

Letter dated 31st January, 1926. form Diwanayah.

Off at dawn tomorrow to visit the Anizah winter tribal area, according to the special sanction obtained in Baghdad. We go via Kerbala and the Shitathah oasis to Wishash, where Fahad Beg is now camped. This will be my headquarters for a tribal tour over the desert some two hundred miles West of the Upper Euphrates. I have had to leave the tour a little late, however, and I am so afraid some of those I want to meet may have moved off to the Syrian border again.

By the way, did I ever tell you of the final arrangement made with regard to my section of Akhawan refugees? Eventually government was persuaded to allow them to remain with Fahad Beg, so that they were not driven into the Jazirah desert to become the prey of their enemies, the Shammar. And much relieved they were too, poor fellows! The last I saw of their leader, Ali al Shuarabat, was near Rahat¹iyah, when he said he hoped ere long, to obtain merciful terms of pardon for himself and his people from Ibn Saud. This had been brought about by the tactful arrangement of old Fahad Beg, I think. Ali al Shuarabat bade me a most friendly farewell saying that he hoped some day

to be able to be of service to me, and that he always would remember me as "an Englishman of courteous understanding". Quite nicely put, but I fear me as easily forgotten as said. And yet he was an attractive young fellow, with a great reputation as a gallant leader of raids - indeed it was his partiality for this pastime that got him into such serious trouble !

Letter dated 15th February, 1926: from Ramadi.

In Ramadi once again - but only in passing. Have just returned from our journey through the tribal areas of the Shamiyah desert, and we have had a most interesting tour.

I set off from Diwanayah viâ Najaf and Kerbala, staying a night in the latter place with Rashid Chelabi, a rich merchant; and then we struck off into the desert, travelling one hundred and seventy miles, E.W. of Kerbala past the old ruined castle of Ukhaidhir that I told you of before, and on to Tel Jathûm, where Fahad Beg al Hadhdhal had pitched his camp. I received a most cordial welcome, and everything possible was done for my comfort and entertainment. The old man even gave up his special personal tent to the use of my party. I stayed three days with Fahad, and during that time had the interesting experience of moving camp with the Bedouins. I rode Fahad Beg's camel - a very fine beast - and he by way of a change travelled in my Ford car! Fahad has a car of his own, but it was away in Kerbala being repaired. During my stay we also did two days hunting with hawks - also an interesting experience tho' a rather cruel sport. On one of these occasions I was

accompanied by the old man himself, and one of his younger sons - Bandar - and on the next occasion Shaikh Makrut, his eldest son, took me out. This young man and I are on very good terms, but he is a headstrong fellow, rather over-conscious of his tribal rank, and inclined to rash acts both personal and political. His old Dad, however, keeps him well in control as a rule. Makrut had just married his sixth wife, and was in a most ecstatic state of mind on the subject ! He confided his contentment to me with the most friendly freedom, and praised the delights and benefits of married bliss with quite embarrassing frankness !!

Fahad Beg and I had a good many important things to discuss. The Irâq government does not like him, and there are many schemes to reduce his influence with his tribes. He remains quite fanatically pro-British in spite of the recent lessening of British support, and of course his candid preference for British control does not increase his popularity with Irâqui officials. Compared with most tribal leaders he is amazingly consistent, honest, and level-headed. He has failings, of course, and in the past may have done things we would consider savage, but on the whole he is a most

notable personality, and has served us well for many years. My admiration of him has increased during my tour of his tribal area, when I have personally met many of his other tribal chiefs. He has a difficult kingdom to control, and he controls it well.

Although my tour was interesting and enjoyable throughout — every minute of it — yet it was not without difficulties. Before we left Fahad, we discovered a partially broken front spring on the car. Fahad produced a blacksmith and a carpenter however, who made a serviceable temporary repair. We were also supplied with several gallons of extra petrol from the Shaikh's private store, and were so able to proceed on our way with fair confidence. All went well over about another hundred miles, and then just at dusk, a huge rock in a wadi-bed we were crossing struck and cracked the gear-box under the car. We were not very far from the camp of Murdhi al Rufdi, but it seemed best not to risk going on in the dark, so I sent one of my Arabs ahead to try to find the camp, while we settled down for the night just where we were. It was chilly, but we were all suitably equipped with fur wraps. Soon after dark we were surprised to hear the sound of

horse's hoofs approaching up the wadi. Rifles and revolvers were hastily seized, and at a suitable moment we challenged the newcomer. It was pitch dark, and an amusing period followed while neither side would allow the other to approach. Eventually an agreement was reached, and we mutually advanced, and then we found a single Arab horseman, very suspicious, who would not lower his rifle till one of my men had agreed to go right up to him unarmed. Then followed much laughter, and we all sat down to an amiable discussion. My man found Murdhi's camp all right, and about two o'clock in the morning the shaikh sent two of his negro body-guard to act as escort for us.

With Murdhi al Rufdi, of the Salgar section of the Anizah, I spent two more interesting days. He is a young man, influential and popular, but rather unruly and rather a thorn in Fahad's side. Quite recently he had lost his two favourite brothers, while raiding the Aqaidat at the border. He wanted to present me with a silver dagger set with two rather nice looking stones, said to be rubies. I, of course, had tactfully - and with secret reluctance -- to refuse this gift. Shutes did what he could to the car, but we

set out on the next stage with some trepidation - and it proved justified ! We had about ninety miles of very stony waterless desert to cross before reaching an area with camping Arabs. A strong head wind held us back, and the oil leakage also increased, so that at one time it seemed that we were in for a thirty mile walk to get to water and assistance from the Arabs ! But necessity is the mother of invention, and we managed to pack chewed up chupatti into the oil leak, and so conserved sufficient oil to get across the barren area, and at dusk we reached the camp of Aftân al Sharji - a shaikh I already knew quite well, having stayed with him when he was camped in the Jazirah desert last summer. The oil question, however, became acute, the only available oily substance being the butter in the Arab camps - very plentiful just now. This we decided to try - tho' it seemed a sin to use lovely fresh butter as motor oil ! And for about one hundred miles we did run the engine on butter ! Surely a novelty in the history of a Ford car !

After Aftân we visited Mujhim ibn Muhaid of the Fada'an section of Anizah. He is an extremely important man, whose tribe usually remains in Syria. They

are Anizah tribesmen, but he only comes under Fahad's control when in Irâq. In Syria he has been practically independent of any control. In common with many other Syrian tribes he has now moved into Irâq to show his disapproval of the Syrian administration. He is a fine, handsome man of middle age, with a rather autocratic manner. To me he was courteous, and we had an exceedingly interesting private conversation during the course of my stay. He is a most astute fellow, and can discuss European politics with an understanding and interest which is very rare in an Arab tribal shaikh. One had to be very careful what one said, as he had a considerable knowledge of the matters he discussed. Indeed he seems a fellow worth careful consideration in this part of the world. At present he expresses strong pro-British sentiments, but is also a strong supporter of Ibn Saud. Only one incident jarred on me during my visit to him. Like all important shaikhs he owns a number of sporting hawks. One of these was still in process of training, and he had a wretched live hare brought into the guest tent for demonstration. The wretched animal's hind legs had both been broken, and it was almost dead with pain and fear. When the hawk

failed to show interest, an Arab twisted one of the broken legs to cause the hare to scream - which it did, just like a child. I was furious, and fortunately this fact was noticed before I lost control of my feelings, and the nasty business was put an end to. On another similar occasion in the past, I ordered one of my men to bring the hare to me, when I had it killed forthwith. There was a moment of tension in the guest tent after my action -- but then my host decided to accept the situation -- and no ill feeling resulted !

From Mujhim I went on to the Wadi Agherre area, and visited the Emir Ibrahim of the al Mouali, and Muhammad Pasha of the Bani Khalid, both leaders of visiting Syrian tribes, whom it was interesting to interview. Muhammed Pasha I visited on camel-back from Rutba, while the untiring Shutes made further gallant efforts to improve the condition of the car. He worked like a Trojan throughout, and without his cheerful energy the car would certainly never have brought us through. I set off on the visit to the Pasha at the head of a party of six camels, the party including my own "attendants", and some camel police. I rode a large white camel, and to conform to the rest

of the party, as usual wore an Arab headdress, and an Arab cloak over my uniform. I find it much more satisfactory to do my outlying tribal work in this dress. My "large white camel" I found quite a handful ! I never realised that a camel could be "frisky". But all went quite well !

There are notable differences in the customs and appearance of the Syrian Arabs. The most noticeable difference in dress was their liking for high leather boots, rather like Russian boots, and the most noticeable difference in customs was the sensible behaviour of their womenfolk. They made no silly paraphernalia of bashfulness, but were candidly interested in the visit of strangers, and most anxious to be helpful and hospitable. Even in the presence of their menfolk they came into the guest tent to help with the fire and coffee making and at one tent where we stayed, when the menfolk were temporarily absent, the ladies quite naturally took the attitude of hostesses, and entertained us until the men arrived ! Of course this shocked my own Arab "attendants" terribly. They looked on in amazement, and could talk of nothing else for days ! All Bedouin women are far more sensible and decent-minded

than the townswomen, but I have never seen any quite so common-sense and unaffected as these.

From Rutba we returned two hundred miles to Ramadi along the direct motor track. All the way we had great difficulty with the car, and at nightfall were again obliged to stop for repairs. This time we sheltered in the tent of a quite poor tribesman of the Dulaimi, but here again they gave us of their very best, even killing a lamb for us. While we were there, an old, old, man of the Anizah also arrived for shelter. He had been to the Jazirah, and was now tramping back to his section. It was interesting to note how hospitably he also was received and cared for, and how courteous he also was to his hosts. There are points of great attractiveness in the Arab customs of hospitality, which go far towards covering the less lovely side of their character.

Indeed it has been a wonderful tour amongst these desert people -- the same desert that I visited in certain areas during the summer -- but what a change! Then miles and hundreds of miles without a sign of life -- except the hideously prevalent scorpions which somehow exist everywhere -- no water, no grass, no shade. Now one passed over many many miles, green as meadow-land,

with pools of water in all the wadis, many varieties of flowers everywhere, including tulips and a sort of orchid, and often clumps of leafy shrub growing to quite a height. Animal life was marvellously abundant; thousands of sand grouse, greater and lesser bustard, gazelle, hares and rabbits, and also foxes. As a matter of fact it seems that there are leopards as well, two having recently been shot in the districts we passed over, and the newly flayed skin of one was shown us at Rutba. But we did not see any leopards nor did we see hyaenas or wolves which likewise exist.

And everywhere there were Arab camps - not hungry and parched and driven to raiding one another, but happy and contented, their flocks of camels, and sheep, and goats grazing and multiplying all around them. The great number of young things was very attractive, hundreds of baby sheep and baby camels - and also comic baby Arabs in all directions. They say there has never been such a plentiful season for many years, and are full of gratitude to Allah, whose name is unflinchingly mentioned whenever the subject is discussed. In Syria the conditions are said to be not nearly so good - and this in many quarters is looked upon as a sign of heaven's displeasure towards an unjust foreign government !!

It is fortunate to have seen the desert in such a charming aspect. Of course there are still large tracts of stony and waterless ground, but the Arabs avoid these. It was one such tract we had to cross with our poor damaged "Tin Lizzie" !

It will be a remarkable memory - the days in the open, the almost "royal" receptions everywhere, the really delicious foods, the evenings lying restfully in the "Mudhif" (guest house) with all the queer camp sounds around one - tinkling sheep bells, the grumbling and roaring of camels, and the curious cries of the herdsmen. In the "Mudhif" many discussions would arise, and stories would be told in a curious, rather attractive sing-song tone, with suitable and expressive gestures at all dramatic points. And once a visitor - one Hajji Muhammed of Zubair - just back from the Pilgrimage, delighted his audience by well-told legends of Haroun-al-Rashid, and fairy stories of the Arabian Nights variety !

Baghdad.

One stage on ! And I do so look forward to some home letters in Diwaniyah !

Letter dated 23rd February, 1926. from Diwaniyah.

Just arrived "home", and am very busy with reports and the arrangement of monthly accounts and local affairs generally, having been away a month

"Am very pressed for time just now, however, as my reports are urgently called for."

Letter dated 2nd March, 1926. from Diwaniyah.

This has been a very busy week - a lot of back work to fix up in the office which had accumulated during the tour as well as reports to produce. Just now I have completed the writing up of some rather complicated "land cases", and am holding myself in readiness to set off on tour at any moment to investigate these cases further. Land cases, and quarrels over the irrigation system, are frequent, complicated, and often of great importance in this area, which is the most productive one for crops in the whole of Irâq. Many local landowners are immensely rich, - always they are scheming and plotting amongst themselves to improve their own land, or to obstruct the improvement of the land of some rival tribe or family - a nice happy little party, what !

Still no news of my leave ! but it will come about the end of July, I believe.

Letter dated 28th March 1926, from Diwaniyah.

Since last mail I have been to Nasiriyah - flying down by aeroplane, and returning by railway. It is nearly as far to Nasiriyah as to Baghdad from here, but southwards. My servant Razouki, came with me - quite unperturbed by the aviation !

At Nasiriyah I met G., and we had a small "conference". Tomorrow I am off at dawn for one day's tour round the Afaj and Dagharah districts, where I expect soon to be spending a great deal of time doing tribal maps and lists.

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My future movements are likely, I fear, to keep me out of convenient reach of postal services - so please don't let irregularity of letters worry you ! I will of course try to make arrangements for posting.

I shall not be far out of Diwaniyah; but it will not be quite easy to arrange for letters, I fear.

.. .. .

Still vexatious indecision about my leave !
Really most exasperating, but we most hope for the best. Such a row is going on across the river tonight ! It is the Ramadhan period, and each evening there are "readings" from the Koran held in the houses of the more important citizens. At the joyous passages of the reading, all the listeners raise shouts of triumph, and at the grievous passages the most realistic cries of anguish or rage are raised ! and this goes on for about two hours each evening. Tonight the breeze is blowing this way, so I get full benefit. In another part of the town someone appears to have died, and there is a dismal wailing of womenfolk by way of variety !!

However I shall now go up to my bedroom and go to sleep in spite of these various little noises.