

Arabah
April 14th [1931]

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Dear Mother.

I expect you will be wondering very much what got me up at 3:45 in the morning - You will remember my description of the great religious gathering we went to last year. It was held in the cemetery where there are several very holy sheiks' tombs just before the pilgrims start on their journey to Mecca. They spend the night in chanting the Koran & various fanatical religious performances. Then at dawn they indulge in other excitements in the way of camel racing, donkey racing & displays of horsemanship, as we had seen the night affair last year, we decided to go in the early morning this time.

At half past three our camels arrived, I woke to hear them bubbling & gurgling outside my window. We had breakfast at four o'clock by lamp light, & then set off in the ghostly light that comes before dawn. We had 8 miles to go across the desert, & we did it in

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an hour & a quarter. which considering we had a large escort on foot was pretty good.

As we drew near Beni Hamael we were joined by many others, on camels, donkeys & afoot all making for the same destination, some were splendidly attired slaves mounted on splendid trotting camels, some bundles of rags trudging along, or crowded five together on the baggage camel of a fortunate friend & the in betweens trotting along on their donkeys. It was a motley crew.

When we arrived at Beni Hamael the whole cemetery & adjoining desert were one cloud of dust. & such a pandemonium. there were camels galloping madly, urged by ^{the} wild cries & antics of their riders, who in several cases were standing on their backs. a camel in full gallop has the most terrific^{sic} action of any animal I have ever seen, it is a marvel how any man can remain or ever seated, let alone standing. they do not seem to have any

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organised races. they do not start together, but just rush about, each man when & how he pleases.

We joined the onlookers, & were soon wedged in a long line of camels & their riders lining the course.

The people were very courteous & every where made way so that we could have a good view.

We watched the various displays of camel riding for some time & then went to see the horses.

The first group we saw were charging madly at the brick wall of one of the tombs. They would rush towards it full gallop, bringing the horse to a sudden stop a couple of yards away. It was marvellous horsemanship.

The horses were of course pure Arabs. They had gorgeous saddles, many covered with plates of pure gold. & they had their own music, wild shrill pipes, like the squealing of stallions played to the rhythmic beating of drums. This special music is never played except for the horses, & they love it. They prance & toss their manes & are never still a moment while it is

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being played. but when it stops they stand as quiet as anything. it is the most contagious rhythm one can imagine, even the camels got affected by it. Amice's camel was a lady & evidently very musical, she swayed her head from side to side & took first a step to the right & then a step to the left in perfect time to the music - it was funny & a little disconcerting for Amice as the camel next her was doing the same thing & occasionally they bumped - however nothing would stop her while the music played.

It was pretty to watch the horses dancing, their movements guided by the long lances their riders carried, they circled & pranced & reared & knelt, & all the time the men playing the pipes & the drums danced in & out with them - you can't imagine anything more wild & barbaric.

We stayed watching for about two hours & then having seen all the sights we started on our return. we were back at work in the Temple by 10 o'clock, but left off work early

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in the afternoon as we were so tired with our early rising & long ride. I was too weary to even write my usual letter so just sent a hasty note.

Our expedition was a wonderful experience but it had a slightly unpleasant aftermath as we have each got nasty throats, probably the result of the dust. with a crowd like that there were probably

lots of germs. if you'd only seen some of the garments worn by the very holy men, it was only the dirt that kept the threads together.

however we are gargling & cinammoning & taking every sort of cure so hope the trouble will depart as quickly as it came.

Lots of love from us both
Your affectionate daughter
Myrtle.

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