

185

EPISODE XIII.

My Mother's arrival in Cairo; Happily
shared interludes; and some further
Middle-East Occasions.

My little Mother arrived in Port-Said on Sunday January 2nd 1938, on board the S.S. LALANDIA. I had at Port-Said helpful official friends, and so was able to go out in a Service launch to meet the dear little lady and take her ashore in comfort. The Lalandia, - a Swedish vessel if I remember rightly - was not large, but very well fitted, and I was glad to find that Mother had travelled out in a pleasant large cabin to herself. My brother had seen her on to her ship at Marseilles; but he himself having already been allotted official accomodation at the end of his leave, had to follow two days later on board the S.S. LLANGROVY CASTLE. We planned to await him at Port-Said, and to greet him on his way to Uganda. The hotel Marina (which has lately been demolished in the present spate of rebuilding in Egypt) was in those days a quiet and convenient resort, on the sea front near the famous . At this hotel we stayed; but to occupy time we explored the shops and on the second day my young friend Whitehead motored us out to have lunch at Ismailia. On Wednesday the 4th of June, my brother Bob (Eric) duly arrived and we had a cheerful reunion, despite the sadness of subsequent farewell. Next day by the 12.15 train my Mother and I went off to Cairo where we found all ready and the staff beeming with welcome at my flat; my senior servant, Awad, immediately practising his knowledge of French to greet the "Sitt el Kebira", and Ibrahim, his immediate subordinate making up in smiles what he lacked in language. It was a very happy moment, and my dear guest seemed delighted with the new surrounding. The ensuing two years are particularly congenial to look back upon. My Mother and I shared all my spare time. There were parties and small outings with friends; -

dear Ida Flower, a cousin of the Grenfells, - who was already a very congenial crony of mine, gave Mother a specially kindly welcome. Ida, I shall always think of with good comradeship; her son was an A.D.C. at our Embassy, and with her own Dukal background she considered herself to be, - an indeed rightly, - very much a personage! She was also however a great personality as well, full of humour sometimes perhaps a little caustic, warm hearted, and impulsive. One habit she had, somewhat disconcerting to those who did not know her well, and that was to fall asleep inevitably for some ten minutes towards the end of dinner, no matter what the setting or circumstances! Soon however, this was taken for granted and no one minded it at all! I remember her especially at the house of Dick Graves and his sister Mrs. Preston; Dick himself was also a noted "character" in the Cairo of that day, and concluded his career as Jerusalem's Mayor during its days of greatest trouble. He was sometimes rather sarcastically referred to as "Graves supérier" by those whose acquaintance of him was slight. Ann Quinnell was another of that interesting little group.

On such occasions as Xmas Day, Mother and I always made a point of dining together alone, usually at Shepherd's Hotel, which was much more attractive in atmosphere and status then, than it is now, and where Xmas was celebrated with gaiety and taste.

A joint adventure the memory of which we both much appreciated was when on Friday April 29th 1938, we set off together for Siwa Oasis. It was a plucky and rather arduous undertaking for a lady of my Mother's gracious seniority of years, but she was quite undaunted. Another "mother" was also of the party, the charming parent, of Lt. Nicky Rathbone of the "Brigade" Battalion at Kasr El Nil Barracks. Nicky had a large car of his own, and in this he conveyed the two dear ladies, I myself acting as escort in the Service vanette of the R.A.F., in which also ~~our~~ stores for the expedition we were carried. Our ladies travelled as "tough" as is usual on such tours, without a murmur of dismay; and even when a

snake emerged from the rafters of her room in the Arab house in which we sheltered in the oasis, my Mother accepted the situation as calmly as she has dealt with revolutions in South America, earthquakes in Asia, the proximity of wild beasts in Central Africa or wartime bombing in Europe! Mother also went to stay with that dear lady Joan Bennett at Alexandria; and there were other similar occasions. Of course there were less ^{happy} episodes also, for twice Mother was seriously ill at the Anglo-American hospital, ~~and~~ ^{she} on one of these occasions was nursed by the charming and efficient little lady who later became the wife of one of our Senior Diplomats, and is now Her Ladyship. Of course also Mother and son together cannot always agree, and the inevitable divergence in outlook ~~of course~~ did occur; but never was the basis of our deep mutual affection in any way altered.

In a quiet way one of our most pleasing methods of summer time evening recreation, other than the Gezira Sporting Club, was to hire an ordinary but quite smart local gharri, and trott quietly around Zamalek for a drive. We always had the same gharri, and the old driver in due course became quite a trusted "retainer" of ours.

Often during those days Mother entertained for me in my flat a series of noted Middle Eastern people, and these included Noury Pasha, the Iraqi Premier, Hafez Wahba, King Abdul Aziz's Ambassador in London, Ragheb Nashashibi, the Palestine leader and his wife, Members of the Royal entourage of the King and of Prince Mohamed Aly, Egypt's Heir Apparent. A very happy relationship came about between Mother and the latter Prince, who always extended to her with special care, that charming consideration which is one of the most gracious of his Princely assets.

187
a

In view of later developments culminating in the Battle of Alamein, I find it stirring to recall an experimental desert reconnaissance in which I took part in May 1938. The Senior Officer of this party was my old friend Air Commodore (as he then was) Peter Drummond, and I was attached as Liaison Officer and desert "expert". I had with me as "personal staff" the invaluable Hamza Effendi and a Senoussi tribesman who had been my companion in many wanderings in the Western Desert. We left Cairo by a little used track via the Oases, skirting the monasteries looking rather lone and bleak with their small patches of greenery, and then we bore across the most North-easterly corner of the famous Kuattara Depression, camping one night on a ridge at its fringe. We struck the Mersa Matruh road eventually and thence to Matruh itself, and direct across the desert to Siwa. We had with us a mixed column of cars of various types, including one large six-wheeler lorry. Most of our airmen personnel were not very "desert-conscious", and as the desert crossing from Siwa oases, via the Oases of Sitra and Bahriya to Fayyoun and then back to Cairo, had, at least as far as Fayyoun, some hundreds of miles quite untried by a column such as ours, I felt a little disconcerted by their happy nonchalance. Deserts of any sort merit respectful approach, especially by the uninitiated, and have uncomfortable ways of reproving disrespect! After a pleasant couple of days, camped in the shady palm groves of Siwa, we set off on the most formidable part of our exploratory crossing.

The main object of our reconnaissance, besides checking up the area, was to discover how vehicles of various types would fare on this crossing, and so to gain for the British Authorities a clearer estimate of what would be the possibilities of rapid approach to Cairo, should enemy forces at the Jarabub frontier attempt any sudden advance into Egypt. I, with my Senoussi tribesman, and Hamza Effendi travelled in our light Ford Truck just ahead of the column. Our advice and guidance however were at first listened to somewhat reluctantly, -- but when disregard of such points of the necessity to keep to the summit of sand dunes and to avoid the temptation of their easier looking but treacherous hollows; and to approach with suspicion those large solid looking areas of flat desert, where the solid crust may often hide a morass of salt-march, wherein wheeled traffic can flunder most inconveniently, had laid to several hours unnecessary delay, then our friends began to show a distinct change in their attitude! However one particular piece of disregarded advice almost led to a major set-back. British Service personnel have a great dislike for sun-helmets, and reluctantly realised that an Eastern sun, like the desert, demands respect. Whenever, and that was not seldom, some vehicles became stuck in its tracks, our lads would cheerfully cast aside their inconvenient-seemy sunhelmet, the more easily to dig and heave. My warnings passed unheeded, -- till suddenly one after another about ten fellows collapsed. The large lorry was soon full of semi-conscious airmen who did not recover till the next day! This rather drastic example was however salutary in the end, and we had no more

cases of sun stroke. Sitra Oases when we reached it, was a lovely spectacle, its clumps of palm trees and desert shrubs shading a placid lake. It was a salt lake, but looked exceedingly cool, and the solitude and the coolness of breeze which somehow seemed to stir its leafy groves, was a most welcome interlude in the endless miles of long bleak sand dunes we had just traversed.

We paused there for a time, moved to appreciative admiration, — but all too soon realised that desert flies and many mosquitoes also shared our appreciation of this romantic spot. In such company the romance grew much less, so off we went.

There was a moment of thrill some days later, when on topping a bleak and rocky ridge, we saw spread below us the expanse of Bahriya Oases, and realised that the most arduous part of our crossing was over, that all vehicles were still with us and that a successful outcome of our undertaking seemed within reach. After a night in Bahariya village amidst this cultivation, and its antiquities — in the sands I myself found one ancient seal and a curious tiny fragment in the shape of a horse's head, — we pressed onwards towards the Fayyoun. This even larger Oases we skirted along a well marked track. We were now near enough to Cairo to seem practically home again. Peter Drummond and his Second-in-Command now decided to go on alone in their car and to reach Cairo a day or so ahead of us. I was left in command to bring in the main column. After strongly advising my two friends to take extra water and spares with them, I bade them *au revoir*, and ~~a~~ cheerfully they set off at speed. I with the main party spent another two nights camped in desert places; then the next day we greeted with a rousing cheer

187 d

the familiar sight of the Giza Pyramids. In passing Mena House Hotel, my very good friend Herrling, the Manager, brought out refreshments for us all, with a cheery welcome. He also brought us the disconcerting news that our two commanders had only just left for Cairo in a hired vehicle, and that they had in fact, early that morning, walked in from the desert in a very exhausted condition. It seems that the car had broken down and with their water supply at an end, the two had had a ~~tough~~ experience in reaching the Pyramids on foot, whence they were brought for rest to Mena House Hotel.

So again, even at the end the desert had asserted her authority! In the end, I with the main column reported to Headquarters in Cairo actually before our two all-too-optimistic leaders. The whole expedition was an interesting and instructive experience.

There now follow a few letters from Middle East personalities, the first of them being concerned with the following incident. At the beginning of September 1937, I had the interesting privilege of being requested by Noury Pasha to help him translate into suitable English one of his earliest memoranda to Mr. Anthony Eden (then our Foreign Minister) ~~earliest~~ upon the question of the Syria-Iraq-Amman adjustments,

which have since become and still remain a matter of considerable controversy, - and Noury in fact, at this moment of writing is yet again in Cairo discussing with various statesmen still unsolved problems descendant from those earlier days.

For several evenings we sat up very late working upon this document, which was then despatched to Mr. Eden under the following covering note from Noury.

Cairo, September 6th 1937.

Dear Captain Eden,

During a recent interview which was granted to me at the British Embassy in Alexandria, it was suggested to me that it would be opportune for me now to send to you direct a summary of my views on what I consider to be a possible solution of the problem in Palestine and other problems concerning the relationship of the various neighbouring Arab states.

I have, therefore, composed this precis of my proposals which, of course, can be considered only as a very general statement which needs much working out in details. This document I venture to send you herewith.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Noury Es Said.

In this matter, it is interesting to note a comment in a letter I received dated September 1938 about a later stage of this project. This ~~comment~~^{note} was to the effect that Noury Pasha was already "too much a back number" to foster schemes of major importance"! It astonished me at the time, and it still astonishes me that a senior British political authority could ever have described in those terms a mind so obviously one of the most alert and determined of any of the statesmen of the Middle East.

Certainly anyhow this "back number" has become a "forward number" again in Middle Eastern affairs *today*.

Various other letters now follow.

From Turf Club Cairo, 20th July 1938, to H.E. Jamil Bey Madfai (Premier) Baghdad.

Dear Jamil Bey,

My thanks are yet again due to you for the very pleasant and interesting meetings which you found time to arrange for me during my recent visit to Iraq.

Although times and circumstances change, the memory of old days and the links of friendship do not change. Therefore, there will always remain the bond of mutual effort, good will and appreciation, between those of us who can look back to the early days of endeavour which we shared together.

There is a special link in the instinctive outlook and interests of Arab and British people, and one hopes that this may prove strong enough to survive the stresses and perplexities which may be experienced from time to time at this very difficult period of the world's history.

Will you please convey to H.M. King Ghazi all appropriate messages of respect and remembrance; and will you please accept also my warm good wishes to yourself and all my friends in Iraq.

Believe me, Excellency,

Very sincerely yours,

H.H.J.

From Jamil Bey Madfai, Prime Minister of Iraq, to Sqdn.Ldr. H.H.J., dated 30th of July 1938.

I have received with great pleasure your letter dated the 20th of July. I avail myself of this opportunity to express my warm feelings concerning the sympathetic effect which your visit to Baghdad has left. I, too, still remember those past days.

I wish to confirm to you that it is my belief that the connection existing between the English and Arab peoples is so strong that it will resist all the difficulties that have come about in the world now. Especially if the Palestine Affair can be settled in conformity with this friendship, I believe it will remain strong for ever.

Kindly accept my best wishes,

(signed) Jamil Madfai.

190

From Turf Club Cairo, dated 8th September 1938, to H.E. General Noury Pasha Es Said.

Dear Noury Pasha,

After leaving you, the information which we mutually discussed was passed by me personally direct to those persons who could most quickly inform you as to whether the general idea was acceptable or not.

Although considerable interest has been shown, and due consideration given to ideas coming from a source whose opinions, of course, always have respect, yet I am afraid that so far I am unable to inform you that there is any real likelihood of this matter progressing on lines suggested in our most recent discussion.

You will understand, however, I know, that the whole question will remain clearly in mind.

I greatly appreciated the interesting exchange of ideas during my recent visit to your part of the world, and I also consider it an especially interesting privilege to have travelled with you over the country which you last saw twenty years ago during the victorious march under your leadership of the Arab Forces at the capture of Damascus.

With my very best regards to yourself, to Madame Noury Pasha and to your son, I am,

Most sincerely yours,

H.H.J.

From Turf Club, Cairo, September 1938 to H.R.H. the Emir Abdallah, Amman.

Your Royal Highness,

On my return to Egypt I hasten to express my cordial appreciation of the hospitality which Your Highness so graciously extended to me during my visit to Amman.

This occasion I shall look back upon with warm remembrance, and I hold it in especial esteem to have been privileged to hear Your Highness's personal views on matters of such great importance to us all.

The present problem is unfortunately complicated by rights which may seem to conflict, but for which a solution may be found by giving consideration to some such wide-viewed and constructive outlook as that which Your Highness expresses.

I myself, as Your Highness is kind enough to remember, have special links with Your Royal House, so that I am especially sensitive to the kind reception which Your Highness has again shown me.

With a final expression of my belief that a solution can and will, with God's help, be found, believe me Your Highness,

Yours in cordiality,

H.H.J.

Telegram from H.E. Noury Pasha, Baghdad to Mrs. James Cairo, dated 28th December 1938.

"Very many thanks - Noury Es Said".

From H.E. Noury Pasha Es Said (Premier), Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Baghdad, dated 4.1.39.

Dear Hindle-James,

I am very glad to receive your very kind letter of the 30th December 1939. I am deeply touched by your sincere words and thank you so much for your good wishes towards Iraq and myself.

I am remembering you to your friends in Baghdad, and I am sure that no one of them will fail to remember you always. I am very glad to convey your messages of respect to H.M. King Ghazi.

With my best wishes,

(signed) Noury Es Said.

From Jamil Bey Madfai (Premier) Baghdad, 24th January 1939.

I have received your kind letter dated the 30th ult., and wish to thank you most cordially.

I much appreciate your interest in following up events here.

With my personal regards to your goodself and best wishes for your health and happiness, believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

(signed) Jamil Madfai

On February 3rd, 1939, I received from Noury Pasha in London, during the Arab Conference there, an interesting joint telegram from himself and Aly Maher Pasha of Egypt, asking me to approach Ragheb Bey Nashashibi on certain points under discussion at this conference. This I fortunately was able to do apparently to the mutual satisfaction of both British and Arab participants.

From H.E. Sheikh Hafiz Wahba, Royal Legation of Saudi Arabia, London,
14th February 1939.

Dear James,

Thank you very much indeed for your kind letter of the 7th inst., and for the expression of good wishes for a happy outcome of the Arab Conference.

I am sorry to hear that you were unwell during the visit of the Arab delegates to Cairo, and hope that by now you have completely recovered.

I shall have much pleasure in conveying your greetings to H.R.H. the Emir Feisal.

With my kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,

(signed) Hafiz Wahba.

From Ragheb Bey Nashashibi, Carlton Hotel London, 28th February 1939.

Dear Mr. Hindle-James,

I have received your most sincere and kind letter, and I assure you I am very grateful to your dear mother and yourself for the sincerity you have shown me.

I am feeling somewhat better now, and my only worry at present is my work for the good of my country and the restoration of peace and order out there. I am hoping that our hard work will be adorned with success.

I shall never forget the wonderful time I had with you in Cairo, and I am looking forward to see you both in the best of health.

With kind regards,

(signed) Ragheb Nashashibi.

From Turf Club Cairo, 24th June 1939, to H.E. Moustapha El Nahas Pasha,
Ramleh, Alexandria.

Dear Nahas Pasha,

I feel that before setting off out of Egypt for a period of some weeks, I should like, if I may, to express to you the pleasure and privilege I feel in having achieved the interesting acquaintanceship, - perhaps I may be allowed even to say friendship, - between us.

I should like also to express my sense of appreciation of the courtesy and understanding which you have kindly extended to me personally.

It is only by good will and human understanding ~~but~~ these difficult relationships of these stressful but historic days can be brought to a conclusion beneficial to our fellow-men, and thus it is that one is all the more appreciative whenever one finds that best form of greatness in great men, - that is to say, wide-viewed human understanding.

I have been most anxious during the last week or so, to avail myself of your kind invitation to visit you in Alexandria. Duties, however, have prevented my being able to accomplish this, but I very much hope that on my return to Egypt in a few weeks' time, I may be allowed again to come and see you.

With my sincere greetings, believe me Excellency,

Cordially yours,

H.H.J.

On the occasion of H.R.H. the Emir Abdallah being crowned as H.M. King of Jordan, I sent to Him a personal letter of congratulation. The following is a cable which was sent to me in reply:

To Hindle James, Club Mohamed Aly, Cairo.

"I am commanded by H.M. the King to thank you for your congratulations appreciating your good wishes and affection."

(signed) Chief of the Royal Cabinet.

194

Sadness mixes with my memory of the very pleasant contacts I had during these latter times with Colonel Muirhead, then an Under Secretary of State. I accompanied ^{him} on a tour of his by air to Bagdad and then Basra, pausing en route for an ^{un}official visit to the ancient site of Ur. It was near Ur, that an R.A.F. desert H.Q. had been set up, quartered in a stationary train during the operations against the Akhwan, of which I gave some account in my diaries of 1924 - 1930. Muirhead's last letter to me is as below.

India Office
Whitehall.
1st Feb. 1939

Dear James.

Thank you very much for your Christmas card. It was very nice of you to send it. I see you give your address as the Oxford and Cambridge Club. If you are still in London let me know and come and have a meal. Keeling and I had a most interesting trip in India and Burma and enjoyed it immensely. We flew home, stopping for 4 days in Palestine en route. As I think I told you, O'Connor, who commands at Jerusalem, is an old friend of mine. I hope very much that a satisfactory solution will be arrived at - satisfactory not merely to Palestine but to India.

Yours Sincerely.

A. Muirhead.

Not long after, Muirhead was found dead in his country home in England, under tragic circumstances. It seemed a grivous ending to a life full of useful activity and personal qualities of soundness and goodwill. For his kind interest towards me and my work, I had, and still have, a very sincere sense of gratitude.