

Letter dated 15th March 1926. from Diwaniyah.

I missed last week's mail, being on tour again.

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My recent tour was of eight days' duration, and was through surroundings of quite a new variety. The object of this tour was to watch the course of events during the execution of government orders as to the re-distribution of certain valuable areas of land amongst rival tribal sections. It has been a very complicated land case, and by the decision of the government, Abardial Hussain, a powerful and wealthy Shaikh of the Fathah, who has been scheming to dominate and encroach upon all his less influential neighbours has been obliged to hand back portions of this contested property. Feeling of course ran high, and there was just a chance of a local "blaze up" amongst the opposing tribes. However all went very quietly. It was most interesting, tho' at times somewhat disconcerting, moving from Shaikh to Shaikh of the four tribes involved and listening alternatively to triumphant praise of the government, or scarcely concealed bitterness against it ! However, everywhere I was courteously received, and there was no "unfortunate incident". The district

was wholly in the marsh areas, and I moved from place to place in the light, somewhat gondola-shaped craft which the Shaikhs always use as their means of movement in these parts. The marshes themselves are full of reeds and tall rushes, but all the canals and river channels leading to them are bordered by palm trees and are most attractive. Except for one stormy day I had excellent weather, and it was really delightful moving slowly and pleasantly along these water-ways in the agreeable sunshine of approaching Spring. Last year, on leave, I visited the marsh Arabs, but that was in the Miskharb, South of Abu Sukhair, and this was in the Hor (marsh) ibn Najur, North East of Kufah. All the dwellings of the tribes, including the guest-houses of the Shaikhs are made of reeds, the guest-house in of a curious tunnel-shaped formation which I have described before. The villages or settlements are picturesquely grouped on small islands, or by the side of the canals. As regards customs, these people are all Shi'as, and consequently there is a much bigger religious barrier between them and us, than between us and the Bedouins or northern Sunni tribes. In spite of outward courtesy this barrier is very apparent, and in almost every guest-house I find Saiyids, or other learned men of ~~the~~ Najaf

and Kerbala. who obviously exercise a great influence on all present including the Shaikhs. These "holy" men of Najaf and Kerbala, who are of a very distinctive type, with polished manners and often most plausible conversation, have a tremendous hold on all the tribes of this area, and stir up much trouble. Nearly always they are violently anti-British, and nearly all restlessness is caused by them.

Yesterday I had a particularly interesting day in Abu Sukhair, when I was present at the investigation of a very curious case, again concerning some of the Fathah Shaikhs, this time Abdul Wahid and his brother Hassan. Their "qasr", or castle, - (all the Fathah Shaikhs, being enormously wealthy, have conveyed material to their remote districts and built themselves really excellent and spacious residences) -- was robbed by some enterprising members of a tribe hostile to them. Three culprits were caught by the authorities, but could not be induced to say where the money, a very large sum indeed had been hidden. Then by some peculiar personal transaction, Hassan induced the Quaimaquam of Abu Sukhair to hand the three men over to him. After some days, when the men were required back, one of them had vanished

and Hassan was eventually himself arrested. The story the remaining men tell is that when handed over to Hassan, he told them he had authority to extract a confession, even to the point of causing their death. At the abode of Hassan three pits were dug, and each man was buried up to his neck, and when in this helpless and painful position were cross-examined, with, of course, suitable inducements to force replies ! They were kept like this all night - and in the morning one man was missing. Hassan says he unfortunately "escaped", but it is obvious he was either forced by combined fear and promises of freedom to reveal the hiding-place of the money, and then released by Hassan's authority, or that he died under "cross-examination" ! What nice people these are, aren't they ? and how persuasive are their methods of justice ! It was a queer business hearing the poor wretches who were present before us describing their experiences ! - one was quite blasé about it, but the other became very hysterical every time he tried to explain what happened during the night. Both looked very worn, and their bodies showed clear evidence of gross ill-treatment. Nevertheless, nothing would induce them to say what

happened to the third man, and they are obviously hiding something. And when Hassan - himself under arrest - was brought into the room one could see that they were still frightened of him. It was Hassan and Abdul Wahid who had in their keeping a large number of British prisoners during the revolt ! - makes one think, what !

Really this country is a place of curious contrasts ! When I visited the castle of Abadi on this last tour in the marshes - Abadi is Abdul Wahid's father-in-law - I found it a well-built and comfortably appointed residence. The formalities of Shi'a prejudice were relaxed as soon as I was alone with the sons of the house. They had a good gramophone, and some English dance music, and one of the sons was busy trying to teach himself the steps of a fox-trot, and appealed to me for an opinion on his progress, which was quite good ! A young man, who was a guest there, discussed Shakespeare intelligently, and the prospect of a varsity career - occasionally pausing to spit on the carpet. Really it is a very odd state of affairs !

One sees strange contrasts in the official and

and private life of quite high government personages. They have fine and dignified offices, are dressed in the best of taste, and talk well on a wide range of subjects. Yet at home their children are dirty, and their household is run on amazingly squalid lines. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule.

Letter dated April 6th., 1926. Diwaniyah.

B's successor has been staying with me for a few days and I have been trotting him round introducing him to local notabilities and officials; seems a nice fellow and possibly clever.

He was very friendly to me.

Over Easter I had two airmen staying here as my guests. They were fellows I had met recently on the Baghdad train, when they were returning to Basrah after taking part in athletic sports. They were helpful to me during the journey and in course of conversation mentioned that they would much like to get away from the aerodrome for a little change at the Easter holiday. I told them I would put them up if they could get their C.O.'s permission. This they did and appeared to enjoy their visit. They were a nice couple of lads and educated above the average. I have ample accommodation in my house for guests, and was able to give them a sitting room and quarters to themselves. Am expecting other visitors soon, officers this time, and have had one or two brief visits from fellows, by air, during the last fortnight, rather cheering and pleasant.

I have just acquired a funny little house for

myself in Dagharah village, and shall use this as a pied-à-terre during tribal mapping. This makes my third residence ! a "mansion" at Diwaniyah, a bungalow by the river at Samawah, and now this wee "villa" in Dagharah. Quite opulent in house property, aren't I ! Dagharah is a picturesque village, with lots of trees, and is on a tributary stream of the Shattl-al-Hillah.

Expect to visit Baghdad shortly to discuss plans for new tribal work.

Yes ! I think Aix-les-Bains would be an excellent spot to start my leave in — if I get it !

Letter dated April 10th. 1926, from A.H.Q., Baghdad.

Baghdad Floods.

I write you this week from the midst of a somewhat agitated city. Great expanses of water surround Baghdad on all sides, - the Tigris itself is swirling past us with a subdued but ominous roar which is distinctly impressive! The Maude bridge, which was carried away in the less violent floods of 1923, is this time standing the strain wonderfully well: but the Kotah bridge broke yesterday. Luckily the sections, owing to the plucky efforts of Arab workmen, were prevented from breaking away and crashing into the Maude bridge. The banks have already caved in outside Baghdad North Gate, and that district, which includes in it the palace and gardens of H.M. King Faisal; and also the Cavalry Barracks, Civil Jail and Baghdad North Railway Terminus are under water to a depth varying from three to ten feet. About a hundred people were drowned when this break occurred, and the Royal household was hastily rescued in boats from a position which, to say the least, had become most inconvenient. The palace kitchens are now reported to have collapsed, but the main building is still standing, though in a precarious condition.

All round Baghdad are working parties re-inforcing

the Bund, in which signs of collapse had become evident at several points. Police periodically patrol the streets and collect all able-bodied men they see and march them off to give assistance.

The Tigris is really a fine sight -- very broad, with whirlpools and waves over its surface as it sweeps along. At one time the water was in the Transport yard of A.H.Q., as well as in the basement of many other riverside buildings. The Carlton Hotel has had to build up some of the lower windows to keep their kitchens in use.

Out at the Hinaidi cantonment there have also been energetic scenes, and there too there are continual patrols and working parties protecting the Hinaidi bund, both night and day. Flying has had to give way to manual labour, and the squadron personnel is having a strenuous time !

To-day the water is lower on the Tigris, but a little higher on the Diala. And a vague rumour is now stirring that a further flood wave is on its way to us from Mosul !! I have been staying in Hinaidi the last few nights -- now rather like a seaside resort. The Bund acts as a promenade, and beyond is a veritable sea. Unfortunately a brisk wind has been directing waves -- quite sizable waves -- against the earthworks, and it is this that makes the Bund weaken, and which needs careful watching.

Letter dated April 14th., Wednesday, 1926. No. 8.  
Squadron. Hinaidi.

Still surrounded by floods. Rumours are conflicting, but on the whole the situation is better, and the work of checking the erosion of the Bund is well in hand. It is hard work however, as the parties have to hasten from place to place, according to the urgency. Flares and searchlights are going all night round the Bund, and work is continuous - quite a curious state of affairs. 8.Squadron mess is situated near the Bund embankment, and it really is an uncomfortable sight to walk only fifty yards and behold an expansive ocean lapping persistently upon the earth-works at a level most inconveniently higher than that of the Cantonment !! The same conditions prevail on the Baghdad bunds, where thousands of men are engaged in fighting the advance of the water into the main city. There was considerable menace at one time that the river would change its course through the big break above the King's Palace, and pour thence into the most crowded area of Baghdad. There is water all round us, and very few high points exist in the town where the population could take refuge - so you may imagine the state of mind of the unfortunate people in the threatened area.

In fact, both in Baghdad and Hinaidi there have been moments when the situation was near to a greater disaster than one likes to contemplate !

I am off out of Baghdad tomorrow, and do not expect any trouble on the road between here and Diwanayah, which is said to be well above flood level. It is interesting to have seen a large city fighting -- almost, I suppose, for its existence -- against such a flood. However it seems that the danger has now been averted.

Yesterday I had a small job of work to do, which necessitated a flight nearly to Rutba and back, assisting in the search for some lost Spanish aviators.

Two days ago I had a private interview with the A.V.M. I had asked for this prior to agreeing to continue my service in Irâq for a further period of years. He was very gracious to me, and finished the interview by making some very encouraging remarks. So that's all right !

Au revoir !

Letter dated April 19th., 1926. Diwanayah.

Am off at dawn by aeroplane to guide a small formation of aircraft over the abodes of some tiresome chieftains who at the moment need to be impressed with the fact that they are within reach of the arm of the law ! There was a small disturbance yesterday, quite suddenly; another is expected by which, amongst other things, a certain fatherly old Shaikh hopes to get two of his sons "accidentally" assassinated !

K. asked me to dispatch a messenger urgently to Baghdad with a request for aeroplanes -- which to our great satisfaction are forthcoming immediately. It will create a most satisfactory impression to have aircraft on the scene so rapidly.

All's well, and am fit and flourishing. Bed time now; have sat up rather late, drawing sketch maps, etc., for our better guidance tomorrow.