

"PER ARDUA" On sick leave, in France, England, Germany & Italy; & return to Irâq.

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In The final pages of those reminiscences of mine which I have called "Arabian Episode" (Vol.II), I was telling of my departure "on leave" from Basrah & Irâq. I had been seriously ill again with malaria, and though one tries always not to admit to one's mind forbodings disastrous to one's content — yet at the back of mine there was a very real sense of uneasiness. If all went well, I should return after the leave, fit once again, and with the prospect of duties very congenial to me, and of greater interest than ever. I had the offer of a post in a remote but important area of Arabia where personal initiative, would be more even than before. Yet my latest Medical Board had not been altogether satisfactory, and there remained this shadow over the future.

I reached Marseilles after a voyage of no outstanding interest, but comfortable enough. From Marseilles I went on at once to Hyeres, where at the Hotel des Ambassadeurs, a warm welcome was awaiting me from my dear parents, and this kind warmth of spirit, as well as the lovely Riviera sunshine soon chased from my mind the remaining hauntings of distress. It was a happy time — except for a period of alarm when my little Mother developed severe bronchitis. My young brother, on leave from the civil service in Uganda came to stay with us, and we were a very happy party.

I had one quaint adventure to record, of some annoyance to me at the time. When on a shopping visit to Marseilles — that wicked but attractive city! — I was "caught out" by a very old trick.

In a street somewhat disordered by re<sup>s</sup>building operations, a man came up asking for some small gift of alms. Feeling amiable, I foolishly pulled out my pocket book to take out some "change" — & of course my "poor fellow" snatched it — & ran off at no small speed. Feeling too irritated to realize my rashness, I gave chase, all amongst the hoardings and builders rubble. Luckily my man was so surprised at my persistent pursuit that he lost his head a little — and ran direct into the grasp of a "gendarme" — who forthwith retrieved my pocket book intact! So far, so good! but this adventure led to the tiresome necessity of my appearing as a witness in court, where the man received a sentence for his activities.

Later, at our respectable Hotel in Hyères, two far from respectable looking "ladies" made an enquiry for me. They stated that they were the "destitute dependents" of my pick-pocket friend — and asked "alms" again! Their actual appearance was far from that of destitution, and I think they rather relied on their flumboyance to alarm a sum of money out of my possibly rather uninitiated looking self! However, a prompt threat to turn them over to the police had the desired effect of securing their immediate departure and non return, — to my no small inner relief!

I did not wander far a field, and my intention to re<sup>s</sup>visit old haunts was not carried out; so that past days when I have basked on leave in Mentone, gambled mildly at Monte Carlo's Casino and International Sporting Club, or browsed at Roches Rouges, and St. Tropez remained just a pleasant memory.

From Hyères I went to London. I stayed first at the R.A.F. Club, and then took a little service flat in Charles Street, Pall Mall,

which I made my centre for a round of visits to friends and relatives, and a less agreeable round of visits to doctors and Medical Boards. However the general outcome was good — I was passed fit to return and resume my congenial duties in due course in Irâq, first being granted a further period "of recuperative leave". At last my mind was at rest again. Soon after my first arrival back in London, I wrote the following letter :-

Letter dated 12.3.29 to H.R.J. Hyères, France from the R.A.F. Club, 128 Piccadilly, London.

"I arrived easily at the end of my journey yesterday evening. At the Club I have found pleasant accomodation and was given a warm welcome from the Hall Porter, and the valet who always looks after me when I am here. I have met no one else that I know in the Club yet, and I am in no particular hurry to do so. I don't want to make a lot of engagements at present.

"On the other hand I have had a kindly welcome from my small sister and her Mac. Molly had been trying to meet me, but alas! met a five o'clock train instead of the 7.30. However she left a message at the Club and after a quick meal and wash and change, I went over to her flat, where we had a cosy chat. I like Mac very much indeed, and my new nephew is a wonderful fellow. He was amiable to me, and gave me a beaming smile! He looks fit and surprisingly real and human! Usually babies are rather frightening to look at I think; but this particular little person is not at all like that. He includes an excellent crop of hair amongst his charms.

"Dear Folks, my time with you has been so jolly, and I left Hyères with great regret. Despite the anxieties, that will be yet another happy memory of times spent with you. It was so good of Dad to see me off — and made Toulon a very agreeable episode."

Letter to H.R.J., Hyères, France, from R.A.F. Club  
Piccadilly, dated 24.3.29.

" I have returned to London from Oxford last evening, after a memorable visit. I was treated very pleasantly at "The House", and had rooms allotted to me in Tom Quad not far from my own old rooms. The Dean was kindly and cordial when I paid my visit to him to receive the "Grace of The House". I also happened to meet Bishop Tommy Strong and he remembered me amiably. I greatly appreciated the dignity of the ceremonial of conferring Degrees, and was much interested in it all. There were only three candidates for M.A. degrees from ChristChurch. One was a charming elderly professor from a Scottish University; the second was Richard Elwes, a rising young barrister, brother of the well known painter, and a most charming fellow. The third was my humble self. I hit it off very pleasantly with Elwes and he kindly drove me back to London in his car. As usual Oxford was a delight to me, a delight mixed also with a poignant and indefinable pain. Somehow Oxford stands for me as the beginning of strange and wonderful things, and there all the ideals, achievements, regrets and disillusionments of my life seem curiously recorded, and somehow made calm and impersonal. "The Grace of the House"! It is indeed a dignified and beautiful phrase which the Dean uses when admitting members to the privilege of their degree, and it seems to have a meaning very special and intimate. I do greatly appreciate the privilege of this membership, and your forethought in making these things possible for me. Oxford was looking beautiful in a day of glorious sunshine. I wandered alone in the Meadows and thought of many things. Many thanks for your congratulations. Yes, the O.B.E. (Military) is supposed to rank above the D.F.C.; yet I would rather mine were a D.F.C. really! Still, I must not be fussy, must I I liked the great Miss Lily Brayton very much, and she had a charming niece staying with her. Her house is charming also, Elizabethan in style and attractively furnished".

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Note: As an Undergraduate I had rooms in Tom Quad only for a very short time. As a "fresher" my terms were spent in rooms on the "cockscrew" staircase in Meadow Buildings; later I settled "permanently" - like my father & Uncle before me, - in Peckwater Quad. Oxford tends to be our family "Alma Mater" on my paternal side; and Cambridge on the maternal side. My Hindle great-grandfather was a Fellow of St Jones; & my pleasant young cousin Harold Hindle (who was killed in the first world war) was an "undergrad" at that same college in my day. We exchanged congenial visits to one another, at our respective Universities. My nephew Don Mackinnon is now (1951) up at New College, Oxford.

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Note: Simon Elwes, the portrait painter, I came to know rather well of later years, in Cairo, when he was painting portraits of King Farouk & Queen Farida.

By now my parents had travelled on to Arco, a little town a mile or two inland from the Northern end of Lake Garda in Italy. Soon I was also travelling thither — but I selected a leisurely route. Having the luck to secure a single birth cabin on a large Atlantic Liner, I travelled in state therein as far as Cuxhaven. Then by train to Hamburg. I cannot now recall the name of the hotel I stayed in nor exact details of the city. I have a general impression of a large business city, and I seem to remember strolling in a pleasant smallish Park. My journey on to Berlin was comfortable, and on arrival I went to the Continental Hotel, a somewhat old fashioned but comfortable hotel not far off Unter den Linden where I had a room reserved for me. I had few personal links in Berlin, but formed agreeable companionships through the friendly medium of a young German who had travelled out with me in my large liner from Southampton. His name was Ludwig, and he was a cheerful companion. I dined at the famous hotel Adlon in Unter den Linden and at the Eden. I lunched at various renowned restaurants including a vast popular resort in the Potsdamer Platz. I went to the Opera in the handsome Opera House, and spent a day out at Wannsee, and then to Potsdam, and was particularly interested in my tour of the Sans Souci Palace. I also called upon various Embassy folks of ours, for whom I had letters, and was pleasantly treated by them. A curious afternoon was spent at a vast swimming bath, whose speciality was the periodic onset of artificial waves. Several evenings were spent under friendly leadership at some of Berlin's rather peculiar night resorts., amongst them a place then known I think as the Kleist Club. Much I noted that was gay, and more light hearted than I had expected in Berlin, and much that was more than a little reckless and exotic.

Wherever I went, I was struck by the unexpectedly genial manner of people in general towards myself in my ordinary daily contacts,— and these included officials, police, porters etc. The city of Berlin, heavy and handsome in appearance, but with little aesthetic charm in its setting, seemed none the less a clean well ordered place, with an underlying spark of easy companionableness. That was all more than twenty years ago — and before the days of Hitler. I have not seen that city since, and I try to remember it only as I seemed to know it then; not as the capital city of ruthlessness and terror, which the Nazis later made it, nor as the desolate region of human despair and material ruin which it has now become, but as the capital of that country which was the home of our dear old governess, Gertrude Sack, who died - really of heartbreak - soon after the first war between Germany and England started; those two countries which she loved, and which she always had taught us to look upon as the joint leaders of a benevolent civilization.

My visit to Munich, which came next was brief but agreeable. I stayed at an hotel the "Four Seasons" - near the station. Of course I paid visits to the famous Hofbrauhaus, and was served enormous tankards of excellent beer by the famous blonde, and buxomly enormous waitresses! I also saw museums, pictures, and on strolling out over the bridge, looked back upon attractive tree fringed views of the stately city.

The onward journey from Germany and across Italy to Arco, passed without any special event. My dear parents were there with their usual enheartening welcome. We were settled into a small hotel - the only remaining such establishment. A large hotel, and a Casino had existed before the 1914-18 war, but had been damaged by shell fire, and remained thus. So Arco was very peaceful, and not frequented by

any tourist influx. The situation was lovely, wooded hills around us, and my window looked out on to a particularly striking turret-like pinnacle surmounted by an old castle. The lake was a mile or two away, but lovely in aspect. Our days were passed mainly in quiet strolling, with picknicks sometimes nearby. I also found a congenial comrade in young Hans Strasser, the son of the Hotel owner, a young fellow only a little my junior. We did some easy "mountain climbing", together and spent in this way many a companionable day.

My father was deeply engaged in preparing his latest book — On India — quite unperturbed by any interruptions or disadvantages due to travel. Sometimes however, he hired a local car, ancient but comfortable, in which we all toured the district including the valley and impressive mountain roads up to Trento and Levico. It was over this very valley that I used to fly in the latter days of the war, and the contrast of circumstances was indeed a moving experience. Sometimes too I visited Riva town, and sailed on the lake with a young fellow named Alec Gregori, who owned a sailing boat. He knew all sorts of delectable lake side retreats — , and with books, sandwiches and some bottles of light beer, these were pleasant occasions indeed. I have delightful memories of visits to other local lakes — Toblino, Caidonazzo, and Ledro, each with its own particular charm of setting. Malcesine was the place to which we next moved. There the Hotel Malcesine was close beside Lake Garda. The site was again romantic, and again dominated by a small old castle. High mountain slopes were behind us, the village itself was colourful and its people friendly to chat to; and across the water we faced, far off, other mountains with some rugged cliffs here and there. I did a lot of sailing, sometimes in the little ship of Aldo, and sometimes in that of his pal Finez,

both of them friendly young men, of the handsome local type, and the latter champion swimmer of the district. My father found time to take long walks with me, during which I marvelled again at the range of knowledge, and the gentle yet valiant philosophy of his code of living, which were revealed to me again and more fully during the leisured yet earnest discussions which these long walks included. With my little Mother I also strolled, and talked also earnestly; and sometimes they both came sailing with me. Garda lake is, or was then, much less frequented than the other lakes, and so here as at Arco, there was peace and quiet undisturbed by tourism of the more tiredome sort. One day we were invited by the Mayor, and his charming daughter, to a village festival. It was pleasant enough, — but a little marred by the assertive participation of a large visiting fascist element, — sad symptom of the future.

So far all had been well; problems seemed solved and our minds at rest. Then slowly there came back those shadows which had haunted me. I developed a cough. At first slight, but soon embarrassingly violent. We all tried tactfully to ignore it, but my happiness was less, and more so for the distress I saw in the eyes of the two dear people with me. I seemed to have no definite symptoms however, and a local doctor was optimistic. The cough however did not go — and in the meanwhile the days of my "leave" sped by, and soon it was time for me to leave Malcesine to return to duty. We made the parting as cheerful as possible. The evening before I left, Aldo, Finez and their pals rowed up under Mother's sitting room windows at the hotel and serenaded us most melodiously in farewell; a pleasant friendly thought. My father came with me in the little steamer as far as Decinzano, to see me into the train on the way to my embarkation

at Trieste. Trieste seemed to me a rather sombre city; but I strolled out upon a lovely country road guided by a friend of the moment met at the local hotel, one Gino by name if I remember rightly who talked cheerfully and helped me to forget the considerable inconvenience which my symptoms were now causing me. Then I embarked, and the following four letters were written during the journey to Haifa, en route for Baghdad :-

Letter to H.R.J. and M.E.J. from hotel de la Ville, Trieste. dated 20.6.29.

" Here I am quite satisfactorily transforming myself into an independent special service officer once again! My journey was easy, Trieste is interesting, and the hotel convenient, I embark on the S.S. Adria this afternoon at 5p.m. It was awfully nice to have you with me as far as Decinzano and a great assistance; thank you! The parting of course was horrid, but my whole leave with you, and especially the time at Malcesane is a reviving memory, reviving to the spirit even more than to the body which is far the more important thing. I attained a sense of content and mental security greater than anything I have known for a long time, and this will have a lasting good effect. I set off eastward fully equipped to meet anything that may be in store for me.

This hotel, though convenient, is rather large and gloomy. I therefore hastened out into the streets and wandered about vaguely all over the place, talked to various sorts of people before eventually retiring to bed. This is a biggish town full of a quaint variety of inhabitants, and there are a great many music supplying cafes, so that the evening was on the whole cheerful. Before I went to bed I took the two cough tablets in accordance with Mother's instructions and had a good night.

Letter to H.R.J. at Malcesine from the S.S. Adria dated  
21.6.29.

Well on our way to Brindisi now. We shall reach there early tomorrow morning and leave again at noon. This ship is reasonably comfortable and my cabin conveniently placed. As first class cabins go it can boast of no great luxury but is satisfactory. There is first class accommodation for 50 passengers, but actually we are only two! Myself, and one other Britisher, apparently a doctor doing an extensive tour in the study of malaria. So I shall not be lacking in medical supervision during this voyage! He seems a nice fellow. We are at some distance from the coast, and have glimpsed only an island or two during the course of the day. It is now 6.30p.m.; I dare say you are both in the garden or possibly doing a small stroll towards the Val di Sogno; it seems scarcely possible, even now, that I have really left, and that I shall not return tomorrow to resume our reposeful routine. I am now going to stroll on deck for a bit before dinner. "

Letter to M.E.J. at Malcesine from S.S. Adria dated 26.6.29,  
(8.45 a.m.).

"My voyage is almost over; we reach Haifa this afternoon, and I disembark I think at about 4.30p.m. It is of course considerably warmer here today but not yet hot. The six day voyage has been restful and I continue to improve. I am impatiently awaiting a telegram from you which I expect I shall find in Haifa. How strange it will seem to find myself in the "Windsor" again. How different were my circumstances when I last passed that way when I had before me the prospect of 6 months freedom and your wonderful welcome awaiting me. Now that the stress of parting is over I do feel that I can face the

future even contentedly. I feel the attraction of work and of places that I understand. I certainly feel the charm and interest of the East again as I approach it, and it gives me confidence to be returning to places and to work which I understand and which are congenial to me. There will be difficulties of course and there may again be some loneliness, but I can't help thinking that we have decided for the best in making my time in the East as long as possible. It was a difficult decision to make and I am grateful for your sympathy and understanding while I have been making it. In many ways we have much with which we can all be satisfied now-a-days. Let us do all we can to hold together and to realise and to preserve our own and one another's content of mind. Dear people you do both deserve so much happiness. On the whole I think you are content, but I am rather concerned that my father cannot get more of the intellectual interests which are so very necessary to a man of his mentality. It is a little difficult to realise a scheme which will have all the right conditions for you both, but I think a good "working arrangement" should always be possible. I'll close down now I think and finish off after we arrive at Haifa. (6.p.m.) Just arrived, and settled in at the Windsor Hotel."

Letter to H.R.J. from Windsor Hotel, Haifa dated 26.6.29.

" The telegram is very welcome. All well here. The cars for Damascus don't start till 10.30 tomorrow morning, a comfortable time. My sea route has taken me via the Corinth Canal. I had a near view of Corinth town, which still shows evident signs of last year's earthquake; and we also passed close enough to Athens to see

the Acropolis clearly. It was most interesting. I wished we might have been on a voyage together, and you about to act as my guide to the land you know so well. Of a largish temple ( I believe of Jupiter) in Aegina I had a quite close view. I have often wanted to see these places, and even this fleeting glimpse is better than not to have seen them at all. I am feeling much fitter and quite up to the desert crossing.

" Here it is not very hot; that will change after Damascus I am afraid!"

On arrival at Haifa, I was unwell; and the journey on although in the comparative comfort of one of the new 6 wheeler motor coaches (what a contrast from the original Nairn convoys, and in particular from that crossing of the desert from Ramadi to Damascus which I once made in a small Ford car!) was for me something of a Hades. Our night in Damascus revived me, but thence onwards was an unpleasing experience, although kindly fellow passengers assisted me.

I felt sure my good friend Bobby Jope-Slade would be at the Baghdad Coach terminus to meet me, — and when he was not it seemed the last straw! (Actually he had been detained by an urgent duty at R.A.F. Headquarters). Somehow I bundled myself into a "gharry", leaving my kit to follow; and oddly enough nothing was lost! I went to the hotel, by then I think named "The Carlton", but on the original site of, and partly incorporating the old Officers' Club, and Maude Hotel, which I first knew in 1920. Arrived in my room, I just collapsed into the bed. Not long after, my good old friend Bobby arrived in haste, and in much distress at my condition. It was he who arranged for my removal by ambulance to the R.A.F. Hospital at Hinaidi; and in this way I reached Irâq in June 1929.

To me it is interesting now to remember that not long after I had entered the Hinaidi Hospital, I was, at my special request, informed of my condition. One of my lungs, it was stated, was badly affected, and the other so seriously threatened, that my survival might be only a matter of months. It is curious to recollect how impersonal this verdict seemed. I was not any longer disturbed by a shadowy threat, and the matter of fact statement did not alarm me as being a sentence of probable extinction to myself, but merely seemed something affecting a set of circumstances for which I need no longer have any unrestful sense of responsibility. I did not of course, at the time, mention this medical verdict to my relatives and friends. During the ensuing months, until February 1930, the following letters of mine are sufficient to indicate the course of events: -