

Thence by way of broad sunny waterways we moved onwards down the stream towards the Bahr al Shinifiyeh. Still we passed amidst trees, all flecked with shadows, and the sharp contrasting points of sunlight, and past small Arab hamlets, usually rather somnolent, where only a few naked youths luxuriating in the water or in the glow of the river bank, stirred lazily to watch us. Other craft we met from time to time, some small, others large, and moving with slow gracefulness under the wide spread of a tall triangular sail. Mostly these big sails were white, but some were a kind of artistic patchwork of brightly striped material. The whole scene with its warmth and colour seemed vaguely yet insistently delightful.

Frequently, in fact at the abode of any man of even moderate importance, we came upon the squat sturdy-looking war towers, with loop-holed upper stories, which are built as a stronghold and place of refuge in times of local warfare. Of course, these war towers are absolutely contrary to the law of the 'Iraq Government, but in many districts and especially in these marsh areas, which are so difficult to approach, the Government is obliged to be discreetly tolerant of quite a number of local breaches of

its discipline. Passionate quarrels, leading to armed encounters are common amongst these people, but are passed over with discretion so long as they do not involve issues of too wide a significance.

Thus was I observing my surroundings in a kind of dreamy contemplativeness, when abruptly I was aroused therefrom by the sound of rushing water, and excited cries from the boatmen and my fellow-passengers. Looking round I saw at a bend in the river just ahead of us that the waterway narrowed down into a rushing torrent, which descended suddenly to a lower level in the guise of foaming rapids. At a considerable pace, our boat was making straight for this uneasy passage, but by our united energies we managed to direct her against the bank, where by clutching some overhanging branches we succeeded in staying her impetuous course. By means of much laborious punting and pulling, we retraced our way, once more nearly coming to grief, this time against a dead buffalo, which, wedged in some tree stumps, made an obstacle both difficult and disagreeable. At last we reached a junction of waterways, and realised where we had taken the wrong course. It was now necessary to go up another small canal, by which we might eventually reenter the main river, and up this canal we proceeded,

from now onwards our route being against the stream. The canal was very narrow, and the water very rapid, so to lighten the load — and incidentally to avoid a possible ducking — the passengers all disembarked, and walked along the bank, while the boatmen, by means of ropes, towed the little craft up-stream. At one point we reached another waterfall, where the water dropped about two feet with a concentrated rush. It looked to me an impossibility to drag our boat up over this, but by united efforts this was done with surprising facility, and so far from the little craft being swamped, its curved prow rose gallantly and mounted ~~upwards~~ without hesitation. This ended our main difficulties, and after that, though it remained necessary for us to walk, the boatmen were able to tackle the towing without further trouble. The surrounding country had now changed its appearance a good deal, being treeless and marshy, and in the distance on our left the Bahr lay shimmering under the sunshine, a featureless and rather desolate expanse of water. Some way ahead of us we could see a cluster of palm trees with an imposing castle-like building showing amongst them. This was the residence of Saiyid Alwan ibn Abbas, and our destination for lunch.

We sent our servants ahead as before, to announce our approach, and ourselves proceeded at a leisurely pace, only disturbed occasionally by the furious onset of dogs of savage aspect, who rushed from the Arab settlements as we approached, to contest our right to pass. They were nasty beasts, but for all their snarling, kept themselves at a discreet distance from our sticks. In the vicinity of Saiyid Alwan's abode we found several intersecting water-channels, but by means of a ferry, and a couple of primitive bridges, we were safely guided over the approach. Alwan was away from home, but his son, Saiyid Hamid, a youth of about 19, made an efficient host. With difficulty we succeeded in persuading him that owing to the late hour, we should prefer only to take such food as was ready, and he then led us to a small isolated guest-house built of baked-mud bricks, evidently specially built for the reception of guests with modern tastes. It stood apart from the main building, which rose, an impressive structure, in the background. Here was no mere 'war-tower', but a solid square fortress, some three stories high, with battlements and loop-holes and turrets. Fresh

building operations were in progress — a new wing being added as young Hamid explained to us, for his own use, in preparation for his approaching marriage. The room in which we were entertained was small and narrow, and quaintly furnished with what was supposed to represent European comfort and good-taste. Enlarged photographs of male members of the family were on the walls, stiff velvet-covered benches were along two sides of the room, and round a table were grouped a number of old fashioned cheap cane chairs. Hamid had with him a friend from Baghdad, a smart 'modern' youth dressed in a European lounge suit, and fez. He was quite intelligent, but of a type less likeable than the more primitive Arab aristocrat. The meal was brought almost at once. Ordinarily one has to wait for some three hours after arrival — no matter what the time — while a special feast is prepared. Sometimes this grows very tedious, especially if one is tired and hungry.

After a suitable time had passed we proceeded on our way, leaving messages of thanks to be delivered to Shaiyid Alwan on his return. The latter, besides

being a "Saiyid" or descendant of the Prophet, is an influential man of considerable wealth.

Nothing of any particular note occurred from that time till the time of our arrival at the Mudhif of Shaikh Dakhil ibn Sha'alan, our next host, which we reached at about 6 p.m. His reed guest-house was not built close to the river bank, as the others had so far been, but was behind the belt of gardens and palms, and facing into the wide open plain, cultivated now, but in winter completely flooded — for which reason the Mudhif itself, and the other buildings nearby, were built upon raised platforms of earth. This Shaikh is the chief of the Ibrahim tribe, and is a young man of about 23, finely made and good looking. He is possessed also of a rather attractive personality, and a manner of conversation which kept us agreeably entertained during the several hours spent lounging on cushions and sipping coffee, prior to the evening meal. His tribe had been against us in the revolt — as indeed had all the local tribes — but Dakhil himself had not taken a prominent part. His father had been alive at that time, and had been the dominant personality of the district. Shaikh Dakhil explained to us how his

father had been obliged afterwards to fly into exile, and now a British column had arrived on the scene when Dakhil had been left in charge. An order was issued to him to move all his people out of the family Qas'r at dawn, as that and the guest-house were to be razed to the ground. Dakhil further told us how he pleaded with the British Colonel, and how, by a timely jest, he so appealed to the Colonel's sense of humour, that he spared a valuable portion of the property, and left a part of the Qas'r intact for the family to shelter in.

With surprising frankness he also discussed the material and moral effects of the British bomb raids in the district, of which there had been many in 1920.

I have done a lot of bombing in this very area myself — always a disagreeable duty to anyone who thinks, and a method of suppression that can be terribly abused, yet sometimes absolutely necessary, as it was at that period, when the British were few and the Arabs fanatically hostile. He then made brief enquiry concerning the recent hanging of a relation of his — an old and well-known Shaikh of another section of the tribe. "He was a friend of the British," remarked Dakhil, "but we must bow to Allah's will." Indeed one cannot but

wonder whether the present Arab Government does not subordinate justice to political policy, and this was a case in point. I was in Hillah when the old man was hanged, and his body publicly exhibited, after trial for alleged complicity in the assassination of an anti-British official; and there were strange rumours.

Later we were told stories of the notorious Abdul Wahid, of the neighbouring Fatlah tribe, a leader of the revolt. This is the fellow who became an outlaw, was then quixotically pardoned and remunerated by us, and is now one of the most influential Shaikhs in 'Iraq, and a personal friend of King Faisal. He is still openly anti-British, but also unpopular with his own people, on account of his oppressiveness. Shaikh Dakhil evidently has no liking for this formidable neighbour of his.

October 28th. 1924.

This morning, a further touch of briskness in the air, blended with brilliant sunshine, urged us to activity soon after dawn. On starting off, Shaikh Dakhil also entered our boat to proceed with us on the first stage of the day's itinerary, which was to take us

to the abode of Kamil al Chalub, whose property lay about an hour's distance up the river. Behind us followed for a while the private boat of a certain Saiyid whose name I forget, who had also been a guest of Dakhil's, and had been chiefly noticeable to us by the continual and somewhat fulsome compliments towards the British race, with which he regaled us to a tiresome extent; thereby creating an unfavourable contrast with the friendly but more candid attitude of our young host. The Saiyid's boat was a very neatly constructed craft, propelled by two boatmen dressed in a kind of white Arab uniform. He accompanied us as far as a branch canal where his route separated from ours, when he left us after many a salutation. Dakhil sat beside me chatting, and we passed the time most companionably. Our subsequent early arrival took Kamil al Chalub somewhat by surprise, and there was a scurry of attendants while we waited for the cushions and coloured mattresses to be fetched. Kamil is a distant relation of Shaikh Abdul Wahid, into whose territory (Fatlah) we had now passed, but there is no love lost between them. Almost at once we found ourselves listening to an angry tale of grievances, the situation apparently originating somewhat

as follows. Most settled tribal leaders only hold their land and revenues by virtue of their position, and not by private ownership, and therefore any loss of personal prestige may leave them awkwardly placed. If, however, they can induce the Government to grant them personal rights over any portion of land, or can produce claims to private ownership, their position is financially more secure. Some of the more advanced Shaikhs realize this acutely, and they also realize that the policy of the present 'Iraq Government is to undermine the authority of the Shaikhly families, so that gradually the allegiance of their tribesmen may lessen to an extent most inconvenient to the Shaikhs. Abdul Wahid is a particularly astute fellow, is an accomplished intriguer in the Arab manner, and has also a mysterious influence upon King Faisal. He happens to be overlord of his lands only in a tribal sense and is of course by no means content to leave the matter at that. By every method in his power he has been scheming to gain private ownership, and so far has managed cleverly to advance his cause. He obstructs Government survey of his territory, and he evades all accurate calculation as to what exact areas known owners may hold, whereby he can keep secret the amount of revenue

he extracts from his people and their property rights. Such is the case of Kamil al Chalub, who has been in occupation of his house and gardens for many years, and who is now threatened with the destruction of his home, and the appropriation of his land, to prove, as Abdul Wahid puts it, that he is merely a subordinate tribesman. Only a few weeks ago a war party was sent by the Shaikh to carry out this destruction and confiscation by violence, but luckily for Kamil, he was saved by the Qammaqam of the district, who hastened in person to the scene, and declared to the invaders that, owing to his presence, any attack on the place would be regarded as an open act of hostility to the 'Iraq Government. Quaintly enough, Abdul Wahid then appealed to the King, and the energetic Qammaqam received a curt official telegram, asking him why he had been so impertinent as to interfere in the "family affairs" of the Shaikh of the Fatlah.

Kamil al Chalub now lives from day to day in a state of disagreeable uncertainty, although he still has the protection of a small party of 'Iraq police on his land — not that they could protect him from attack, but because Abdul Wahid probably realizes that an attack on government police might not be tactful even for him. This police

post we afterwards visited. The Police are usually much above the average of 'Iraqi alertness, and have the added virtue of pro-British tendencies.

Our visit concluded, and farewell salutations duly exchanged with Dakhil and Kamil, we now continued onwards, having in view the entertaining project of visiting for luncheon the very gentleman about whom we had been receiving so many lurid reports. Our boatmen continued to show an excellent energy, each taking it in turn to tow from the bank, while the other sat in the stern manipulating a paddle in the manner of a rudder. The more exuberant of the two boatmen became again boisterous in his humour, advancing sometimes at a run, and hurling spicy banter at Arabs towing other boats, as he overtook them. He allowed nothing to stay his course, and once when a wretched donkey cumbered his path, he seized same by two legs and threw it skilfully to the ground -- quite a small "rodeo" display in fact. However he became so very vivacious that at last we were obliged to check him somewhat. Some of the boats we overtook were heavy barge-like craft, towed by three or four men, mostly unhampered by clothing, and moving along the bank with an even stride, often to the rythm

of a sort of low chant. It must be heavy work moving mile after mile in this way. Yet they looked brisk enough. Tall virile savages they were, most of them, their limbs rippling with a graceful display of well-developed muscle. Once more before lunch we made a temporary halt, to visit the small village of (?) Here G. was recognised by several Arabs, including one Hardi al Shaikh Muhsin, whose house had been raided and burnt last year, by the agency of one of Abdul Wahid's friends. Very soon after moving from this place — which was a picturesque spot with quaint river craft of all sorts drawn up along the banks — we reached a point where the river divided round a large island, and then opened out to a broad though shallow expanse of water. Here conspicuously on the right bank stood the long peculiar structure of a very big reed Mudhif, and behind it, partly hidden in the palm groves, the high walls of a well-built Qas'r. This at last was the abode of the bold bad Shaikh himself. As we approached the "hostile camp" a small crowd gathered in rather chilly silence to watch us, then as we slowly ascended the pathway from the bank, the figure of a tall Arab approached us from the entrance of the Mudhif. This proved to be Abdul Wahid.