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 ever so many thanks.  
 I love the colour.

Arabah. el. Madfunah.  
 Jan 15<sup>th</sup> 1930

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Dear Mother.

I went to the Festival at Kena after all, my cold was so much better Tuesday evening that at the last moment we decided to go just for the Muled, & leave visiting the Temple near by for some other time. We were off by 6.45. caught the train at Baliana 7.8.30 & arrived at Kena a little before 12. we took Sardic with us, & enough provisions for the day. we had lunch in the train to save time. When we arrived we had a good look round. it was a wonderful sight. a real Eastern crowd. we found it so dusty & difficult to push through the throng that we hired a carriage, we could only go along at a footpace, the driver shouting "h'oa ya ragil". (Take a care oh man) all the time. Once, when we got quite blocked a nice police officer came to our rescue, & gave us two policemen to clear a way for our carriage, we drove all round the fair & saw all the stalls, fruit, sweets, fancy pots etc. This Festival is held in honour of a certain very holy sheikh who's tomb is at Kena. we saw this tomb, it is like a fairly large mosque, the road way going all round it. (like some of our town halls in market places). There

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 riding like mad round & round the mosque, we joined  
 the throng our horses urged to a gallop to keep up & round  
 we went twice camels to the right of us, camels behind  
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 drunk with excitement, we left them to continue going  
 round the prescribed number of times, (7 I believe) while we  
 went to see more sights. We watched naboot men giving  
 an exhibition of single stick, & we saw a most extraordinary  
 sword dance. There were two rows of men lying flat  
 on the ground like this,  with drawn swords  
 laid blade downwards across their tummys, the  
 drums & pipes played weird exciting music, & a man  
 supported on either side by two other men leapt from  
 man to man allighting on the swords each time,  
 the men seemed to be almost hypnotized, they were  
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we spoke to them to ask when the big procession started. & curiously enough I recognised two of them. they were spending Xmas at the Thebes Hotel, Luxor the year I was there. was'nt it funny. They invited us to have tea with them after the show.

The procession of camels is the climax of the festival. I have never seen such an extraordinary sight, each camel carried the embroidered cover from some famous sheiks tomb these covers are called "holy carpets", but they are really decorated material & not carpets. they are stretched on large frames like this  and are all sorts of colours.

these go in procession round the town, & the people stretch up & touch them as they go by in order to get special blessing, all the camel riders follow also. some of them were very beautiful in their festival robes & some of the saddles had priceless bokhara rugs over them, it was impossible to see everything at once. we were very fortunate, we were advised to drive to the square to see the procession, when we stopped there, a very polite Egyptian came & asked if we would like to watch from the balcony of his harem, of course we were delighted, so we left Sardic in the carriage & was escorted up. the husband was not permitted to enter his own harem, as his wife was entertaining visitors, but he turned us over to an ancient dame. The lady of the house received us very kindly, she could speak

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 a little English. she took us out onto the balcony where the other ladies were assembled to watch the show. some of them were very lovely & some very fat & uninteresting. They seemed very pleased to see us, & we could see everything perfectly. after the camels had all passed by, the representative of the king rode through with an escort of mounted police & a detachment of the famous Soudanese camel regiment; he threw handfuls of coins right & left among the crowd. there was a mad scramble. The police were armed with long whips & they beat the people as they scrambled for the money. we could only see the surging throng & the whole affair was soon over. We bade our hostess farewell, & drove to our school master's friend's house where we had a very nice tea. then we had another walk round the fair ground. saw it all lit up, went to a conjurers' entertainment, made several small purchases & got to the station about 8, arrived here a little before midnight, very weary, but very pleased with ourselves. There was another curious thing I forgot to mention. in the centre of the market place there is a large tree with a boat hanging from it. The people say it is a very very ancient custom & we think it is probably the survival of one of the boat festivals of the ancient Egyptians.

• Fri 17<sup>th</sup>

I was so anxious to describe the Muled that I forgot to describe the events of the previous day. On the Tuesday we paid a visit to the Coptic Priest. there is a little Coptic community living near here. They have built their little village of mud houses

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inside the ruined walls of a very ancient fortress (probably 4000 years old) I expect they choose this situation in the days when they were so persecuted. we went into the little church, part of it is very old, supposed to be sixth century AD. most Coptic Churches claim to belong to this period, it probably was a time when they flourished & did a lot of building (& a lot of wanton destruction to temples etc) The Priest showed us some old pictures with great pride, one was a very exciting one of St George slaying the dragon. (I wonder if you know that our patron saint originally came from the East) I trust our gasps of amazement were taken for admiration. but really Coptic painting is the climax of the truly awful. The old Coptic Bible was really beautiful, After viewing the church the Priest took us to his house & regaled us on cinnamon<sup>sic</sup> tea & insisted on presenting us with a cock on our departure. Miss C. had given him a very fine cover for his reading desk. it was made out of the remains of a cream satin evening dress (the joins disguised with feather stitching) with a large Coptic Cross in apricot silk sewn on to it. it looked very handsome & pleased him tremendously.

Tuesday night was a special time for Mohamedans. it was the night on which the Heavens open. & if any one offers a prayer at the exact moment their desire is granted. also if any one dies at that very time they go straight to Heaven without any preliminary judgment or punishment for their sins. On that night also the Angel of Death shakes the Tree of Life.

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and the people whose names are written on the leaves that fall will die within the year. The people make a special kind of bread for the occasion with wheat & sour milk, each one gives away his own loaves, & of course receives from his friends, there is a special blessing in the bread which only acts when it is a gift. All our men brought us loaves, & we had to eat some of each. It is so nice to be included in all their little feasts & they are so delighted because we are interested. I must say some of the bread is rather nasty especially the loaves brought by the very poor ones, but we were very careful to eat equal quantities of all of them. Your letter with the second leg arrived safely today. I was glad to hear Christopher was well & I was pleased to have a cheery note from him. The stockings are lovely, much too good to wear here, I shall save them for some swell occasion or for wear on my return journey.

Our cook celebrated our absence from home on Wednesday by calling in the local barber to pull out a double tooth that had been aching, the result was the tooth was broken off short & the poor man was nearly crazy with pain. Miss C sent him off to Assiut first thing in the morning to the Anglo American hospital with Sardic to look after him. They got back this morning, the cook proudly displaying three awful fangs. He said the dentist got them out without hurting him. They both seemed to have quite enjoyed the experience.

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Now that Mr Beazley has left we shall not need any more cross word puzzles. our time being fully occupied with far more exciting & interesting things

I must be off to bed now. I am so glad to hear you get so much enjoyment out of my letters I expect quite a lot of people imagine I have a very dull monotonous time living out in the desert - perhaps it is dull for some people. Mr Beazley got rather bored - but for Miss C & I it simply teems with interest

Lots of love to you both  
also to Pat & the Childs.  
your affectionate  
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