

We were accorded an expressionless welcome, yet a completely courteous one, and were led to the customary place of honour in the Mudhif. But the atmosphere of our reception struck me as very different from that which one usually notices. There was no sort of responsiveness, and the crude staring of the onlookers was rather obvious. However, once seated in the Mudhif, and sipping our host's coffee all went perfectly smoothly. G. is amazingly skilful in the comprehension of the Arab mentality, and kept up an easy flow of non-controversial conversation. It is never easy to keep such a conversation going — always with a crowd of silent listeners. This I presently learned for myself, when G. went away for some time, and I was left to carry on alone. However I filled in the blank better than I expected, and trotted out all my stock subjects and phrases; but I was not at all sorry when G. at last returned. Meanwhile I had ample opportunity to study the worthy Shaikh. This man, a comparative upstart, only latterly of tribal importance, looked to be some 35 years of age, and was of a very tall, lean figure, and of a countenance that could only be described as funereal — by no means the splendid tyrant of romance that I had half expected.

His manner was dignified, and courteous without cordiality. He had the expression of an acute man, yet it was not an attractive expression, nor one to inspire confidence. One could not but recollect disagreeably the time when some sixty Britishers had been kept as prisoners at this man's disposal. Mostly they were fellows captured after the Manchester disaster, who were afterwards marched down to this district by Abdul Wahid. It is said that they were not actively ill-treated, yet the humiliation must have been great. Deprived of all but a few rags of clothing they were marched from village to village and displayed to the population. The men were mostly youngish lads fresh from England, and in the hottest season of the year, this at least means an unpleasant tale of exhaustion and neglect.

Luncheon arrived in due course — and proved an excellent meal. Our departure followed not long after, but ere leaving, it did not escape G's vigilant eye that an additional war-tower seemed to be in course of construction near the house of our host.

Altogether it may seem that Abdul Wahid is definitely a "bad lot", but I doubt if this is quite the case. No doubt he possesses many of the redeeming

qualities of Arabs in general, but his interests happen to have been in opposition to the interests of the British policy. And the Arab mentality is a devious and strange affair anyhow.

From now onwards we proceeded up the main stream of the Euphrates, no longer by the smaller channels, from out of which we had emerged yesterday, shortly before entering the territory of Shaikh Dakhil. Palm groves continued most of the way, though for a few miles the right bank became barren, with rolling sand-dunes beyond it. Incidents of the way were much as usual, but one little scene stays notably in my mind — an Arab youth, brown and naked, standing amongst the reeds at the water's edge, making plaintive airy music on reed pipes — a very personification of the spirit of Pan !

Presently we approached the small town of Abu Sukhair, situated just off the main stream in the seclusion of its own palm-groves and small waterways. The minaret and a few roofs were all we could see, though I know the little town from former visits. And so our river journey came to an end, and at a point near-by, where a

rough track comes down to the river bank, we found G's faithful Ford Car duly awaiting us. Thence within three hours we once more arrived in Diwaniyah. We would have done the run in a shorter time, except that at one place we called a halt, while G. had an interview with a certain minor Bedouin Shaikh, according to previous arrangement. This man is amongst those suspected of being implicated in the recent disappearance of two Air Force officers who had a forced landing. G. however believes that this man was wrongly suspected. I noticed that the wretched fellow appeared to be in a condition of obvious terror during the interview — possibly expecting to be seized and ill-used to extract a statement — a method I am afraid not quite unknown even yet.

October 29th. 1924.

Today I received the official reply to my telegram asking for three days' extension of leave, over the weekend, to enable me satisfactorily to complete my tour of the Diwaniyah district. The leave is refused, and this means a hasty return by car to Hillah, where I must pack my possessions rapidly and return tomorrow night by train

to Baghdad. And so end my brief months of freedom; but they leave many pleasant impressions in my memory — the sense of enterprise, undictated wanderings, magnificent sunshine, and the interesting friendliness of a dissimilar yet hospitable people. Above all it has been delicious to be free of the impertinent interferences of one's formal existence in a routine of official obtuseness !

I do indeed regret this conclusion of my free wanderings yet fortunately there is also a certain exhilaration in new beginnings. And thus I must leave my future at the disposal of the 'powers that be' at Baghdad.

"Khali Nashuf" — we must wait to see !

IN A GARDEN NEAR FARHAN.  
-----

Hannáküm Alláh ! God's blessing upon thee  
For the blessing of water thus given today !  
Weary, a Stranger, through merciless splendour  
Of this mid-summer Sunshine, had fate set my way.

I nothing asking, with nothing of show  
Parched by monotonous, heat-shimmered glow;  
Thou with thy Welcome, refreshing and clear  
As the sweet fresh water thou bringest me here.  
Alláh yousellmek ! may plenty and peace  
Deep in thy gardens for ever increase !  
Rich in the waters, thy bounty now giveth  
Water ! where Alláh's great mercy most liveth !

Hannáküm Alláh ! Our praise to the Highest  
For this life-giving water ! I speak and I know,  
Who have tasted of wines, rich, rarely savoured,  
Never choice as this water !  
I bless thee ! —  
and go.

