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Los Altos, Calif.
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H.O. Thompson, Vice-President
Arabian American Oil Co.
505 Park Avenue
New York 22, N.Y.

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Dear Mr. Thompson:

I am grateful to you for the frankness of your letter, and for your thoughtfulness in sending on the full annotated manuscript and Jack Butler's report.

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P
As you suppose, there are many of these suggestions and marginal comments with which I completely agree. I had discussed with Gordon Hamilton the necessity of rewriting, shortening, and brightening Chapter I, of adding a Foreword on the present condition, size, importance, and state of Aramco, and of revising the somewhat supercilious and anti-British tone of some of the early passages. Likewise, I had naturally expected to rewrite the whole book for interest and readability, if and when I returned to it. On some matters that are politically touchy, I understand the Company's reasons for discretion, though from the point of view of the book itself it seems to me a pity if discretion has to suppress vital facts or personalities. In matters of fact I anticipated making a good many corrections, and such things as the contributions of the Ten Men, especially Max Steineke, clearly need expansion. All this is part of what I anticipated as the natural process of revision.

Y
Nevertheless there are some things, as you apparently surmised, that disturb me, and I want to be as frank with you as you have been with me in discussing them.

As you know, this kind of book may be either of two things: It may be frankly a "Company history," written by Company employees according to Company specifications and published with the Company's backing or at the Company's expense. This makes it, essentially, a public relations job. Or it may be a book written by an outside observer, with more or less cooperation from the Company and with greater or less access to its records, but representing his interpretation of people and events and published under his name and at his responsibility. Done on this basis, its aim is the truth of history insofar as its author can attain it, and not the immediate and uncritical promotion of Company purposes and prestige. What we have been doing so far, I am afraid, is straddling two stools---having me, as a consultant on the Company's payroll, do a book that will represent my best understanding of Aramco's first ten years in Arabia, and that may be published under my name, but that at the same time will be satisfactory to the Company and subject to its approval or disapproval. There are some real problems in this straddling, and it is of these I want to speak.

Up to now, you have bought my services as a writer and paid me for them and I hope got value received. In proposing that I revise the book

for publication you may be wanting simply more of my services, without my name on the title page, or you may be proposing that I publish the book under my own name and thus assume responsibility for it. In the second instance, you would be asking me to engage my reputation and integrity as a writer, as well as my skill in writing. And if this is what is being asked of me, then I would want to make clear to you and the Management Committee the attitude I would feel it necessary to take.

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I am troubled, and have been troubled from the beginning, about the problem of speaking frankly on Arabs and Arab-Company relations. Because the book is the human story of a frontier, it depends on the dramatic contacts and sometimes conflicts of culture and personality that such a frontier involved. In these matters it is very hard to know where discretion shades off into timidity on the one hand and into rashness on the other. One illustration: Dhahran has struck out several casual mentions of the Company's inevitable involvement in Saudi Arab boundary problems, but it has left untouched whole sections of the text dealing with the experiences of Tom Barger and Dick Hattrup in the surveying of these disputed boundaries. Is the one permissible if the other isn't? And in fact, aren't both so intimate a part of Aramco's frontier experience in Arabia that they can hardly be censored out?

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Similar considerations apply to a whole body of comments intended to soften or remove references to personalities and personality conflicts. Portraits of Holmes, Sir Andrew Ryan, Schloesselin, Dreyfus, Burchfiel, and others are watered down, --I think to the definite weakening of the book. The sort of editing that strikes the "God" out of all "God damns" and squeamishly eliminates any references to bodily functions and wants all personalities ironed out to a Florentine flatness, seems to me simply timidity. I have seen this editorial-board method at work in magazines, and its effect is to reduce every good, strong, lively, and important idea down to the least common denominator which will offend---and interest---no one. Several times I have had editors whittle pieces of mine down this way, and I have felt compelled to stop their publication; once I took my name off a State Department report for the same reason. For better or worse, I would like any book published under my name to represent my honest opinions and the best work I can do. Then I can defend it, if I have to.

You can see the direction of my worry. I don't know whether Dhahran's marginalia and Jack's suggestions are suggestions merely, or orders. I don't know, either, that these may not increase in numbers and restrictiveness as we get closer to publication day. And because I think it would be fatal to the book to be subject to this sort of whittling, I would welcome your frank opinion: How much is pressure from the Company going to inhibit the presentation of characters and issues in the final draft? Hamilton did dislike Sir Andrew Ryan, he did want to kick him downstairs, he did take pleasure in discomfiting him. And though later Hamilton learned rather to like him, Ryan did seem to Lenahan to be a pish-toshing Britisher, convinced that waterclosets would not work in Jidda. Why not put him down as he was? Why wash Schloesselin's mouth out with soap? His quality all comes from his odd combination of a tough and foul-mouthed exterior with a heart of gold. Why try to make Holmes into a pleasant and harmless "good guy" when the confidential record shows that, at least in his entry into the Jidda negotiations, he was bending the truth badly and taking desperate chances? Why not mention Burchfiel's neuroses about his insides? These were part of the hazards of being a pioneer in Arabia. As

for the poker-game analogy in Chapter I, that is originally Lombardi's, Hamilton's, and Lenahan's, not mine. I find it hard to believe that harm can come from showing the negotiation as a game in which clever antagonists each set out to win from the other the best deal possible. To make altruists and disinterested gentlemen of them would be to falsify the process and the personalities both.

Finally, one more question. This book will presumably be read both by people in America and by people in Arabia, by Company personnel and by the public at large. Many who will read it with the greatest interest will have in their minds the Saudi antagonism against Israel and the Saudi prohibition against Jews. Naturally I don't want to take sides in this; I don't even want to discuss it; but I want to mention it, if only to say why, in a book about Arabia, I don't take sides and don't discuss it. I think it has to be admitted that the Company (like the U.S. Air Force) has had to accede to this and other conditions in order to stay in business in Arabia. I would expect to speak objectively and openly about some of the unresolved differences of opinion or interest, as well as those that in a quarter of a century have been amicably resolved. In other words, I should think the ideal model for this Foreword would be a considered, balanced, and judicious look at Aramco's position--and perils--in the Middle East, the sort of feature article that a good journalist might write after looking over the facts and interviewing the people involved. Yet Dhahran's marginal notes object even to the casual mention of "Jewish families from Haifa" who are in the Lebanese mountains when the first geologists summer there. I would find it hard to write this book in the pretense that Jews and the Jewish problem simply don't exist. The best way would seem to me to be to mention the problem, and the other continuing problems, but dissociate ourselves from it because this book that is to follow is neither a Company history nor an analysis of Middle Eastern affairs, but an account of the ten-year frontier period when Americans first made contact with Arabia.

In working on the book up to now, I have been struck by the fact that in spite of the obvious political problems, no one in Aramco has tried to steer me toward writing a Company whitewash job. I have also been struck by the fact that Aramco comes out, in the eye of the soberest historian, looking very good indeed for its sobriety, responsibility, patience, and generosity toward Arab demands that sometimes approached the outrageous. This, like the not-so-pleasant Jewish problem, ought to be said; they ought to be said in balance, and the burden of judgment ultimately, if it is my book, ought to be on me.

Considering all this, you will know better than I what steps we take next. I have spent most of this long letter indicating the conditions under which a book under my name would seem proper. It may be that you will feel the Company can't risk such a book now. Or it may be you will want to enlist my writing capacities without enlisting my name. Or it may be you will want to have Hamilton or someone else rewrite the book so that it can be kept completely in control. I honestly will be content however you want to do it. I do feel the obligation to finish what I started, if you want me to and if the terms can be worked out, as I am sure they can. But I would not want my name on it unless I could feel that what I sign is really what I can believe in.

Many thanks for your understanding.

Sincerely yours,

Wallace Stegner