

Arabah-el-Madfunah
Dec 16th 1929.

Dear Mother.

We are having a real sand storm today. we have to stay in the house & keep the doors & windows shut as tight as they will shut. outside nothing is visible but driving sand, all the scenery is blotted out like in a sea mist. We are settling down to do various odd jobs, Miss C is making a case to carry one of the cameras, I am writing letters & afterwards shall do some mending, & probably make some more fancy boxes etc for the Xmas tree.

Yesterday we walked along the outskirts of the village past the place where the potter makes his pots. there were rows of new clay pots laid out to dry before baking, we had a look at his oven it is just made of earth bricks built in a circle with a hole to put the fire in, over the fire is a clay plate with holes in it, the pots are piled on top of this, & the oven roofed over when ready for baking. The wheel he makes his pots on is a very simple affair he works it with his feet sitting on a plank over a hole in the ground

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Dec 17th

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my efforts at letter writing yesterday were cut short in their prime. First Miss G. asked me to make a little case out of an old kid glove for a special lens, & then Capt G asked me to mount a big map on linen. both jobs in my line, I am quite general handy man here.

Today the storm had blown itself out, so the temple was swept & we continued our work.

In our rest hour after lunch Miss G & I went for a walk across the desert looking for an extra nice patch of fine sand to lie on & take a sun bath, our investigations led us to a strange looking hole, & instantly our body snatching instincts were roused & we set to work like a couple of terriers, our excavations laid bare a portion of mud wall, but as further ^{hap-hazard} digging was impossible we built a big cairn of stones to mark the place & retraced our steps. When we had finished work for the day we took old Ahmud with us & showed him our hole. he has been employed on all the excavations round here ever since he was big enough to carry a basket of sand. he got very excited & said there was a man down there, & his head was in a certain

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direction etc etc. From his description he evidently recognized a Roman burial. Of course such burials are too common to be worth opening up, but old Ahmud warmed up to his pet subject & told us tales of strange painted figures to be found here, buried with pots of date stones & grains of corn. These are probably figures of Osiris buried with the chief produce of the country in order to increase the productive powers of the earth. The old boy says he knows where more are to be found after two days digging, so we are thinking of writing to the antiquities dept to apply for a permit.

Dec 18th I had a letter from you, & one from Father to-day, with sand paper, pencil protectors, calendars etc I also had a letter from the Andersons enclosing a dear little mending outfit. I will write to thank them later when I have time, perhaps Father will tell them it has arrived safely & that I am very pleased with it & am writing.

I think I have enough calendars, one for my room one for the dining room, one for my pocket, one I have given to Miss C & an extra one.

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a hamper from Fortnum & Masons, we shall have a feed at Xmas. we are having lots of good things sent up from Cairo as well.

Poor Sardic has the flu. he is reduced to a miserable bundle in a blanket. he is also in great distress because his "Excellent Lady" insists on his keeping a recumbent position when she condescends to visit him. This is a very terrible breach of good manners for a dignified Arab. he is being dosed with cinnamon, aspirin etc & fed on meat broth. As it is quite impossible to prevent all his friends visiting him to condole with him in his affliction, we have given all the servants a strong dose of cinnamon. there were great rejoicings, our little house boy Abdullah attracted by the smell & the big lump of sugar that was in his cup, swallowed the dose in one gulp! he just gasped Ya Allah! & fled hand on mouth ~~amid~~ ^{amid} hoots of joy from all the others.

Dec 19th Today we went with Sheikh & Abdu Wahid to visit his farm. The people who can afford it rent a portion of the fertile part of the valley where they grow clover to feed cattle, also wheat, barley, beans, lentils etc. they build shelters of the thick straw stalks & live out there with their families when the

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Dec 20/~~19~~th

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inundation has gone down. We saw Mrs Abdu Wahid, Mahomet & Fatima the son & daughter, they showed us the clay oven where the bread was baked, the cheeses made in tiny baskets & put in a big bowl to drain, the butter, & the dried goat skin in which they make the butter, also the buffalo milk in the pans with the thick blanket of cream on top, the cream was over an inch thick & ever so slightly sour. The Sheikh sat on the ground & held a bowl & we were given spoons & invited to help ourselves, the spoons were like soup spoons. I thought of Father & wished he could have had such an opportunity. I am afraid our abilities in that direction fell rather short of the Sheikh's expectations.

Sardic is better, but now Semman our water carrier has the flu. I expect they will all have it one after the other, if one is ill, all the others huddle in with him in order to keep out the angel of death, a kindly custom but rather unhygienic.

Dec 20th Today we had the Director General of Customs his wife & son & daughter to lunch, they were on their way to Luxor in their private motor launch

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they tied up at Baliana & came on here to spend the day. they are such nice jolly people, we all enjoyed their visit very much.

I had intended to send this letter off by tomorrow's mail, but we hear that as tomorrow is election day there will be no post at all, as there is no post the following day either I am afraid there will be rather a gap between this & the previous letter. I had a lovely home mail today your letter with the fine red bell, silver tinsel & pink shoulder strap ribbon came, all contents very acceptable, the envelope had been opened & not sealed again it was fortunate the contents arrived intact. they did not charge any duty.

I also had a letter from Buffles, she is very sad & depressed & very bitter about Floss.

There was a fine fat letter from Pat with a lovely little boudoir cap. pink to match my nighties, I think of wearing it in the temple to keep my hair tidy windy days.

Sardic is better & back at work again, he has appeared in a glorious daffodil yellow satin gallibea with maroon stripes, we think this must be to celebrate his recovery. he said the

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Dec 21st This is election day, round here
everything is very quiet, but we hear rumours
of riots in other places.

Christmas presents continue to pour in.

I have had a dear little diary for 1930 from
Miss C's aunt in Cairo, she sent something
for everyone. Professor & Mrs Newberry have
sent Turkish Delight, Nougat, Sugar Almonds
& stuffed dates, about 7 lbs in all.

We hear Dr. Gardiner's hamper has got as
far as Baliana & its declared value, (customs
pre paid) is £3. We are wondering what
it can contain. We shall have a good
time in the eats line.

I hope you will have had a
splendid Xmas & that the parcels appeared
on the breakfast table as a surprise

Lots of love to you both
& all friends

Your affectionate daughter
Myrtle.

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