

EPISODE IV.

Invalided out; prelude to tragedy.

The following letter tells of the eventual decision of the authorities.

Letter to H.R.J. at Algeciras from the R.A.F. Club
Piccadilly, dated 27.1.31.

" I have final news at last, and sent off a telegram to you this afternoon. I am invalided out of the Service. I am about to write various letters enquiring as to my exact rights in case of need for further medical treatment. This has verbally been agreed to, but it is as well to have it in writing. I cannot so far complain of lack of generosity in treatment. They have done the best possible forme so far, within the bounds of regulations; but an annual pension of under £.300.- a year, after all my years of service is hardly munificent treatment. Yet I must be thankful indeed for this, and that I do not find myself in the case of many other unfortunate fellows who have perhaps no pension nor any private means. Anyhow all is now settled and I am thankful that the suspense is over. Now at last I am a free man, even if not a rich one; and my dear Dad, there is very much to be said for freedom! I still have some business affairs to settle and I also feel I would like to stay a while with Aunt Edie and also visit Aunt Ethel and Mr. Scrimgeour. All these visits will be pleasant and now there is no hurry. I am not actually out of the Service until the 11th of next month, and remain on half pay till then. I still favour Tangier as a place to start my new life in. It has a combination of good points which I find satisfactory. For me there is much congenial interest there

and still some links with Arabia. The conditions of living seem reasonably suitable for all three of us, and living is not expensive. Last but not least Gibraltar, with its Service Hospital and doctors, and modern conveniences is a satisfactory "emergency ration" to have at hand."

This decision was a shock of course. I shall not forget my first night after I received the verdict. I wandered aimlessly all night long through London's streets, and must have walked miles! At first in tumultuous thinking and then in a kind of daze. I was staying at the R.A.F. Club at the time, and I can still remember the startled look our respectable night porter gave me as I returned at dawn looking no doubt rather peculiar. My letter dated 2.2.31. discusses plans for my immediate future.

Letter to H.R.J. at Algeciras from Moyses Five Ashes Sussex, dated 2.2.31.

" Many thanks for your telegram, a nice cheerful one. I wonder what you think of my idea for making Tangier my headquarters for the immediate future. Your own plans need not of course be bound by mine, but it will be to me the happiest plan that we should not be separated for too long, or by too complicated distances of travel. Morocco in the summer would probably suit me, but might be a little too warm to be acceptable to you and Mother. About that point I am uncertain, for I do also want you two to be able to settle down also.

"I definitely go on the retired list on the 11th on this month. At present I have been granted invaliding allowance on a hundred per cent disability basis, that is to say the highest possible. This does not exactly mean that I am a hundred per cent disabled (i.e. almost dead!) but I think this is partly a gesture of official generosity.

It is curious how sad I feel at moments as I realise that those scenes in the out-stations and deserts of Irâq, which had grown so strangely intimate and absorbing, I shall probably never see again. There are people there too, odd people in a way, sheikhs, and tribesmen, and personal retainers, for whom I have come to feel a curiously real friendship, which is not I think altogether onesided. It is sad that I may never see them again, or ever be able to interest myself in their welfare and way of life. It is all over, that chapter of my living it seems; yet this opening of a new chapter also has great interest for me.

"I am back again at Moyses now, a quiet house this time with all its sons away at school. I am being "spoiled", breakfast in bed etc.. Today I had tea with dear Aunt Edie; she is far cheerier and seems to intend to keep on her house. She now has added to her household staff, and so is more comfortable.

"On Friday I go to stay a night with Leveson-Gower. I then go to London for the week-end.

"There are steamers from Southampton to Tangier on February the 20th and March the 6th, and I aim at the first of these. I yearn to have everything accomplished and to be quiet and settled again.

"I am being treated most hospitably but here at Moyses I insist anyhow on making a nominal payment, as it is not fair to dump myself on these dear generous people without paying expenses. They are charming people! If only my dear uncle did not let his generousities at times get out of hand; but he is such a good fellow, and there are indeed worser forms of indiscretion! I have been having long talks with Aunt Ethel and I do realise that there is a lack of sense of proportion in certain quarters, combined with a touch of obstinacy, which needs tactful handling. I think my dear Aunt has the necessary watchfulness and tact for all likely contingencies.

"I am afraid it must have been very cold for you at Tangier during this cold continental spell we hear about. It is still rather chillsome in England, but here with our warm log fires one does not mind!

"I must stop scribbling now as my uncle is just off to the post. I am writing by the fire in his study, and he too has been writing at his desk. An agreeable and industrious scene. He is a busy, and I think contented man these days with many local interests."

Except for this fateful decision, this particular visit to England has no very notable memories for me though there were one or two visits again to friends. I spent a memorable period at Packwood, the lovely country home and estate in Warwickshire of my friend B.A. As a matter of fact while there I was taken ill, but in my spacious foreposter bed, and with my friend's kind attentions, and well cared for, it was almost a pleasure to be unwell. When fit again I spent happy days in the grounds, which have a famed speciality in their lofty and ancient clipped hedges of intriguing shapes; and in being taken by car to visit other fine country houses round about. It is a gracious episode to remember. Sometime later B.A. presented this lovely place as a gift to the nation, so I shall never stay there again; yet though without Packwood B.A. is by no means destitute or homeless, but has acquired for himself a fine castle as a residence elsewhere! It is in these present times only active industrialists who can maintain such properties! Mere professional men, or "landed gentry" are now "out", and if not also "down" are at least definitely descending.

Note. Extracts from a letter from Baron Ash.

Packwood House,
Hockley Heath,
Warwickshire,

January 26.

Jimmy Dear, its very quiet here without you, & I miss your cheery presence and our amusing fireside chats. I am sorry in a way you wont be here for the Hunt Ball, but console myself with the thought that when you do come down I shall not have to spend a quiet evening, while you prance around with all those pink-coated people making wierd noises and treading on each other's toes!! (How's that for a description of a Hunt Ball?!) I spent a marvellous time last night dining at Broadway; Prince George Chevdivavodze was there at dinner & afterwards played the piano till about one o'clock. I could have listened till now, it was both delightful & amazing, the sort of musical treat I very rarely get. I glance at the gorgeous book you gave me from time to time; certainly it is a wonderful book, and very many thanks. I have a hunting-crop here given to my father, with the motto "Souriez toujours". He always managed to do so, & I hope you may. At any rate this is to let you know I am thinking of you & wishing you luck. Yours Baron.

Meanwhile my parents had moved on to Tangier. In due course I embarked in the stately R.M.S. Viceroy of India to rejoin them.

During this journey I chanced upon the final stage of one of those strange personal tragedies with which the human path is not infrequently beset. I noticed a fellow-passenger, a man of some forty years, and of distinguished appearance. He however rather called attention to himself by his aloof silence and by the fact that he always wore an overcoat even at meals. It was only towards the close of the voyage that I discovered that this was because he had no jacket underneath it. At length I reached Tangier; all mention of my invaliding was tactfully avoided and the understanding affection of my Mother and my Father gladdened my spirit with encouragement. When seated on the terrace of our hotel next day - the Hotel Cecil - I noticed again my strange fellow-passenger and observed with some distress that he looked exhausted and rather dischevelled. He appeared, without success to be seeking admission to the hotel; he had no luggage. A few days later, we heard that he had been found unconscious and suffering from pneumonia in a public garden. He was sent to the local British doctor's clinic, and because he had no money was put into a bed in an outhouse; where he soon died. No one ever enquired for him; nor was it ever discovered whether the name he gave was his real name. One wondered what sad story lay behind this lonely and tragic ending.

Pleasant contacts were soon made locally; especially we appreciated the kind hospitality of Lady Maclean, widow of the famous Kaid Maclean, one time advisor to the Moroccan Sultan, and the "power behind the Throne" of those days. This lady had a handsome mansion on a high point of the mountain, where she still maintained almost vice Regal state, and where interesting social gatherings took place. Through her we came to know many people, Mrs. Marriott, Lady Scott, Admiral Sir Guy Gaunt, the old established Green family, Mrs. Hampton, and Lady Drummond-Hay. These are names I seem to remember specially.

All were people of rather unique personality, and most had lovely homes in a romantic setting.

I still felt a little perplexed in mind at my changed circumstances. My father's wise and constructive words and my Mother's sympathy however were a revival for me and the social life and a few external thrills kept my mind from brooding. These thrills were mainly the rumours of the Spanish revolution, and its repercussions in ~~Al~~ Tangier. We read our British Daily Mail one morning to be informed that all the civilian British residents in Tangier had been evacuated on a British Cruiser! As we were all still going placidly about our daily affairs this somewhat amused us, but our friends in England were alarmed for our fate! There was also a rumour that the Mayor of Algeciras whom we had known, had been burned alive in the little town square; this too luckily proved untrue though similar horrors did later occur in Spain. In fact the only local excitement was when two lorry loads of young Spanish "reds" careered past our hotel on their way to attack the Spanish Post Office, from which they tore down the Royal Arms and portraits. Amidst this setting I recomposed my thoughts, and began to look with a sense of greater repose towards my plans for the future. Then one day we were just settling to our usual cosy afternoon tea, when my father was taken ill. The usual remedies proved useless. Soon he was in great pain. There was only one British doctor in Tangier and so to his clinic my father was taken by ambulance. The doctor seemed at first satisfactory but when he had to admit that his first diagnosis of appendicitis was incorrect his whole attitude changed. Apparently the appendicitis operation was his speciality, and we learned that a quite amazing number of tourists had become his patients for this. My Father's condition he bluntly told us was due to advanced abdominal cancer, and he could do nothing for him. The doctor's manner became

harsh to a sinister extent; and I found that he frequently and unnecessarily emphasized to my Mother in sadistic detail, the exact internal processes of my Father's illness. My Father despite his courage was obviously unhappy. I decided that he must be removed elsewhere. Fortunately I knew of a French doctor of good repute and decided that my Father must be placed under his care. The manager of our hotel, unlike the usual hotel custom in the case of illness, was most helpful. As soon as possible we moved the patient back to the Cecil Hotel, despite the attempted angry interference of the clinic doctor, who attempted to terrorise my Mother. I threatened to report him to our Consul General, and then in a fury he left us alone. The whole episode was however sinister and rather horrifying. The French doctor proved as considerate and efficient as his predecessor had been harsh and careless. My Father realised his grave condition. He was in no way afraid, but was anxious to reach England. That became our main objective. We could get no trained nurse, but my Mother showed amazing pluck and efficiency. It was my task to arrange for the journey home. This was not easy, as most ships are reluctant to accept a sick passenger. At last it was arranged; but ships at Tangier anchor far out in the Bay. I had to hire a launch and in this my father was conveyed, and then lifted on board by a crane. Realising our pain and anxiety for him he treated the whole matter with calm interest and good humour. The week's voyage was a heartrending experience. Again my Mother usually considered the frail member of the family to be carefully safeguarded was untiring throughout this time. We arrived in England and he was happy and much interested. He was taken under the care of a specialist, our cousin Reginald Vick to a nursing home. Many friends came to see or enquire for him including his old associate Mr. P.C. Lyon and of course his beloved brother Leo James. On Sunday May the 31st 1931

we three took Holy Communion together in his room administered by the Reverend Dr. Dearmer. My Mother became ill from strain and was moved to the same nursing home. On the afternoon of Tuesday June 2nd, we were suddenly summoned to my Father's side. His last spoken words were "they were so kind to me". Then he became unconscious; and supported by my Mother and myself he died. Thank God he reached England. He had always loved and served his country so well. He would not have liked despite his wide sympathies, to make his final rest in any other than English ground. He is buried at the lovely little ancient church of Mayfield village, which he knew so well.

For me this was the final disintegration of past accustomed ways, and the crumbling also of the very foundation of plans upon which to start the new ways of life into which fate had only just precipitated me. The wise counsel and friendship of my Father was an irreparable loss.

A brief but poignant letter from my sister dated June the 4th 1931 from Buenos Aires to me follows now, which expresses much which I also felt.

Letter from my sister, from Buenos Aires dated 4.6.31 to myself.

"I have just written to our little Mother. It is terrible, terrible, for her. I can't think how she will bear the loneliness. I am so thankful she has you with her. I am anxious about her, she will be so ill and worn out with the long strain and grief. And you too. Where will you both go now. It feels so lonely and amazing to realise I have no Father anymore. But he will live tremendously with us all our lives. Dear Huck it is so hard to put anything into words. My love and my thoughts are constantly with you."