

EPISODE II"IN THE SHADOW"

Letter to H.R.J. and M.E.J. from Hanaidi Hospital near Baghdad, dated 5.8.29.

" Only a hasty scribe! mainly to say how much I appreciate your cheering letters. All goes well, and on the whole my improvement is good. I am still kept however severely to my bed, and not allowed to be at all enterprising. The doctors are studying my case thoroughly. They consider that with proper treatment I might be sound again within a reasonable time. Then for a while, I shall have to lead a quiet life; and then we hope all will be well. They consider that my condition is entirely due to my having served rather too long in the trying conditions of the desert and out stations, and therefore that the authorities are likely to deal generously with me. I have had a little difficulty about arranging for packing up my belongings at Basrah, but all is well now, and thanks to Mother's forethought, I have the address of the furniture store at Southborough, and I shall have all my kit sent there. It can be sorted later on. Captain Wallis, A.D.C. to the General Commanding the Levies here, died in hospital yesterday, poor fellow. He had done 5 years in Irâq, and was due to leave to rejoin his Regiment in England, next week. He picked up the same type of malaria that I had last year, and had an attack exactly like mine, soon after being admitted to Hospital, only he poor lad, never regained consciousness. Certainly I have cause to be grateful for many things; and yet I had hoped for a good deal from these next few years. I am essentially a lover of solitude

and independent enterprise. In this I had ample scope in my work out here. My promotion is a satisfactory point anyhow. I think I owe this mainly to Air Commodore Bowhill, and possibly in some degree also to Sir Edward Ellington; but I think it was Bowhill who did all the useful backing of my case. I feel it a privilege that he should have interested himself, for he has a considerable reputation for demanding a sound standard of efficiency in his subordinates; but I feel it rather badly to have to go sick like this immediately after he has shown interest in my progress."

Letter to M.E.J., from R.A.F. Hospital Hanaidi, dated
25.8.29.

"Plans are becoming gradually more definite. It is almost certain that I leave here by air on Sunday the 31st, and embark at Port-Said a few days later. It is not yet quite certain what boat I go by; most probably it will be the "Rasmac". It now seems that I shall have one travelling companion only, an officier who accompanies me from here. He is a nice fellow, recovering from a very serious flying accident. He was unconscious for three weeks. We shall have a doctor travelling with us by air; and on board ship, there will be one or more orderlies detailed to look after us, as well as the ship's doctor. So that's all right! You need not expect me to look particularly ill when I arrive, in fact quite the reverse. My port of arrival, I don't yet know, but will inform you as soon as possible. I presume I shall be able to stay one or more days in London, before re-entering hospital. These are my future movements as far as I can tell; but even the slightest "set back" in my health would probably cause my departure to be postponed. I have been seeing Bobby Jope-Slade almost every day, and I am now sometimes able to go over

and sit in his quarters for tea; and we do a stroll together most evenings. He is off on leave to the Persian Hills, the same day that I leave for England. He has been awfully good to me, and always cheery and hopeful though I think he has been a good deal concerned for me at this turn of events. We had been expecting our work to be linked for at least another two years."

The letter hereafter is one ~~was~~ which Bobby J.S. sent to me early in my illness.

Air Headquarters,
Hinaidi.
29th September 1929

Dear Old Jimmy,

It was very pleasant to find your two letters awaiting me on my return from Persia and to learn that the homeward trip had not been too bad and that the sea voyage had done you good. In fact, in my opinion, the best bit of news in your letter was that you find yourself "quite surprisingly fit"! I am still very anxious to know what the Air House are going to do with you and, for the love o' Mike, try and remember that your main job in life at the moment is to get absolutely well again - and that not only for your own sake!

The trip to Persia was quite a success, but our plans were rather upset by the fact that Seward got a touch of sand-fly fever at Karminshah; this limited the trip to Hamadan only as far as he and I were concerned, but Bussell, who is going on to the Staff College, wanted to see as much of Persia as possible and went on by himself to Kazvin, Resht, Enzeli and Taheran, finally re-joining us at Hamadan in time for the return journey.

Hamadan itself is extraordinarily pleasant; there is a small British community who are the essence of hospitality and, after five days in the hotel, we found ourselves spirited away to live with the British Consul (one Summerhayes, previously vice - Consul at Alexandria) in his magnificent residence in the hills. Except for the driving part, which was pretty strenuous and which I did NOT hand over to my companions, we had a very restful time - tennis, swimming and eating. However, I brake loose on one occasion and climbed a 12,000 foot mountain, nearly died on the summit and established a local record for the outward and return journey of 26 miles - all on foot! It was well worth the effort, for the view from the top was magnificent and one looked clear over about sixty miles of country in all directions and felt very much as though one was actually "sitting on top of the world".

The trip cost about £ 25 each, all in , and the car ran like a bird although some of the mountain passes nearly caused her to shed a few tail feathers! The Pai Tak is the most impressive; the road, runs along the valley until it suddenly runs straight into a 6,000 foot barrier of rock over which it proceeds to scramble in the most amazing series of loops and twirls. The scenery is well worth looking at, but, having noted the wreckage of a couple of lorries which had gone over the edge at some earlier period, I glued my attention severly to the road!

Apart from the Persian Officials, who are a most unpleasant crowd of scruffy and unshaven red-tapists and to whom one has to kow-tow in a most humiliating manner if one wishes to get through, the only thing I found lacking in the trip was the

companionship of one who had, unfortunately, flown away the day before I left Baghdad. Seward and Bussell were very pleasant fellow tourists and no harsh words marred our period together, but they are but shadows of the real thing.

Juri was, quite frankly, a bloody nuisance. Directly we crossed the frontier he adopted the manners and garb of a Baghdad effendi and ceased to be a bearer. He swaggered about Kirmanshah in his double-breasted flannels and left me to clean the car, change tyres and do the packing. For this, and for many other sins, I beat him most heartily; he merely wept. At Hamadan, where his honesty came under suspicion, he was worse; I know he took opium (the Persians live on it); I fancy he "had" a dancing-girl in his room in the hotel. I beat him again and - he bought me a bunch of roses ! He is still with me, but I fear that his days are numbered. Even as a Squadron Leader I can't afford to keep Juri Effendi and a bearer !

In Baghdad, during my absence, things were fairly lively. The Zionist disturbances in Palestine had their inevitable effect in local political circles and were used as a happy medium for stirring up the anti-British element. Luckily, we had advance news of all their demonstrations and the Police were well to the fore, while H.C. applied a certain amount of pressure to the Palace. The latter had but little effort on the virulence of the Political party, but put a most effective stopper on the activities of the extremists and subsequent acts of violence. There were some pretty tense moments, but the total casualties were, I believe, one dead and several battered Jews and one dead Muslim

Sir Gilbert Clayton's sudden death came as a shock to everybody; the A.O.C. took over the reins of government on a temporary basis, but Young, the new acting High Commissioner, arrived by air to-day so things will revert to normal. Sir Gilbert's death is a great loss to "I" Branch, as his earlier training had given him a considerable bias in our favour; the new man may not be so sympathetic.

There isn't much other news. Dan Deacon has gone home; Warburton has been promoted to Squadron Leader; Foster and Anderson go at the end of the year; Teague leaves some time in February and there is a suggestion that DeGaury may replace him in the office; Jack Cottle and Kenny Levick are dur out as SSOs. in the near future and one, Greenlaw, from the Armoured Cars, is also joining us. I don't know whether Drew is coming out or not.

The match-cases were duly presented to the Matron and sisters before I left for Persia; Mr Buggal Subby had made a really artistic job of them and the recipients were obviously highly delighted. I got a couple of whiskey-and-sodas out of it!.

Your boxes have been handed over to the hospital for onward transmission, but I have yet to see about the packing of the Samawah rug. I believe you made all arrangements with Burton about the forwarding of your Basrah kit ?

This is about the sum total of my news at the moment, old Lad.

God bless you,

Bobbie.

Letter to H.R.J. from R.A.F. Hospital Uxbridge, dated 11.10.29.

"It was very nice of you both to come along to see me today. I dare say you have noticed that I cheer up considerably during the course of our chats; but please don't imagine that I am at all depressed. In fact, having accepted the reality of the overthrow of a few small "castles in the air", I have now become fairly placid in outlook. Possibly my plans may readjust themselves reasonably in the future; meanwhile I have books, paper and pen, and I am comfortably situated. It is a fine experience in this fickle world to have you both standing by me again. Actually I seem to have very few living people now who still seem "to belong" to me; outside the family there is no one now except Bobby Slade; between him and myself there does exist an essential friendship, in a different category to ordinary friendships, — as it was with the other Bobby, Bobby Jenks. Even yet I cannot quite realize that dear old Jenks has really gone away for always. It seems unreal and strange at times to be the survivor of so many very young and very pleasant pals.

Today I am feeling fitter than usual, and the pain in my chest much less.

Yes, of course I would very much like to see the "young men" from Westminster School, if either of them would care to come along. Presumably they are only free at week-ends."

Letter to H.R.H. from King Edward VII Convalescent Home Midhurst, dated 18.12.29.

"Your letter duly reached me to greet me on my first morning here. It seems curious to think of you two journeying together amidst the old scenes at Aix-les-Bains. It was a good leave I spent that year; everything so secure and satisfactory.

"I left my flat in Charles Street Haymarket at 3.45p.m. yesterday, and caught the 4.15 train from Waterloo. At Haslemere I found the car I had ordered duly awaiting me, and in it proceeded the 8 miles to the Midhurst Home. You may imagine that the drive was a little desolate; wondering what sort of place it was to which this new turn of fate was leading me.

"My bachelor flat in Charles street, when actually the moment of departure came, I left with some regret. It was a cosy corner, and it had been all my own. Yet I knew too, that it was an excellent thing that my weeks of liberty to tread the ways of a free London life were at an end! Pleasant enough those weeks of liberty had been, but already the time had extended beyond the limit I had allotted to myself, as an alleged invalid, for reasonable relaxation from restraints! Certainly I have been glimpsing life from standpoints somewhat unusual to me; all very interesting, if not all so congenial as the more solitary ways of my living during latter years in desert places. This period in London has shown to me an outlook upon several new types. I have not frequented the stricter "Social round" so much as I did during that spell of the "London Season"

just before I first went East to take up my special duty, but I have mixed a little with social sets of a rather more Bohemian (silly word) kind. First there was the Colin-Felix set. Mostly very well placed young men and women, all dabbling in "art" or "literature", some few seriously, most quite vaguely. Rather charming people all of them, many of them very "exquisite" to look upon, some very interesting to talk to, full of vivid though evanescent enthusiasms; but almost all of them rather superficial in their outlook upon life, or else thinking it a more elegant pose to pretend to be so. Rather futile lives many of these young people seem to lead, yet some of them obviously have real brilliance and talent lying dormant. Next I was introduced through the connecting link of Sidney C.-O., to a rather different set. Most of these ^{though} ~~were~~ having much the same rather feverish outlook on life, yet are kept within reasonable bounds by the necessity to make at least some personal efforts to earn a living. These people are avidly interested not only in themselves but in each other and in humanity as a whole, and so are more genuinely companionable. The young Serbian writer, I told you I am friendly with, is of this set, and I found him and some of his friends, very good company. Finally I touched, slightly but quite sufficiently, on an unlovely outer circle which borders upon these sets of youthful free livers. Curious beings, not altogether human, quite without morals, and so assiduously perverse as to make their vices quite stupidly uninteresting! In that at least they serve some useful purpose, certainly in no other way. It takes all sorts to make a world, and it stirs one usefully to meet new kinds of people.

"Now I am in the midst of yet another and very contrasting community. In this nursing home, are about 104 persons, of both

sexes, but mostly men. Although there are amongst them a number of "gentle folk", the great majority are of that sort commonly described as "middle" and "Upper middle" class. There are many clerks, well-to-do traders, schoolmasters, and several young men invalided home from various business houses abroad. It has surprised me how young the majority of patients here are, and how few seem outwardly ill. Yet very soon one detects the more subdued signs that all are stricken in the same way. Some have been here for several years already. Many have lost their jobs, and are faced with great problems even if they recover soon; and yet there is a remarkable atmosphere of good cheer, of good fellowship, and a desire to be helpful to one another. Really it is a pleasant thing to see and experience. I was courteously received by all I came in touch with on my arrival; and while I was in bed fellows brought me my letters, papers etc. and were very helpful. There is only one other representative of the Services here at the moment. He also is a Royal Air Force Officer, a Flight Lieutenant, but I had not met him before. There was also a Naval Commander here, but he has just left. I appreciate the friendly attitude here, but all the same, one does feel a bit isolated, for I am not fond of "community life" even at its best, as you know, and here we are essentially "communal". The hospital buildings are rather splendid, and situated in charming surroundings of pine woods, bracken, and wide outlook; but the regime here is strict, nor are there unnecessary indulgences. Patients are adequately looked after, but not pampered. Most of all one feels the cold! Throughout this vast building there is only one room for patients' use which has a fire. There is central heating, but only in a moderate degree. Everything is open to the winter winds; and it seems bleak indeed to a poor lonely wanderer from Eastern parts!

"When I first arrived I must admit that a wave of depression did rather overwhelm me; the cold white corridors, the restrictions, and the discreet but obvious indications of prevailing invalidism, seemed sinister and dreary. Now however I have recovered a reasoned cheerfulness. The doctors are encouraging and even express some doubts as to whether I have an actual infection at all. I have seen an eminent specialist today, and he too seemed hopeful; so probably after a brief spell of further special treatment I shall be able to return to you more hale and hearty than ever."

Letter to H.R.J. and M.E.J. at Spotorno from the Midhurst Convalescent Home, dated 6.1.30.

"A letter today, and another two days ago, both containing interesting accounts of your Xmas-New Year doings at Spotorno. It seems that you too were merry and not without your festive occasions! You say you were wondering on New Year's eve about myself, and trying to picture what I was doing. How very surprised you would have been could you but have seen me! For I was at the Chelses^{Arts}/Club Ball, at the Albert Hall in London. You may remember that it had long been suggested that I should include myself with a certain festive party for that occasion. I had not supposed however that it would be at all possible. Upon putting forward a proposal to my "medical advisers" here, however, that I should spend three days in London over the New Year, no objection was raised by them; and I was of course not slow to take advantage of this. The Ball was a vast success! The night of the 30th I spent in the comfort of the Old Court House, and then moved on, to the flat in London of my young Serbian friend who was also to be of the party. In all we were 9 people, and we went to the pleasant extravagance of hiring a box at the Albert Hall for this gay evening.

Certainly it was an amazing sight! There were not less than 4000 revellers either upon the huge floor space or in the private boxes; and many of the costumes were very striking. In many cases, to be exact, the costumes were more striking for their extreme slightness than for their elaboration! Usually a gathering of English folk trying to be festive is sadly hampered by the "decorum complex". Here however there was no such restraint. Never have I seen in England a public festivity with so many happy persons of both sexes so nearly and so charmingly in a natural state of youthful beauty! Surprising certainly but as certainly attractive! Our party included at least three whose "costume" placed them in this category of charming frankness! I myself was in a dress of an early Georgian "courtier", — a coat of green velvet brocade, and flowered silk waistcoat, white satin knee breeches, and all the various paraphernalia of lace cravat etc. It was completed by some rather nice old fashioned jewellery of considerable value, lent to me for the occasion. My costume was quite discreet, you will please note! But I was told it looked rather well. The fun was vigorous, and it was indeed an asset to have a private box to retire to at intervals to watch the revels from a position of security! The united singing of "Old lang syne" at midnight was a remarkable episode; and by 4a.m. the scene became positively bacchanalian! We did not leave the Albert Hall till 5.30 a.m! Needless to say, most of the next day was spent sleeping soundly in the flat of my hospitable friend.

After a day of quiet recuperation in London, I returned to Midhurst; and was thereupon examined again by the doctors, and pronounced in no way worse for my frivolity.

My friends were kind over the Xmas period. I received a great many cards, packages, and letters. Among the latter, a note of greeting from Air Marshal Sir Edward Ellington which was rather nice of him.

I have great hopes of being able to join you within a few weeks though I have no exact dates.

I must now go and have a chat with a poor lad who has just been told that his treatment cannot be successful. He is being very plucky, but I think it has been a shock. Such a nice lad, only about twenty four and a keen athlete until this complaint developed about a year ago.

I have been most interested in my young brother's letter. How splendidly he has been doing in Uganda."

Letter to M.E.J., Palace Hotel Spotorno from Midhurst Convalescent Home, dated 11.2.30.

" Last saturday I had quite a number of visitors. It was the anniversary of Bobby Jenkins' death, and his mother motored over to see me, bringing as a gift a silver card case of his which he always carried with him. It was nice of her and she was kind and friendly. She and her husband are just off to Italy for their annual holiday. She has suggested my going to make a long stay at her house on their return. I believe the Jeurwine's home now is a very nice country house, called Tangley Place. Miss and Mrs. Russell arrived to see me the same evening also. It was pleasant to see them but it was perhaps a pity that I happened to be confined to bed just the day that I had so many visitors. Mrs. Forshall has also been to see me, so I am by no means neglected."

23.2.30.

"I have returned after a medical board. Doctor Trail sent up a sound report. The Board were friendly, and evidently willing to be helpful. They refused however to be so optimistic as Dr. Trail. At first they hinted at my being invalided out at once, under favourable terms. Then however my chief at the Air Ministry expressed his desire to retain my services even if I am not passed fit for full duty. At present the Board entirely refuses to pass me fit for any arduous conditions, or for aviation. It seems however that, — unless the Air Ministry "policy" should forbid it — I am likely to be given a special job in Jerusalem, where the conditions of life meet with the approval of the doctors.

"I expect to leave Midhurst in about ten days.

"On March the 4th I have to attend an Investiture at Buckingham Palace and a Levee at St. James' Palace a few days after. This of course necessitates full dress uniform.

"While at the Air Ministry I went to make sure about my foreign decorations for the Levee. I especially enquired about my Order of the Nahda, and have received orders from the Director of Personnel to wear it. I should have been uncomfortable about wearing it otherwise. I have also ascertained definitely that my present disability is officially attributed at the Air Ministry to my service with the R.A.F."

In looking back to these long past days I remember that this Investiture I found an impressive ceremonial. It took place in what I believe is known as the Throne Room, & we approached it slowly up the vast staircase, & along the lofty picture gallery. His Majesty King George V stood at the far end of the room, with an imposing semi-circle of high officials behind him. It was a moving moment when the formal summons came for one to advance alone up this great room to stand before His Majesty. Owing to some minor ceremonial re-adjustment, I had the privilege of several extra minutes with the King, during which he spoke to me in a kindly & very good humoured way. On my way out from the Palace, I met a group of friends, & we chatted for a while in a big "Salon" with bow windows looking out into the grounds. It was all very pleasant.

To the Levée at St. James Palace I went in company with the then Lord Nelson, & had lunch with him at his club. He was no longer young, but was small & dapper, & looked well in his Court uniform. He was a strangely shy man, but with a quiet sense of humour. He commented whimsically that it is inconvenient to bear a great historic name unless one is also the possessor of an appropriate appearance; said he "when I arrive at some function & my name is announced, people are liable to gaze in expectation of a great presence arriving, -- & then it is only me!" I must add however that his modesty was excessive, and in fact his trim figure & quiet manner pleasantly counter-balanced any lack of grandiosity!

I much enjoyed both ceremonies. Buckingham Palace & St James Palace contrast interestingly; the first with a vast imposing sort of stateliness, & the second, having in its smaller & more ancient apartments a special dignity of its own. Of more recent times I have been privileged also to visit Marlborough House, The Residence of H.M. Queen Mary ever since she became England's dearly loved Queen-Mother. On a lesser scale there is the same spacious style as in Buckingham Palace, but there seems a special graciousness in its fittings & atmosphere, reflecting, as it were, the grace of the beloved and lovely Lady who resides there.