

# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvi
1: An Incidental Encounter	1
2: From Fishing Village to Commercial Port	5
<i>Photo Gallery A</i>	21
3: The Coming of the American Mission	31
4: Decade of Austerity and Promise	59
5: World War II Comes to Kuwait	81
6: From Boom Port to Boom Town	105
<i>Photo Gallery B</i>	123
7: Developers, Dissidents, and Diplomats	133
8: Road to Independence	155
9: Independence	179
10: Growing Pains and Engagement	201
<i>Photo Gallery C</i>	221
11: A Bad Neighborhood	233
12: Sea of Troubles	253
13: Tentative Alliance	275
14: Prelude to Disaster	293
15: Besieged but Not Beaten	321

vi Contents

<i>Photo Gallery D</i>	347
16: The Valley of the Shadow	357
17: Troubled Dawn	395
18: Legacy of Pride and Suffering	413
19: Friends and Allies	439
20: Snapshots at Age One Hundred	463
Appendices	483
Bibliography	501
Notes	524
Index	689

## The Coming of the American Mission

With the turn of the century, we see the first Americans settle down and call Kuwait their new home. In 1911, the Arabian Mission<sup>1</sup> of the Reformed Church in America purchased, with Shaikh Mubarak's permission, a parcel of land on a small hill outside the walls of the town for its hospital and other facilities. Dr. Paul Harrison was named by the mission to direct the medical work; Edwin Calverley was assigned as evangelist/educator and Dr. Eleanor Calverley, his wife, was sent to handle medical practice among the women of Kuwait.

The arrival of this tiny American community was the culmination of years of effort from the Arabian Mission to gain acceptance of a permanent station in Kuwait. The mission had looked upon Kuwait as a very desirable location for its work almost from its founding in 1892.<sup>2</sup> From its first bases in Basra and, to a lesser extent, in Bahrain, mission personnel visited periodically, beginning in 1895. Early that year, Samuel Zwemer spent three days there, noting the splendid harbor and cleanliness of the place.<sup>3</sup> The following May, two *colporteurs* visited for five days.<sup>4</sup> In an excess of optimism, Zwemer reported "The door is now ajar; one more visit and that by our medical missionary will push it wide open, perhaps off its hinges."<sup>5</sup>

The true situation became clear in 1896, when another *colporteur* passed through Kuwait when Mubarak had just come to power. The new ruler firmly rejected the sale of bibles and other Christian literature. If Zwemer's sense of timing proved inaccurate, the other aspect of his advice was more valid. The mission had initiated the practice of sending its physicians around the Gulf to cultivate contacts and good will.<sup>6</sup> This strategy, however, was not an immediate

success. When Dr. Sharon Thoms and two assistants returned to Kuwait in June, 1903, Mubarak had them put on the next vessel departing the harbor that same day.<sup>7</sup> Despite the rebuff of Dr. Thoms and party, another *colporteur* moved to Kuwait with his large family and operated from a rented house for a year before he had to leave.<sup>8</sup> A further visit by Zwemer in February, 1904 proved equally unavailing. The prospects in Kuwait appeared so bleak that the mission, at its annual meeting in 1907, considered a motion to divert funds being held to purchase land for a hospital there for uses elsewhere in the Gulf.<sup>9</sup>

Events, however, were about to take an unexpected turn in a dramatic twist worthy of fiction. The mission base in Basra periodically dispatched a physician to tour adjacent towns. In late 1908, Dr. Arthur K. Bennett made a routine visit to Muhammera where he treated an enthusiastic Shaikh Khaz'al for diabetes. Shaikh Mubarak was visiting his friend at the time and Bennett was taken to meet the Kuwaiti ruler aboard his yacht. With Khaz'al's endorsement, Mubarak invited Bennett to come to Kuwait to look at his sister who suffered from eye problems.<sup>10</sup> According to Bennett's subsequent recollection, he successfully performed cataract surgery on the patient, cementing a warm relationship with the ruler.<sup>11</sup> The positive impression created by Dr. Bennett's work was further strengthened by the efforts of Sayyid Rajab Al-Naqib, a prominent notable and religious figure in Basra. Highly respected by Shaikh Mubarak, Al-Naqib and his family had also been treated by Bennett and mission personnel. Now, he added his influential voice to those urging that Mubarak invite the mission to establish a presence in his domain. Early in 1909, Mubarak issued the invitation.

Shaikh Mubarak's apparent reversal of position was a fateful one, not only for the Arabian Mission, but for the people of Kuwait and the ruler himself.

One of the leading modern chroniclers of Kuwait's history considers Mubarak's "introduction of modern medicine" to have been the "major achievement in social services."<sup>12</sup> It is not possible, on the basis of available sources, to unravel the reluctance of Mubarak to countenance mission activities prior to 1909. Kuwait was unaccustomed at the time to hosting Western residents who represented a foreign culture and faith; Mubarak may have been uncomfortable

with the idea, as were many of the other citizens of the town. But Abu Hakima, in his review of the record, suggests that an entirely different factor may have been in play. He finds no indication in the records of the Arabian Mission that its personnel were aware of the terms of Mubarak's 1899 agreement with the British. Among other things, the agreement stipulated that Kuwait would not sell, rent, or otherwise alienate land to foreigners.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the mix of motives and concerns influencing Mubarak's decision, it seems likely that he obtained British approval before issuing his invitation.

Having secured permission to establish a medical facility in Kuwait, the mission looked forward to building a hospital; for the moment, however, Kuwait was designated an "outstation" of the mission's main lodgement in Basra. Arthur Bennett, John Van Ess,<sup>14</sup> and Gerrit Pennings were tasked with visiting Kuwait to maintain the operation, possibly with the support of a resident Iraqi Christian with first-aid skills. Drs. Stanley Mylrea and Paul Harrison, from the mission's station in Bahrain, shared these itinerant duties. This arrangement did not please Shaikh Mubarak, who was soon pressing for a permanent and independent facility in Kuwait. The first resident staff was in place by December, 1911.<sup>15</sup>

For the first two years, the mission in Kuwait functioned in two rented houses in the center of town. One of them, called Bayt-ar-Rabban, had been the scene of a murder for which the owner was banished and his property seized. Since no Kuwaiti would live there, the mission obtained it for very low rent.<sup>16</sup> The other was in fact an annex of Shaikh Mubarak's palace and served as both a residence and the hospital.<sup>17</sup> The structure had two inner courtyards onto which the rooms opened. The larger section was selected for Dr. Harrison's medical practice and residential quarters. The smaller, more private courtyard was used for Dr. Calverley's practice for women. One room was divided by a calico curtain and functioned as both an office and operating room. The other room was converted into a rudimentary ward. Operations were sometimes performed in the mornings on the roof where light was good and the sun had baked the area. Dr. Harrison, who was replaced in 1914 by Dr. Mylrea, provided a glimpse of the town in his time:

*The city of thick mud walls and flat roofs spread along the south side of a spacious harbor. Sailing craft of different kinds were built along the shore, and Paul, as he talked with the boatmen, learned that hundreds of them went out each year to the pearl banks and dove for oyster shells. Back of the city the open desert stretched out in unbroken emptiness. There was no drinking water in the city, but water was brought in every day by sailboats that plied back and forth to the mouth of the river (Shatt Al-Arab) fifty miles away.<sup>18</sup>*

The town in which the newcomers settled had not changed fundamentally since the 1880s.<sup>19</sup> Nestled in an arc along the Kuwait Bay, it covered an area of about eight square kilometers and was adapted to both its geopolitical environment and the livelihoods of its inhabitants. The clear, flat shoreline served as a dockyard for vessels of various sizes. (primarily *booms* and *sambuks*) It was employed in enterprises from pearling and fishing to oceangoing trade, while the landward [desert] side had been intermittently fortified against the threat of bedouin tribes, for whom Kuwait was entrepôt and trading post. Harold Dickson described Kuwait's importance for desert tribes in his legendary book, *The Arab of the Desert*:

*... from time immemorable the Mutair, Harb, Shammar, 'Awazim and northern 'Ajman have done their musabila to that town. This system allows the town authorities to exercise a degree of control over the badawin who market with them, as any misbehaviour may result in the tribe's being forbidden to enter the town—a great hardship.<sup>20</sup>*

There were few monumental buildings in Kuwait in the first decade of the twentieth century with the exception of Seif Palace, the seat of the ruler built in 1904, and a number of minarets. The old city was, in the description provided in the 1960s by a Levantine city planner, "compact, its typical dwelling a courtyard house ..., its scale human." These homes, housing several generations of an extended family, were "strung around main pedestrian traffic arteries ... producing an urban pattern as 'organic' as can be imagined."

Whether approached from the sea or the desert, Kuwait presented the aspect of "a typically Islamic desert Arab city."<sup>21</sup>

One change that had occurred since the first American visit was the dismantling of the mud-brick wall that had been built in the eighteenth century to protect the city from landward attack. As the town underwent normal growth, the wall was removed to facilitate expansion of urban areas. Perhaps, also, the decision to dispense with its protective fortifications reflected an increased confidence and comfort with Kuwait's geopolitical situation. Despite resurgent Ottoman efforts to assert greater control over Kuwait during the empire's twilight years, Shaikh Mubarak astutely gained a measure of security by concluding a formal agreement with Great Britain. Signed on January 23, 1899, the relationship evolved into full-fledged protectorate status for Kuwait by 1903. From London's point of view, the arrangement not only checked Ottoman ambitions but also torpedoed German ambitions to build a Berlin-Baghdad Railroad with Kuwait as its terminus on the Gulf. With the agreement in hand, Shaikh Mubarak felt secure enough to proclaim Kuwait's autonomy from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup>

With its autonomy confirmed internationally, Kuwait was free to pursue its mercantile vocation. From its seafront on the best natural harbor on the Gulf, Kuwaiti cargo vessels sailed to Basra, Muhammera (in what is now Khuzistan), India, and as far as Mombasa on the African coast. In the Safat, an open desert market at the southeastern edge of town, trade was conducted with the bedouin of the hinterland. Craftsmen practiced their trades in covered *suqs*, or markets, stretching from Safat square toward the center of town, producing goods needed by both townspeople and traders.<sup>23</sup> The new American residents found themselves in the midst of a busy seaport. It was healthier than most because of the absence of mosquito-borne malaria and the cleansing powers of the strong sun, but was apparently not free of vices common to seaports.<sup>24</sup> By 1914, the population was variously estimated at between thirty-eight thousand and fifty thousand souls, there were about thirty mosques, some five hundred shops, and approximately three thousand residences.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Eleanor Calverley, who joined the American Mission in January, 1912, recalled her vivid first impressions of the town on her arrival by steamer from Bahrain:

*Out of the desert on the horizon appeared a city of low houses the colour of sand. Above the sky was very blue. Beneath, the blue water of the Persian Gulf was dotted with white sails. Beached along the shore a line of brown sailboats awaited the season for pearl diving... In the whole picture was scarcely a tree or a patch of green. And yet Kuwait had a beauty of its own; a beauty of sand and sky and sea....*<sup>26</sup>

The tiny new American community was composed not of adventurers or explorers, although they would experience both adventure and discovery in the course of their work, but rather they were inspired by their faith and the desire to spread Christianity in “that part of the Muslim world which seemed least vulnerable to the Christian message.”<sup>27</sup> To that end, the Arabian Mission was establishing “stations” along the Gulf Coast, from Basra to Muscat. As the writings of the early missionaries make clear, however, the ultimate dream of the collective was to penetrate the interior of Arabia.

From its inception, the Kuwait “station” was unique. Whereas other mission stations had a medical component, their activities included a range of activities—including evangelizing and education. Kuwait was from the outset designated as a medical mission.<sup>28</sup> There were probably two reasons for this anomaly. The first was the peculiar combination of circumstances that convinced the ruler to approve its establishment. The second may have been a perception that, aside from its intrinsic importance, Kuwait was a plausible launching pad for the hoped—for jump into Central Arabia. Within a few years, this subsidiary goal was accepted as a forlorn hope as it became apparent that an invitation to establish a permanent presence in Central Arabia would not be forthcoming. Nevertheless, by almost any other measure, the “American Mission” in Kuwait was a spectacular success in transforming health standards, as well as caring for and assisting the emirate with the difficult transition to modernity.

The permission of Shaikh Mubarak to reside in Kuwait and his willingness to sell land to the mission did not assure societal acceptance. This prize remained to be earned even as they set about establishing facilities for their medical practice.

The Kuwaiti townspeople were accustomed to seeing strangers, including Europeans, calling at their port or passing through to other destinations, but they had little experience with European or American-Christian residents. The British Political Agent, with a staff of one or two, had only come in 1904. Most Kuwaitis were initially curious and apprehensive, whereas some were actively hostile. Dr. Paul Harrison, who, a few years earlier, carried out medical work for a period of two months, contrasted the Kuwaiti reaction with the friendliness he had encountered in Oman; "The townsmen showed plainly that they were suspicious of foreigners, and children ran from them in fright when they walked in the streets."<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, he and his partner, Dr. Gerrit Pennings, made the most of their brief stay. They were warmly welcomed by the nearby bedouin tribesmen who came for treatment and, by the time of their departure, had positively shaped the attitude of the ruler due to their good work. On their parting, Sheikh Mubarak informed them that he had been following their activities closely and added, "I give you permission to return whenever it is convenient for you to do so. May Allah go with you."<sup>30</sup>

It was a start toward breaking down local resistance, but it would take almost a decade for Arabian Mission personnel to achieve full acceptance and integration into Kuwaiti society. Dr. Stanley Mylrea, an Englishman who replaced Harrison in 1913 and went on to achieve legendary status in the country and ultimately choosing to be buried in the city, had left a snapshot of the situation he and his early colleagues encountered:

*... While it was true that Shaikh Mubarak wanted us, the great majority of the population including all the leading families were solidly opposed to the policy of allowing Christian missionaries to settle in their city. It was all very well to send for a doctor to come down from Basra to attend an important member of the community who might be ill, but to have a colony of Christian missionaries living in their city? No, they did not want that!*

*...It used to hurt my pride to realize that in Kuwait I was looked upon as an unbeliever and an infidel. It should be noted that this curiosity and rudeness was a manifestation on the part of the man*

*(and the boy) on the street only. The upper classes were aloof and supercilious but they never stooped to the cheap vulgarity of the common people. They kept their good manners and were courteous and civil even when they were probably suppressing inward prejudices. Only a very few were really rude to me.*<sup>31</sup>

It should not be concluded from the fear and suspicion of American residents that there did not exist Kuwaitis who, especially those engaged in the international pearl trade with Paris, were aware of events in the United States that could affect their interests. John Van Ess was puzzled to hear the pearl merchants complain about the depressed market in 1909, but noted that they had a single hope for better times:

*It was that 'taaf' might happen. I didn't recognize the word and the Arabs themselves did not know either just what 'taaf' was, but anyway if taaf did happen, pearls would jump in value. It did happen. When word came to Paris that Taft had been elected President of the United States, pearls more than doubled in price.*<sup>32</sup>

Ready or not, the Kuwaitis were on the brink of being drawn relentlessly into closer contact with the wider world. In 1912, the first automobile arrived in Kuwait, the British-India Steam Navigation Company initiated weekly port calls, and the Hamburg-Amerika Line added Kuwait to its routes.<sup>33</sup> By 1916, Kuwait was connected to Basra and beyond by telegraph. Kuwaiti horizons could never again be confined to the nearby Gulf region.

Equally essential to the mission's acceptance and success in Kuwait was the attitude of the British authorities in the region. At least some of them were initially highly suspicious of these American newcomers who trekked around the Arabian Peninsula interacting, insofar as they were permitted, with local shaikhs, rulers, and tribesmen. With some reluctance, they acceded to Shaikh Mubarak's invitation to set up a medical practice in Kuwait, but not before extracting from the Arabian Mission a written acceptance of Great Britain's "special" status in the Gulf. This agreement, signed at Bahrain on November 18, 1910, also clarified that the mission station in Kuwait would not in any way involve the Ottomans in the affairs of the shaikhdom.<sup>34</sup>

Over time, relationships between the newly established station and the local British authorities developed into mutual respect and even cooperation. While the British establishment was occasionally exasperated by what they regarded as naiveté, brashness and lack of sympathy for colonialism in general,<sup>35</sup> mission personnel were fortunate in the quality of the early political agents, like William Shakespear and Harold Dickson, who came to value the medical and other services they provided. British officials further afield, however, continued to regard mission activities with suspicion and vigilance.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the decade, the British representatives on the ground in Kuwait at least appear to have been won over by the achievements and contributions of mission personnel. In 1919, the political agent there included Dr. Mylrea on his annual honors list. The citation read:

*Dr. Charles Stanley Garland Mylrea, American Mission, has been of great assistance to my predecessors Colonel Hamilton and Captain Loch as will be seen from this office No. 1465 dated 18.8.18 to your address. He has also been of great assistance to me during the blockade incurring thereby much displeasure among the local population much to the detriment of his own work. His assistance continues and in consideration of his help I recommend him for the honour of O.B.E.<sup>37</sup>*

Undeterred, the mission pioneers went about their medical work while planning facilities, transforming the property, and raising their families.<sup>38</sup> In 1914, Dr. Stanley Mylrea, who had replaced Harrison the previous winter, built his house (the doctor's residence) on a small hillock which he "deemed of great importance."<sup>39</sup> The realization of this project was not without drama and an epic scene worthy of a Hollywood script. Two young American engineers, Charles Shaw and Philip Haynes, were brought in to build the first men's hospital in 1914, where they quickly surveyed the property according to the specifications of the deed of sale. In the process, they found that the property markers were inaccurate and relocated them. An unanticipated consequence of the survey was to exclude two-thirds of the cherished thirty-foot hill! Dr. Mylrea, who had been assigned to Kuwait the previous winter, decided to call on the ruler to ask that the entire hill be included in the mission's property.

Shaikh Mubarak was not amused to learn that the boundaries had been redefined and angrily chastized the mission for delays in the construction of the promised hospital. Mylrea left the audience in a depressed mood.

During the ensuing weeks, the mission sought ways to retrieve the situation, and Mylrea decided to invite the ruler to come to the mission site to measure the property and make a public statement. After some delay, Shaikh Mubarak agreed. The resulting visit is of such supreme importance for the future of the American mission that Dr. Mylrea's recollections merit repetition at length:

*The fateful day came and it was raining. Now the Arab hates rain, which indeed converts the cities into quagmires and pools and he usually prefers to stay indoors rather than brave the elements. However, hoping against hope, Mr. Calverley and Dr. Mylrea walked out to the property and sat on the hill and waited. The afternoon wore on and they began to fear the worst. At last, to their relief, a procession came in sight. It was a procession worthy of the "Movies." In front came three carriages, in the first of which was Sheikh Mubarak himself accompanied by his little grandson. In the second carriage was Sheikh Jaber, the heir to the throne. In the third carriage was the resident British Government official who, at the request of Dr. Mylrea, had come to witness the proceedings. Riding alongside of the carriages were all the chief men of the city, out perhaps to see the hated missionaries finally rebuked and dismissed. Accompanying the whole was the usual crowd of small boys hoping to enjoy themselves....*

*Slowly the cavalcade halted and the Sheikh, accompanied by his son and grandson and by the British Government Official, slowly walked to the top of the hill. The chief men of the city dismounted and also came up the hill. Salutations, barely civil, passed between the Sheikh and the missionaries. Solemnly the official measuring cubit was laid along the Sheikh's arm, to make sure that the official cubit was the right length. At last the measuring was begun. The task took some time but when the figures were given to the Sheikh he could but acknowledge that we had taken only what was our right. His expression underwent a complete transformation and he turned to the missionaries, saying 'Why, this is*

*all right.' He then made a sign to those present that he was about to speak. The gist of his speech was as follows:—'Men of Kuwait. I have summoned you here to-day for a rather unusual purpose. You all know that I am under very special treaty relations with the British Government not to lease or sell any of my territory to foreigners without the sanction of the British Government, and you all know that I have been most scrupulous in observing this agreement. But these people, these Americans, are not politicians or tradesmen. They have come here to teach us and to help us. They have come here to build us a hospital. Now, the doctor here wants something of me. I am not sure just what he does want, but whatever it is I am going to give it to him as a personal expression of my good will.' And then he turned to Dr. Mylrea and said 'Doctor just what is it you want?' to which the doctor replied 'I want you to give us all of the hill'. 'Good' was the answer. 'My men will come out tomorrow and you can tell them where to put the landmarks.'<sup>40</sup>*

The first hospital building took shape in 1914 under the direction of engineers Shaw and Haynes. The structure, basically a line of rooms surrounded by a broad veranda, was unique in Kuwait and the Gulf. Because of its use of imported steel beams and concrete, constructing it was more of a challenge than its simple design might suggest. Local builders employed for the project were completely unfamiliar with modern building techniques, and a great deal of on-the-job training was required as the structure was being built. Another feature unfamiliar in Kuwaiti construction was the number and size of windows added for light and ventilation, and the large and airy rooms. Nevertheless, the completed hospital, which was known locally as "the glass house," was so soundly built that its demolition to make room for the Mylrea Memorial Men's Hospital in the 1950s was an unexpectedly difficult task.<sup>41</sup> By 1916, what was called "the padre's house" was added west of the doctor's residence, with an adjacent line of rooms designed originally as the mission school. Finally, in 1919, the mission capped a decade of intensive building with the erection of a women's hospital, similar to the 1913 hospital structure. In the course of this burst of building, the Americans made their mark on the physical face of Kuwait.<sup>42</sup>

Through their writings and other contemporary sources, we know a great deal about these earliest American residents. Dr. Eleanor Calverley, who overlapped with Dr. Harrison and served with absences for leave until 1929, was that rarest of professionals in the region at the time—a female physician. Her gender greatly facilitated interaction with the secluded women of Kuwait and she may have been the first member of the mission to make enduring inroads into Kuwaiti society. As her colleague noted:

*When it became known that the lady doctor would visit women in their homes, Eleanor Calverley had more work than she could do. Her husband bought a donkey on which she rode to her calls... Her skill began to save lives of child-mothers who so often died giving birth. With her advice babies survived the diseases that usually killed them.<sup>43</sup>*

Dr. Calverley experienced her share of hostility during the first months of her service, however. On one occasion, she was called to the home of a woman experiencing a difficult delivery only to be turned away at the door after hostile midwives had persuaded the family not to let her in.<sup>44</sup> A turning point for her was the case of “Fulana,” a Kuwaiti patient suffering from a hernia. Word of the successful operation quickly spread throughout the town; “What do you suppose the doctor lady did? Why, she cut Fulana open, took out her insides, carried them to the sea and washed them and then put them back again.”<sup>45</sup>

Edwin Calverley, her husband, a graduate of an Ivy League seminary, was the mission’s first permanent minister and educator. Early in his residency, he set up a small modern school with an English curriculum in the line of rooms near the hospital. Elements in the town, who were hostile to the American mission and Shaikh Mubarak’s support for it, established a dispensary and competing school which the ruler neutralized by bestowing his patronage on them as well. The dispensary failed in several months but the school, “al-Mubarakiyah” succeeded to become the first modern Arabic school.<sup>46</sup> Some students continued their studies at the Calverley School after completing their early schooling at al-Mubarakiyah.<sup>47</sup>

The iconic face of the mission in its early stages was, however, provided by Dr. Stanley Mylrea. British by birth, he was married to an American, Bessie, who earned the nickname “Khatun Sa’idah” or “happy lady” among the Kuwaitis. Bessie Mylrea was a gifted pianist who imported the town’s first piano. Contemporaries recall her pumping and playing the “baby organ” at weekly worship services held by the mission. Mrs. Mylrea attempted to establish a comparable school for girls but was too far ahead of the times. She was compelled to abandon the project by strong religious opposition.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Mylrea possessed a grave and formal manner, tempered by a dry sense of humor and occasional flashes of exasperation. Lewis Scudder, Jr., who knew him personally in his later years, characterizes him as the epitome of the *hakim*, a “sober man of deep spiritual learning” and wisdom, held in particular esteem in Arab culture: “Even when galloping through the streets of the town on his horse with his dog, Khalaf, pelting along in their train, racing to meet an emergency at some house where illness threatened, he never lost his dignity.”<sup>49</sup>

Gradually, the mission began to take shape under the determined leadership of Dr. Mylrea as facilities were built and human relationships were developed.<sup>50</sup> In addition to a growing medical practice among Kuwaitis,<sup>51</sup> mission doctors served as medical examiners for the British political agent. Mission personnel also managed to uphold their evangelical responsibilities. Prior to the construction of a purpose-built chapel twenty years after the arrival of the community, weekly services were conducted in the courtyard of a traditional Kuwaiti house. Although the missionaries would later come to realize the futility of attempts to convert Kuwaiti Muslims, the sounds of their worship and singing often lured passers-by in a town where entertainment was scarce. On occasion, as many as sixty to one hundred Kuwaitis crowded the courtyard to listen to homilies preached in Arabic and to engage in lively discussions of Christianity and Islam.<sup>52</sup> As much as anything else, these early encounters began to undermine the suspicion and hostility within the Kuwaiti population regarding Christians, and laid foundations for the unique level of tolerance among most Kuwaitis today. It was extremely hard to discount these Christian-Americans who had come among them to serve their medical needs.

The Arabian Mission staff, men, and women had the distinction of being the first Westerners to establish a viable community in Kuwait. While small in number, the group was larger than the official British establishment up until the beginnings of the oil industry. With their *colporteurs* and staff from India and other Arab countries, the critical mass for community life existed. Whether single or married, these Americans had come to establish their homes among the Kuwaitis and to interact with their Kuwaiti hosts.<sup>53</sup> To supplement the work of the hospital, a school for boys was established in 1911 with the permission of the ruler and under the direction of Edwin Calverley. In 1916, it moved into newly constructed facilities on the mission compound and continued to operate until forced to close during the worldwide depression. Its curriculum included English, typing, and other modern skills and produced a small cadre of Kuwaiti boys prepared for the demands of modernization that they would confront sooner than they could have anticipated at the time. Among its graduates were the first directors of the Public Works, Health and Customs departments.<sup>54</sup> The Calverley School had an influence on the development of modern education in Kuwait.

Even as the Americans were consolidating their foothold in Kuwait, their sponsor, Shaikh Mubarak, died on November 28, 1915. He was a leader of extraordinary vision and capability. By his adroit conclusion of a protectorate agreement with Great Britain, he secured Kuwait's independence not just against the Ottoman state but also against tribal and dynastic rivalries swirling around him in Central Arabia. Although he occasionally overreached himself domestically<sup>55</sup> and in military adventures abroad in his quest for a greater role in the region, he demonstrated a remarkable capacity for regaining his footing.

In addition to inviting the Arabian Mission to Kuwait to bring modern medical services to his people and presiding over the beginnings of modern education in Kuwait, Mubarak exercised regional influence much greater than Kuwait's size and resources would suggest. Perhaps most significantly he was able to play the part of "king-facilitator," if not "kingmaker," in the Arabian Peninsula. Little-known is the role of Mubarak and Kuwait in the success of Abd al-Aziz al-Saud in consolidating his rule over that vast territory.

Kuwait's relationship with Abd-al-Aziz and the rise of the Saudi state is a thread that runs through the remainder of this history, a thread in which the members of the nascent American community would sometimes find themselves involved. Here it suffices to set the stage for subsequent developments. Lewis Scudder provides a concise scene setter:

*From 1896 Mubarak was the mentor of the exiled scion of the house of Al-Sa'ud, Abd-ul-Aziz, and protector of his father, Abd-ur-Rahman... He (Mubarak) was pleased to continue giving sanctuary to Abd-ur-Rahman Al-Sa'ud.*

*Through all these maneuvers, the young Abd-ul-Aziz was Mubarak's observant student, and it was Mubarak who gave his blessing to the undertaking which resulted in Abd-ul-Aziz's dramatic coup against the Al-Rashid in Riyadh in 1902. Mylrea commented:*

*It is to Mubarak that the great king, Ibn Saud, owes his early training, for Ibn Saud spent his boyhood in Kuwait. Mubarak took a great fancy to the young lad and undoubtedly molded his character in the impressionable days of boyhood. It is not too much to say that had it not been for Mubarak, Ibn Saud would never have become the historic commanding figure that everyone acknowledges to be the greatest Arab since the days of the early Caliphs.<sup>56</sup>*

Stanley Mylrea met 'Abd al-'Aziz al Saud in the spring of 1914 when the future Saudi king was encamped in the desert near Jahra for a conference with Mubarak and the British to discuss plans to extend the Baghdad railroad to Kuwait. When fever broke out in the camp among the entourage which had come from malaria-prone Hasa, Mylrea was summoned to treat the victims.<sup>57</sup> Mylrea was quite taken with Ibn Saud and later wrote a lengthy account of their first meeting, including a conversation about faith.<sup>58</sup> They met in Kuwait several times until 1917.

Shaikh Mubarak's death occurred during a period when momentous events that would affect Kuwait and all its inhabitants were unfolding not only in the Arabian Peninsula but also in Europe

and the Middle East. These events would shape the future of the country, often in unpredictable ways.

In Europe, even before Shaikh Mubarak passed from the scene, a bloody and protracted conflict involving all of the major powers of the day had broken out. With Britain a leading participant in the Allied coalition on the one hand, and the Ottoman Empire linking its fate to Germany and the Central Powers, it was inevitable that Kuwait's environment would be significantly affected. Since the Ottomans controlled the three wilayets that constitute modern Iraq, hostile forces were a scant seventy miles away and their tribal allies were even closer. Ironically, one of the earliest consequences of the war was to confirm Kuwait as an "independent" state under British protection. Whether the significance of the development was fully appreciated in the town at the time, "November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1914 was an historic day for Kuwait since it witnessed the undoing of the [Anglo-Turkish] Convention and the severance of two centuries of diplomatic ties with Turkey."<sup>59</sup> The British political agent in Kuwait had protested his government's ambiguous position on Kuwait's status during the negotiations, but was overruled until changed circumstances made the entire convention a dead letter.<sup>60</sup>

Shaikh Mubarak swore allegiance to the British position in the conflict, but not all of his people were comfortable with his decision. Among these was much of the Islamic establishment in Kuwait who were "embarrassed to be siding with the infidel 'Ingleez' against...the Sultan-Caliph."<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Mubarak's son, Shaikh Salem, who would himself become ruler in 1917, associated himself, at the time, with the objections of the Islamic party.

At the same time, trade restrictions and shortages associated with the British prosecution of the war added to the difficulties and discontents affecting Kuwaiti society. The British were concerned that the Turks and their tribal allies could not obtain food, arms, and other useful commodities from traditional sources in Kuwait. As a consequence, legitimate commercial activity in the town was seriously depressed. There were some offsetting opportunities for increased trade with British-controlled Basra. Those who were prepared to test the British restrictions could also realize wind-fall profits by engaging in smuggling—and some did. Ultimately, the British authorities thought it necessary to impose an economic

blockade on their own protectorate. To add insult to injury, the worldwide influenza epidemic made its appearance in Central Arabia at the end of 1918. There is little contemporary information on the impact of the pandemic on Kuwait specifically. In Riyadh, the effects were devastating. An estimated ten thousand residents, 10 percent of the city's population, perished.<sup>62</sup> It is difficult to believe that Kuwait completely escaped this highly communicable disease, although mission and other materials of the time are mute on the point. Ironically, the impact may have been mitigated somewhat by the curtailment of normal commercial contacts.

Shaikh Mubarak died, therefore, at a time when Kuwaiti society was experiencing serious strains. Nevertheless, the succession passed smoothly, with his son, Shaikh Jabir, quickly assuming charge. His brother, Shaikh Salem, facilitated his brother's accession when he returned to the capital from a military mission to assist Ibn Saud in a successful campaign against the Ajman, "a powerful tribe that was fighting to maintain its independence of Ibn Saud."<sup>63</sup>

Shaikh Jabir's rule would be extremely brief. By February 5, 1917, a scant sixteen months later, he was dead, having refused treatment by European doctors, including Dr. Mylrea.<sup>64</sup> During his short tenure, Jabir sought to straddle the issue of British trade restrictions, proclaiming loyalty to the British relationship while also sympathizing with merchants disenchanted with constraints on commercial activity. One of the highlights of his rule was a *darbar*, or convocation, called in Kuwait in November, 1916 by Sir Percy Cox, the British Political Resident in the Gulf. The meeting, aimed in large part at heading off a growing rift between Ibn Saud and Kuwait, brought together Ibn Saud, Shaikh Jabir, and Shaikh Kha'zal of Muhammera.<sup>65</sup> After concluding their ultimately unsuccessful political discussions, the three Arab rulers paid Dr. Mylrea and the Arabian Mission the honor of a courtesy call at the recently completed "house on the hill."<sup>66</sup> This was probably Ibn Saud's last contact with the mission in Kuwait.<sup>67</sup> The failure of the conference and other efforts to halt the slide into hostility between Kuwait and the Saudi state had other consequences for the Kuwait station. Originally conceived as a "doorway into the Arabian interior," Kuwait's growing isolation from the Arabian hinterland put an end to that illusion.<sup>68</sup>

On the death of Shaikh Jabir, his brother, Shaikh Salem succeeded him as the ruler. Salem was a complex and religiously conservative man as well as a key figure in Kuwait's bitter feud with Ibn Saud. According to mission personnel, his relationship with his father, Shaikh Mubarak, was troubled; as a strict Muslim, he was known to be highly critical of Mubarak's appetite for luxury as well as his friendship with the more liberal Shaikh Kha'zal. His dislike of "foreigners" carried over to his early attitude toward the Arabian Mission; "For a long time he bore the mission no goodwill."<sup>69</sup> After appointing relatives and loyalists to his new regime, one of Shaikh Salem's first initiatives was a campaign against "immorality" and laxness toward religious observances in the town. Despite his religious orientation, however, he rebuffed a delegation that appealed to him in February, 1917 to take firm measures "against Christian propaganda in Kuwait," allowing the mission to continue its work undisturbed.<sup>70</sup>

Given Salem's alignment with the opposition of the conservative Islamic establishment when Shaikh Mubarak declared support for the war policy of Britain against the Ottomans, it might have been anticipated that his relationship with the British would be troublesome. As ruler, however, he was outwardly friendly toward them, although he may have been less than scrupulous in curbing smuggling. Consequently, in 1918, Britain declared a formal blockade at sea on Kuwait.<sup>71</sup>

Kuwait's relations with the Saudi state would be the central feature of Shaikh Salem's period of rule. He did not come to power with a clean slate on this issue. Despite strains in his relationship with his father, Salem had remained a dutiful son during the former's life. At the moment of Mubarak's death, Shaikh Salem was in the interior where he had been sent to support Ibn Saud.<sup>72</sup> The combined campaign was successful in routing the Ajman forces, but its aftermath laid the groundwork for Saudi-Kuwaiti hostility. Although Salem provided help as ordered to Ibn Saud, there was little love lost between the two men. Perhaps, the origin of this tension lay in childhood; Abd al-Aziz al-Saud knew Shaikh Salem well during his youth in Kuwait. It seems likely that Salem resented his father's high regard for his Saudi guest and protégé. Still other observers suggest that Shaikh Salem and his predecessor, Shaikh

Jabir, may have been concerned by the power and influence that Ibn Saud was accumulating in adjacent Central Arabia. As Rush comments:

*During most of Mubarak I's reign Kuwait had assisted Ibn Saud in extending his authority over Arabia's tribes including the Ajman. By 1915, however, many Kuwaitis—and particularly Shaikh Salim—felt that Ibn Saud's successes had gone far enough and regarded the Ajman as useful agents in curbing his power lest he should ever threaten Kuwait. This was probably the reasoning that led Jabir II to authorize Shaikh Salim to grant some of the Ajman refuge in Kuwait in 1916 even though Shaikh Salim—by order of his dying father Mubarak I—had just helped Ibn Saud defeat them.<sup>73</sup>*

The question of whether Ibn Saud would have eventually turned against Kuwait in the normal course of events, as some Kuwaitis feared, will remain moot, although it is not beyond the realm of probability.<sup>74</sup> In the final analysis, the state of Saudi Arabia originated as an empire with tribes and territories from Hasa to the Hejaz incorporated by the sword. The *Ikhwan*, which Ibn Saud harnessed to his purposes until their rebelliousness caused him to curb their power by force, had little love or respect for the townsmen of Kuwait. Whether the motive was the Ajman incident or Kuwaiti refusal to act as tax collector (on behalf of Ibn Saud) with tribesmen from Ibn Saud's territories trading in Kuwait, the Saudi ruler felt highly aggrieved. In 1920, he imposed an embargo on Kuwait's trade with his desert tribes while simultaneously unleashing his *Ikhwan* allies against the city.

Thus began what was arguably the seminal period in the development of modern Kuwait—the Battle of Jahra. In Central Arabia, Ibn Saud's forces finally defeated the Shammar and occupied their chief town of Hail. By May, his *Ikhwan* stepped up raids into Kuwaiti territory, killing some Kuwaiti loyalists and rustling large numbers of camels, sheep, and goats. Kuwaiti forces sent against the raiders that same month, suffered a bad defeat. Ibn Saud's power and prestige were at their zenith and Shaikh Salem had no option but to prepare to receive a major attack.

As noted earlier, the old, second wall encircling the city had been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair as Kuwait had grown beyond its confines. During his rule, Shaikh Mubarak was unconcerned by the lack of effective defenses, describing himself as “Kuwait’s wall.” Shaikh Salem was not in a position, for personal and geopolitical circumstances, to be so blasé. On May 22, 1920, he issued orders for a new wall to be built immediately, despite intense summer heat.<sup>75</sup>

In a prodigious feat of human will, the inhabitants of Kuwait built the mud and coral wall, three miles in length, over the hottest and most humid four months of the summer. Anchored on the slaughterhouse on the town’s west side, it arched around the built-up areas to include Dasman Palace on the eastern shore. The Arabian Mission compound was about one-quarter mile inside the new fortifications.<sup>76</sup> At each end, the wall was extended well out into the waters of the Gulf to prevent attackers from skirting the fortification at low tide. The project required admirable qualities of organization and coordination as well as the *corvée* labor of every able-bodied man and boy. When completed, it included four fortified gates, firing platforms, and towers and round bastions spaced approximately every two hundred yards along the entire circumference. If there were societal tensions and discontent with Shaikh Salem, the shared threat posed by the *Ikhwan* clearly outweighed them.

It was fortuitous that the construction proceeded so quickly, for the wall was completed just in time. The *Ikhwan* force moved into Kuwaiti territory in early October, less than two weeks after the wall was completed. Before turning its attention to the town, however, the horde camped before the oasis village of Jahra, situated at the head of Kuwait Bay, a key position in any assault on the town itself.

On October 8, the *Ikhwan* force, under the command of their most famous general, Faisal al-Dawish, reached the vicinity of Jahra, barely eighteen miles from Kuwait town.<sup>77</sup> Having anticipated Dawish’s opening move, Shaikh Salem had already positioned his main army in the oasis. In the town, efforts to augment the forces were redoubled and an additional few hundred recruits were drafted to man the new wall. Their shouts and war songs to keep up

morale during the night were clearly audible at the mission compound.<sup>78</sup>

Two days later, on October 10, the *Ikhwan* launched their attack against the Kuwaiti defenders at Jahra. Dr. Mylrea recounts events in the town as firing from the battle was heard:

*At once the air became charged with wildly conflicting rumors. Everyone was thoroughly aroused. Young and old, rich and poor, bond and free, streamed past the mission hospital to take their places with those who were holding the gates and the wall. It was quickly realized that should the enemy be victorious at Jahra, Kuwait would be attacked without warning. No one was unarmed and nearly all carried Mauser or Martini rifles with plenty of ammunition, while some had swords and revolvers as well....<sup>79</sup>*

Toward midday, Lt. Col. J. C. More, the British political agent, came to the mission compound with news that he had heard that Shaikh Salem had retreated into the small fort at Jahra and was besieged. More and Mylrea decided to drive around the town and ended up at the main gate where they met Shaikh Ahmad Salem, the heir apparent, who had been left in charge of the town.

Dr. Mylrea recalled the scene of confusion that lay before them:

*Refugees from Jahra were pouring in at the gate, whole families with their household effects, their camels and donkeys and dogs.*

Each new arrival was immediately beset by questioners, all shouting at the tops of their voices... Little black Badu donkeys struggled manfully in, all of them greatly overloaded and almost invisible from the amount of stuff stowed on top of them. In addition to household goods they carried small children and the blind and the aged.

*Presently some horsemen galloped in—this looked bad—but it was explained away. It afterwards turned out, as might have been expected, that these horsemen belonged to Shaikh Salim's cavalry....In fact the defeat and dispersal of Salim's cavalry by Faisal Dawish had been the opening move of the Battle of Jahra. There*

*was one dominant impression that carried away as we drove home and that was that the town was very nearly in a panic.*<sup>80</sup>

In the early afternoon of October 10, the first Kuwaiti wounded arrived at the American hospital. All were cavalymen who had left the battle early and had limited information about the fighting, which was continuing.<sup>81</sup> Although details were few, in the town it was understood that Shaikh Salem and his forces were surrounded in Jahra fort, with ample food and ammunition but little (extremely brackish) water. During the coming night, the *Ikhwan* would launch three reckless attacks on the fort without success.<sup>82</sup>

Within Kuwait town, the population, including the small American community, knew that the battle was at a desperate stage. Dr. Mylrea captured the atmosphere during that tense and anxious night:

*An hour or so after sunset my wife and I were just sitting down to dinner under the stars when there was a great panic at the eastern end of the town. We could hear the screaming of women and the yelling of boys. All around us rang the cry that the Ikhwan had come in. I called up the Political Agent on the telephone, since the disturbance was at his end of town, and asked for the facts. He replied that it was just a scare. Some fugitives had arrived at one of the gates and the sentries had at first taken them for Ikhwan. The mistake had been explained and the panic had subsided.*<sup>83</sup>

There was very little rest in Kuwait town that Sunday evening and none in Jahra.

The following day, October 12, brought a dramatic reversal of Kuwaiti fortunes. Several hundred Kuwaiti reinforcements—Persian coolies and the scrapings of last-minute impressment—were transported across the Bay to Jahra, and six hundred Shammar tribesmen unexpectedly arrived to join the defenders. The latter were traditional foes of Kuwait and allies of the Ottoman state, but the desire for revenge on the *Ikhwan* was uppermost in their minds. The arrival of these fresh forces and *Ikhwan*'s sizeable casualties in the nighttime assaults restored the initiative to Shaikh Salem. The *Ikhwan* forces were quickly routed and asked for a truce. They soon withdrew, taking many hundreds of wounded with them.<sup>84</sup>

The American mission hospital and its small staff were soon overwhelmed with the care of the Kuwaiti wounded. Sixty-three Kuwaitis died in the two-day battle, or one for every twelve of the enemy who died at Jahra. Kuwaiti wounded were about 127 as against the estimated 800 Ikhwani killed.<sup>85</sup> Remarkably for the time, only four of the casualties that reached the mission hospital on October 11 and 12 did not survive. Most of the cases were gunshot wounds, although some had suffered sword and dagger wounds. One of the four who could not be saved with the drugs available in 1920 was a case, rare in Arabia, of gas gangrene, probably contracted because the fighting took place "in the heavily manured date gardens and grain fields of the oasis town."<sup>86</sup>

Dr. Mylrea experienced difficult hours on October 12, but not because of the Battle of Jahra in any direct sense. That morning, he left the hard-pressed hospital to attend to another of his civic duties; as Quarantine Medical Officer for the Port of Kuwait, it was his responsibility to visit and inspect all incoming vessels. As he waited for the launch to take him out to an arriving ship, he probably was not anticipating more crises than he already had on his hands.

He decided to wait in a portside coffee shop, which happened to be occupied by many of the most influential men in the town. Following the exchange of traditional greetings, and as he listened to the talk of the group recently relieved of the stress of the battle, his well-known temper came to the surface, exacerbated no doubt by weariness and lack of sleep.

*There was plenty of pious talk ... but when the twentieth prominent man told me that God would reward me I boiled over and said:*

*"This is all very fine but talk is the cheapest thing in the world. You people pile all this work on me, but it never occurs to one of you to do anything or help, either financially or in kind. In my country, rulers would be the first to visit the wounded and to do all in their power to ensure that those who had risked everything for the sake of their native land should have the best possible care and attention. Here the Shaikh's slaves dump helpless men on the hospital veranda and depart. That is all there is to it. No thought of how my small staff is to cope with all this extra work."<sup>87</sup>*

Years later he recalled saying a good bit more along these lines before he became aware with “horror” that all other conversation had ceased and the entire room, including a senior Shaikh, was listening to his tirade. Without a word, the Shaikh rose, gathered his *bisht* around him and left. All the others followed suit and departed. Mylrea was certain he had made an unforgivable mistake.

He spent a miserable day and it was not until that evening that relief came, in the form of two prominent citizens who had been present in the coffee house that morning. With great courtesy they acknowledged that everything the doctor had said was true, and assured him that the entire city was behind him and ready to help him and the mission hospital. As the spokesman said this, he placed a paper containing the signatures and pledges of many of the leading merchants, as well as a canvas bag containing one thousand rupees, as a down payment.<sup>88</sup> Over succeeding days, additional contributions continued to arrive, and prominent citizens who had been hostile to the Christian mission for most of a decade showed the character to express their new-found friendship for the institution. The American missionaries were no longer an alien community tolerated by the town, but had come to be seen as an important and integral part of the community. Dr. Mylrea concludes his account of this episode which pays tribute to this quality—“Personally I have always felt that the people of Kuwait just did not realize what was being done for them until they were told. When they *were* told they rose to the occasion.”<sup>89</sup>

While the *Ikhwan* assault had been repulsed and the American mission was more comfortably settled into its Kuwaiti environment, the threat from Ibn Saud and his *Ikhwan* allies had not ended; it was only in abeyance. The Battle of Jahra had ended with a truce rather than a peace. A scant week later, anxiety was rekindled in the town by the arrival of an *Ikhwan* delegation bearing an ultimatum for Shaikh Salem. A council including many prominent Kuwaiti leaders was convened to consider the *Ikhwani* communication. The proceedings were reportedly heated as some participants pressed Shaikh Salem to invoke the protectorate agreement with Great Britain. Against his own inclinations, the ruler was “more or less forced” to seek British assistance. The request was delivered to them on October 20 and Dawish’s ultimatum was officially rejected the same day.<sup>90</sup>

Although the British had earlier warned Ibn Saud that he and his minions must leave Kuwait alone, they were not asked and did not play a role in the Battle of Jahra when the *Ikhwan* ignored their warning.<sup>91</sup> They had, however, initiated contingency measures by sending warships to Kuwait. A second British vessel entered port on October 21 and an aeroplane flew in the same day to conduct reconnaissance.

Dr. Mylrea, who figured so prominently in the events of the crisis, was called upon once more to play an unexpected role at this stage as well. He was having tea with the British political agent when the pilot returned to report that he had not located the *Ikhwan* forces. Mylrea and others familiar with the countryside surmised that Faisal al-Dawish was most likely to have camped at Subahyah, a series of wells about thirty miles to the south. He was amused when the pilot explained that he had been searching for houses and palms and jokingly suggested that the pilot take him along to point out the muddy holes that marked Subahyah. The physician was likely surprised when his offer was accepted.<sup>92</sup>

And so, on the morning of October 22, the head of the American Mission hospital found himself in the open cockpit of the two-seater aircraft, carrying an official British letter ordering the *Ikhwan* out of Kuwaiti territory under threat of being bombed out of it. Numerous enemy tents were soon sighted and the weighted letter, festooned with colorful streamers, was dropped. Almost as soon as a man was observed retrieving the message, the encamped *Ikhwan* poured out of the tents and began firing their rifles at the plane. The pilot prudently gained altitude and returned to Kuwait, his mission accomplished.<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile, in Kuwait, a third British warship sailed into the harbor bearing Sir Arnold Wilson, the Acting British Civil Commissioner in Baghdad. A council of war (to which Dr. Mylrea was invited) was convened on board to make contingency plans, including, if necessary, the evacuation of British and American nationals in the town.

By October 24, preparations were complete. The wall was fully manned and supplemented by British landing parties with machine guns to secure the town's gates. The next day, a naval signalling party was posted on the roof of Dr. Mylrea's house. The

small hill on which it was built made it the best vantage point from which to maintain contact with the supporting British warships in the harbor.<sup>94</sup>

Three days later, having received a defiant reply from Faisal al-Dawish to its formal warning, the British authorities ordered a further air reconnaissance by recently arrived bombers. Dr. Mylrea was once again in the cockpit. The wells at Subahyah were occupied only by several tents, which probably sheltered wounded too ill to ride with the fleeing *Ikhwan* host. A survey far beyond revealed no sign of the enemy. The immediate threat to Kuwait and its inhabitants had passed for the moment.<sup>95</sup>

For several days in October, 1920, the future of Kuwait hung in the balance. It had faced other challenges and threats before in its history, but none more serious and imminent than that posed by "the territorial ambitions of Ibn Saud and his army of zealots."<sup>96</sup> Kuwait would not face a comparable experience again for almost exactly seventy years.

The crisis of 1920 merits serious attention for more reasons than that it greatly impacted the small American community as well as Kuwaiti citizens. As usually occurs when shared trauma affects a group, the events before, during, and after the Battle of Jahra provided the impetus for several important strands of Kuwait's development that would influence the nature of the society until the present day – chiefly, the way Kuwaitis look at themselves, the "others" among them, and their country itself. Among the more important strands are the following:

As already noted, the American Mission emerged from these events with greatly enhanced status. As the redoubtable Dr. Mylrea put it, "For the American Mission, it marked the beginning of a new epoch."<sup>97</sup> Now the mission became not a foreign implant grafted on the body politic, but an institution interwoven into the social fabric. While there may have been a few holdouts in this new embrace, henceforth the mission hospital would benefit from acceptance and material support from Kuwaitis. The ruler, Shaikh Salem, is inexplicably absent from accounts of events after his successful military defence of Jahra and he would die on February 22, 1921, only four months after his victory. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that he too moderated his attitude toward the American mission as a

consequence of its yeoman service during the crisis. He gave the mission additional property to expand its compound and, even more significantly, enrolled his son, Fahad, in Edwin Caverley's school.<sup>98</sup>

In a broader sense, at least two major facets of modern Kuwait may be traced to the traumatic experience in the fall of 1920. It was the date chosen as a benchmark for determining citizenship. As memories of the Battle of Jahra fade elsewhere, outside observers, and possibly even younger Kuwaitis, are frequently puzzled by the emphasis on determining who is a Kuwaiti on the basis of descent from persons who were residents in 1920. Their grandfathers understood that this was an affirmation of the shared anxiety and sacrifice of standing for Kuwait's survival as an independent country in the face of what must have seemed, at the time, an unstoppable *Ikhwani* tide. Nor was this benchmark chosen as an act of exclusion; the shared terror and sacrifice undoubtedly contributed not only to an embrace of the American mission hospital, but to the acceptance of one another as well—Sunni or Shi'a, Christian, Arab or Persian, merchants or Baharna,<sup>99</sup> or tribesman. It may not have ushered in a millennium of tolerance, but it was a way point on the route to the relative tolerance that characterizes most Kuwaitis today.<sup>100</sup>

The second crucial trend originating in this pivotal period was reflected in the dispute noted between the ruler and his prominent counsellors over whether to invoke British support and assistance in the later stages of the *Ikhwan* threat. The delegation of prominent citizens prevailed in this argument and would never again be content not to have a voice in major questions of public policy. Several significant threads combined in the push for a legislative institution, but it is also a familiar outgrowth of crisis situations that demand popular risk and sacrifice. Over coming decades, there would be a series of unsuccessful starts and experiments, but the trajectory which resulted at independence in one of the most vigorous parliamentary experiences in the Gulf region may be plotted from this time.

While these events were playing out, the modern world was relentlessly pressing in on Kuwait. In the 1920s, camel caravans still made their way to Mecca<sup>101</sup> and traditional bedouin raids remained the

major threat to Kuwait's security. Change, however, was in the air. Not only was Kuwait connected to the outside world by telegraph, but the grandson of Shaikh Mubarak, Shaikh Ahmad al-Jabir, visited London at the invitation of King George V in October-November 1919.<sup>102</sup> A small water distillation plant installed by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company went into operation the same year,<sup>103</sup> while at the American Mission hospital the first generator was installed in 1921, providing light and a few fans, and making possible the introduction of ice cream.<sup>104</sup> American-made automobiles were also transforming travel and shortening distances. As the mission was taking delivery of its first Model-T Ford in 1921, entrepreneurs in the Levant were pioneering automobile connections with Baghdad and the territories beyond. Employing a succession of American cars and buses, formal service from Damascus to Baghdad began on October 18, 1923 and continued until 1956, when the Iraqis imposed stiff customs requirements.<sup>105</sup> The new influences were not merely in physical objects, as a charming vignette supplied by Bill Brewer illustrates:

*Wanting to encourage Kuwaiti women to remove the veil, Mubarak had the ceiling (of his audience chamber) 'inlaid' with pictures of well-known Western actresses, many of them American. When I took Joe Alsop to call on Abdullah Salim in that room, Joe spent most of his time identifying the various beauties portrayed above us.<sup>106</sup>*