahallati, is the hereditary chief and unrevealed Imam of the Ismailis, the present or living holder of the Imamatus claiming descent in direct line from Ali, the Vicar of God, through the seventh and (according to the Ismaili creed) the last of the Revealed Imams, Ismail, the son of Jafar Sadiq.' He was fully entitled to the customary dues and 'rightfully wielded his formidable powers of mediating sentences of excommunication'. The Ismaili version of the Aga Khan's family history received the court's seal of authenticity but descendants of the Khoja rebels of 1866 have on several occasions, albeit unsuccessfully, tried to revive the old feud and to reverse the Bombay verdict.

The old Aga Khan, well into his seventies, delegated many functions to his son Aga Ali Shah whose third marriage was an exceptionally happy one. Lady Ali Shah was a well-rounded woman with soft good looks and luminous dark eyes hidden behind her yashmak. For an oriental princess, she was open minded, practical, shrewd and interested in public affairs. The couple started their married life at a hilltop palace in Karachi bought from the Maharajah of Kolhabur and renamed 'Honeymoon Lodge'. They had two sons in quick succession both of whom died in infancy. On November 2nd, 1877, at 'Honeymoon Lodge', Lady Ali Shah gave birth to a third baby, a delicate but resilient boy who was named Sultan Mohammed. Karachi took the baby to its heart, his birthplace became known as 'Sultan Tekri' (Sultan Hill) or 'Tekri' for short.

Prince Sultan Mohammed was still a small boy when his father first took him on visits to Ismaili communities and to *jamatkhanas* for prayers and religious ceremonies. One of his earliest memories was of his grandfather, 'an old man, almost blind, seated on a grey Arab horse, peering to watch a line of other horses galloping in training'.

Supported by servants, the baby prince was on a pony by the old man's side. For the fine old Persian aristocrat it was almost the end of the road. His Highness Prince Hasan Shah Mahallati, Aga Khan I, died in April 1881 and was survived by three sons, Aga Ali Shah, Aga Jangi Shah and Aga Akber Shah. After an impressive funeral

he was laid to rest in Hassanabad, a mausoleum in the grounds of his palace. The Shah of Persia sent a warm message of condolence and, following an old Persian tradition, gave the new Imam, Aga Ali Shah, Aga Khan II, a precious robe and the emblem of the Persian crown studded with diamonds which has been handed down to Karim Aga Khan as a treasured family heirloom.

The health of little Prince Sultan Mohammed was so precarious, doctors feared he might not live. He was fussed over by his mother and her servants and the thought that he would one day inherit the Imam was never far from the minds of the people around him. The day came sooner than expected. Aga Ali Shah had been Imam for only four years when he caught a chill hunting and developed pneumonia. He died in Poona in August 1885 and his body was embalmed and taken to Kufa, the Shias' holy place, where he was buried in the same spot as his saintly ancestor Hazrat Ali, the first Imam.

To the boy of eight who now became the forty-eighth Imam and Aga Khan III the death of his father was 'the first big emotional and spiritual crisis of my life'. An historic photograph shows him at his installation on the *Gadi* of Imams, a divan-like throne, surrounded by the bearded, turbaned Ismaili nobles. In his smart *sherwani* and astrakhan hat, he looked solemn but completely self-assured among the figures of a passing age. Like other Imams before him, he mourned the end of a carefree childhood. Once more in Ismaili history, but in a more enlightened period, a little boy was suddenly credited with mystical powers and unusual wisdom and became the subject of deep veneration.

His early contacts with the English in India served as useful checks and balances. Lady Dufferin, the Viceroy's wife, took an interest in him, and Lord Reay, Governor of Bombay, and his wife asked him to tea. An English tutor, Mr Kenny stimulated his interest in 'Eng. Lit.' (Shakespeare, Milton, Macaulay, Scott) and other mentors, religious instructors and governesses belaboured him with French, Arabic, Urdu, Gujerati, Persian literature (Hafiz and Omar Khayyám became his favourites), history and the philosophy of the faith of which he was now the supreme arbiter. He was constantly exhorted to think good thoughts, do good deeds, speak good words—and tried hard to oblige.

Although acutely short-sighted, he was forced to practise calli-

graphy in a cruel daily discipline which was plain torture and would have broken a less indomitable spirit ('I cannot understand that I did not die'). Before he was much older, theology, science, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry and mechanics were added to his curriculum laying the foundations of his encyclopaedic knowledge which he constantly improved by asking questions of everybody about everything.

Sport was not his strong suit. Unlike other Indian princes, he never took up cricket but liked hockey and eventually introduced the sport to India. In later years he went fox- or jackal-hunting in a desultory way. Spectator sports like horse-racing were more to his taste. When his mother got rid of her late husband's hawks and hounds he was not particularly concerned but the family's racing establishment, though reduced from eighty to thirty horses, was still good enough for his colours—red and green, the colours of the Ismaili flag—to show up well on the Indian turf. He was, of course, very rich but the British government made him an allowance of a thousand rupees a year and, when he was nine years old, Queen Victoria conferred on him the title 'Highness' as, some seventy years later, Queen Elizabeth II honoured his grandson Karim (same title, no pension).

The Aga Khan's early life was dominated by the remarkable Lady Ali Shah who frequently ordered his bottom to be spanked. 'My mother,' he said, 'is the only woman of whom I have ever been afraid.' She made the oriental attitude to women look rather foolish and it was with her in mind that he campaigned for the emancipation of Indian women. Social advancement and happiness, he came to think, were greatest where women were least debarred by artificial barriers and narrow prejudices. He ordered Ismaili women to do away with the veil and come out of purdah, 'the imprisonment of half the nation'. Orthodox Muslims reproached him but he was simply ahead of his time.

In the manner of Indian princes, the family moved with the seasons from Bombay to Poona to Mahabaleshwar and back to Bombay. Lady Ali Shah managed the boy's fortune and made excellent investments. She bought properties in Ismaili centres in India and Africa at favourable prices which later enabled the Aga Khan to stay at his own palaces whenever he visited his community.



Although he was under no legal obligation to support them, his relatives not only lived in houses he owned but also received allowances from him that were taken so much for granted that an angry family wrangle in the courts came about as a result. People living on his estates were fed at his expense, a practice his grandfather had started.

At the age of sixteen, the Imam took charge of his own affairs but his mother continued to keep an eye on his extensive properties and to look after the community. The management of his racing establishment he shared with Aga Shamsuddin, his cousin and closest friend, and some of their horses did extremely well, winning the Nizam's Gold Cup, the most important race in western India, four times in succession. In spite of his youth, western India's Muslims chose him to present their address on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. At the same time he handed over his own and the community's homage in a solid gold casket in the shape of an elephant. His address assured the Queen that he was as loyal to the English throne as his grandfather, who had fought for it on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Sind.

The young Imam had his own battles to fight. While on a pilgrimage to Jeddah, Uncle Aga Shah and his son were murdered and word was put around that the culprits were *fidai's*, as fanatically devoted to the Aga Khan as those of Alamut had been to the Old Man of the Mountain. Lady Ali Shah was said to be at the head of Moto Punth, a secret Ismaili society not unlike Hasan-i-Sabbah's 'Assassins'. Aga Jangi Shah's murderers were arrested but when they were found poisoned in their cells before they could be brought to trial, it was announced that they had committed suicide. Speculation was rife. Some said they had been murdered on the Aga Khan's orders so they could not incriminate him.

The Aga Khan's health suffered as a result of the tragedy but as soon as he was fit to travel he went on a tour of Muslim centres in the course of which he visited the Anglo-Muslim College of Aligarh and was deeply impressed by its founder, Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan, and the students who shared his deep sense of Muslim tradition and destiny. How wonderful if Aligarh could become a full university to bring up a generation of young leaders and advance the cause of Islam. Here was a chance to follow in the footsteps of his ancestor

who had founded al-Azhar, the first Muslim university, which greatly appealed to the young Aga Khan. He decided to put up money for the cause and persuaded wealthy friends to contribute. It was a long struggle but he missed no opportunity to plead for this cause and when Aligarh finally became a university two dozen years later, it was more to Muslims than a seat of learning. In retrospect it was recognised as the intellectual cradle of independent Pakistan and the Aga Khan's enthusiasm and support which made it possible earned him a place among Pakistan's founding fathers.

When he returned to Bombay he found—a bride. Gallantly the Aga Khan always insisted that he had been deeply in love with his cousin Shahzadi, daughter of the murdered Aga Jangi Shah and sister of Aga Shamsuddin. But in spite of his protestations, it looked suspiciously as if Lady Ali Shah had arranged her son's marriage so as to silence the rumour that either she or he was responsible for the death of the bride's father. As Aga Shamsruddin was also taking a wife, a spectacular double marriage was arranged.

The nuptials were celebrated with customary ritual and extravagant hospitality. Surrounded by friends and relatives and dressed in precious robes, the two bridegrooms and their brides sat side by side on a platform in the grounds of the palace. Thousands of guests looked on as the *mukhi* chanted his prayers and, the religious formalities completed, an unending line of Indian princes, British dignitaries and Ismaili delegations offered congratulations. For sixteen days consecutively guests were treated to delicacies and (non-alcoholic) drinks and, in the atmosphere of a joyous élite fair-ground, entertained with music, swordsmen's dances and performances from acrobats and tumblers. The double wedding costs were more than £50,000, in those days a gigantic sum.

But life in Bombay was not all glitter and gold. When violent communal rioting broke out, the Aga Khan ordered his followers not to join in attacks on Hindus, even offering Hindus refuge on his estate. When India was hit by famine and thousands of his followers became destitute, he supplied them with seeds, cattle and tools enabling many to start a new life. They camped at Hassanabad and were fed from his kitchens. From his own pocket he put up half a million rupees to build Yarovda Palace in Poona for no other purpose than to provide employment for his followers.

After the famine, the bubonic plague. Khojas living in the worst hit part of Bombay refused to be inoculated. To break down their prejudice, the Aga Khan gave his bungalow to the medical authorities as a laboratory and allowed himself to be inoculated not once but several times to set an example. (Similarly, he took a sympathetic interest in the Untouchables, many of whom were converted to the Ismaili faith, educated at his expense and given employment—long before Mahatma Gandhi took up their cause.)

The young Ismaili leader had little time to attend to his own problems. Although reluctant to admit it to himself, his marriage was not a success. The wedding bells—and the Reform Party's campaign—had hardly died down when he exchanged his oriental silk robes for a well-cut lounge suit and went on a visit to Europe without Shahzadi. The change of clothes and the change of climate were meaningful. His first trip overseas turned out to be more than a voyage of discovery. It was a giant stride from the nineteenth towards the twentieth century, from the battlefields of the East to the parquet floors of the West, a plunge into another world which he would soon make his own.

Accompanied by a retinue of servants he sailed from Bombay to Marseilles. The Côte d'Azur was the destination of this very presentable, round-faced young man with a dark drooping moustache and short-sighted eyes which disguised a deceptively quick mind. Not very tall and with an early hint of corpulence, he did not look very prepossessing but already had a quality best described as 'personality'. In these strange surroundings he seemed at first shy and reticent but the tails and frock coat, patent leather shoes and spats, sashes and decorations in his luggage suggested the social landscape for which he was heading.

In the high season of 1898, the man who later came to own some of the Riviera's finest villas, found it difficult to get rooms. Queen Victoria was at Cimiez, Austria's Emperor Franz Josef at Cap Martin. There were so many Balkan kings, Russian granddukes and German princes about, the newcomer was 'dazzled and awed'. But people were not unmindful of his status in his own world. Apartments were found for him at Queen Victoria's hotel and he was thrilled to watch her come and go and noticed the Indian servants in attendance.

From the Riviera to Paris where he saw Sarah Bernhardt at the Comédie Française, visited the Opéra and lunched at the Jockey Club. He was incognito and discretion covered the more mundane pleasures of a young man on his first visit to Paris. But when he moved on to London, it was as 'His Highness, the Aga Khan'. The Duke of Connaught welcomed him on behalf of the Queen and presented an invitation to meet her and spend the night at Windsor Castle. At the dinner in his honour he was seated on the Queen's right and noticed that she had the German habit of frequently inserting 'so' (pronounced 'tzo') in her conversation. He thought her Indian servants inferior to his own. The Prince of Wales nominated him for the Marlborough Club—fifty years later, he was fond of saying, he and the hall porter were the club's oldest inhabitants.

His successes as an owner and breeder of racehorses in India were, of course, well known. Queen Victoria gave him a Royal Household badge for the enclosure at Ascot race-course and all her successors bestowed the same privilege on him as 'a friend of the family'. When he went to register his colours he found that this had already been done as a courtesy by one of his English racing friends. The colours turned out to be not green and red (the Fatimid colours), which were not available, but green and chocolate instead. They became so successful that he never changed them although elsewhere his horses raced under green and red colours which his son adopted when they became free.

The lure of racing was strong and the Aga Khan attended the exciting Derby which was won by the hundred to one outsider Jeddah; he was on the winner but had only managed to get sixty-six to one. He told the Duke of Connaught that he hoped to win the Derby one day but could not have expected in his wildest dreams that he would win the world's greatest classic race five times. The London Season over, he visited Paris, Geneva, Lausanne, Florence and Vienna. It would have been a perfect summer had there not been news from India with an ominously familiar ring—Hashim Shah, a cousin, had been killed by a steward in his own house in Poona. One saving grace—the murder was prompted by a personal grudge and had no religious significance.

Lawlessness and violence in his own back-yard would have to be

dealt with firmly, he decided, as he travelled back to India and Malabar Hill—but not to his wife. Only the splendid oriental isolation in which they lived disguised the failure of his marriage. Though living under the same roof and maintaining appearances, he and Begum Shahzadi drifted apart, she—according to him—‘to a private purgatory of resentment and reproach’, he to the social round and his duties as a religious leader. He played a little golf and went racing. The English in India liked him, East and West met in perfect harmony. His working day at his main office at Aga Hall was occupied with the affairs of the Khoja community.

The feudal establishment he had inherited was becoming quite insupportable. The number of descendants of his grandfather’s horsemen and of Ismaili pilgrims who had stayed behind as retainers had vastly increased and included whole families from Central Asia, Turkistan, Sinkiang, Bokhara, Afghanistan and Africa. The bigger they grew, the smaller were their allowances from the Aga Khan which were split so many ways that each received only a pittance. Some of them made a little money on the side as hawkers, racing tipsters and odd-job men but the majority just idled. They were well fed (by the Aga Khan) but unruly and mischievous and, though he was anxious to get rid of them, once let loose on Bombay as vagrants, they were liable to become a public danger.

It took many months to liquidate this embarrassing heritage of a turbulent phase in Ismaili history. In the end the Aga Khan paid lump sums to some and sent them packing. Others were helped to start new careers away from Bombay and some who were not even Indian citizens were deported. He provided funds to set up schools for children who stayed behind and many of them went on to universities and became lawyers, doctors and civil servants. The purge did not completely deprive the Aga Khan of servants. When it was over he still employed about a thousand at his various residences.

His next trip was to Africa where Indians worked and traded much as the Irish in England and the United States. Many were Hindus—Gandhi was practising law in South Africa in the 1890s—but thousands who had settled in East Africa were Muslims and Ismailis, many of them rich and prominent in public life and politics. Without help from Indians, explorers could not have

mounted some of their expeditions—Tharia Topan, who became the leader of Ismailis in East Africa, saved the life of the famous H. M. Stanley who, in November 1871, found Dr David Livingstone at Uijiji, Lake Tanganyika: ‘One of the honestest among men, white or black, red or yellow,’ Stanley wrote, ‘is a Mohammedan Hindi called Topan . . . among the Europeans at Zanzibar he has become a proverb for honesty and strict business integrity. He is enormously wealthy, owns several ships and dhows, and is a prominent man in the councils of the Ruler of Zanzibar’—Zanzibar was the Ismaili headquarters in Africa.

Sir Tharia—he was knighted by Queen Victoria—received the young Aga Khan on his arrival and introduced him to the community. (Sir Tharia, incidentally, was typical of the cross-fertilisation of Ismaili talent between India and Africa. When Pakistan became independent in 1947, descendants of many East African Indians returned to the sub-continent, and Sir Tharia’s own great-grandson, Dr Habib Patel, a leading member of Pakistan’s medical profession, now heads the extensive Ismaili health organisation in Karachi.) For Ismailis it was a tremendous occasion. Because they had not as yet built their big *jamatkhanas*, in most of their homes one room or at least a corner was set aside for worship. Now their veneration concentrated on the supreme pontiff to whom they looked for guidance:

‘I was staying in Bagamoyo in August of 1899,’ was how Otto Mahnke, a former German colonial official described the occasion, ‘when His Highness the Aga Khan set foot on the African continent for the first time. His Highness arrived in his own yacht which was anchored about four miles from the shore. Thousands of Indians, natives and also Europeans were waiting on the beach to see His Highness and welcome him . . . The enthusiasm and the veneration for His Highness on his arrival as well as during his whole stay were tremendous . . . Europeans, too, received him with great honour and an Indian from Zanzibar sent a cab with a white horse so that His Highness might move about with great speed. Ovations of the highest veneration took place everywhere but as soon as His Highness gave an almost imperceptible sign to say a few words absolute silence reigned.’

Followers crowded around him to catch his *didar* (glance), feel

the touch of his hand, get his blessing and listen to his every word. They told him their personal and business problems and firmly believed that a wave of his hand could make their difficulties disappear. Ismailis in Zanzibar were involved in an angry dispute over valuable real estate which the natives claimed. He ordered his people to compromise—all his life he believed in compromise. At Dar-es-Salaam there was ill-feeling between Ismailis and Germans who suspected them of hostile activities. The young Aga Khan managed to smooth out the differences but his first official contact with the Germans did not endear them to him and prejudiced him for decades to come. Non-Ismaili Indians were impressed and he made his first converts whose descendants became Prince Karim's most loyal followers.

On his first visit to Cairo, he was struck by the all-pervading presence of the English, who were as powerful as his Fatimid ancestors of yore. The city seemed like another Poona or Simla, Egypt as much a citadel of British supremacy as India. Such was British colonial snobbery that Egyptians were barred from the Gezira Club and similar social centres. A more leisurely precursor of the jet set of which his grandson was a prominent member two generations later, the Aga Khan returned to Bombay but, a week later, was already on his way to Burma to visit his followers there. Soon he was back in Europe once more.

In Paris he spent some time with his kinsman, Persia's Shah Muzaffir ud-Din but there was little love lost between them. The Aga Khan was shocked by the Shah's behaviour: 'Grossly ignorant, capricious, extravagant,' he called him. The Shah took fright when Monsieur and Madame Curie showed him a glowing piece of radium in a dark cellar: 'He began to scream and shout and run about the room,' the Aga Khan recalled, 'He raved and ranted and accused the Curies of trying to murder him.'

In Berlin, the Kaiser gripped the young Indian leader's hand firmly with his powerful right which compensated for a withered left arm. His next stop was Turkey where he was received by Sultan Abdul Hamid, the Terrible. Sunni and Shia in amicable discussion was an unusual ecumenical occasion. To see Hamid heavily made up, lips rouged, beard died black, surprised the visitor, who knew the Sultan to be a virile man and father of many children.

He also knew of Abdul Hamid's pathological fear of assassination which accounted for the heavy armour under his enormous great-coat. The terrible Abdul Hamid smoked incessantly which did not endear him to the non-smoking Aga. The meeting was not a success—the Aga Khan later blamed the Sultan's 'disastrous reign' for Turkey joining the wrong side in the First World War.

Czar Nicholas of Russia and the Emperor of Japan were the next additions to his growing collection of crowned heads. But in the following year he lost the dearest of them, Queen Victoria, who had launched him on his progress through the corridors of royal power. The Queen was dead, long live the King! In spite of the big difference in their ages, King Edward VII and the Aga Khan were very much birds of a feather with similar interests and many mutual friends. Mayfair gossip obscured his real interests. The Aga Khan with a beautiful woman was news, the Aga Khan at the races a social event and the Aga Khan at a party a rewarding experience. But his questing mind was largely stimulated by artists, lawyers, surgeons, politicians—mainly politicians. His friendships with kings and statesmen gave him a healthy appetite for politics. Unlike his ancestors, he had no territorial power but he had a vested interest in India, in an India where Muslim and Hindu could live in communal peace. Although the trend was against him, he worked hard to ward off the gathering storm.

The Viceroy, Lord Curzon, offered him a seat on the Legislative Council in Bombay which gave him the opportunity he had been looking for. By far the youngest member, he quickly made friends with two outstanding colleagues, Lord Kitchener (whom he helped with his recruiting campaign) and Mr G. K. Gokhale, the biggest political figure among pre-Gandhi Hindus. With Muslim-Hindu relations under constant discussion, the Aga Khan, an ardent advocate of Muslim rights, was scathing about the Indian Congress Party which he thought to be blind to Muslim claims. For him, the basic issue was education, education, education. Education, he told all who would listen, was the key to a rewarding life; illiteracy the root cause of poverty and disease. If he could not carry all Muslims with him, among Ismailis his word was law. He made education the main plank of Ismaili development and it became the pillar of Ismaili success.



In England, the following summer, the King consulted him about the Prince of Wales's forthcoming Indian tour. On this visit he went to see the aged and ailing Florence Nightingale and was annoyed when Lytton Strachey's account of their conversation made it look as if they had talked at cross purposes—he about God and Florence Nightingale about sanitation. Strachey quoted Miss Nightingale as saying of the Aga Khan: 'A most interesting man but you could never teach him sanitation.' Actually the Aga Khan had asked her serious questions about the human condition and they discussed the topic, he said 'with the gravity with which I had expounded it'.

Around that time he first met 'Whimsical Walker'—Colonel Hall Walker (later Lord Wavertree)—owner of a big stud in Ireland on whose help and advice on racing he came to rely. Their meeting foreshadowed the time, still some fifteen years distant, when the Aga Khan dominated the English turf. One of the first Aga Khan anecdotes which began to circulate, some true, some invented, all reflecting his wit and humanity, was about a man who asked how someone regarded by his followers as God could spend so much time at the races: 'And why should not God go racing?' was the Aga Khan's retort. He was seen drinking wine and was asked whether this was not a sin for a Muslim and was credited with the classic answer: 'I am so holy that when I touch wine it turns to water.'

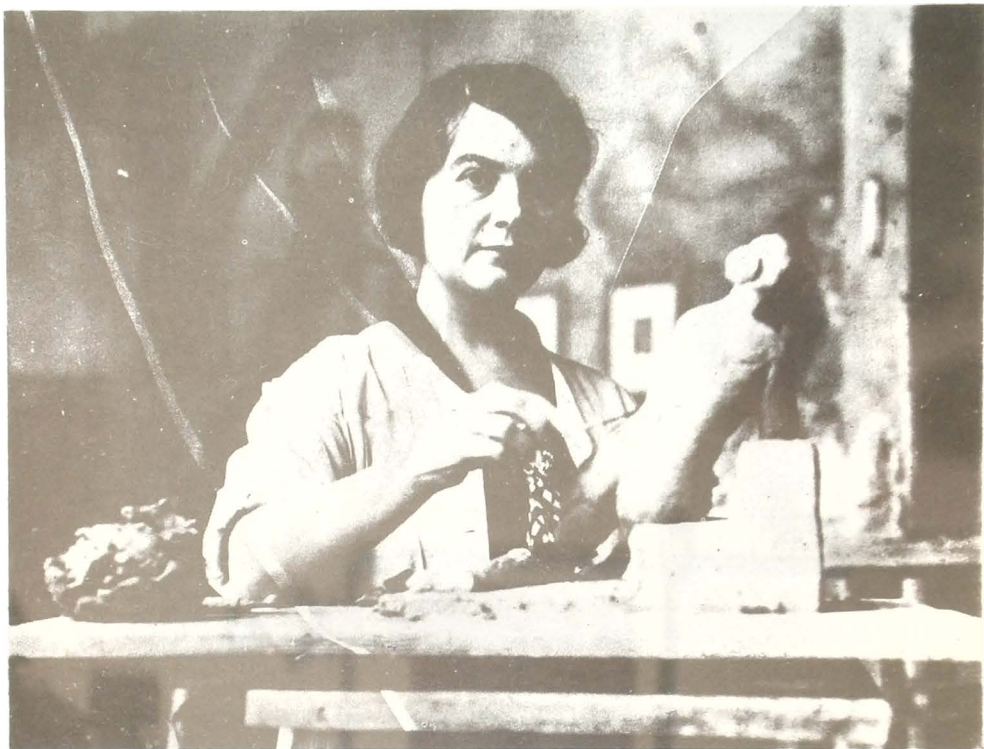
By this time the Côte d'Azur to him was home from home. His interest in pretty women was apparent and he was seen enjoying life to the full. But his mind was on more weighty matters. Africa staked a claim on his other life and his duties as a religious leader.



**Aga Khan III and Begum Andrée at Epsom in 1938.**  
*(Radio Times Hulton Picture Library)*



**Aga Khan III with his fourth wife, Yvette Labrousse, in Zürich, 1945.**  
*(Keystone)*



Teresa Magliano.  
(*Radio Times Hulton Picture Library*)



Aga Khan III and his third wife, Mlle Carron (Begum Andrée), at their wedding  
in 1929. (*Keystone*)

## CHAPTER IV

**'WHEREAS the Holy Prophet (May Peace be upon Him) is the last Prophet of Allah,**

**'AND WHEREAS Hazrat Mowlana Ali (May Peace be upon Him) is the first Imam of the Shia Imami Ismailis,**

**'AND WHEREAS Hazrat Mowlana Shah Karim Al-Husseini Hazar Imam is the forty-ninth Imam in whom is vested absolute and unfettered Power and Authority over and in respect of all religious and social matters of the Shia Imami Ismailis . . . His Highness Hazrat Mowlana Shah Karim Al-Husseini Aga Khan is graciously pleased to ordain . . .'**

**'Mowlana Hazar Imam has absolute and final authority and discretion to abrogate, suspend, rescind, amend, delete, alter, add to, vary or modify the Constitution.'**

**From 'The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismailis in Africa' and 'The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan', 1962.**

**CONDITIONS in India deteriorated and the Aga Khan worked out a plan to settle large numbers of Indians in Africa. He put it to the Viceroy's Council and it was still being considered when, in 1905, he decided to pay his second visit to East Africa. He was twenty-eight, well informed on political and social conditions in the West and anxious to bring the benefits of western civilisation to his people.**

**In Zanzibar he found his followers' state of health leaving much to be desired. Although they were well off, he was shocked by their low physique and a high incidence of tuberculosis among them. Many were listless and apathetic but when they blamed the climate,**

he called the community leaders together and told them that it was no different in India, yet his Khojas were certainly not apathetic. He converted one of his palaces into a sports centre, offered prizes for athletics, football and cycling competitions and laid down a programme for systematic health care.

He had even bigger plans. What his followers needed was a set of firm rules to embrace their whole life, an administrative and religious framework. He decided to give the Ismaili community a written constitution. With the authority of his office, he told local leaders what he had in mind and in a series of consultations with them laid the groundwork of the world-wide Ismaili organisation of Territorial, Provincial and Local Councils, the leaders to be chosen by the Imam from panels of local candidates. He instituted a 'Pledge of Office' by which officials would swear, in the name of Allah, to discharge their duties without fear, favour, affection or ill will, bear allegiance to Mowlana Hazar Imam and the Ismaili faith, not to disclose matters discussed *in camera* and to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.

The rights and duties of *mukhis* and *kamarias* were clearly defined and system was brought into social and cultural activities. Health and education, twin pillars of Ismaili strength and economic welfare were regulated. One set of rules was devoted to *jamatkhanas* (*jamat* means community) where Ismailis meet not only for prayers but for group activities, children's exercise and religious instruction. A cornerstone of the Constitution would be a Personal Law to govern the lives of Ismailis from cradle to grave. Antiquated Muslim practices were discarded, contamination with tribal customs shunned. Polygamy was out, child marriages were out. Engagements would be registered and could not be lightly broken off. Divorces were a matter for the *mukhi*, perhaps even the Council; among grounds for divorce were a partner's renunciation of the Ismaili faith, a husband's impotence or a disease which made married life dangerous for the other partner. Disputes about dowries and alimonies to be submitted for decision to the *mukhi* and *kamaria*.

The Constitution eventually laid down the details of engagement and wedding ceremonies—avoid ostentation, limit the number of guests (to two hundred in Africa), no extravagant wedding gowns, no alcoholic drinks. As to the children, strict rules on legitimacy,

guardianship and adoption were laid down. At the other end of the line were the rules for burials. The Imam's judicial powers were not limited except by his sense of duty and fairness but Councils were given wide authority to admonish or punish offenders. Severest punishment was and is 'excommunication' which completely divorced the offender from his fellow Ismailis and could be ruinous. (Paragraph 220 of the African Constitution says: 'No Isma'ili other than the immediate family members of a person who has been excommunicated shall have any social or other association with him.') Apostates were regarded as enemies and no Ismaili would ever marry a defector from the faith.

The first Ismaili Constitution was issued in Zanzibar on September 9, 1905, but was not published in printed form until 1922 when it appeared in English and Gujerati (more recently it was also translated into German). Although it has since been revised several times, the basic laws remain the same as those first laid down by Aga Khan III. Designed for a society which was still largely primitive, the original 1905 draft was a splendid testimonial to his scholarly and modern mind. He issued a Holy Firman ordering Ismailis to abide by it and instructed local leaders to send him regular reports about every aspect of the community's life. The practice is still followed and his young successor is often snowed under with communications from Ismailis all over the world.

Back in Bombay, the Aga Khan found India's Muslims in need of political attention. Lord Minto, the new Viceroy, and John Morley, Secretary of State for India in Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal government, were working on a reform of the Indian administration and Muslims were concerned about their place in the new scheme. The Aga Khan no longer saw them as merely a religious community, they were developing into a national entity with the right to be represented by their own leaders. Chosen to lead a Muslim delegation, he put the Muslim case to the Viceroy and obtained a promise that their rights and interests would be safeguarded which established the principle of 'separate electorates' for Muslims and Hindus and was the first step towards an independent Muslim state.

Only a strong central Muslim organisation could maintain the impetus. The Aga Khan and his friends founded the Muslim

League and turned it into a political force. He became the first President and pressed the Muslim case wherever he could until Morley warned him: 'You mustn't get too much power, you know!' Indeed, when the reforms came into force as the Indian Councils Act of 1907, they did not take Hindus or Muslims very far towards self-government.

Defying the leisurely pace of the period, the Aga Khan commuted between India and Europe. One day he was in Bombay crossing swords with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, a young lawyer and (non-practising) fellow Ismaili who thought separate electorates would divide the nation; the next he was in London arguing with Winston Churchill. He could not foresee that Winston would one day 'refuse to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire', while Qaid-i-Azam (Great Leader) Jinnah would be hailed as the founder of Pakistan.

The strain of this kind of life was beginning to tell. The Aga Khan's eyesight was poor, his heart weak but he would not spare himself. While visiting the Viceroy in Simla, he collapsed and was ordered to take a rest which to him meant only one thing—travel. Accompanied by a French friend, he headed East and visited Malaya and Singapore. He went on to China, a 'crumbling empire'. In Shanghai he was entertained to a splendid meal prepared by a Chinese Muslim—several Ismaili groups were living in China and some of them are still there but, like those in Russia, cannot communicate with their Imam.

After a brief visit to Japan he reached Honolulu which, at a time when it was neither a tourist centre nor a military base, struck him as a haven of absolute peace and happiness. His next stop was San Francisco which was still in ruins after the catastrophic earthquake of 1906 and he was glad to move on to New York where he was a great social hit, went to scores of parties, visited museums, theatres and the Metropolitan Opera—music and ballet were his favourite aesthetic experiences.

Most mornings he could be seen in the Criminal Court listening to the sensational trial of Harry K. Thaw, the millionaire husband of the beautiful Evelyn Nesbit. Until he himself told the story few people were aware that he knew Evelyn. He had met her in London at a dinner party some years earlier and was talking to her when a

friend took him aside and warned him that her husband was violently jealous and that it was perhaps not prudent to pay her too much attention.

The incident came back to his mind as he listened to the proceedings. Evelyn, it appeared, had confessed to her husband that, before their marriage, she had been drugged and seduced by the well-known architect, Sanford White. Coming face to face with White in the ballroom of Madison Square Roof Garden, Thaw had pulled a revolver and killed him. Observing the courtroom drama, the Aga Khan could not help thinking that something like that might easily have happened to him in London.

Restored to health, he returned to the South of France where he made friends with some of the finest contemporary talents—Stravinsky, Puccini and Massenet among them. Massenet once received him at his hotel sitting stark naked in his bath dictating music to a woman secretary. To the young balletomane's delight, Diaghilev allowed him to attend his rehearsals. He made Cannes his headquarters and sallied forth to cultural events all along the Côte d'Azur. What drew him to the Casino of Monte Carlo in the year 1907 was not the gaming rooms but the Ballet Opera of Monte Carlo under the same roof.

He became the Ballet's most enthusiastic supporter and it was not difficult to guess why. He never missed a performance when the cast included the handsome première danseuse whose name appeared in the programme as Theresa Magliano. Personal and artistic interest coincided, and it was not too difficult to find a mutual friend to introduce them. He soon learned that Ginetta, as Theresa called herself, came from an artistic Turin family. She was nineteen and at the beginning of her career. Her teachers predicted a great future for her—Monte Carlo was her first foreign engagement, a great opportunity to be noticed.

In the ten years since the Aga Khan's unhappy first marriage he had escorted some of Europe's most desirable women but none of his affairs had been serious. He was very serious now and Ginetta felt as strongly about him: 'We fell deeply in love,' he said simply. So sure was he about his feelings that he proposed only a few weeks after they first met. From the little pension where she shared rooms with two other girl dancers, he moved her to a suite in the Hôtel de



Paris, then left for Bombay to tell his mother that he proposed to make his home in Europe and marry a European woman.

He could not have chosen a less opportune moment. For the Aga Khan to take another wife at this stage—or for some time to come—would have advertised his estrangement from Shahzadi just when a vicious family feud between his and her immediate relatives was coming to a head in the courts of Bombay. In essence, the challenge to the Aga Khan and his mother was almost identical with the old Khoja Case. As in 1866, the dispute was largely about finance and once more the history and the background of the Imam's relations with the community came under public scrutiny. The case arose from the purge of the hangers-on, who, reluctant to give up their sinecures, constructed a claim with arguments designed to embarrass the Aga Khan and damage him in the eyes of the community.

His principal adversary was Shahzadi's sister, Haji Bibi, daughter of Aga Jangi Shah whose murder had shaken the community ten years earlier. The 'Haji Bibi' case was as difficult to follow as the Khoja Case. Although all claims against the Aga Khan had long been renounced on her behalf, she and other relatives demanded a share of the community's property and the Imam's income as of right. They were no more likely to succeed than the plaintiffs in the Khoja Case.

For the outsider, the main interest centred on the public discussion of the Imam's financial relations with the community. For the first time, the technicalities of *zakat* were revealed to the eyes of unbelievers. Witnesses recited a long list of rituals and ceremonies for which he was entitled to receive fees. It started with followers, twice or three times a day, bringing sweetmeats, fruit and food for Hazar Imam which were put up for auction to the highest bidder who paid up saying: 'This is the property of Hazar Imam.' Ismailis (Khojas) made payments when assembling for special prayers and, when the collecting box was handed round in the *jamatkhana*, paid the Dassoan—two annas in the rupee.

But marriage fees (a percentage of the dowry or the cost of the dowry) were—and still are—paid to the Imam for the use of the *jamatkhana*, the *mukhi* often providing refreshments and even transport for the guests. Fees to mark the birth of a child, bigger for a boy than a girl, largely went to cover similar expenses. The Imam was entitled to a fee for death ceremonies but this might go towards

the cost of the coffin, the burial place, the undertaker and the religious service. In the spiritual sense, a family's payments made after a relative's burial were to ensure that his soul rested in peace, a practice borrowed from the ancient Greeks who placed a coin in the mouth of their dead to pay their fare across the River Styx.

Payments when Hazar Imam comes to the *jamatkhana*, payments on the seventh day of the month when followers fast from six to ten a.m., payments when Hazar Imam names a child, payments at the ceremony of Sir Bundi (literal meaning: offering of the head) when a faithful puts his property at the disposal of the Imam while the Elders magnanimously save him from too great a sacrifice and fix a price at which it can be bought back, the money going to the Imam. The Judge went to see for himself: 'We sat on chairs,' he described the ceremony, 'in front of a raised seat or throng on which the Aga Khan sits when he attends the *jamatkhana*. The whole room was filled with Khojas seated or kneeling on the ground, in another room the women of the community . . . a most impressive sight owing to the reverence with which the whole proceedings were conducted.'

As the trial went on not much reverence was shown by the Aga Khan's opponents in court. Witnesses tried to spread as much dirt as possible, rouse religious feelings, repeat every damaging rumour and injure the Aga Khan in every way. So outrageous was some of the testimony that Mr Justice Russell cleared the court on more than one occasion. Some of the witnesses were not too particular about the truth either: 'As regards the ladies,' the Judge said, referring to some of them, 'I could not see their faces as they were covered from head to foot in black dominoes with white pieces of muslin let in across the face. But one has only to read the evidence . . . to see how full of inconsistencies and untruths it is.'

The main issue was almost completely submerged by the petty quibbles the other side raised. The history of every Aga Khan bungalow in Poona, Bangalore and Bombay was traced back, mostly on the basis of hearsay; each piece of family jewellery was discussed; the amounts some relatives had received as allowances from the Aga Khan were analysed. The acid atmosphere was reflected in attacks on the Judge who had to defend himself against the insinuation that he could not be expected to hand down a fair verdict because he

was friendly with the Aga Khan, had been his guest at dinner and had entertained him in his own house: 'The same could probably be said about every judge in Bombay,' the Aga Khan's Counsel remarked.

At the end of the long proceedings the Judge was left to decide 128 specific points. He answered the question whether the offerings and presents made to the first and second Aga Khans were their absolute property with a firm 'Yes'. Was Haji Bibi, or any member of the family, entitled to any interest in such property? The Judge said equally firmly: 'No'.

The key question was whether the offerings and presents the Aga Khan was receiving from his followers were given to him as 'the Hazar Imam and in consequence of the veneration and devotion of the Shia Imami Ismailis to his person'. The Judge's answer was 'Yes'. In every one of the 128 points the verdict went in the Aga Khan's favour. His legal triumph was complete and, except for an occasional little local difficulty, the Imam's right to *zakat* was never challenged. It developed into a kind of church tax, most of which is invested in schools, health and community centres. As in the times of the Prophet and his *baitumal* (Treasury), which was filled by contributions from his followers, Ismailis pay *zakat* (two and a half per cent of their income) and *khums* (ten per cent) voluntarily and directly to the Imam. The Haji Bibi Case anchored this arrangement in modern law.

Not wanting to rub the noses of the losers in the dust by a public announcement of his divorce and a spectacular second marriage, the Aga Khan bade farewell to the splendour of Malabar Hill and his palace in Poona with the sweet mango trees in the grounds (the fruit was sent to him wherever he went), returned to Europe, the Côte d'Azur and Ginetta, for whom he bought a house in the rue Bel Respiro overlooking the Casino. He named it 'Villa Ginetta'.

Writing about the events of 1908 and his great love for 'Mlle Theresa Magliano', the Aga Khan recounted the next move: 'In the spring of that year she accompanied me to Egypt and we were married in Cairo in accordance with Muslim law.' His marriage brought him great happiness—he called it 'spiritual and mental satisfaction'—and those who met him and Ginetta thought they made a splendid couple.

But in view of the situation in Bombay, it was all done so quietly, almost stealthily, that some of the Aga Khan's friends refused to believe that a marriage had actually taken place, and if they were thinking in terms of a European marriage they were, of course, quite right. Almost sixty years later, Leonard Slater, an American writer investigating the life and death of Prince Aly Khan, quoted official documents in which Ginetta, long after 1908, was described as 'Theresa Magliano' and as 'nubile' (unmarried). But things were not as simple as all that.

A Roman Catholic country abiding by the laws of the Vatican, Italy did not recognise the marriage of an Italian Roman Catholic which was not solemnised in church (Sophia Loren's marital tribulations show that nothing has changed in half a century). A Muslim marriage contract concluded in Cairo had certainly little chance of finding favour in the eyes of Italian officials. That the intended husband had another wife or was divorced finally ruled legal marriage for an Italian subject out of court. In Italy the Aga Khan might even have laid himself open to an indictment for bigamy. The position in France in these days was not so very different.

The reason why the owner of 'Villa Ginetta' figured in the local land register as 'Theresa Magliano' was that the Aga Khan had put the house in his bride's name before they went to Cairo. This was also the case with regard to another villa he was building for her at Cimiez, Nice, where he had stayed on his first visit to Europe. It was a temple for their favourite muse and he called it 'Villa Terpsichore'.

Untroubled by complications, whether in Italy or in India, Ginetta was expecting her first baby. For the Aga Khan the birth of a son in the following year was a joyful event. To have a male heir was no less important to an Imam in modern times than throughout Ismaili history. He named the boy Mohammed Mahdi but his mother and her Italian relatives called him Giuseppe.

Oriental husbands were not in the habit of attending on their wives for days and weeks on end. The Aga Khan was no exception. As he continued to travel the world, Ginetta was often lonely, although her brother Mario and her two sisters frequently stayed with her. She was devoted to the baby but missed her dancing and, as an outlet for her artistic temperament, took up sculpture. When her

husband was with her, her happiness was complete but his sojourns in Monte Carlo or Cimiez were brief.

The deteriorating political situation in Europe and the Near East kept him busier than ever. German influence in Turkey was on the increase and it worried him to see a Muslim country moving into the anti-British camp. Western statesmen were glad to know that he was pleading their cause and, although some Muslims frowned on his pro-British outlook, he went to Constantinople to do what he could to preserve peace. The Turks were as intransigent as the British, tempers in the Balkans were getting shorter and a bloody conflict seemed inevitable.

One of his trips to England was in the line of a sad duty: 'In May 1910,' the Aga Khan wrote later, 'my great and good friend King Edward VII died in London.' The assembled crowned heads were bickering about status and seniority; quizzically he watched the Kaiser and the Kings of Greece, Spain and Bulgaria competing for places of honour in the funeral procession.

From Bombay came the sad news of the death of his old friend Aga Shamsuddin, one of the last few links with his early youth. An even more grievous loss was imminent. Before reaching his second birthday, little Mohammed Mahdi died of meningitis. Father and mother were disconsolate but at least she was expecting another baby. Desperately anxious to protect the new arrival against all risks, the Aga Khan sent his wife to her native Turin where she could be with her family and have the constant attention of a top-class gynaecologist. He installed her in a big flat in the fashionable Corso Oporto where, on June 13, 1911, her second son was born.

The Aga Khan received the news while attending the Coronation of King George V in London. Although he was not there to see the baby, his birth was, as he put it, a great solace and joy to his wife and himself. The mother had a difficult time and the baby was not strong but he would not be lacking the fondest care and the best medical attention. There was another complication. Because no official evidence of a wedding was available—at least none that would have been accepted as legal in Italy—the baby's birth certificate, embarrassingly, described the mother as 'Teresa Magliano, unmarried 22 years old, living on independent means' and the father as 'His Highness The Aga Khan, son of the late Aga Ali

Shah, 34 years old, born at Karachi (British India), living at Monte Carlo'. The boy was given the name Aly Salomone Khan.

In later years, ill-wishers suggested surreptitiously that Prince Aly Khan was of illegitimate birth because his father and mother were not legally married when he was born. Friends countered helpfully that it was all above board because the Aga Khan had concluded a *mut'a* marriage—*mut'a* marriages were first practised by Muslim warriors who were separated from their wives for long periods but were permitted to enter into temporary associations (*mut'a*) with one or more other women for a night or a week or even longer.

Both the insinuation against the marriage and the well-meaning defence were ill-founded. As the highest religious and legal authority in his Community, the Aga Khan could, if he so wished, legalise his own marriage whatever the circumstances. If his first marriage was an obstacle, he only needed to tell his wife: 'I divorce thee' and the marriage was ended, but there was no evidence that he had done so. He could take a second bride by telling her: 'I take thee as my wife' and they were legally married, which is what he did in Cairo—where a Muslim is concerned, many countries recognise the law as it is practised in the land of his origin. Although some Muslim writers (among them Mr Asaf A. A. Fyzee, writing in the *Aga Khan Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Book*, 1945) have claimed that '*mut'a* (temporary marriage) . . . is, according to Ismaili Law, altogether unlawful . . .' the Aga Khan himself, supreme arbiter of Ismaili religious practices, obviously did not concur because he mentioned in his Will that he had married his second wife 'by *mut'a* marriage'.

Even in the Aga Khan's frantically busy travels, few periods were quite as crowded as the first year of Aly's life. The Coronation in London gave him an opportunity to discuss the dangerous trends in the Balkans with several statesmen. More than anything he wanted to prevent a conflict between Britain and a Muslim country and spare the Muslims of Turkey an unnecessary war. His support for the British Empire never wavered and one of his hobby horses was the potential of Indian manpower which could be summoned to defend it in the event of war: 'India could put troops into South Africa as quickly as they could be sent from England,' he wrote prophetically in a 1911 issue of the *National Review*. 'She could

land soldiers in Australia long before England could do so; and forces from India could reach western Canada almost as soon as from England.' He wanted the myriads of India to be taught that they were guardians and supporters of the Crown just as the white citizens of the Empire: 'India and the self-governing dominions stand and fall together!'

His range of interests was as wide as ever. He joined the Maharajah of Patiala in organising the first All-India cricket eleven to visit England—they lost fifteen matches, won six and started a tradition which is still going strong. His campaign for the Aligarh University required a final big heave and, as chairman of the fund-raising committee, he went on a collecting tour through India's main Muslim areas: 'As a mendicant,' he announced, 'I am now going out to beg from house to house and from street to street for the children of Indian Muslims.' It was a triumphal tour. Wherever he went, people unharnessed the horses of his carriage and pulled it themselves for miles. He collected 'rupees thirty lakhs'—three million rupees—of which 100,000 were contributed by him. For decades, whenever the University was in need of funds, he made new donations and persuaded others to give generously.

The year 1912 brought the historic Coronation Durbar when the new King-Emperor met the people of India at their new capital Delhi, the only British sovereign to visit the Dominion during the period of British rule. The ceremonies were the most colourful ever staged, but owing to some disaster in the kitchen, the great state banquet provided food only for the King and a handful of guests sitting near him; the rest went hungry. During the investiture in a brilliantly lit tent (to add to his titles of Knight and Grand Knight Commander of the Indian Empire, the Aga Khan was made a Knight Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of India) an electric bulb burst and others began to flicker. For an instant it was thought fire might break out and engulf the elevated company. Whistles blew and fire engines were cranked up but panic was avoided and the lights and the excitement settled down.

Although not much in evidence himself in his family circle, the Aga Khan made sure that Ginetta and the baby were surrounded by comfort and luxury worthy of their status. He was concerned about his son's health and had a new idea for his welfare almost every

week. Might the boy and his mother not benefit from the mountain air of the Italian Alps? Was not the climate in Normandy more conducive to the child's well-being? He took a summer house in Deauville, 'Villa Gorizia', bought a Paris town house in the rue de Prony, and yet another residence at Maisons Lafitte, not far from the capital.

Almost before he could walk, Aly was taught to ride a horse; he learned to swim and was introduced to tennis as soon as his little hand gripped a racket. But he lacked the company of other children; instead his uncle Mario spent much time with him and remained a close companion of Aly's in later life. Alfredo, the Italian chauffeur, was another of his 'playmates'. Ginetta was happiest in her studio, exhibited some fine sculptures under the name of Yla, an anagram of her son's name, and received several important commissions, one of them for a fountain statue in Vienna. (Though he was born more than ten years after her death, her grandson Prince Karim inherited her talent as a sculptor.) Her art was her life and she rarely accompanied her husband on his social and diplomatic rounds. But when she appeared in public, Princess Theresa's lively beauty, haute couture elegance and magnificent jewels were the talk of Deauville and Paris.

Moving easily among the European élite, the Aga Khan was so much part of the western scene that his eastern origins and connections tended to be overlooked. He never forgot them for a moment: 'My way of life,' he wrote at one time, 'has taken me from the slowly changing East to the West which is ever-swiftly changing. The work I have to do keeps me, for the most time, in Europe and on the move. I am a pacifist and an internationalist. Yet I belong to no country in the West but only to many people in the East. My skin, my religion, my taste in food, my way of thinking—all these make me differ profoundly from the people among whom I move.'

His health was precarious but his love of golf triumphed. Whenever he was in London, he could be seen early in the morning emerging from the Ritz Hotel in his white sports outfit bound for one golf course or another. His increasing weight worried the doctors but his energetic travels were as much exercise as any man could be expected to take. He always carried a little instrument with him, a watch and compass combined, which told him the time and



the direction to Mecca. Every Friday, wherever he was, he turned towards the holy city of Islam and spent an hour in meditation and prayer: 'That hour is my greatest hour!' he used to say.

But his prayers for peace in the Balkans remained unanswered. The strains and stresses of so many people—Greeks, Serbs, Bulgars, Turks—jostling in a narrow space meant that power politics and rival alliances were liable to erupt at any moment. Behind the scenes the Aga Khan did what he could on behalf of his fellow Muslims in the old Ottoman Empire which had become the 'Sick Man of Europe'. He travelled to Russia, and in his memoirs which he dictated to the late John Connell some forty years later, described his leisurely progress in St Petersburg and Moscow. Reticent about the really important things—reticence remains the predominant Ismaili characteristic—he wrote about overheated palaces rather than the rising political temperatures on Russia's borders, dwelling on them lovingly as if he sensed that they would be destroyed in the impending world conflagration together with much else.

In Moscow he was shocked by the poverty around him and described the gulf between rich and poor as 'truly appalling'. Unlike many other wealthy men he had a strong sense of social justice and genuine compassion. His feeling was that such contrasts created pressures which could not be bottled up for long. Even so his sense of humour did not desert him. In a Moscow public steam bath he saw women attendants looking after male visitors, passing the soap and towels and acting as masseuses. They were elderly and so ugly, he commented, that it was utterly impossible to imagine the slightest misbehaviour with them.

While he was in Moscow, the situation in the Balkans came to a head. In October 1912, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece went to war against Turkey, which was also at loggerheads with Italy and emerged severely mauled from a short sharp burst of fighting, unable to continue the war. Bulgaria and Serbia agreed to an armistice but hostilities between Turkey and Greece continued. The Aga Khan returned hurriedly to India where tempers were on edge and Muslims wanted to go to the aid of the Turks. He and his friends protested against Britain's 'delicate but chilly policy of non-intervention' but the British government turned a deaf ear. There was little he could do for the Turks and he found himself in a serious

dilemma. While his fellow Muslims, feeling that the honour and integrity of Islam were at stake, advocated a *jihad*, a holy war, he realised the futility of asking the Turks to fight on and opposed such a move. When he said so in an interview with the *Times of India* many Muslims were angry.

A peace conference was convened in London, broke up and was re-convened and produced a treaty which imposed considerable territorial losses on the Turks. There was a *coup d'état* in Constantinople followed by a second Balkan war. It was a confusing conflict. First the Bulgarians attacked Serbian and Greek positions, then Rumania joined Turkey against Bulgaria, which was quickly defeated. Albania was invaded by the Serbs and the Turks recovered some of their territory. The Austrians intervened, a German general was appointed Turkish commander-in-chief—Turkey's alliance with Britain's enemies was almost complete.

By this time the Aga Khan was in the Middle East, another explosive conglomerate of races, religions and alliances. On a rare visit to Syria, he found some of his leading followers at loggerheads. The Joundi family sprouted two wings, one religious, one political, fiercely competing for one Ismaili seat in parliament. The religious Joundis won, the community was split and the Aga Khan's attempt to mediate failed because Arab feuds are not easily abandoned. The two factions were never reconciled and fifty years later the ancient quarrel affected Prince Aly Khan even after his death.

## CHAPTER V

THE Aga Khan's apartment at the Ritz was a beehive of activity. Visitors came and went in an unending stream to be swallowed up by the social scene in London's premier hotel. Some of the British diplomats among them were content to remain anonymous because of their mission which was to solicit the Aga Khan's help for some of the more delicate and secret services important personages like him could render a country in time of international tension. He was more than willing. Envoys of several countries followed emissaries from his 'spiritual children' in many parts of the world who wanted to hear his views and his wishes in case of an emergency.

As the situation was visibly deteriorating and Europe was drifting towards war, he had two main concerns. It was probably too late to prevent the impending conflagration but important to strengthen the British Empire with which his personal interest, much of his property, indeed his whole life were bound up. He was even more concerned with the well-being of his millions of followers who depended on his guidance. What was said of the British Empire in those days also applied to the Aga Khan's religious realm—the sun never set on it. In Asia, in the Middle East, in Africa, war would confront them with a deadly peril. He was anxious to visit those at the most distant end of the long lines of communication which would become precarious as soon as the first shot was fired.

Time was short, and he was in a hurry. His first destination was Burma, still under India Office rule, where mounting nationalism threatened to isolate his community. In Rangoon, he gathered Ismaili leaders around him and laid down a new policy for his followers to take account of the changing conditions. He ordered them to adapt themselves to local customs, give up their strange-

sounding Indo-Saracenic names, wear Burmese clothes, speak the Burmese language and become Burmese in all but their religious beliefs. It was a historic decision. His directives to Burmese Ismailis in the early months of 1914 created the pattern for relations between Ismailis and indigenous populations and worked for their mutual benefit. Ismailis everywhere adopted the nationality and became loyal subjects of the countries in which they lived.

The Imam's next destination was East Africa but while he was on the high seas Austria's Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serb in the little Balkan town of Sarajevo. Repercussions were bound to be grave; they were not long delayed. The news that Austria was marching against Serbia to punish her for the political outrage and that Russia was coming to Serbia's aid reached the Aga Khan in Zanzibar.

The fire spread quickly. The Germans intervened, declared war on Russia and moved into neutral Belgium. On August 4, England declared war on Germany—peace all but vanished from this earth. The Aga Khan went to see the British Resident in Zanzibar and offered his services to the British Government. He was preparing to take the next boat out of Mombasa but was warned that a German sea raider was operating in the Indian Ocean and advised to travel to England via South Africa. To leave no doubt about his sentiments, he returned the insignia of his German decorations to the Kaiser.

Never had a voyage seemed so slow. Arriving in London at long last, the Aga Khan told the Press that he would not mind joining an Indian regiment as a private soldier but his old friend Lord Kitchener, now Secretary of State for War, had more useful employment in mind for the Aga Khan's special talents. Allied to Germany, Turkey was at war with England, France, Serbia and Russia and was trying to rally Muslims in a Pan-Islamic movement against the Empire and the Western allies. Once more there was talk of a holy war and Indian troops, many Muslims among them, fighting with the British found themselves confronted with mullahs sent out by Turkey to persuade them to desert.

The Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean—the Empire's lifelines—were under grave threat if Turkey's campaign succeeded. Only a leading Muslim of the Aga Khan's

calibre, Lord Kitchener said, could help to foil this plot and counteract the dangerous propaganda. After a conference with Lord Kitchener, the Aga Khan saw Prime Minister Asquith and was received by the King who was well informed on the intricate subject.

Although he was not entirely uncritical of British policy towards Turkey, the Aga Khan got his influential Muslim friends together to support an appeal to Muslims everywhere not to follow the Turkish call for a *jihad*. He described the Ottoman government as a tool of Germany's aggressive, imperialist strategy: 'Our only duty as Muslims,' the manifesto concluded, 'is to remain loyal, faithful and obedient to our temporal and secular allegiance.'

British confidence in the Aga Khan proved justified. The idea of a *jihad* collapsed, India's Muslims remained loyal to the Aga Khan—and the British Empire. An even more delicate task awaited him, this time in Egypt, nominally part of the Ottoman Empire but, since 1882, under 'temporary' British occupation. The Aga Khan's own account of his mission suffers from excessive tact towards the former Khedive, Abbas Hilmi, who largely created the situation which required his attention but who became his friend some years later.

Suspected of pro-German machinations, Abbas Hilmi was called to London but got no nearer than Paris and finally turned up in Constantinople. His moves created confusion in Cairo about the Muslim attitude to the war, and the Aga Khan's mission was to stabilise opinion and explain the allied cause. In Cairo the Palace was hostile. Prince Fuad, the future King, together with some of the princes and ministers, had strong German and Italian affiliations. The Aga Khan's best policy was to win over the powerful Muslim teachers of Al Azhar University, and who better to accomplish that than the descendant of the founders of their university? While Lawrence of Arabia worked among the sheikhs, the Aga Khan fought Britain's diplomatic battle in Cairo. That Egypt remained calm and stable when the war came close was largely due to his skill.

On a brief visit to Bombay, he found his mother busily helping the allied war effort, looking after Indian troops and working for the Red Cross, yet keeping a watchful eye on Ismaili affairs. The Imam attended to his religious and administrative duties before

returning to England to be greeted with a most welcome piece of news. As a reward for his services, the King conferred on him the right to an eleven-gun salute and the rank and precedence of a First Class Ruling Prince of the Bombay Presidency. In Imperial Britain no Indian could ask for more.

Presently it was suggested to him that he might make his headquarters in neutral Switzerland, an ideal base for a man with his international connections. He took a house in Zürich but had no sooner settled down when he found himself under attack on two fronts. Fellow Muslims criticised him for supporting Britain and helping to recruit Indian troops to fight against Turkish Muslims, and German agents who were thick on the Swiss ground naturally assumed that he was operating against German interests. The German Press launched a vicious campaign against him, while more sinister German plans were maturing. He had an inkling of what might befall when his cousin Aga Farrokh Shah was assassinated at the instigation of German agents while visiting Ismaili settlements in Kirman on his behalf. Now they seemed ready to rub him out.

The German attempt to rid themselves of a dangerous opponent came at a critical moment. The Aga Khan's health was giving him considerable trouble: 'I myself was laid low with a difficult, painful and protracted illness,' he wrote in his autobiography. His sight deteriorated and his eyes suffered damage which proved to be permanent. His pulse was irregular and, though he was eating normally, he was losing weight rapidly. A French physician diagnosed Graves' Disease, which affects the thyroid gland, and advised him to consult a famous Swiss specialist.

The Germans did not believe that their quarry was really ill and moved in for the kill: 'With typical German thoroughness,' as he put it, they had a bomb thrown at him and, to make doubly sure, arranged to have his coffee poisoned. The bomb did not go off and the Aga Khan did not drink the coffee. Under the glare of publicity, the Swiss police investigated the two attempts.

For the Aga Khan it was a difficult time. Although he was physically at a low ebb he spent much of his enforced seclusion drafting an account of political developments in India which, in a way, was a reply to those who called him a British imperialist and suggested that his activities were not in the best interests of Muslims.

But it was also a blueprint for the future in which he visualised India as an integral part of a South Asian Federation reaching from Malaya to Egypt.

While he was quietly working away in his study, the noise about his alleged activities and the German attempts on his life grew louder until it reached a new crescendo with the arrest of three suspects. The British authorities were embarrassed: 'All the British government saw fit to do,' the Aga Khan remarked with some bitterness, 'was to request me to leave Switzerland.' He gave up the house in Zürich but instead of returning to London decided to see the war out in his Paris residence.

His condition was still causing considerable anxiety. His eighteen months under the shadow of death—from bombs, poison and natural causes—had left a deep mark. A hundred medical remedies must have been tried when a new investigation revealed that the original diagnosis had been wrong. A fresh line of treatment began to show results and put him on the slow road to recovery. But as long as he lived, plagued by new infirmities, constantly under the care of doctors, he would never again meekly accept the verdict of even the most eminent authority without demanding the most detailed explanation. Every doctor who henceforth treated him was subjected to a barrage of questions about his diagnosis and his suggested treatment. His troubled health became the source of his fabulous familiarity with every therapy under the sun, which turned him into the world's medically most knowledgeable patient.

Between 1916 and 1918, while war restricted his movements and illness confined him to his rooms, Ginetta saw more of him than at any other time. They were together in Paris or in Maisons Lafitte, and little Aly, too, though his august father remained a remote figure, felt not quite so overawed in his presence. Whenever the boy was taken from Cimiez to Deauville, he visited 'Papa' who always questioned him thoroughly about his progress.

Aly was not too sure of himself. A succession of young tutors, Swiss or French, taught him as much as he would absorb but he was no keener on his books than most boys of his age and easily tired of a subject. French and Italian came naturally to him and he was making good progress in English. An Ismaili scholar acquainted him with the rudiments of Islamic history and the basic tenets of his

father's sect. As the first-born, important religious duties would eventually fall to him but the Aga Khan remembered the ordeal of his own boyhood too well to allow his son to be subjected to a high-pressure education.

The boy was moody, sometimes high-spirited, sometimes lost in a world of fantasies. But he had an easy charm and a way of endearing himself with people. His father encouraged him to take exercise, swim and ride. Aly's favourite tutor was Monsieur Edmond Grin, a personable, talented young man who was father, elder brother and friend to him. When Grin left the household to start a teaching career Aly took a tearful farewell of his beloved 'Professor'. When they met again in the mid-fifties Grin was Rector of the University of Lausanne.

The book on which the Aga Khan had been working was published in 1918 under the title 'India in Transition'. Emerging from his sick room after a long absence from active politics, he joined the peace-makers who were mixing cures for a war-sick world at their conferences in and around Paris. The Versailles Treaty between the western allies and the Germans which was about to be signed inspired the Aga Khan with little confidence. India was in a difficult situation and his suggestion for a Commonwealth of Asian states in association with Britain was unlikely to be adopted. Instead of swift progress towards responsible government in India, prolonged deliberations only produced recommendations for harsh measures against political agitation and sedition which provoked a hostile reaction. India was restive and on the brink of the same troubles that afflicted Ireland.

Although demonstrations were banned, there were many 'unlawful gatherings' in Indian cities. In the course of one, in the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar on April 19, 1919, police fired into the crowd and 379 people were killed. It was a grave setback but the Aga Khan tried hard to calm tempers and encourage negotiations. He joined the members of the Indian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, lobbied British politicians and was in constant touch with Mr Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India.

As if to make up for the accident of history which ranged him against Muslim Turkey in the war, he took up the cudgels on her behalf but found British policy as hostile to Turkey as ever. The



country's dismemberment was to be sealed by the Treaty of Sèvres, but Kemal Ataturk, the new Turkish leader, refused to submit. At this critical moment the Greek army invaded Asia Minor to liberate Greeks under Turkish rule, captured Smyrna and marched deep into Turkish territory. Britain and France sent expeditions to secure footholds in this troubled part of the world and a big row developed over British claims to an insignificant little city called Chanak.

It testified to the Aga Khan's skill and instinct that, in the face of strong anti-Turkish sentiments, he managed to secure the help of a most powerful political campaigner—Lord Beaverbrook, the Canadian multi-millionaire, who turned the London *Daily Express* into a vital and highly successful newspaper. The Aga Khan could not have wished for a more sympathetic ally: 'In the Graeco-Turkish conflict,' Lord Beaverbrook wrote in 'Politicians and the Press', 'with Britain backing the Greeks, nothing could be foreseen but disaster.'

In August 1922, Lord Beaverbrook visited Deauville: 'At the Royal Hotel there,' he recounted, 'his Highness Prince Aga Khan discussed with me the disastrous character of the relations of the British government with the *de facto* Turkish government.' Lord Beaverbrook did not conduct his campaigns from the ivory tower of his private office but decided to go to Angora (Ankara) and discover what the real intentions and terms of the new Turkish government were. With the Aga Khan acting as intermediary he made arrangements for a meeting with Kemal but also suggested that it would be a good thing if Mr Churchill and Lord Birkenhead met the Turkish leader.

To tell the British government how strongly they felt about the Turkish question, India's Muslims sent a mission to London which included the Aga Khan. They were received by Mr Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, to whom they put the case for the return of Thrace and Smyrna to Turkey. When they had had their say, Lloyd George—according to an account by Sheikh Mushir Hosain Kidwai, a member of the mission—asked bluntly: 'Now that the Greeks are in military possession who will turn them out from there?' Unable to restrain himself, the Aga Khan jumped up, wagged a finger at Lloyd George and said: 'Well, Mr Prime Minister, old though I am, I will go sword in hand and turn them out. We

will charter ships, we will do everything. Leave them to us.' Mr Lloyd George was thunderstruck: 'No, no, we cannot do that!' he murmured.

But strong anti-Turkish forces in Britain rallied to resist all this pressure. Lord Curzon frowned on the joint activities of the British press lord and the Imam of the Ismailis, and the conservative press published alarming accounts of their movements. The Turks themselves relieved the gallant couple from further exertions on their behalf. Taking matters into their own hands they put an end to the presence of some three million Greeks in Asia Minor. Smyrna was burned down and Greeks who were not massacred got away with little more than their lives.

How the Aga Khan, who was constantly in the political limelight, managed to squeeze his ample religious and private activities into a bursting timetable remained for ever a mystery to his friends. Even in Europe he was constantly commuting between London and his houses in Deauville, Paris and the Côte d'Azur. Conferences in Lausanne and Geneva demanded his presence and, as if this was not enough, he was also fond of snatching a few days' rest and privacy at Aix-les-Bains, not only to take the waters but to enjoy the air and the scenery. Among his many friends in Aix were the Carron sisters, Marcelle and Jane-Andrée, daughters of a local hotel manager. Andrée, who was eighteen when he first knew her, often used to accompany him on long walks or drives in the foothills of the Haute Savoie. Later Marcelle moved to Paris and worked at a fashion house, Salon Guérin, where the Aga Khan's wife bought many of her clothes. Andrée was also working in Paris and he helped them to open their own establishment, Maison Carron-Sœurs. It enabled him to see much more of Andrée. As he said when their friendship became public property, he had known her on and off for nearly a dozen years.

Four years of war without racing had whetted the Aga Khan's appetite and he rarely missed a meeting. Horses to him were precious creatures: 'Nothing,' he said, 'is more poetic than a man riding a beautiful horse, riding it to perfection, the man and the horse, like a centaur, carved out as one.' To talk about horses was one of his favourite pastimes.

Gradually the idea of racing in England and France which he had

nursed since his very first visit began to materialise. The decision came in the spring of 1921 and was the start of an important chapter in racing history: 'I was dining at a friend's house in London,' he recalled, 'and my neighbour was Mrs Asquith, one of Lord Oxford's daughters-in-law, who was the sister of Mrs George Lambton . . .' They talked about horses all through dinner and Mrs Asquith suggested that he should start racing in England and get in touch with the Hon. George Lambton who could help with training or management: 'It was like a trigger being drawn on a cannon,' said the Aga Khan.

Lambton came to see him at the Ritz and agreed to start buying mares for an Aga Khan stud. Through Lambton, the new recruit to English racing met Richard Dawson, trainer of the Derby and Grand National winners of 1903, and engaged him. In a parallel operation in Paris, he secured the services of the American trainer William Duke who helped him to buy French horses at Deauville: 'The result of one chance dinner party affinity,' the Aga Khan mused, 'led to my becoming engaged up to my neck with horse breeding, bloodstocks and with it, naturally, cattle breeding and farming in Ireland and France.'

Although cautious with money, the Aga Khan was prepared to spend up to £100,000 in three years to build up a top-class racing stable. Richard Dawson looked after his horses at Whatcombe in Berkshire. Soon all eyes were on them. Among Lambton's first purchases was Cos, who cost 5,000 guineas and promptly won the Queen Mary Stakes at Ascot bringing in nearly twice the amount in stake money.

The Aga and George Lambton were at the Doncaster sales early in 1922 when a grey Sledmere filly came up for sale. She was a daughter of the Tetrarch and the Aga Khan would not allow himself to be outbid. When the filly went to him for 9,100 guineas, cheap at the price, he christened her *Mumtaz Mahal*, after Emperor Shah Jahan's favourite wife who lies buried in the grandiose Taj Mahal. On his visits to Whatcombe, he admired her dappled grey coat, fine shoulders, strong legs and powerful quarters and watched her going out on her training gallops accompanied by a stable companion without whom she was never happy.

Not satisfied with the Tetrarch's daughter, he also bought his

son, Salmon Trout, paying 3,500 guineas and his faith in both horses was splendidly rewarded. The fastest filly the turf had ever known, Mumtaz Mahal ('flying filly', 'spotted wonder') won every race but one that season and carried the Aga Khan's colours in the Queen Mary Stakes past the winning post ten lengths ahead of her nearest rival. Her amazing turn of speed was the talk of the town and, though she ran only one more season, brought her owner £14,000 in stake money before retiring to stud.

There was no holding the Aga Khan now. He gave instructions to find him a suitable home for his stud in Ireland and settled on a place in the Curragh, Co. Kildare, which he named Sheshoon. He also bought another French farm at Marly-le-Ville—it was only a beginning. Although he could command expert advice, he owed many of his successes as breeder and owner to his uncanny instinct. George Criticos—'George of the Ritz'—the hall porter to whom the Aga Khan took a great liking and who acted as his cashier, private secretary and factotum in London, mentioned how His Highness on one occasion asked him to cable George Lambton to buy a horse called Papyrus. The Aga Khan was finally advised against the purchase but the horse won the 1923 Derby.

When on the continent, the Aga Khan often sent instructions to his stables through George Criticos, and George, in turn, telephoned him details of races in which his horses were involved. So fond was the Aga Khan of the Ritz concierge that he named a horse after him, Criticos—it did not come up to scratch and was soon sold. He even asked George to spend his holidays at the Deauville house. George proudly preserved a cutting from a London newspaper which reported in its gossip column: 'Mr George Criticos, head porter of the Ritz Hotel in London, is staying as the guest of the Aga Khan in Deauville. He is a cross between major-domo and grand vizier to the Persian potentate . . .'

In his biography of the Aga Khan, Stanley Jackson tells of a punter who told the Aga Khan: 'If you will give me a tip, Your Highness, I would willingly risk my shirt', to which the Aga Khan replied that the happiest man is often the one who has no shirt on his back. George Criticos says that he placed many bets on behalf of his famous patron whose usual stake was £500 but double the amount when he thought he was on to a good thing.

For young Aly, his father's racing interests opened up a new dimension and brought him new friends. Soon he was as fond of Dickie Dawson as he had been of Monsieur Grin. At Whatcombe, he tested his skill on a horse and proved that he was a worthy heir to the family tradition. Already he handled horses with great confidence and courage, perhaps too much courage. He was still very close to his mother (there were, incidentally, rumours that she and the Aga Khan had gone through a second, secret marriage ceremony). She was not in good health and it came as a shock to her when the Aga Khan decided that their son needed a spell in England to balance the Latin element in his mental make-up and the French influences of his environment at Cimiez or Deauville.

However painful the prospect of a long separation from Aly for the Begum, the Aga Khan's mind was made up. He was less certain about the kind of English education that would be best for the boy. Much as he admired English institutions, a public school was not necessarily the most useful preparation for the life ahead of Aly. Private tuition to prepare him for entrance to a university seemed much more suitable.

The next move was to ask friends at the India Office to suggest a man to take charge of Aly's education and they came up with a very good choice—Charles Waddington, ex-officer of the Indian Army and former principal of Mayo College at Ajmer where generations of Indian princes received their training as future rulers of their states. Waddington, who shared the Aga Khan's love of India and England and was living in retirement, agreed to take Aly under his wing at his fine Sussex country house and see that he was taught style, self-discipline, savoir faire rather than that he should have his head crammed with academic knowledge.

The routine at the Waddington house would be much the same as the curriculum to which English boarding schools subjected their boys. Aly would be instructed by tutors and spend his free time riding, swimming, playing tennis. Summer vacations would be spent with his mother in the South of France or in Deauville. During other holidays, Waddington's own children, two boys and one girl, home from their schools, would keep him company. One could not wish for a better arrangement.

For a little 'English gentleman' in the mould in which the Aga

Khan hoped to shape his son, it was not unusual to suffer the pangs of separation from his loved ones which clouded Aly's life during his first few months at Sussex. But the warmth of his new surroundings, though well controlled, English-style, was no less comforting than the atmosphere in his mother's homes. Waddington grew genuinely fond of Aly whose charm became more evident as he grew older. He wanted to be liked, was pleasant and well mannered, but a restless streak and excess nervous energy found a happier outlet in physical activities than in desk work. He was good at games, prerequisite of successful adolescence in England, and fortunate in that his agile mind made up for what he lacked in application.

A great adventure was in store for him. Towards the end of 1923, the Aga Khan decided to take his wife and his son on their first visit to India. For Ginetta it was a tremendous event because she had never been at her husband's side when he faced his followers in the style to which the Imam was accustomed. For Aly it was a romantic expedition into the mysterious interior of his father's religious empire, but his first reaction was unexpected. Standing on deck as the ship approached the landing stage in Bombay, Aly looked out on the Khoja dignitaries assembled by the quayside to receive the Imam. The boy was not easily perplexed but their *jubas* (impressive crimson gold-embroidered gowns) and their *paqris* (golden turbans) puzzled him and he turned to his father: 'Why have so many magicians come here?' he asked. The grandiose palace at Malabar Hill, his venerable grandmother and her exotic court were pure fairyland, except that boys of twelve take naturally to fairyland.

Dressed in the style of a young Indian prince, Aly looked perfectly at home in the setting of his eastern forebears. And when it came to visiting the *jamatkhana* with the Imam, he was well-versed in the prayers and the ritual for which his Muslim teachers had prepared him and as familiar with Ismaili history as any Christian boy of his age with the Bible.

But the extravagance with which the ordinary Ismaili venerated his father made a deep impression. An oriental writer, Ibn Zul Quarnain, caught the spirit of one of the ceremonies in honour of the Aga Khan when he wrote: 'As far as the eye can see thousands are streaming across the countryside. At dawn the great pilgrimage began. Now it is late afternoon, yet still they come. Old men, young

men, poor men and rich men, the lame, the halt and the blind. Some barefooted and in filthy rags, others on mules and those who are very sick in rough litters. They have come at the bidding of their High Priest.

‘Presently a huge limousine slides silently between the waiting thousands and from it steps an imposing figure in flowing Kashmir shawl robes and a Persian lamb headdress. A sigh, as soft as an evening breeze, runs through the immense throng who fall on their knees, their lips moving in silent prayer. Rose petals thrown by devoted worshipping hands fall like gentle rain, and slowly the broad figure lifts one arm above his head to bless them. Silently he blesses them. Then, as suddenly as he came, he is gone and behind him he leaves the multitude rejoicing; for have they not fulfilled the life dream of every true Ismaili? Have they not been privileged to set their humble eyes on the mighty Aga Khan, direct descendant of Allah’s greatest Prophet?’

Among his followers, the Aga Khan, an impressive figure at all times, seemed to grow even further in stature, made decisions and gave guidance with immense authority. The inspiration he derived from his office as Imam distinguished him from other men and was impossible to explain except in terms of Sufist mysticism, part of the Ismaili creed: ‘I am convinced,’ he said, ‘that many Muslims . . . and that I myself have had moments of enlightenment and of knowledge of a kind which we cannot communicate because it is something given and not something acquired.’

In this spirit he tackled the problems of his followers with the knowledge and insight which are the Imam’s gift. He was in constant correspondence with the heads of his widely scattered communities, mostly hereditary—as in Hunza, where the Mir is an Ismaili and the religious leader—but local organisations were always strengthened as a result of his visits. On this occasion, too, he streamlined the religious and administrative institutions of Ismailis in India, adapted rules and regulations where necessary and gave his interpretation of the Holy Law.

*Zakat* still served the old Reform Party as a pretext for agitation: ‘When the Aga Khan visited Karachi in 1920,’ they told all who would listen, ‘he carried away fifteen lakhs of rupees after a stay of only twenty-six days.’ They claimed that, on another occasion, he

collected 1,540,000 rupees after a stay of only two hours. As with his pet project, Aligarh University, he always collected money for a good purpose and every Ismaili would have been mortally offended had the Imam refused his contribution.

Frequently the boot was already on the other foot. Had the Aga Khan granted his opponents a glimpse of his accounts, their case would not have stood up very well. He and Lady Ali Shah not only invested their followers' contributions shrewdly, the growing number of health, education and sports centres testified to the community's social and economic advance under his régime—the value of land and property at the disposal of his followers was constantly going up; yet, with religious fervour, many of them insisted on giving more.

Though far short of the extravagant notions abroad (some suggested later that there was more gold in his coffers than in the vaults of Fort Knox) the Aga Khan's personal fortune had grown immensely as a result of clever management. One of the first to appreciate the potential of Middle Eastern oil, he acquired shares in American oil companies with concessions in the area whose value multiplied. His lucky touch was beginning to attract the attention of financial experts and his portfolio of shares was an object lesson on how to grow richer every day.

Other people's money was of absorbing interest to him and he was intrigued by the affairs of ex-Khedive Abbas Hilmi with whom he was on friendly terms. He had always thought of Hilmi as a brilliant financier who had made a large fortune for himself after losing most of his capital in Egypt. To his great astonishment, the Aga Khan found out that dubious associates had relieved Hilmi of all he owned and that he died a poor man.

There was no risk of such a disaster befalling the Aga Khan, the least gullible of men. Even his hobbies were richly rewarding. Returning to Europe in the spring of 1924, he found his racing interests prospering and his fame as an owner spreading. As a politician, he received many honours—the Council of State in India recommended him for the Nobel Prize for Peace—but as a popular figure he was also a target for good-humoured music-hall jokes. Comedians were singing ditties about him. Whether referring to beautiful women or his sporting activities, they ended with a punning refrain about what the Aga can or Khant do.



## CHAPTER VI

‘It is a matter of concern to India, and more particularly to Bombay, that His Highness the Aga Khan should find happiness in his private life.’

The *Times of India*, December 8, 1929.

THE Aga Khan was in Aix les Bains—he was actually in his bath at the time—when the news came through that his horse Diophon had won the Two-Thousand Guineas Stakes at eleven to two, his first Classic winner in England. Salmon Trout made it a pair by winning the St Leger at six to one . . . The green and chocolate colours were flying high.

Success confirmed many of his idiosyncratic views on racing matters about which he argued fiercely with friends. There was the question of mating—which was more important, the dam or the sire? On this he was in harmony with his old friend, Lord Wavertree, partisan of the pro-dam school. Mollycoddling? He seemed to side with William Duke, who (like the coachmen of yore) did not spare the horses. If a horse broke down during the preparation for a big race it would probably have broken down in the big race.

William Duke, or, for that matter, Frank Butters, who took over the training of his horses some time later, attached little importance to a horse’s appearance. Both believed one yearling was as good as another as long as it had good health, nervous energy and the capacity to rest and sleep. Duke hardly ever looked at a horse before he bought it.

Racing in the footsteps of Salmon Trout and Diophon, Teresina and Paola assured the Aga Khan second place among England’s winning owners of 1923. In the following year, Friar’s Daughter and Voluse were the stars of a splendid batch which went to Sheshoon,

where Sir Edward Greer looked after the Aga Khan's expanding Irish interests. The next stud farm he bought, Gilltown (Kilcullen, Co. Kildare), became the best known of all. There was no holding him now. He headed the list of winning owners for the first time in 1924 and repeated the performance more frequently than any other owner.

His technique as a punter did not lag behind. When he entered the previous year's Irish Derby winner *Zionist* for the Lincolnshire Handicap, he warned young Charlie Smirke, the jockey, not to talk about the horse's chances. Smirke gathered that his owner had placed a bet of £500 at a hundred to one on *Zionist* and agreed to allow the bookmakers time to 'hedge' the bet—George of the Ritz thought the bet was £1,000 at fifty to one but, then, there were always at least two versions about everything the Aga Khan did.

A nine to two favourite, *Zionist* faltered in the last few strides and was beaten by a rank outsider: 'He was a desperately difficult horse to ride,' Smirke told the Scout, *Daily Express* racing expert, years later, 'I don't think it was my fault we were beaten but the weight *Zionist* carried and had to give away was too much for us.'

Of course the Aga Khan had his eye on the Derby but it was his ambition to win the great classic with a horse bred in his own stud. To him, breeding horses seemed infinitely more satisfying than buying them. It stimulated his imagination and became his main interest. He pondered a hundred theories about the making of a good horse, studied the conformation of thousands of sires and dams and followed the history of their offspring through generations. This involved science had no more advanced scholar.

So well versed a racing man was bound to encounter an echo in a like-minded expert. The Aga Khan met him in the person of Colonel J. J. Vuillier, the famous French breeder who operated an idiosyncratic points system. The Colonel accepted the Aga Khan's invitation to join him but this did not mean that his calculations were always accepted without question. This particular owner was quite capable of adjusting the Colonel's findings in the light of his own views. Colonel Vuillier was installed at Marly la Ville, the Aga Khan's first French stud farm—he bought another, *La Coquenne*, in 1927, and a third, *St Crespin*, two years after that.

In the winter of 1925, Kenya's Ismailis were excitedly looking

forward to one of the Imam's rare visits, few with greater anticipation than Eboo Pirbhai, a young Indian-born Ismaili who cherished a childhood memory of seeing the Aga Khan in Bombay ('This is your Holy Imam,' his parents told the boy at the Mosque where they went to pay homage to their leader). The family settled in East Africa before the First World War, went to live in Lamu by the coast, then moved to Nairobi. After graduating from the Aga Khan Religious School (later renamed Duke of York School), Eboo and his brothers, like most Ismailis, started up as small shopkeepers. Soon Eboo went his own way, bought a filling station ('I was convinced everybody would want a car'), learned to drive and established a transport firm.

Every free minute was devoted to the community, helping in the Mosque, serving with the uniformed Aga Khan Volunteer Corps, working for the new Health Board. When jobs were allocated to followers for the Aga Khan's visit, Eboo was chosen 'to drive His Highness'. He was there, proudly at the wheel of his own car, when the Imam arrived to be received by Gaivanji Lalgi, leader of East Africa's Ismailis.

As was his habit, the Aga Khan soon engaged his driver in conversation: 'He seemed to like me,' was Eboo Pirbhai's impression. The Imam asked him many questions, then said: 'I give you my blessing for your business—you will be a great man in years to come.' For a young Ismaili nothing could be more inspiring. Eboo's pride knew no bounds when the Aga Khan added that he hoped to see him again on future visits and that he ought to be a member of the Ismaili Council. It was like an accolade. Eboo's appointment to the Council was not long delayed.

In this way the Imam encouraged the young men of his community, often linking exhortation with practical advice, bringing a whiff of his European experiences to Africa, giving his followers new ideas but also good old-fashioned faith which took so many of them to the top. The encouragement generated ambition, the prophecy became self-fulfilling. The Aga Khan's eye for ability and talent rarely failed him. He was certainly right in this instance because Eboo—Sir Eboo Pirbhai—has become leader of East Africa's Ismailis and owner of Kenya's biggest fleet of safari vehicles and taxis.

Recalling the fateful days of 1925 which launched him on his spectacular career—Kenya Legislative Council, knighthood from King George VI, great wealth and standing in the new Kenya—Sir Eboo showed me over his fine bungalow, Dar-ul Amam (House of Peace), in Nairobi's exclusive Muthaiga district with the foreign embassies and big private residences standing in their own grounds. His three sons, Cambridge graduates, hold prominent positions in the Ismaili community, his three daughters were educated at Cheltenham Ladies College and three grandsons at Harrow, Winston Churchill's old school. The whole family feels strongly that they owe their good fortune to the Imam, and Sir Eboo at once made his statement of faith: 'The Aga Khan is our leader,' he said. Speaking about the old Aga Khan and his successor in the same breath, he went on: 'He is more than a Pope. What he says is for our benefit and his guidance and advice is often years ahead of the times. They are accepted although he applies neither force nor pressure.'

In the mid-twenties, while the Aga Khan travelled, Aly continued his education and his sport. By the time he was fifteen he was familiar with most of his father's famous horses, frequently went to the Berkshire stables or, with Thomas and Nesbit Waddington, on excursions across the Irish Sea to visit Giltown and Sheshoon. He was already beginning to live up to his father's notion of the ideal horseman. So far, though separation from his parents sometimes bothered him, he enjoyed a largely untroubled and uncomplicated boyhood.

His mother had been ailing for over a year but he was utterly unprepared for the news which reached him at the end of 1926. It seems that her health had been failing but the doctors had been unable to diagnose the source of her troubles. In December, in a Neuilly clinic they operated to remove her appendix but discovered that there was nothing wrong with it. She seemed on the way to recovery, was, after all, only thirty-seven years old: 'But one afternoon'—to let the Aga Khan take up the sad story—'I was driving in the Bois, and when I went back to the hospital I was told that she had died during my absence.' The cause of death was an embolism.

The Waddingtons told Aly as gently as possible but it came as a great shock. He travelled to Paris to join his father and attend the funeral rites in the new Paris Mosque. Ginetta's body was taken to