



The Accession of His Majesty King Faisal II

SATURDAY, the 2nd of May, 1953, will go down as a highly significant date in the annals of the Arab World for, much more than a milestone on the age-long road of Middle East history, it was a day that brought a renewal of confidence in the constitutional order of things and a renewal of hope for the future. It was as though the young King, who succeeded to the throne of Iraq on that day, was a personification, not only of the ideals that lie deep in the hearts of his people, but also of the new age that has already dawned for Iraq in particular and, indeed, for the Arab World in general.

In Iraq the name of Faisal is synonymous with a progressive, shrewd and statesmanlike leadership that derives from the present King's grandfather; it is a name that has happy associations, and all portents strongly favour a sweeping vindication of the whole-hearted loyalty and devotion which the people of Iraq have invested in their new King.

Baghdad, liberally bedecked and illuminated for the occasion, was reminiscent of fairyland, particularly at night when hundreds of thousands of electric-light bulbs, all of vivid hue, transformed the streets, parks and gardens into fascinating fairy grottoes; but the spirit of celebration and the urge to decoration were not confined to the capital itself, but radiated outwards into every town and village, the towns challenging the capital in their demonstrativeness and the villages enlisting the medium of the radio to bind them more closely into the family circle. In Baghdad, every shop window had its Coronation motif with a Royal portrait as its centre-piece; buildings of any prominence vied with each other in decorative design, with the national colours the only limiting condition; houses were beflagged; trees grew electric-light bulbs almost overnight. And the people milled happily through the streets, whether any pageantry were expected or not—and if occasionally they caused unmanageable traffic-jams, nobody minded very much and it was all in excellent good spirit.

Celebration began with a firework display on the west bank of the Tigris just below King Faisal Bridge, and thousands of people crowded into vantage points on the east bank, the approach roads and the bridge itself. As barrages of rockets soared into the star-studded night sky, burst and bathed the whole city in warm light, the roar of approval from the crowds reverberated up and down the river in the still air, as also did the great



*An historic picture—the enthronement of
His Majesty King Faisal II.*



His Majesty the King and H.R.H. Prince Abdul Ilah leave the Parliament building after the Ceremony of Accession on 2nd May, 1953

burst of cheering that greeted the set-piece depicting the King's head. This set the pace for several days of unflagging excitement when, to a background of official functions which brought together the delegations of over thirty countries, with Iraqi statesmen, senators, administrators, officials and the military, there were demonstrations and dancing in the streets.

Early on the morning of Accession Day His Majesty drove in his ornate State Carriage through cheering crowds to the Parliament building where he took the oath. In a short speech which followed he paid warm tribute to his mother, the late Queen Aliyah, to whom he referred with evident emotion, and to His Royal Highness Prince Abdul Ilah, whose guidance as Prince Regent, both to him personally and to Iraq generally over a long period of years, had been such a source of inspiration and confidence. "With God's will," he vouchsafed, "your co-operation and that of my noble people, I shall be a constitutional monarch and safeguard democratic principles," and in conclusion he expressed the confidence he felt in the support of his people in the attainment of contentment and prosperity for the country.

The sentiments of all present at the ceremony were expressed by the President of the Senate, His Excellency Mohammed al-Sadr, when, in a short address to the assembly, he said that the oath-taking was a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of the nation which was so solidly behind the King.

After the ceremony His Majesty walked to the gardens of the building where, amid the flowers and the smooth, green lawns, he received the congratulations of his Ministers, his officials, and the visiting delegations, and later he drove in state to the Royal Mausoleum, where he paid homage at the tombs of his forebears. Meanwhile, in the city squares and main streets, where the people waited for their now-enthroned King, excitement ran at high pitch. The crowds packed all available space from wall to wall, they milled to and fro, listened to impromptu addresses of loyalty from speakers, on a sudden urge, raised shoulder-high; they waved flags and staged spontaneous demonstrations and, when His Majesty returned home after the official ceremony was over, a journey that normally took ten minutes took two hours.

A day of rejoicing culminated in a big reception that night in the grounds of the Palace of H.R.H. Prince Abdul Ilah, when some 1,000 guests, drawn from some of the world's royal houses, from among heads of many different states, diplomats and officials and their ladies, met together on the great front lawn in the mellow light of a myriad of vari-coloured electric-light bulbs set in the encircling belt of trees. The fascinating scene, in a similarly glamorous setting, was repeated two nights later when His Excellency the Prime Minister held a reception in the city, an occasion which presented His Majesty with the opportunity to thank all the visiting delegations for their presence at the celebrations—some had travelled many thousands of miles—and for their tangible expressions of friendship towards him and his people; but in the meantime there had been two other important functions, in honour of the King, which were highlights of the occasion of Accession.

One was the eight-miles-long procession of the Iraqi armed forces in a March Past at which His Majesty took the Salute, and the other was a delightful display by school-children, taking the form of a procession that traced Iraq's history in tableaux form with, in addition, flower floats. This was a magnificent effort in imagination in conception, ingenuity and thoroughness in execution, and conviction in effect; it carried top credit to the Ministry of Education, teachers, pupils and parents alike, for a wealth of diligent preparatory work that had most obviously been invested in this pageant.

The Pageantry of Accession

From a special stand, flanked and fronted by a huge broken ring of grandstands, His Majesty King Faisal II took the Salute as March Past of the Iraqi Armed Forces—the Cavalry, the Infantry Regiments, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy, the Mechanised Brigades, including the armoured units, and the ancillary Services—and, on another day, reviewed a pageant prepared for the occasion and staged by Iraqi school-children. With him at the saluting box was His Royal Highness Prince Abdul Ilah,



His Majesty at the saluting base



An immaculate Infantry Unit

Iraqi schools staged . . .



. . . colourful tableaux

A children's flower float



Cavalry units in the March Past



while immediately to his right and left were representatives of the world's Royalty and of Heads of States, foreign delegations, Iraqi Statesmen and members of Parliament, senior officials and guests representing spheres of commerce, education, social affairs and the professions. Also present were young men, among the personal guests of His Majesty, who had been his close friend Harrow School in England. In the pageant of flowers the accent was on youth. Anith responded to the occasion when in Baghdad, as well as in other cities and towns of Iraq, the schools staged before their new King an impressive display depicting the highlights of the ancient kingdom's history and traditions, together with colourful manifestations of unity in the form of floral floats.