

SECTION IV.  
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Baghdad Floods; a local "war";  
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Letter dated 5th January, 1926. THE ARK, Euphrates River.

I am writing to you this time perched not uncomfortably in a small armchair set in the stern of a "Safina" ! A "safina" is a type of local river craft, picturesque and rather roomy, with a large much-patched triangular sail as a means to locomotion when there is any wind; when there isn't the "crew" rush about the place with enormous punt poles, singing barbaric ditties and making a great splashing of water down my neck ! My situation on the globe at the moment is at a point somewhere between Hillah and Jarbuiyah. I am on my way to Diwaniyah and have travelled thus all the way from Ramadi ! In my ark there is the whole of my domestic staff, all my furniture and kit, and my horse - or rather my horse was with us till this morning, when owing to

his rather drastic method of showing that he was bored with rivers, I have sent him on with the syce to complete the journey - only some forty-five miles now - by road. In addition to my own "staff" I have a crew of six who work the comic ark, and an Irâqui policeman to act sentry ! So altogether we are quite a crowd. The ark is divided into four compartments; and my cook cooks, and my "valet" valets, and the groom grooms, and the crew crews, and I - I do nothing at all - so it is all quite well arranged ! By day the craft is open to the air, but at night we rig up a kind of long canvas roof, and then light an oil stove inside. We have been very lucky with our weather - but even so it has sometimes been bitterly cold. However there is an ample provision of wraps for all. And this is the fifth day of the voyage. Probably there will be two more. It is all rather quaint - and much more novel as well as more convenient than moving myself and household by alternate stages of car and train. I formulated this idea quite suddenly, and luckily A.H.Q. agreed to my proposal.

Although not exactly a luxurious method of travel, yet it has been a decided interval of rest after my rather strenuous time recently in the Dulaimi Liwa, and

during my recent expedition. A comic affair that in a way, for originally the S.S.O's party was supposed to be only attached to the main party for tribal "liaison". Actually my party was the only section that carried out the expedition as planned originally, all the rest being stranded at the Wadi Tharthar, or diverted through other ~~and~~ adventures. In all we crossed the Jazirah desert four times, zig zagging from the North. Some of the going was difficult, some monotonous, but it is most interesting to have done it. The cold during the nights in the desert was really rather noticeable at times however ! I think I have given you a brief outline of all that expedition; but did I mention that when staying at a Shaikh's house outside Ramadi after the third desert crossing, shots were fired during the night into the Shaikh's tent where the cars had been housed, and a bullet passed through the head-dress of one of the special guards that the Shaikh had provided for us ! Also on our outward way from Baghdad on the road to Shergat we passed a car containing an Iraqui officer and his wife and other relations. Only half an hour after we saw them they were attacked by highwaymen, the officer was gravely wounded and his wife was killed ! We had

news of this the same evening when we stopped to camp. So with this and the other episode, you see that the tour was not without incidents of interest, besides the traversing of new ground.

It seems to me more than probable that I shall miss the mail again this week, which worries me - but I can do nothing to prevent it. I doubt if you can actually realise how rushed I have been for nearly three months now - always on the move, and never sure of any move till it actually occurs. Since my last note, I returned duly to Ramadi on Xmas Eve, and spent a very pleasant two days there over Xmas. Then I became unwell - not only Xmas but also a touch of some sort of flu which has been prevalent lately. Three days I spent in bed, two to recuperate and pack, then spent a hurried day in Baghdad, and off the following day on my "ark" !

Lots of presents reached me just in time for Xmas, and some just after, and were a most cheering episode. I opened them at the correct moment on waking with George as interested audience. The wee jewel case is simply topping ! Such a surprise, and awfully useful. I love the hankies ! and my domestic staff were most impressed

by the thoughtfulness of "her ladyship my Mother" in sending gifts not only to me but to my household ! The books have come in awfully suitably for this river journey ! I had jolly gifts from Aunt Edie too, and lots of letters.

My Xmas was briefly as follows: Woke to the sound of violent trumpeting and rumblings just outside my window - a wretched camel being drastically treated for boils ! I got up to protest - then remembered it was Irâq, and that I could do no good - also a blast of cold air drifted in through my unglazed windows, so I hopped back into bed ! Then came my faithful George, with a beaming Xmas face, and lots of hot tea, a lighted oil stove, and my parcels ! All a most welcome apparition. Next I rose and received polite calls from Arab officials, after which I gave out Xmas tips and some boxes of crackers to my domestic staff - the latter causing immense enthusiasm ! In the afternoon I returned calls, and in the evening dined with Major and Mrs. W. It was a very happy little party - just the four British officials of Ramadi - the A.I., Police Officer, S.S.O., (me) and last, but by no means least, our hostess. The W's recently held a big job in Basrah where "she" was leading

Lady, and a very gracious one too. We were very cheery, then after dinner played the gramophone. There was one serio-comic incident. By chance one of the "records" introduced "God save the King" in the middle of it, and we all jumped up and stood to attention !

Next evening a little dinner was given by the R.A.F. Wireless detachment just outside Ramadi - did I ever tell you of the small detachment, just an N.C.O. and about a dozen men ? They gave an excellent little dinner, and behaved excellently, especially towards Mrs.W., whom they treated with a natural courtesy and carefulness that was most refreshing to see. I also spent New Year's Eve with these fellows, and next day they all turned up unexpectedly at the sailing of the "Ark". They gave me a most pleasant send off, and to my great confusion sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" as I left the bank. A number of Arabs also came to see me off, and the ladies of the only Christian family in Ramadi sent me a parting gift of a pair of skilfully embroidered cushions. It was all really quite touching, and a great surprise.!

The W's had gone out with L. to a Shaikhly shooting party, but I found them on the lookout for me further down the river, and I was given another cheery send-off from there.

I have had you all more than ever in mind lately. Bob set sail at Marseilles for Uganda the same day I set off in my "Ark" ! I sent a telegram to his ship. I hope it reached him. Dear old Bob - I feel confident about him. But it has been a wrench - mentally I felt it very much, and could imagine the sadness of the parting. But these things must be, and he has chosen well. God bless him.....

Am just about to hold my evening "sick parade" ! I carry a small stock of easy medicines with me, and these often come in handy, and bring much gratitude from these simple folk.....

P.S. Settled in my Diwanayah house ! A nice house it is, and very spacious. It was originally built as the official residence of the British Civil Surgeon in the old days. It is therefore well planned, and pleasantly placed. Heve settled my furniture in, and it looks very cosy. Am now busy with the office organisation !

The other Desert expedition seems to be off.

Letter dated 18th January, 1926. from S.S. Office, Diwaniyah.

This mail I write to you again from more or less settled surroundings. I am at the moment seated at the desk in my new office, and it is quite a nice office too, of comfortable size and convenient arrangement. I think I mentioned last mail that my house here is a good one. It is quite large, well arranged in comparison with most houses here, and is situated by itself on the river bank away from all the main town - if one may flatter Diwaniyah by calling it a "town". There is a walled enclosure around the house, with some shrubs and small trees in it, which could easily be made into a real garden. In front this garden slopes right down to the river, and I have picturesque views from most of my windows. Of course a lot of minor repairs are necessary to the house, and some of the garden wall needs rebuilding, but that I hope will all be accomplished in course of time. My main sitting-room is a really large comfortable room, with a big fire-place, and I have now got it all looking most cosy. I have a screen over one end of the room, which divides the "dining-room" from the "diwan". There are two other large and one small room on the ground floor, and there are two good-sized

bedrooms upstairs, and a dressing-room and bathroom. Then at one side of the house, down a small passage, is reached the kitchens, scullery, and very ample servants rooms, with the stables conveniently adjoining.

It is really rather nice to live once more in a real house, with real windows and doors !

So you see I am now pretty comfortable ! As for my domestic staff, they have elected to follow me in a body - despite the fact that they are all Sunnis and therefore almost as much foreigners in this very bigoted Shi'a town as I am ! My faithful Assyrian, George, is also of course here - but now dressed as an Arab, poor lad ! He has to alter his nationality to suit my movements, and does it all most cheerfully. It is rather a good thing to have my own isolated party, as there is less likelihood of chatter in the bazaars. All my lads show a vast scorn of the local community ! and indeed with some cause ! The blatant immorality, and the sanctimonious hypocrisy of the Shi'as as a whole is positively humorous when it isn't revolting ! At least that is my present impression and the one that I also eventually gained when on language leave down here a year and a half ago. My chief Arab "attendant", an

Anizah tribesman, is also down here with me, so I am able to keep in touch with Fahad Beg al Hadhdhal and his tribal affairs.

On the whole, I think you will agree that my present situation is satisfactory, and promises well. I have omitted above to add that Shutes, my British chauffeur, has also been permitted to come here with me: an unheard of thing previously for an S.S.O. to be allowed a British driver in this town ! He made a special application to be allowed to come with me, which I strongly recommended, and after the usual consternation at A.H.Q. in the contemplation of anything out of the usual rut, they agreed to let him come. He is now contentedly settled in a bed sitting-room of his own in this "commodious residence" ! He, too, is an excellent young fellow - very well disciplined. We are the best of friends. When not tinkering with our "Tin Lizzie" he studies journalism, which he has an idea of taking up when he leaves the service.

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Letter dated 28th January, 1926. from A.H.Q., Baghdad.

Another flying visit to Baghdad ! Have been here three days, but return to Diwaniyah tomorrow morning. I should have returned today, but my car was temporarily out of action so I couldn't. I had an easy journey up here, but it has poured with rain ever since, making the roads unspeakably unpleasant and almost impassably slippery. However the storms seem to have passed off now, so my return journey should also be all right. I have been given special sanction by the A.V.M. to proceed on a tribal tour to visit Fahad Beg in his winter camping areas. This is in accordance with a long standing invitation from the old Shaikh. It is rather useful, for previously he has, I believe, rather discouraged the idea of visits from official persons when all his tribal sections from Syria and elsewhere are gathered around him. It should prove an interesting tour, and I hope to meet many of the more important of Fahad Beg's subordinate Shaikhs.

At Diwaniyah I am as it were in a "hostile camp" as far as Fahad is concerned, for many of the Shammar Bedouins encamp in that neighbourhood during the winter. They are an unruly lot and therefore not very popular

with the local settled cultivators. The day before I left Diwanayah I became involved in a small local "war". I had gone out to visit Shaikh Agab ibn Agil, the big local Shammar Shaikh. On arrival near his camp, I found considerable rifle firing going on, and indignant Bedouins took me to see a severely wounded man. In fact they had several wounded men, and some dead camels, to show me. I, however, was meanwhile pleasantly situated in a sort of "No man's land" across which the Shammar Bedouins and the local cultivators were firing at one another. I was not altogether satisfied with my situation, so I sent messengers to both sides saying that I wished to hear the reason of this disregard of Government orders. I then, ere long, became the centre of a highly demonstrative and talkative group of Arabs, emphatically and loudly voicing their grievances. I endeavoured to cope with the situation, and eventually left them in a state of "truce". Next day the local mounted police went out to ensure that peace was maintained ! The Shammar then moved on from the hostile district towards Hillah. I passed them on my way up to Baghdad - an impressive sight. For about twenty miles I ran through an almost continuous mass

of moving camels, thousands of them. Most of them at first were laden with household property and the women and children of the tribe, and escorted by a few horsemen, and by a vast army of savage dogs ! At the head of the main body rode Agab ibn Agil, and his son Afit, on fine camels, with their womenfolk perched in their queer and cumbersome carriers, with high carpet-draped sides, atop an array of the best camels of the shaikhly herds. Ahead of all were the great herds of driven camels, representing all the spare wealth of the tribe. It was altogether a remarkable spectacle.

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