

Letter dated July 27th., 1926, from Diwaniyah.

So suddenly soon is my leave now that letters, so important hitherto, seem of comparatively small importance ! I have now packed or arranged for the disposal of all my furniture and kit, and my office is about to be handed over to the officer taking on my duties from me. At present it is understood that the Colonel wishes me to return to Diwaniyah at the end of my leave - but you know how uncertain things are. In some ways I shall like to return here. I have a very nice house, and have also made my garden quite pleasant. Again a change of scene to the Mosul or Kirkuk areas would be interesting.

The prevalence of fever in Diwaniyah itself is much less now and there are many less deaths in this district. Other districts, however, continue to suffer pretty severely. Many Shaikhs and notables have been in to say goodbye to me on my departure for leave -- a few of them in a quite genuinely friendly spirit. Amongst others Saoud Beg al Sa'doun has been in, the brother of Ajami Pasha, a notorious pro-Turk banished from Irâq. Saoud Beg is a clever young man -- at the moment trying to assist in the readmission of his brother ! Recently

Sacud Beg murdered a clerk in his household but seems to have escaped any serious consequences ! All seems to have ended up rather satisfactorily in my little difference of opinion with a certain Squadron-Leader at A.H.Q. ! I wrote a candid letter to the latter and a strong statement of the case to the Colonel — and in the end the S/L was quite satisfactorily silenced. When last I saw him he was most unaggressive ! The Colonel also on my last visit was markedly friendly, and we had a long and unusually cordial chat on affairs in general.

At the end of the official "chat" he expressed "great relief" that he is after all able to let me go off on leave this year, as he had been so afraid my "strenuous work" would cause my health to break down !! He seemed quite genuine — perhaps he really was, who knows !! Sometimes I find him interesting and likeable, at others he exasperates and fills me with distrust. Anyhow he has now given me my leave — and in a most friendly spirit to all appearances.

Have just had news of a most distressing "crash" in Hinaidi yesterday. A large machine crashed into a building and it seems that ten Air Force fellows have been killed. Several of them I knew, and one, Sterling-Webb, who was 1st. Pilot, was down here with his machine

some ten days ago. We discovered we had met one another at the big Webster dance in London, and he knows Joan Chapman and, I think, had met Mollie. He had had a forced landing the other side of Dagharah. I went out to assist him, and he stayed a night in my Dagharah house. As a sand-storm was still in progress next day, I sent his 2nd Pilot to Diwaniyah in my car, and undertook to guide him by air to Diwaniyah. I, with my faithful attendant, Razouki, therefore went off by air and guided them in. As the big machine, in addition to about eight passengers, had large supplies of gun cotton and detonators on board, I was glad when we reached Diwaniyah without further forced landings ! and so was young Razouki, I think, whom I had told in detail about the bombs and gun cotton, just to see if he would still be willing to come with me !! However, on hearing of this, he seemed positively insulted at the idea of my leaving him behind - which speaks well for his loyalty to his master !

While in Dagharah with Sterling-Webb, the Muharram festival happened to be in progress. Presently a coy but friendly message was sent from the ladies of the house next door, saying that they wished to hold a

"breast-beating" assembly in their court-yard, but that the younger women all felt very shy, as they would have to strip to the waist, and were afraid the English airmen might look over the intervening parapet !! Razouki gave our reply to the smiling old dame who had brought the message, saying we "would not look," !! and actually they trusted us, the Dagharah folk being of a quite friendly disposition. At about nine o'clock the sounds of chanting started, and soon the sound of young bosoms being beaten rose with increasing vigour. Indeed it was quite distressing to listen to, especially as the young damsels very soon worked themselves into a state of hysterics, and began sobbing their hearts out, as though some frightful calamity had just occurred. Within about an hour however, the climax was reached, and they calmed down again. Gradually the visiting ladies wished their hostess goodnight - and one could hear her making suitable replies - "O, I thank thee, beloved Jamila, for attending the breast-beating." "O hostess ! it is for me to thank thee, it has indeed been a propitious beating of breasts !", etc, etc.

One can imagine invitation cards to such a show:-
Mrs. Latifa bint Hassan At Home on the 2nd. day of

Muharram at 9.30 p.m. at Dagharah. Breast flogging
10 - 11.20.

Breast-beating is carried on by both sexes during Muharram, but separately. The men also flog their backs, and hack their heads with swords — a most brutal and unpleasing spectacle !

I arrived back in Diwaniyah on the tenth day of Muharram — the big day, but just after the main demonstration. By the time I got back the population had retired in a state of collapse to their houses from which occasional bursts of frenzied chanting echoed across the river. Weird folk, aren't they !

..

..

..

DIARY.

18th August, 1926.

Yet again I pass between the deep yet contrasting blues of Mediterranean sea and sky, and for a while I have leisure again for idle contemplation. I have been glancing through the diary I jotted down two and a half years ago, when last I passed this way on the outward voyage. What has been gained in this small but definite section out of the brief thing that is existence !! Experience certainly in a further range of unexpected interests, the satisfaction for a while of that restlessness which seems to urge almost without reason, and perhaps a little warmth of wider human knowledge. Now there is for me six months amongst my own folk. Returning thus by easy stages to a normal way of life, one does it contentedly enough, nor is there any failure to appreciate the seemliness of normal and well ordered places. So I am glad to find that despite my brief taste of "Savage freedom" I do not tend to grow uncivilized !

From Baghdad I have travelled some five hundred miles over the desert, viâ the ruined city of Palmyra, stately and solemn still with its colonnades and castles, despite an excrescent gathering of Arab hovels within its desolated courts; and thence viâ Homs and Tripoli, and the intricate windings of a lofty coast road, I reached the civilized "amenities" of Beyruth. From this town I made my way by coastal steamer to Cyprus, when I visited Farmagasta, Nicosia, and Limossol. Cyprus I found a pleasant island, but in a quiet way more well ordered and modernized than I had expected. Though I missed some of the best mountain country I motored on the last day through very gracious scenery at the foot of the lofty Trudas ranges. Except for the fact that a front wheel came off my car, nearly causing a somersault, I met with no adventure physical, mental or spiritual, on this island of romance ! Much there is however to awake the imagination amongst the extremely numerous antiquities of many types and ages. The old cathedrals are peacefully beautiful to look upon — but to my surprise most still are in the hands of the Moslem minority, and not yet consecrated to Christian worship. There may be reasons, but this

seems incongruous under British administration, and even an unsound pandering to Moslem domination, which can mistake a too generous tolerance for a weak laxity of faith and self-confidence. One has experienced and one has heard from many sources, of the present curious lack of official support to men seeking to uphold British Imperial prestige as a whole. A painful subject, and one doubts if all is well when one sees so many misunderstandings and misinterpretings, especially in the East. Inactivity is not always "masterly" !

All my journey has so far been pleasant and easy. I took my faithful attendant, Razouki, as far as Beyruth with me, and it was most instructive to hear his comments and to see his keen appreciation of the greater civilization which he met there for the first time. He is a most intelligent youth, and to me a very faithful companion and servant. He will return to me when I go back to Baghdad.

My desert journey was a little more perilous than the last I made that way, partly owing to the Syrian rebels, and partly owing to the fact that I travelled by a privately owned car, instead of by the official

Nairn Convoy. To lose one's way on the desert track might indeed prove disastrous, and during a part of the second night this is what we seemed to have done, which was disconcerting !

And now I have mainly in my mind's eye the prospect of happy meetings and reposeful pastimes ! If in the latter brief two and a half years one has sufficiently adjusted one's personal failings and inadequacies as to be of a little human usefulness amongst strange peoples, then this return is indeed a welcome interlude, before the further journey which I expect and look forward to.

LAMENT.

Great Maker of Anthems, whose chords are drawn
From music of winds o'er the harp of the sky,
Make me an anthem wherein I may mourn
All I learned and I loved so spaciously.

Past are those hours of glamorous sun
My body so greeted in clear delight,
Swell now a dirge for the days that are done
From a Desert breath as it stirs the night.