

SECTION I.

Outward Bound: and Language. Leave in Irâq.

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DIARY.

July 25th. 1924. (Friday)

After a busy morning of final shopping around the Piccadilly-Bond Street area, and a farewell visit to 55, Hans Place, had lunch with my little Mother and the Dad, then set off from my "digs" in South Kensington for St. Pancras station. I did not let the parents come to see me off, as it seemed easier and less painful for us all, to carry out the never-pleasant business of parting in the seclusion of my pleasant "digs."

Mr. L. however saw me off at St. Pancras, and Vernon B. also met me there, and like a good friend, came with me to Tilbury docks and saw me safely on board. The "Naldera" seems an excellent vessel, of agreeably spacious dimensions and three funnels to add to her dignity.

With the exception of myself and two other officers there are no passengers yet on board, but many guests of Lord Inchcape of the P. & O. Company — mostly distinguished personages — who have been invited to spend a couple of days to see the Naval Review at Portsmouth.

We few passengers are also to be treated as guests till two p.m. on Sunday when the other guests disembark at Plymouth. There is a very "festive" air on board and all is much more in the nature of a smart social gathering rather than set in the usual uncertain manner of the beginning of a long voyage, when no one is settled, and no one has become acquainted with anyone else. So even yet I have not quite passed beyond the atmosphere of the "London season," in which I have allowed my usually retiring and un-social self to become involved, that is to say, since the date upon which I passed my Arabic exam -- the latter to my no small surprise and infinite relief! And on the whole I find I have much enjoyed this recent plunge into London's social interests. But I thought these had finished yesterday when in the subdued but still somewhat exclusive surroundings of Ranelagh on an "off" afternoon, I had a farewell tea with Joan.

Tomorrow we shall awake at our anchorage in the Solent, prior to visiting the Fleet. It should all be highly interesting. Lord Inchcape is on board, also Lord and Lady Carson, and many other "stars" of the social, political and financial world and including some acquaintances of my insignificant self.

July 26th. 1924 (Saturday)

Awoke to find ourselves approaching the Isle of Wight, and soon after breakfast came into view of the Fleet, ten lines of splendid ships, each line ten miles long. Upon reaching the review area the "Naldera" steamed slowly up and down the lines, affording us a wonderful view of everything. After that we anchored at an advantageous point, and remained there until after the Royal Yacht had finished her tour of inspection. The King's approach was heralded at about 2.15 p.m. by guns, and by the appearance of escorting aeroplanes, and soon the Victoria and Albert came into sight, preceded and followed by an Admiralty Yacht. As the procession approached, one would hear the cheering of the sailors of the fleet echoing across the water.

Later we moved to another anchorage nearer Cowes, close to where the "^{guard}markship" was anchored last "Cowes Week" when we danced on board. From there we watched the night illumination of the Fleet, and the searchlight display, while the guests on board also took part in a ball, and the ladies displayed much priceless jewellery and fine raiment, and champagne flowed freely. All very amusing !

During the day, and again at night there were

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displays of flying by seaplanes and land planes from local R.A.F. stations; and from across the water I could see the lights of Calshot blinking at me and reminding me of my times spent there so recently in the somewhat ponderous capacity of Adjutant. I don't think nature or the stars at my birth ever really intended me to perform such tasks, or to set myself up as any sort of self-satisfied example of discipline and well regularised efficiency !! Anyhow, I hope not ever again ! Though, no doubt, it has been a very useful and chastening experience for me !

July 27th. 1924. (Sunday)

Wrote letters all the morning.

At about 2.20 p.m. the "Naldera" anchored in a little bay just off Plymouth, and the guests to the number of some 300 were taken ashore in a large tender, from which the new passengers also came aboard. I wish I were a pirate so that I could have captured that tender and held up its departing occupants for suitable ransom ! The amount of capital represented by those people must have been enormous ! Odd folk some of them too ! After mutual cheering and exchange of farewells the tender moved away and the "Naldera" also immediately set off out to sea.

And now I am really away to a completely new chapter of experiences and I wonder what it will all be like this time ! My six months' independence in London, first while studying Arabic, and then while on leave and participating in the social round, has been one of the happiest periods I have spent for some years. Particularly I appreciated the four months' quiet routine while I was studying; with the daily work to keep my mind well occupied, and every evening my comfortable bachelor quarters to return to, to which I would sometimes bring my particular pals for dinner or a chat. I shall always remember this quiet contented period of my existence with the utmost satisfaction and with gratitude to my kindly landlady and the very worthy dame who assisted her, both of whom looked after me so excellently well. During six months I have been entirely free, and always have been in touch only with people I like and who like me — an ideal condition, than which I could wish nothing happier ! But all things have an end, and now I look to the future, expectantly and with interest.

July 30th. 1924. Gibraltar.

During the last couple of days nothing of any particular noteworthiness has happened, except that the Bay of

Biscay made a sufficient effort to be objectionable ! Most of us felt rather " 'ik" from time to time, therefore as I pose as a good sailor, the less said about this the better !

Early this morning we reached Gib and anchored inside the harbour. After our early breakfast -- at 7.30 a.m. -- went ashore. Hired a car with P. and we took Mrs. M. with us. Motored first to Europa Point, then out just over the border to La Linea, in Spain, where we drank beer and then returned and caught the tender back to the ship. At 10.45 we steamed away from Gib again ! Not very long ashore, but we saw quite a lot considering the time available. A small dance on board again tonight.

August 1st. 1924.

After a delightful day yesterday steaming along amidst blue sea and sky, with sunshine and pleasant breezes, often in sight of the Spanish coast, we reached Marseilles just before breakfast this morning. At about 11.30 or a little earlier Rodney S. accompanied me ashore with his father. S. senior, however, soon left us to go our own ways, which we proceeded to do, nor did we go astray despite the insidious offers of guidance from the usual local "touts" who lead one by no means into the ways of the righteous as I seem to remember from the quaint three weeks I once spent in this odd city

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in the company of George P. of the 11th. Hussars ! Then we took it upon ourselves a little to investigate the byeways of the place and discovered much that was interesting and more than a little that was queer !

In the afternoon young Rodney S. and I betook ourselves to the bathing place at Rocas Blanc and spent a refreshing couple of hours there, and were much entertained by the happy if "free and easy" antics of many of the frequenters.

One trio in particular amused us — a buxom French-woman — good looking and cheerful — and two Englishmen. For dinner we returned to the "Maldera," and after dinner the S's, father and son, and myself repaired to a show at the Palais de Crystal.

At about midnight, just before she was due to set off, we returned to the ship.

August 2nd. 1924.

Sighted the coasts of Corsica and Sardinia, and proceeded through typically colourful Mediterranean seas all day, with delicious air and much sunshine. To our no little surprise R. and I discovered amongst the new first class passengers the same cheery trio who so amused us at the Rocas Blanc ! I think the meeting is mutually a surprise — and a trifle disconcerting ! The lady is said to be the

wife of one of the men — but an unkind rumour has it that her luggage is labelled under a different name ! Ja ! Ja ! how quaint is the community of passengers on board any ship on the high seas ! One quarter seems to be ardently in love with another quarter, and the remainder form an interested audience discussing the developments with vivid, and in most cases, highly inventive imagination ! And if any really naughty rumour starts, the origin may certainly be traced to the truly ~~pure~~ coterie of virtuous spinsters, or motherly matrons !

August 3rd. 1924.

Again a glorious and easeful day of happy sunshine.

About lunch time we passed close to Stromboli, giving out funny little eruptions of smoke and dust for our entertainment and later through the Messina narrows, till finally we obtained a fine view of Mt. Etna, smoking lazily from his lofty summit, giving an unique impression of vast potential energy, dormant but dangerous.

August 4th. 1924.

After dark this evening passed along the coasts of Crete for some while. Could see the outline of rocks and mountains in the faint new moonlight.

It was hereabouts that the P. & O. steamers "Arabia" and "Persia" were torpedoed during the war, with great loss of life in the case of the latter.

There was a dance again tonight, and afterwards I sat up very late on deck with Rodney and a young pal of his - respectively undergraduates of Cambridge and Oxford, and both acquainted with friends of my young brother. They are a cheerful couple who much entertain me. It is very congenial to listen to these young men, discussing all sorts of youthful projects and airing their cheerful outlook on life. The weather has turned very noticeably warmer, but the heat is not yet excessive.

August 5th. 1924.

The last evening on board - a small dance and a "treasure hunt," organised by Lord and Lady E., to celebrate the occasion. Later in the evening strolled around the ship with R. and S. and I fear stumbled upon a touching "farewell scene" at a late hour !

Am awfully sorry this brief voyage is over; it is strange how one moves on ! However, it's cheery to gain new friends, even when the means of keeping in touch are few. I hope to keep at least in correspondence with some of the pleasant companions of this very pleasant voyage.

August 6th. 1924.

Once again in Port Said ! Did the necessary business with the customs and passport authorities; lunched at the Marina Palace Hotel, where I also indulged in a siesta, then at 6 p.m. P. and myself entered the train for Kantara, whither we arrived just before dusk, some two hours later. A very deserted place is Kantara now, and very changed. There are no troops there, but a substantial and well equipped railway station has been built as terminus for the Sinai Railway, close to the east bank of the canal. We supped lightly but sufficiently at a small semi-native restaurant near the station, where we got into conversation with an Egyptian Railway Inspector, and the superintendent of the Wagon Lits, who thereupon undertook to assist in making our railway journey to Haifa as comfortable as possible ! The train did not start till about midnight, but as we found excellent Wagon Lit compartments reserved for us, we settled into them much earlier, and I was half asleep as we moved from the long familiar neighbourhood of Kantara and out towards Katia, Bir el Abd, El Arish, Gaza and all those places so much connected with memories that are to me both happy and sad.

August 9th. 1924.

Have kept no daily diary, as this has not really been

practicable during the journey from Haifa to Baghdad. The railway journey to Haifa was entirely comfortable, and I slept well, rising for breakfast just as we reached Lud. About an hour later we drew into Haifa and detrained; there without difficulty we located the convoy of the Nairn Transport Company - five cars in all, powerful Cadillacs and Buicks. Into these we and the other passengers settled ourselves, three to each car, while the baggage and mail bags were stacked in great layers along the footboards and at the back of the cars. This was done with much skill and speed, and when completed the cars could hardly be seen for luggage. Our drivers, fellows of excellent type, all ex-service men, then set off.

As the road at first was vague we made our way along the sea shore close to the water, often with the waves splashing over the wheels, a novel and refreshing method of progress, giving an exhilarating start to our journey! At Akre, a colourful little town, jutting out into the sea, with light spray fringing the base of a small high-walled fortress at the water's edge, we turned on to a coast road, which led us round behind this town. Thence onwards the nature of the road became most uncertain, at times good, at times bad, and at times almost non-existent; whereat the cars would quite happily indulge in a kind of cross-country

steeple-chase ! In this way we passed onwards through scenery that was very full of colour, & tempered sunshine, with an appearance of much fertile contentment being rich with groves of orange, and olive, and many vineyards. Many interesting scenes we passed. Roman viaducts and aqueducts, a village at the site of old Tyre, and another at the site of Sidon. For lunch we halted at a little breezy restaurant with its shady garden set with tables, and cooled by artificial pools of water. Here we ate chupattis, olives, and a queer but appetising dish of eggs. Then on again, and as our speed was often very fast, and as the speed of the many trains of camels and donkeys we now passed was always very slow, it seemed at moments that "incidents" must certainly occur ! But there was no disaster after all ! Once we knocked down two donkeys and a boy - none of them hurt ! - and once our car skidded off the road and down into a ditch - again no damage ! So that was all right. At the Anglo-French frontier we paused for a while at the Frontier Post, at a high wide-viewed point on the coast road, where somehow the general outlook was very reminiscent of the coast roads near Monte Carlo. Then after some hours spent alongside deep blue bays, and amongst groves and villages, we entered the charming area of Beyruth, with its background of high hills. A brief

tea accomplished, we then started on the last run of the day on to Damascus.

The climb out of Beyruth was a glorious episode. Up and up, with the evening light glowing on the curious red soil of Lebanon, and on the cool groves of trees, and rousing innumerable misty tints amongst the roofs of Beyruth, and the clustered villages on the hillsides about us. One more material thrill was also provided during the mount, when our driver decided to race another powerful car, with a deep precipice along side of us ! Our car won, but we passengers nearly died of heart failure in the process ! At an altitude of just over 5000 feet we crossed the topmost pass of Lebanon; and in the gathering darkness, started the long descent into the valley beyond. A curious blustering wind arose at this point, raising a good deal of dust. The country soon assumed a far less fertile aspect, and presently we entered a most desolate area of low barren hills through whose dark and rocky valleys the road wound its way. This continued until we reached the outskirts of Damascus itself where the approach — though only vaguely seen in the light of the rising moon — became again most picturesque. The road ran as it were in the midst of a stream, with water and trees on both sides, and on the slopes of the valley there showed many scattered houses, mosques, and a large

monastery. At one point a conglomeration of bridges, balconies, and seats, in and about a small island, with much glimmer of lanterns, and chatter of humanity proceeding therefrom, showed that this was one of the popular meeting places of the townsfolk.

In a large, and quite well constructed Square we finally drew up, before the Victoria Hotel, in which hostelry we received satisfactory lodgment. It was a largish but oddly constructed building, obviously a native dwelling adapted to the requirements of a modern hotel, and our bedroom windows and doors all open on to the central hall, which had once no doubt been an open courtyard. That evening, and early next day I spent in a mild exploration of the town - well ordered it seemed on the whole, but dusty. The hills around looked rather barren but had numerous houses, trees and gardens clustered on the lower slopes. Damascus itself has a tolerably constructed central area, with a maze of bazaars branching out from it to the real native quarters.

At the end of various negotiations in respect of Passports, once more we set our path towards Baghdad. Having slowly twisted our way through the bazaars, we then passed by a wide dusty track on to the edge of the cultivation and on into the yellow sandy space ahead of us. Once past a jutting spur of rocky hills, we soon sped out of sight of

all life and habitation. Only around us was the hard flatness of the desert -- not soft and undulating sand like the Sinai desert, but hard, and covered with stones and scattered rocks. The heat rapidly increased, and many "sand devils" arose and whirled their queer erratic courses around us.

And thus through an almost unchanging scenery we sped forward for our crossing of the 470 miles of waterless space between us and our destination. We kept up a high speed almost all the time, resulting in a quite merciless bumping of the cars and their wretched occupants ! At rare intervals we stopped for food or water, and to replenish petrol, but the first real halt did not take place till after dark at about 10.30 p.m. Then followed a rather novel type of picnic party. Our excellent drivers prepared everything for the comfort of us passengers -- the cushions from the five cars were taken out and formed into a big square, and within it on a cloth, was set an excellent cold repast. A bonfire was lighted under the expert supervision of "Jock," a big, good-looking Scotch youth -- one of the drivers -- and soon a huge kettle was boiling, productive of limitless excellent tea !

The stars twinkled cheerfully above us, and from the surrounding spaces came a little soft breeze, as though the desert were seen in friendly mood and anxious to show that

he is not always so harsh and inhospitable as he seems under the midday sun ! When at length we re-started on our way we were all feeling much revived and replenished. The remainder of the night journey is just a sleepy memory of continuous speeding onwards through a mighty emptiness of starlight and flat lifeless plains. But there were periods of really violent jolting and one of these resulted in a brief halt, to tend a passenger in one of the other cars, who had been bounced against the roof, and had sustained a severe cut across his nose ! The only other incident of the night was when we encountered three Vernon Aeroplanes, which loomed suddenly out of the darkness. They were machines flying to Cairo, which had been forced to land owing to sand storms ! At about 2 a.m. the air grew surprisingly chilly and we were thankful to make use of our blankets and wraps -- articles which previously had seemed absurd ! Dawn came upon us in a flood of soft and infinitely lovely colours, culminating in a full tawny splendour; but still we sped onwards without any pause ! Our drivers appeared indefatigable, and we made no further halt till at about 9 a.m. when we reached the aerodrome at Ramadi. There we breakfasted and washed at the quarters of the solitary R.A.F. officer in charge, and then commenced the final 75 miles of our run. We had been warned of the heat to be expected on this area, and hot indeed it was, with

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a strong sultry wind, and an atmosphere choked with sand. It was not at all a pleasant period. En route we passed the tribal fortress -- now in ruins -- in which Colonel Leachman was murdered in 1920, but otherwise we saw nothing particularly noteworthy. Then suddenly I found that we were passing along the old familiar road by the side of Baghdad West aerodrome. It was much changed, and deserted by the R.A.F., yet still recognizable. A matter of five minutes brought us over the Maude Bridge and so to our journey's end -- rather tired, rather dirty, but with a sense of an interesting experience achieved, and feelings of gratitude to the untiring efficiency of the drivers of our convoy !