

S.S.O. Ramadi. 7th October, 1925.

Dearest People,

It is not often I seem able to write anyone an even tolerable letter these days. Candidly time for letter writing has lately not existed, which has exasperated me, but was unavoidable. I do want to be certain that you will not be surprised if occasionally I miss a mail. In this job it is almost impossible to be sure any particular letter will catch any particular post! But I have a suspicion that the lack of a letter does cause the dear wee mother some anxiety still - though it really ought not to now that she knows the conditions. Still I know how much I appreciate your letters - and if you are kind enough to like to have mine too, I can understand somewhat!

Now that I am more used to the idea of Bob and Uganda, I am rather thrilled at his good luck, and good sense. I look eagerly for details.

Letter of 14th October, 1925. from Ramadi.

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As for me I have been leading a fairly quiet existence for the last fortnight. In common with many others, I have been a little off colour, chiefly tummy trouble. However I dosed myself with castor oil, and retired to bed for a few days, dieting myself severely, and now I seem all right once again! Mrs. M., the police officer's lady, was most kind and produced all sorts of suitable patent foods and medicines, which helped much to a rapid recovery.

Did I ever mention that Major Y. left here a month ago? His term of service in Irâq has ended, and he has retired to a pleasant life at home after ten years in this country. I believe he has an ample income of his own, which makes such things easier. He is still quite young to retire. I miss him a lot, for his advice and assistance were freely given and this was a great relief to me, especially when I was quite new. Eventually someone will come here in his place, but I don't know when.

You ask about the Mosul question? Yes the long delay is creating a very strained condition and one has to keep one's eyes well open. There are signs and

symptoms not dissimilar to those noted before a former difficult period some years ago - but with the difference that this time I think the authorities are all forewarned and forearmed. The Turks are busy with intrigue - I have been having some busy moments the last few days in respect to an alleged Turkish agent of some importance here ! This is a curious way of living - not awfully restful but often very decidedly interesting.

Old Fahad Beg called in to see me two days ago, and bid me "au revoir" before moving out to his winter camping grounds. About one hundred miles westward from here is the usual winter area for the Anizah. There all the tribal sections gather together, some coming down right from the district near Damascus. Fahad's people are a very large Bedouin confederation. He has invited me to come out to stay with him, and then to travel round on a camel, under his special protection, to visit all important Anizah chieftains that I have not yet met. Colonel D. has already signified his approval of my undertaking these expeditions, and I shall probably be setting off in about a month's time. It will be most useful and instructive. Fahad continues most friendly and is always very fatherly in his attitude. However many revolts

should occur in Irâq I should feel pretty safe as long as I was within reach of the Anizah, for they would never venture to show any disrespect to any one who has Fahad's goodwill ! On departure the dear old man suddenly produced a beautiful fleece-lined Bedouin cloak, which he absolutely insisted in leaving in my house. He said he felt it was just the thing for use in winter touring ! He insisted that it was just a little token of personal friendship, and that he would be gravely hurt if I would not accept it ! In the end I had to let him leave it ! Of course it would be bad policy to anger him by refusing his gift - and to him it is a trifle for he is a very wealthy old gentleman. All the same I shall mention this to B. to prevent any misunderstanding.

Letter dated 18th October, 1925 from Fallujah. (Police Serai)

Just a note written in Fallujah, where I am spending a couple of nights in course of a tour. Have been out in the cultivated district of Dulaimiyah, staying with a Shaikh there who at the moment has a quarrel on with the government. As a result the water supply has been shut off from his lands, much to his wrath and agitation ! He of course has a huge tale of woe, but like most of them he is in many ways just a plausible old fraud, and yet it is difficult to judge them from any standpoint of ours. There are many very genuine grievances about just now, and in the present rather chaotic state of uncertainty, they are almost forced to be frauds to hold their own at all ! In this same district last week two tribes nearly had a pitched battle over an involved tribal quarrel about some looted camels ! The Dulaimi and the Bani Tamim opposed each other with nearly 1000 men a side, but a redoubtable local police official managed to reach the scene in time to avert actual fighting. All is quiet now. Tomorrow I am off on a desert round via Rahaziyah¹ oasis, and the al Jir wells, to Ramadi. I expect to spend the night with Fahad Beg en route, who is said now to have pitched his tents ^{at} near the Wadi Farukh near Rahdilizah.

Letter dated 29th October, 1925. from Ramadi.

The day before yesterday, I returned from another seven days tour. As I have before mentioned I started this tour in the Dulaimiyah district, and found things there fairly quiet, despite a land dispute amongst the Jumailah Shaikhs, and an undercurrent of resentment after the recent Dulaini and Bani Tanain endeavour to scrap with one another. But I think I told you all about this in my last letter, written from Fallujah in the midst of my tour. By the way the Shaikh in that area who gave me a "hostile reception" not long ago has since come in to me at Ramadi to apologise ! So that's all right. Leaving Dulaimiyah behind me - an area which a little annoys me despite its well-watered fertility, because of the petty intrigues and crookednesses which seem always to be going on there - I set out early on a lovely sunny cool morning for the Shamiyah desert. I first sought out and found the newly marked track running south-west of Lake Habaniyah, and followed this track to a point where it runs across the track to Rahaziyyah oasis, and then followed the latter track as far as Ubairah, there to locate the present camping area of Fahad Beg al Hadhdhal and his people. The run was extremely pleasant, and on the whole

easy going for the little car. En route Shutes, my driver, shot a Lesser Bustard, much to his delight. Did you know that I had a British driver? On arrival at Ramadi I was most disconcerted to discover this, thinking that an English "other rank" would be most unsuitable to this type of work; but actually it is amazing how well he fits into the way of things. He does not speak much Arabic, though he has done a lot of touring, but he adapts himself to Arab ways very well, and is most popular with them. He is a fellow of about my own age and build, has "literary leanings" - having already published a little he tells me - and an amusing Yorkshire accent. The only vast difference between us is that he is a fond husband and father, whereas, as you know, even my wildest desire for adventure has not led me into so hazardous a case!

From Fahad Beg, as usual, I received the most courteous and hospitable of tribal welcomes. I feel very much at home in his camp nowadays, and hit it off very pleasantly with his tribesmen. During that afternoon I had an interesting experience. While we were sitting chatting in the Mudhif, a curious dark line began to show on the horizon. Soon this was noticed

and people called one another's attention to it, till gradually there was a stir and movement throughout the camp. At first in a leisurely way, and then with increasing energy men and women began to hammer in tent pegs and adjust tent flaps and ropes. Slowly but surely the line at the horizon darkened and grew, till after about half an hour there appeared to be a curious wall of darkness building itself up into the sky, and at the same time it seemed gently to be creeping nearer to us. Fahad turned to me and informed me that an unusually big sand-storm seemed to be approaching, and would I have my car driven well away from the big tents, in case they blew down on to it. Then everyone bestirred himself - clothing and loose articles were all gathered into safety - and everyone went outside the tents to watch. There was still not a breath of wind, but the huge blackness was now only about a mile away, and rising like a solid wall several miles long and about a thousand feet high. The sun behind it caused fitfully a kind of angry brick-red glow, and at the base of the "wall" were smaller "whirls" and swirls of dust rather like shell-bursts. In the foreground were the Arab hair-tents, with little groups standing about them, and here and there

some excited family party making frantic last-moment adjustments to their possessions. It really looked rather like a picture of the "last day" ! The curious thing was that in spite of the steady advance of this great swirling mass, as yet there was not a breath of wind near us, and the first warning gusts did not reach us till the wall of dust seemed only some fifty yards away - then with a low moaning rush it was upon us. For about fifteen minutes it was literally impossible to see, almost to breathe ! Most men wrapped their heads in their abbhas, and crouched or lay on the ground. I myself was propelled by friendly hands through the gloom to the shelter of my car, wherein I eventually took refuge ! All around the tents flapped, and creaked, and strained, but most of them stood the strain amazingly well, and within another thirty minutes all was over and calm returned ! However it proved a symptom of the first break-up of summer weather, and the night turned out quite tempestuous, with thunder rumbling round us, and a wind so changeable that we were roused several times during the night while readjustments were made to the tent. In each case there were first warning shouts from the men on watch, and then everyone sprang up to

give assistance. It was all a most interesting, but rather moist proceeding, for the rain came driving in, and the tent, not yet acclimatized to winter rains, leaked badly. I and my mattress and coverlet all got rather damp before dawn broke ! Indeed those Arabs are a hardy race ! In summer blazing sun, and scarce water, in winter bitter cold and drenching rain, even the wood often too soaked to make a fire either for warmth or cooking purposes !

Next day I discovered in the camp a handsome Dodge car, and after many discreet and roundabout enquiries as to the presence of so unusual an object in Fahad's desert camp, he confided to me that the day before a party of Syrian "notables" fleeing from the French had arrived from Hama — a long and dangerous desert journey—and had begged a refuge. Later I and Fahad, and the three refugees were assembled in Fahad's special "council tent" and the matter was discussed. They had no passports, but as they had made "dakhala" and thrown themselves on Fahad's mercy, he begged me, as a personal favour to give them my "protection" as far as Ramadi, and to explain their case to the authorities there. This I agreed to do. The fugitives seemed most intelligent and

amiable men, one of them speaking fluent English. They were of a leading family in Hama, where there had been a revolt against the French. And how the Syrians do seem to hate the latter ! Indeed if half they say is true, with some justification ! French control is described as utterly destructive to the interests and prosperity of the Syrian people. Next day, however, I had to pay a visit to the Shitathah oasis. There I found the owners of the local date gardens extremely busy preparing their stores of dates in readiness for the time, a few weeks hence, when great numbers of tribal sections will appear in this area to purchase their supplies for the year. I took lunch - an excellent one - with Hajji Sherif, the big local merchant, and was regaled with all the gossip of the moment. Thence I returned to sleep at Raha¹iyah. The desert tracks were wet and very slippery, but we skidded safely through, and met with only occasional rain storms. That night was spent at the quaint mud house of the Raha¹iyah Mudir. A cosy little place it is, for which he pays the immense sum of R.14 per annum. Let us go and live at Raha¹iyah oasis ! In spite of the local fevers, quite a lot of people seem to survive and thrive there ! And certainly

the house rents are tempting. For sleeping purposes I occupied a sort of enormous "Heath Robinson" four-poster bed, while the Mudir, my driver, and Arab "attendants", slumbered amongst quilts and cushions on the floor. Before sleeping, however, we had a long chatty evening, during which various people recounted strange, and thrilling adventures, in most cases revealing more credit to their imagination than their veracity, but none the less entertaining for that.

The following morning we set off on the return journey direct to Ramadi, picking up en route my Syrian refugees -- or to be more accurate they picked me up, for I completed my journey in their luxurious automobile ! Now poor folks they are under surveillance here, awaiting a decision as to their fate.

All is well with me, and I expect to visit Baghdad at the end of the month to gather my winter kit. Have just had yet another letter from my "boss", the Colonel. It is a letter that can only be described as extremely encouraging and friendly, and he expresses quite a fatherly concern for my welfare. He urges me also to exercise special precautions at the present time, and never to tour in outlying areas without careful

consideration and wariness ! This is said to be "because my area is more restless than some" just now. This is in fact inclined to be correct, which is odd, for it has for so long been quiet and easy to deal with. Makes things much more interesting, though. I don't know what to make of my "boss' " friendly attitude. It is most disarming.

G. has passed through here on his return from six months' leave and stayed the night. We had a long and interesting chat. Not much else to say -- News from Syria continues very troublous, but here I think there is a tendency to calm down again about the Mosul question. Of course, however, Syria is a bad example. There is a queer Syrian rumour that the British are helping the rebels -- certainly, I think, incorrect, but rather a pity for after all the French are, as it were, our kith and kin out here, and increased distrust between us seems unsuitable in these alien lands where mutual assistance seems so necessary.