

Letter of 26th August, 1925. from Ramadi.

It seems rather a long interval since I last sent you a real letter, tho' I did leave a brief note to be posted by my clerk while I was away on tour. I went off very unexpectedly again, as the result of a wireless message, and was away five days. This tour was mainly to gather information in regard to an important tribal dispute. A large and rather powerful section of the Anizah (Fahad Beg al Haddhal's people) are trying to become independent of his authority, and threaten to go over to the Akhwan unless they get what they want! I think I have already mentioned to you Fahad Beg's name. He is the paramount shaikh of the very large confederation of Anizah Bedouins, and a fine old man. He has also been a very loyal friend of the British. M., another R.A.F. Flight Lieut., who is S.S.O. of the southern area, where the discontented Duhamshah sections are at present camped, came up to Ramadi to meet me, and we set out together in our two Ford tourers.

The first part of the tour was over the same desert track that I described to B. in my last letter to him, and went quite easily as far as Shitathah. Then however, we went on about another seventy-five miles into the desert

to an oasis called Tuktukana. The people of Shitathah all advised us not to go, prophesying all manner of disasters and discomforts, and seemed to wish us to believe that if we did not die of the heat, we should certainly be raided by Bedouins! I think this was chiefly because they did not wish to provide a guide, but one of the leading inhabitants finally agreed to come with us, saying that he knew a little of the route and could help us to avoid the areas of impossibly soft sand.

We started at dawn from Shitathah and after about an hour's quite easy progress we reached the castle of Ukhaidhir - a magnificent ruin, of unknown age, but probably over 1000 years old. It stands in solitary grandeur on high ground, over-looking a great space of desert on all sides. It is in appearance of somewhat Roman type, and planned on most spacious lines. A solid masonry bridge leads to the main gate, inside which is a vast reception hall, with a vaulted roof, staircases and passages leading from it. All is in a wonderful state of preservation, and it is possible to wander from room to room, and to mount to the other spacious chambers - probably the apartments of the Governor - which are built in two lofty storeys above the entrance.

Inside the plan of the castle is L shaped, with walls of very great height and thickness surrounding as it were two vast parade grounds. There are several other handsome entrance gates, and on one side is a stoutly built inner fort, containing many rooms and corridors. The outer walls in spite of their great length and height, are not at all monotonous, but are made beautiful by arches, battlements and turrets, and half way up there is a corridor built into the thickness of the masonry, and running completely round the outer wall. This corridor has numerous slotted windows for archers, and ingeniously contrived openings for dropping missiles on to any attacking force. Indeed it was a magic castle, awaking all kinds of imaginations, standing lonely, and strong and splendid, so far from civilization, and yet so evidently the work of some highly skilled and civilized race.

Leaving Ukhaidhir reluctantly we proceeded on our way. It was now very hot indeed and the desert became sandy and very difficult. There was no track, so we had to make our own as we went. For the first few hours, however, all went well - until, in fact, we had actually caught a glimpse of our destination many miles ahead.

Then my car suddenly ran into a sand-drift - and stayed there! M--- did not notice my plight and went on and left us! For several long and tiresome hours we were struggling with that car, digging with our hands in sand that was almost too hot to touch, pulling, pushing, but only moving about six inches at a time! Then the driving belt became loose, and there was a further delay because the metal of the car was so hot that we found great difficulty in touching the fittings. My little British driver worked splendidly at the engine, and I and my servant and Arab attendant did our bit in digging and hauling. There was no water to drink, as what little we had, had to be kept in reserve for the car radiators! We fired shots to attract attention from the other car, but they did not seem able to find us.

Presently Shutes, my driver, alarmed me by developing very trying fits of retching whenever he endeavoured to talk! I thought at first he was in for heat exhaustion - but actually it was only because his mouth was so dry that when he tried to talk it tickled his throat and made him ill! However we were all quite cheery, and after about three and a half hours we got the car to move - and just as we did this the other car arrived on the scene!

Then cautiously we went onwards and presently to our vast relief we came upon a desert spring - just a pool of bitter water - but my word how delicious it seemed! Thereafter our troubles ended. We reached Tuktukana oasis and rested, and then proceeded on over the next fifty miles to Najâf. This town we reached at nightfall. An impressive sight is Najâf approached from this desert. Across a very wide and very level plain we made our way - a plain that had been the bed of an inland sea not so very long ago - toward the gray line of steep rocky cliffs. At a conspicuous point on the summit of these stood the towers and battlements of the walled city, and in their midst the golden dome of the shrine, glowing vividly from the rays of the setting sun. Except for this splash of brilliance, everything else was shaded in dull tones of purple and amber, with just a line of dull green where some palms fringed the base of the cliff. I stayed the night in Najâf, and M---- went on to the Bedouin camp. For reasons of policy we did not wish to interview the shaikhs together. I followed next day, and a series of lengthy interviews ensued both in the Bedouin camp and then at Kerbala another sixty-five miles away. At length I left Kerbala, and

returned to Ramadi by another little-used desert track direct across to Fallujah via the Abu Dibbis lake (a shallow lake of salt water). M---- left me at Kerbala and returned to his own area, I myself stayed one night with the Fahad Beg at his camp near Fallujah before going on to Ramadi. The old shaikh gave me a most courteous and fatherly welcome. Mother would have much approved the way he "looked after" me. When a bit of extra work was suggested by the Mudir of Fallujah necessitating a further couple of hours' touring, Shaikh Fahad was quite angry. "You senseless folk," said the old gentleman, "can't you understand that the boy must be tired? I refuse to let him do any more work while he is my guest!" And with that he sent for extra piles of cushions, and made me thoroughly comfortable for the rest of the day.

Letter dated 10th September, 1925. from Ramadi.

I have just returned - two days ago - from another desert tour. It was a rather strenuous one, and we covered about four hundred and fifty miles in three days! At one point we were within a day's run of Janf, in Ibn Saud's territory. We had to carry nearly all our water supply, as there was only one well at which we could replenish. We passed two other desert springs, but both are dry at this time of year. One of these was a weird spot, situated in an underground cavern, approached down the precipitous side of a deep crater-like opening in the ground. After scrambling down the boulders and rocks to the bottom of this, one comes to a long underground tunnel, which gets lower and lower till one has to crawl. Then suddenly one is in a very lofty cavern, at the end of which flows the spring of water - or rather ought to flow, for all we could find was moist sand! At another spot, called by the Arabs "Wishash" or the "whispering", there is a very small fissure in a rocky bit of ground, and by listening at this, one can hear the strange sound as of a considerable volume of water flowing along some channel deep underground. Fahad Beg was with us and said his father was

the first to discover this place, and that no European had ever before visited it. Fahad is anxious to open up the rock, and try to raise the water, and is, I believe, now going to attempt to do so. I am fit and flourishing, but no letters have reached me this mail -- bother the Druse rebels.

Off on tour again on Monday, to see how things seem to be up at the frontier. Weather much cooler now.

What do you think? M. turned up here two days ago, and spent the afternoon with me! He had arrived by air, and is engaged in plans for the air route to India.

Letter of 13th September, 1925. (to H.R.J.)

You remember I had a job recently investigating a tribal quarrel between a section of the Anizah Bedouins and their paramount Shaikh? A somewhat delicate problem! Well, much to my surprise I have since had a personal letter from the Colonel; a very amiable letter in which amongst other things he says of my report on the subject, "I should like to congratulate you on your report, which struck me as particularly well thought out, well put together, and well expressed." Praise from that quarter is indeed unexpected!!

I think I had previously forgotten to mention to you that after all Colonel D. has returned to Irâq, and is likely to remain!

Letter of 7th October, 1925. from Ramadi.

I have done two tours since I last wrote properly to you. One was a six hundred mile tour up the centre of the Jazirah desert - between the two rivers - northwards nearly to the Syrian border. No one had been up this way for several years, so it was a bit of an uncertain quantity! There are a great many Shammar and Anizah raiders out against one another now, and though I am on excellent terms with the Anizah, I don't know the Shammar so well. I took with me a Shammar Desert Policeman, to help parley if necessary! All went well, however, and we met no Shammar raiders at all - just miles and miles of nothing, with an occasional well of stagnant water. Fortunately we had taken the precaution to take a big supply of water in the car. I visited several Shaikhs, all of whom were most hospitable. Then from the north I approached the river (Euphrates) at Rawah. One very striking moment was when quite unexpectedly, - for we thought we had another plain to cross - we reached the summit of a sharp rocky ridge, where there broke upon our sight a wide and beautiful view of the river - its palm groves, villages, and lazy droning water-wheels making a delicious picture of cool languid

contentment. At Rawah, a rather notorious little place, I stumbled unexpectedly on a secret meeting of local notables, somewhat to their confusion ! The arrival of a Britisher from that side of the desert was a thing they had not at all anticipated !

On the way home by the western bank - having ferried across on a ramshackle raft at Rawah - I ran into a large Anizah raiding party returning with Shammar loot. The first report I had of this was from an Irâqi Judge, travelling to Anah, who had taken refuge from them in Hadithah Serai. Baghdad Irâqi officials are terrified of raiders ! I later interviewed the leader of the raid, and told him how much he was alarming poor innocent Judges from Baghdad, at which he was highly amused, and promised to keep away from the main motor track in future !

My next tour was out into the Shamiyah desert. Again we did about five hundred miles, but took only four days, as we went hard. The main object was to discover a track to link the wells at Muhawir, on the Eastern Transport track, with wells at Rutbah on the Nairn track, a distance of some eighty-five miles. This was satisfactorily done. Again we met with raiders; this time going to visit an Anizah camp, just after a Shammar party had been raiding the district. All the women, camels,

and flocks had been packed into the centre of the camp, in case of further attacks, and a party of camel men had gone off to retaliate. It was interesting to see, though we were not actually present during any fighting.

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I have recently been deputed to assist at the reception of two notabilities here. First Lord C., to whom I introduced myself as my father's son, and was thereat accorded a most friendly greeting, with a few appropriate remarks! Next the A.O.C. wired to ask me to look after Lady H. on her way through. This also I carried out all right. She, poor lady, had come all through from Amman, by a terribly rough road, was terribly tired, and had a cold on her chest; so I was glad to be able to do a little to make things easier for her! She seemed a pleasant woman.