

Arabah-el-Madfunah.
Oct 25th 1929.

Dear Mother.

I have had the thrill of thrills to-day. I rode on a real desert camel. It happened thuswise. When our beds & other things came up a few days ago on camels I got my camera out & took a snap to the great delight of the camel man. today some more stores came & the camels were unloaded just when we were ready to start for the temple, so the camel man asked me if I would like to ride his camel. you may be sure I did not say no. so the gaudiest blankets in the house were fetched & draped over the saddles & then I mounted one camel & Miss C. the other. the man made a hissing noise & the camel heaved up his behind. nearly shot me over his head. then up went his front legs & I thought I should slide over his tail. then he set off with his long swinging stride, it was perfectly wonderful the easy swinging motion. going up & down the sand hills without a sound, it was fine

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34/2

Being able to view the desert from such a height when the camel broke into a trot I really thought my spine would be jarred through my head but I think I could soon adapt myself to the motion. The folding up of the camel for me to dismount was also rather alarming, but I am glad to say I managed everything without loss of dignity. Of course this adventure caused huge delight among the servants, they rode our despised donkeys & there were hoots of joy from everybody. The final incident was almost the most delightful when the camel man thanked us most profusely for honouring his camels by condescending to ride them.

I have received two "Observers" since I have been here we all appreciate them very much. when finished for reading they do to line shelves & keep dust off things. Today your letter with the photo's Mr La/bell took came they are not too bad. they make really pretty pictures. I am sorry to hear mushrooms still do not agree with you.

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34/3

Today Sheikh Abdu Wahid presented us with a charm to protect us from evil spirits, it is composed of certain chapters from the Koran beautifully written out on strips of paper & folded in a special way. This Sheikh is a very holy man & it is a great compliment, for it is very rare for a Mohameden^{sic} to give such a thing to a Christian.

Yesterday our poor little house boy Abdullah came running in screaming & crying with fright. he had been sent on an errand to the village & had delayed his return till dusk. he told us that he had seen a ghost rise out of the desert & it came towards him, he was in a great state of terror. we think he must have seen the wind lifting up a little column of sand as it does sometimes & it probably looked very weird in the half light these people are very imaginative & superstitious. they believe this place is haunted. & hate to be out alone after dark.

We are having a very hot spell just now, they call it the second summer, it is not possible to

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work after 12. so Miss C & I get up at 5.15 & are starting work in the temple by 6.15. we rest in our rooms after lunch till 3.30 & then manage to get in an hour & a half's work before sunset. but even then it is very hot because the sand absorbs so much heat, when we get back in the evening my clothes are all wet through but I don't feel in the least distressed, as soon as we get in we all have hot baths. that means that a large copper bowl big enough to sit or kneel in is placed in our room, also a large can of hot water & ditto of cold, so we are able to get a really good sponge down. I wash my vest & stockings at the same time & put all clean things on for dinner, the things I wash are dry before bed time.

We have had a present of a live turkey from one of the guards of the temple, this gift has caused quite a lot of discussion, because it is against camp rules to accept presents, one has to make very definite rules because the natives will bring such extraordinary

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34/5

things & we should get all sorts of horrid insects & unpleasantnesses about the place, also we would be bound to give a gift back & the situation would become impossible. We tried to explain this to the owner of the Turkey, he is a splendid old fellow & he was dreadfully upset, it seems Miss Calverley had been very good to his family when his children were ill & as he is a very poor man he had nothing he dared offer, so he reared this Turkey from the egg so that he could bring it to the camp when she returned. under those circumstances it was impossible to refuse, but it was an enormous gift for one of these people to make. it was like an english farm labourer rearing a horse to give away. Miss C is writing to the Army & Navy stores to have a blanket sent out from England for him.

We are planning to make a festival of Abu Christmas for the native children & have a decorated tree for them. I want to make some paper toys for it, so could you enclose scraps of bright

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coloured stiff paper in some of your letters.
 pieces the size of an ^{big} envelope will do. you will
 find lots in my chest, if you lift out the box
 that was my dolls house you will find another
 underneath. there should be lots of coloured
 samples there. I have a roll of gum paper here
 with me. so could make all sorts of paper toys if
 I had suitable paper.

Oct 26th We had the police officer to dinner,
 he does not go about with such an army at his
 heels as El Gerzawy did. but his outpost is not
 so important. he has not long left the military
 school, he speaks English very well but has to
 think his sentences out carefully. & we have to speak
 slowly & distinctly. I think he enjoyed his dinner
 party, we had soup. roast turkey. potatoes & beans.
 caramel custard. watermelon & pomegranates
 & coffee.

Oct 27th Two gentleman from the village called this
 evening & drank coffee & made polite remarks; several
 times, in fact in each lull in the conversation they
 enquired after my health & I assured them that I was

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34/7

very well thanks be to Allah. Miss C & I are asked to attend a ceremony which is to be held for the benefit of one of their wives. This is called a Zar & is really a ceremony for propitiating a possessing spirit. It seems one of these ladies has got into a highly nervous & hysterical condition, so a witch doctor is called in. The women sit in a circle beating drums & swaying their bodies about, the possessed woman gets into a sort of trance & the spirit speaks through her mouth & demands certain things to be given it. The curious thing is that these spirits are male & the voice is the gruff deep voice of a man, after the demand has been made the things are got. Then another big ceremony is arranged. The women work themselves up into this hypnotic state & the offerings are made to the spirit. This is the part of the ceremony we are to witness. This special spirit has demanded 3 gold rings, a fish talisman, white robes & a sheep. I shall be able to tell you all about it later on. Of course the men can not go to this, we are very lucky to get the opportunity.

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34/8

Oct 28th. We have been keeping a doctor's shop today, at dawn this morning just as we were starting off two women arrived, a pathetic little wife of 15 with her mother & baby. This girl had a dreadful gathering on her breast. It looked as if it ought to be lanced. She said it had been bad for 10 days. probably the baby bit her & nothing was done at the time. The only thing to do was to send ~~her~~ her to the doctor at Baliana 11 miles away, Miss Calverley wrote a note for her to take saying we were willing to do any necessary dressings according to his instructions since it would be impossible for the poor child to make that journey every day. We are rather hoping she will be sent to hospital but of course they are terrified at the idea, she nearly cried when we said she must go to the doctor for treatment. This evening a man came with a great gash in his shin. He'd done it 5 days ago. It was a nasty cut but not inflamed or septic so we removed dust & dirt with lysol water put hot boracic lint on & bound it up. He is

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coming again tomorrow to have fresh lint put on. These people are so pathetic they have no idea how to look after themselves. they just go on suffering & have no idea how to save themselves so much pain by a little care & common sense. it is all as Allah wills. they think English people have some special power. they can get all the Epsom Salts they require in the village but they always come here for a dose. they say what we give them has greater power - so we dole out Epsom & get much credit there by. This sort of life is full of interest there is no chance to be dull here

Oct 29th Our man patient arrived very early, the lysol compress had done its work during the night & we were able to get the cut properly clean, it was a dreadful gash the bone was exposed, & the poor man had been going about with it uncovered among dust & flies for 5 days. we painted it with iodine, Miss G. explained that it would burn like fire, he said it did not matter & he never turned a hair during the operation. he went off neatly bandaged with

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34/10

much more faith than we have that all will be well.

This is market day & our day of rest, we had breakfast at 8 instead of 5-45. Miss C & I have been washing our more delicate garments that we do not like to trust to the native washerwoman, we had tubs outside in the shade of the house & Abdullah fetched hot water for us & carried the bowls of wrung out clothes ~~while~~ for us to hang them on the line it was a wash de lux.

I am enclosing a special stamp M^r Lebell may like to have it, it is only issued for a short time.

Will you ask Father to get me a couple of pencils with protectors, we want these protectors to use with short lengths of pencil. I think they will come letter post in a strong envelope. I think some of this news might interest Uncle Jimmie will you post it on for him to read when you have all perused it, I am enclosing

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34/11

the first lot of snaps. I am opening an account with Kodak's in Cairo & post all my films off for them to deal with

This is proving the Father of letters. there are so many exciting happenings & I want to tell you all about them. later on, when the weather is cooler we shall work longer hours & my letters will have to be shorter in consequence Yesterday I cut Capt Calverley's hair & shaved his neck, he'd been in to Bahiana to see about some things the blacksmith was making for him & came in absolutely cooked. & shouting for a hair cut at once - his sister was bathing so he siezed^{sic} on me for the job. it was such fun. he has curly hair & I was able to make a very good attempt. he said it felt cooler & that's all he cared about

Nannie has just asked me if I could get her some forget-me-not seeds. I promised to ask you to send me a packet when you are writing.

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34/12.

My wash was dry in ten minutes, it is now ironed & put away.

Let me know if any of my letters are excess weight I have no means of weighing them & Sandie takes our mail bag & gives it to the postman when he visits the village which has no post office

I really think I must bring this to a close, my pen is nearly dry

Heaps of love to you both also to

Pat & Mrs Childs

Your affectionate daughter
Myrtle.

P.S. I hope Father's letter arrived in time for his birthday.

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