

EPISODE XIV.

WARS; GENERAL AND PERSONAL !

During these latter months of 1939, the restlessness in Europe was becoming more marked; and linked with this a restlessness in Egypt. Already the clash of temperaments between Egypt's young king Farouk and Britain's Ambassador H.E. Sir Miles Lampson had become a matter of comment, and this tension was increasing.

It has seemed to many observers an inexplicable Foreign Office folly to have allowed the same individual to remain in authority when the status of the British Residency changed, on Egypt's assumption in 1936 of National Independence, to that of an Embassy.

The first integrated an executive position of enormous prestige and a long tradition of unopposable authority, the second implied merely a diplomatic post, one of many others in Egypt and without executive authority at all. It would have been a severe test for a man, even of most altruistic and humanly sympathetic temperament. The temperament of Sir Miles Lampson, however excellent his qualities as a diplomat, certainly did not include either of those particular qualities so essential to this delicate re-adjustment of outlook. He was a dictatorial man, and perhaps with a touch of that attribute which in lesser mortals would be termed "bullying". In the king he had no doubt a problem; a very young man inexperienced even in ordinary matters, let alone matters of state; yet precocious, good looking, surrounded by flatterers, and at that moment the ideal of a country very self-conscious in its new independence. Inevitably a clash was to be expected, and soon it came about.

A head-strong boy, in a dramatic setting, the king had much companionableness in his makeup, in spite of some tendency

to arrogance; much underlying desire for sympathy and affection, in spite of some budding assertiveness. He might have allowed himself to be led by friendliness; but he would not at all tolerate unfriendly coercion or personal belittlement before his, at that time, adoring subjects.

When Sir Miles Lampson achieved the 1936 treaty, he was indeed at the peak of achievements; of high prestige both in England and Egypt, and thus an asset to both.

When, after long and unnecessary bitterness, he was recalled eventually from Egypt very abruptly by his own government, he was no asset anywhere; and so by a Foreign Office blunder in psychology, the permanently constructed asset of a mutually respected public figure was lost to the history of Anglo-Egyptian relations.

Already friends of mine, both British and Egyptian, were uneasy at the Palace-Embassy disaccord. As I had links with both, I became indirectly involved. Through mutual friends of Hassanein Pasha, Chief of the King's Cabinet, and through my personal contacts at the ^{Egyptian} Foreign Office, an attempt was made to arrange for a meeting informally between myself and King Farouk, as a quiet means towards a move for better relationship between the latter and our Embassy.

It was necessary of course to obtain diplomatic approval for such a thing; but when my departmental head made tentative approaches to our Embassy, any such contact between myself and His Majesty was viewed with definite coldness, and so the idea had to be dropped.

In June 1939, I became due for local leave, and my little Mother and I decided to go to Cyprus, and what is more, to go by air, my Mother's first venture in air travel; which she faced unperturbed and with enjoyment. We set off from Cairo on Monday June 26th 1939.

The plane touched down briefly at Port-Said; then at Lydda we paused for lunch. After that came a flight over the sea and above striking cloud effects, until finally we landed safely at Larnaca at 3.30 p.m. ; - to find ourselves in climatic heat greatly exceeding what we had left in Cairo. After a sultry and not very comfortable night at a small local hotel, we left Larnaca at 2.p.m. next day by car for the hill resort of Prodromos. We passed by way of flat country, via Nicosia, and seaside Kyrēnia, after which we started the beautiful climb by the mountain road, till finally at 6.30 p.m. we reached the romantically named and situated Berengaria hotel. This hotel is rather plain and almost monastic in appearance, but is set in stateliness upon a tree-covered peak with magnificent views all around, and especially over the gradually descending valley slopes, to Kyrinia, and the sea in the far distance. Here we passed a period of charm and repose. A few friends arrived at the hotel in due course, including Judge Murray-Graham, my old friend of war days in Italy, with his wife;

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My memory of Judge Murray Graham is of the old 1914 - 18 war vintage, when we were in the same flying unit together on the Piave front. Later we met again in Egypt, where he and his lady have been good and hospitable friends to me. Mrs. M.G is a fine musician and student of music, and her husband and all the family include in their qualities the kindly sensitivty of musical temperament; to which Mrs. M.G. adds a bracing preference for outspokenness, which, despite her official setting she manages to use at appropriate moments with an astringency much more beneficial than mere suave diplomatic insincerity !

Judge M.G. himself, during my "set to" with Lord K. gave me the staunch" support of his invaluable advice, a gift of good will for which I am truly appreciated.

It was at the M-G home in Alexandria that I first met Judge Zul-ficar Pasha, father of Queen Farida first and very lovely wife of H.M. of Egypt. Zul ficar Pasha also impressed me as a man who had, besides the dignity of a judge, also the gracious gifts of a music lover, which were his special link with that household.

and the Cherifs our old Cairo friends; and I also had contacts with friends at Government house where I lunched on a couple of occasions. A very interesting fellow guest was the Mar (Lord) Shimun, hereditary Archbishop of the Assyrian Christians. Still a young man, and now in unmerited exile from his people, he has a tragic history. His famous aunt the Lady Surma had been the heroine of the gallant march of the survivors of the Assyrian nation after they broke out of Urmia through the Turkish armies, to join up with the British Forces in Persia, and then in Iraq. In the Arab revolt of 1920, the men of this race stood by us gallantly; and at all times they were our efficient and most loyal allies. At the outset of the establishment of Iraqi independence by the British Government, no sort of adequate protection was assured by our government for these Assyrian people in Iraq. Disarmed, and wholly outnumbered, they were left to the mercy of a fanatical people, understandably revengeful, after we had for so long and so openly availed ourselves of the most effective help of this gallant little Assyrian race, in our own times of need. Massacre and oppression followed.

I myself made strong written protest in my reports at the time; and so did others, including Jope-Slade, who was then at Headquarters. Jope told me that a vigorous protest he had written, was in his own presence torn up at our Embassy with a terse verbal order that no such protest must be expressed by him again .

Today they are practically non-existent as a coherent people; just a scattered remnant, acquiring as the generations pass those grievous traits of a powerless minority. It is a dismal story of no credit to government policy of those days. Political expediency no doubt can seem useful from a short-viewed outlook; but to us it can prove extremely destructive in long-range result by the undermining it involves of that good reputation to which the power of the British Empire owed its virile reality in times past. By reason of my long association with Iraq including the Assyrians there, I became on close terms with the young Archbishop, and when not long after he visited England, friends of mine put him into touch with members of our parliament, and he was helpfully and courteously received. Alas, effective use of these contacts was in the end frustrated by that major world disaster, the outbreak of another war.

Mother and I did a number of tours by car, for instance to the charming old Kikko Monastery, along a road grand in scenery, but perilous in its rough narrowness; and to Troodos and Platres.

After a month my own leave came to an end, but it was decided that Mother should remain in the cool airs for a further month. I remember a day or two before I left, war rumours became more acute, and distress came to a young French honeymoon couple, when the young Officer husband was suddenly recalled to military duties in Syria. We discussed the situation between ourselves and with friends; but one felt that even yet human sanity would prevail.

My return to Cairo had other aspects also of uneasiness. My good chief Spackman, now promoted to Group-Captain was to be transferred from Egypt. I had doubts as to the wisdom of my retaining my appointment after his departure. He however, made it a personal request that I should do so, in order, as he put it, at least to assist his successor to settle into the department,

which had very various aspects of work. Of course I agreed to his request.

The war situation rapidly worsened. On, I think, Monday 21st of August 1939, Air Commodore Peter Drummond, my friend of many years, soon to be promoted to be the right-hand man of the Commander-in-Chief; and who but for his sadly untimely death would certainly have attained to the highest Service rank, summoned me to his office. Peter's wife was also still in Cyprus, and he told me that the A.O.C. had directed that all Service families must return thence at once. I received permission to depart for Cyprus to escort my Mother back. By special permission all passport formalities were eliminated for me. I crossed from Port-Said, again in the Fouadieh, having first cabled my Mother to meet me at Limasol, our port of arrival. My little Mother calm as ever, was duly there, arriving by car soon after my own arrival. The Cherifs had also arrived by car, less unperturbed; and the port itself was a mass of would-be passengers, who made no disguise at all of their perturbation. There was no cabin accomodation to be had, but Mother and I were able to secure deck chairs. The little ship soon became a close mass of agitated refugees, some seven or eight hundred in a space normally used for 100. It was a grim night passage we had ahead of us, in complete darkness and with rumours of submarines already lurking. It was very hot, and the crowd was stifling; No food, and only a difficult cup of tea at dawn; but we safely reached Port-Said.

Mother remained for a while at a pension in Port-Said which was then a resort of Officers' families; and I went on to Cairo to see how the situation had developed. All was reasonably well, and so with my faithful old servant Awad as escort my Mother rejoined me at my flat. On September 3rd, came War. War alarms were rampant at first, and we like many others prepared a gas-proof room, and emergency supplies.

My personal affairs moreover did not at all lessen my

my general uneasiness. Hostility, hitherto quite unsuspected (could it have been a long dormant jealousy?) from a third person, made my relationship with Spackman's replacement difficult. The outcome was that I took over a new appointment, this time at Army Headquarters. My new work had a very different aspect, and was in some ways at variance with the whole basis upon which my voluntary work had always been set. Had there been no war outbreak, I would now have taken the reasonable course of bringing my work to a close, but to resign my appointment at this juncture went against ones sense of patriotism. I soon realised that between the chief of my new department, and our Ambassador, an undeclared, but acute antagonism already existed, mainly through the Ambassador's accusation that the Colonel's Department encroached upon Embassy political preserves. I became drawn into this unfortunate atmosphere, and Colonel Cawthorne, while availing himself of my long established Middle Eastern contacts, nevertheless, as I later discovered, had no scruple in using me as a "wipping boy" to avoid Embassy reprisals.

During this curious interim period, a variety of jobs came my way, amongst them the control of Cairo Press matters and journalists. In this role, on one occasion, I entertained about a 100 members of our journalistic world to a dinner at the Continental Hotel; and I was also put in charge of the local interests of Margaret Bourke-White and Walter Graebner who were here representing American journalism, he as a writer and she as a photographic specialist. I gave a cocktail party for them at my flat with my Mother as hostess; they were a most charming and interesting pair, and the inscribed photograph of themselves which they gave me as a souvenir is a valued possession of mine. I also had the privilege of arranging for a special portrait to be taken of H. M. King, Earl of Lothian, with General Milford, who was then

Road. On the same occasion I was myself photographed in

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company with General Wilson and H.E. Sir Miles Lampson, - a quaint memento in view of what happened so soon after.

My friendship with Hassanein Pasha meanwhile became increasingly sincere; I also have a friendly memory of young Lord Alington in those days; Napier Alington and my Mother were on excellent terms, and we had agreeable occasions chatting in his Zamalek flat. Though not physically fit, Napier persuaded the doctors to allow him to join up in the R.A.F. at the war's outbreak, a gallant decision but a tragic one, for he died of pneumonia very soon after he had entered the Service.

Note:

When I entered hospital in September 1940, as the result of injuries, Napier was already a patient there, and he sent me cheerful messages of encouragement. He was believed to be recovering; I was still on the "critically ill" list. We never met again; for Napier died a few days later; whereas I myself unexpectedly made an eventual recovery.

The climax in my affairs came upon me in a peculiar manner. I was invited by the then Egyptian Premier Aly Maher Pasha to take tea with him at Mena House Hotel where he was then living. Our meeting was brief and merely personal, though I did mention it in a normal way to my Chief. It happened then that I was due to proceed in charge of a long desert reconnaissance in the frontier area between Siwa Oasis and Sollum; and on Saturday February 17th 1940 I set off. By an unusual, - almost unique - privilege, I, as a mere invalided officer in mufti not in uniform, was entrusted with two cars and a small detachment of 11th Hussars N.C.O.'s and troopers to carry out this work. It was a memorable tour, pleasant in the doing and successful in outcome. While in Alexandria on my way back, I lunched with the Emir Idris El Senoussi, later to become famous as the selected Head of the new Libyan State after the war, and of whose brother and one time rival Safi Eddine, I still have as memento an interesting old silver inlaid muzzle-loading gun which he gave me. I also spent an afternoon at the house of Saleh Sadek Bey of Prince Mohamed Aly's entourage; then called on H.R.H. himself; and had dinner with my friend Judge Murray-Graham.

I returned tired but rather elated to Headquarters Cairo; and then the storm broke. My visit to the Premier had been taken exception to very strongly by our Ambassador; and the fact of

my contacts with the Air Ministry, and my many personal links with personalities in the Middle East, were also called in question, though these were the very facts upon which my original invitation from the Foreign Office were based. Forthwith I was ceremoniously summoned to my Colonel's office and with his second in command as witness, was informed that I must consider myself "suspended" from my duties, and must hold myself in readiness to return to England immediately. In making this quite unjustifiable and rather shoddy attack, however, both my departmental chief and His Excellency had been over hasty. They had forgotten that I was a volunteer, that I was an invalided officer not liable for service, and that I was primarily in Egypt on the advice of a Medical Board.

* Note:

It has often puzzled me in view of the fact that my appointment was on a voluntary basis, and by the wish of the highest authorities, though rather against my own judgment, why a simple interview could not have been arranged by H.E. Sir Miles Lampson (Killearn), our Ambassador, to tell me that as changing circumstances might make my appointment inappropriate in the future, the right time had come for it to close. In view of former recorded approval, a word of thanks might even have been added. Instead, an unexplained attack with damaging intention, was made upon me, an atmosphere of mystery contrived, and a grave injustice bolstered up not for months, but for years. An altogether deplorable and unnecessary display of petty malice in high places.

The matter of course came eventually before my Supreme Chief Air Marshal Sir William Mitchell. He, after investigation, caused me to be reinstated in my appointment, and refused to take any action as to requiring my return to England. I therefore resumed my duties. But in the strange circumstances the only sound and respectable action I could take was to hand in my resignation forthwith, which I did.

The ungenerous churlishness of my quite undeserved treatment first shocked me into inactive distress; and then aroused keenly my will to fight. It was a rather ill-matched contest but I did in due course vindicate the rightness of my case to a sufficient degree for personal self-respect, but one cannot pretend that this experience has not left, as it were, a spiritual scar; and a sense of disillusionment towards certain highly placed sources of authority for whom one would profoundly have preferred to retain a feeling of confident esteem.

Fortunately I consulted at the start my personal lawyer, whose Firm as it happened carried out also the duties of Crown Advocate for our Embassy, and so knew well the rather unscrupulous methods in those days attempted there. I owe a debt of

gratitude to the Firm of Perrot Fanner & Sims-Marshall, and in particular to the wise personal counsel of Sims-Marshall.

He is now dead; may he for his many actions of wisdom, charity and justice to which he added this consideration towards myself, rest in God's good peace.

The reports, extracts, and letters, hereafter produced are I think, the soundest way briefly to show what now followed. They may perhaps at least serve some useful purpose as a warning and a record of the subtle distortion of endeavour and cynical misinterpretation which may come without chance of appeal upon an ordinary honest non-diplomat, who becomes unguardedly involved in the suave unmorality of some aspects of the "diplomatic" mind; for which in particular mere Service mentality is no match at all. In Service circles, though there is a certain narrowness perhaps of outlook, there is yet a very definite code of conduct which without exception may not be infringed whether in private or public life.

For diplomats however, those sinister words "policy" and "expediency" may cover a multitude of decisions which they would be shocked to tolerate in their private lives. Is it strange then that nations controlled by this diplomatic double code are drifting into the chaos which self-interest and cynicism make inevitable.

The following letter to Air Marshal Sir Charles Medhurst from Wing Commander Bouchet, Senior Legal Advisor at Air H.Q., though not first in date, I place first, as it seems to sum up a situation, which, as my diary will later show, dragged on with unaccountable and almost malignant persistancy.

From Wing Commander C.T.T.R. Bouchet, H.Q., R.A.F.
Mediterranean and Middle East, dated 7th November 1945.

Dear Air Marshal,

I have now had an opportunity of going more thoroughly into the papers which Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James left with you. I have not discussed this matter personally with Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James, as it appears to me, that the root of the trouble lies in his employment with the Royal Air Force in 1939, his intimate knowledge of local affairs, and his close contact with a great number of influential Egyptians in the Middle East.

It would appear that in taking up his new duties in 1939, he had no defined charter, and obviously thought that his duties entailed liaison work of the type more peculiar to Foreign Office political experts.

It would appear also, that the information he obtained by way of his Service duties was far in advance of anything which was in the possession of the Embassy. This is purely my own appreciation. A certain amount of this information was acted upon by Air Ministry, and apparently came to the notice of the Foreign Office who probably took exception. As a consequence, I have no doubt that censure was passed down until it reached Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James. The Embassy, feeling that Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James had encroached on their political work, are endeavouring to secure that no such thing will occur in the future, by excluding him from any post in the Middle East which has any political aspect.

I can hardly think of any official post which would not require some contact or other, however small, of a political nature and certain contact with Egyptians, and if the Embassy are in a position to have a final say in any post offered to Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James, it seems that they could bar him from any useful employment in Egypt or Middle East countries,

It seems to me, therefore, essential that Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James' position vis-à-vis the Embassy be cleared up, and the reason explained to His Excellency why Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James acted as he did in 1939, that it was not an attempt on his part to interfere with the work of the Oriental Secretary, and if this was done it was through no fault of his own, but rather through the fact of his not having a defined charter of his duties with the Royal Air Force; but for whatever reason the Embassy have taken up the attitude they have towards him, it seems of paramount importance that he should make his peace with the Ambassador, and I can only suggest that if you could informally approach the Ambassador and stress the fact that Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James' position

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arises through no fault of his own, it might assist in reinstating him in the eyes of the Embassy.

I have not assumed that there has been any malice on the part of any official person, and it would be extremely impolitic so to do, but if Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James continues to be considered unsuitable for employment on some vague grounds unconnected with his ability, it appears to me his best course would be to petition the Prime Minister.

(signed) C.T.T.R. Bouchet.

Wing Commander Bouchet was killed in an Aeroplane accident only a few weeks after writing this letter.

Turf Club, Cairo
29th March 1940.

To Colonel Cawthorn,
G.H.Q.M.E.,
Cairo.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your instructions of today, whereby you intimate that I am suspended from duty, and to hold myself in readiness to proceed to the U.K. to report to the Air Ministry.

I am at a loss to understand my suspension which, I am bound to say, appears to reflect upon me and my personal and professional capacities, without either being informed of the cause of my suspension or given an opportunity of clearing myself of any allegations.

Upon the question of reporting to the Air Ministry, it would appear that my position with the Services has been misunderstood.

I served in the last war and was retired from the Royal Air Force with the rank of Sqdn.Ldr. on medical grounds due to my service. I am not liable to recall. I

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In 1935, I came to Egypt because I was advised that the climate of the Near East was more suitable for me than the climate of England.

Shortly after this, I was engaged in Egypt by the Royal Air Force, and have since been so employed. At first, the employment was for a limited period of a few months, but from time to time these periods were renewed (I venture to suggest on account of the efficient work I was performing and the commendations which I received and which are in my file).

In these circumstances I respectfully submit that the contract of my services, having been entered to in Egypt for duties to be performed in the Near East, does not permit of the giving of an order for me to proceed to England to report to the Air Ministry.

I am not actuated by any ulterior motive but it is necessary that I should put the position clear.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

H.H.J.

From Turf Club, Cairo,
26th August 1940.

To the Private Secretary,
British Embassy,
Cairo.

Sir,

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter No.573/9/40, dated August 21st 1940, in which you inform me of the receipt by H.E. Sir Miles Lampson of my personal letter to him dated August 13th.

While welcoming the good will which His Excellency expresses towards the point of view I presented to him in my letter, I of course regret that he is unable to grant me the informal interview which I requested. Had he been able to do so, I need hardly say that the consideration would have been, - and would still be, - fully appreciated by myself.

My health, as His Excellency is aware, precludes my serving in an active capacity with H.M. Forces, and the Medical Board which I applied for recently, has unfortunately re-confirmed this.

I now feel however, that I have taken every possible official action in order to give my services again in the National cause, as I had been doing until April last.

This, therefore, leaves me free to appreciate my retirement and to include in it, I hope, at least some usefulness as a private person residing in Egypt during war time. My services, remain, however, at the disposal of the authorities, whenever required.

In conclusion I would like to state once more my appreciation of the good will which His Excellency expresses, and ask that you will convey to him the contents of this letter.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

H.H.J.

From H.Q. M.E.F., Cairo
31st October 1940.

From Group Captain Forbes.

Dear Hindle-James,

Very many thanks for your letter dated 29th October 1940, which has just reached me.

Both Air Ministry and this H.Q., are fully aware of the work you did some time back which without the slightest doubt was extremely valuable over a very long period. I also see in my file that Air Chief Marshal Sir William Mitchell gave you a good clear chit on leaving your appointment.

I know that your long spell of entirely voluntary work at our H.Q. has been genuinely appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Leslie B. Forbes.