

Arabah  
Tuesday, Jan 6<sup>th</sup> 1930/<I>.

Dear Mother.

We have had a real lazy soûk day today. I amused myself by going up the hill that is close to our house & making a little sketch of the ancient mud brick fortress that can be seen from there. Ahmud & Abdullah carried my paints & a couple of boxes for chair & table, they were very interested in the camera lucida.

Wednesday My letter came to rather an abrupt stop yesterday as Nannie told us it was the Coptic Christmas Eve & they were holding a special service in the church all night. I thought it would be interesting to have a look in, Amice was tired, so Nannie & I set out with Sardic Ahmud & Mahmud as escort. It was a lovely moon-light night, our way was across the desert & past the wall of an ancient fortress, a little further on is another of these ruins but not deserted like the first, for the little Coptic community have built their homes & their church within the shelter of the huge walls. This church is said

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to date from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century & it is probable that during that period the Copts, being a persecuted people had fled into the desert & taken refuge in the ruin of a previous civilization.

We passed through a gateway in the wall, news of our coming had gone ahead & the priest's son came to greet us. we said all the suitable greetings & proceeded to the church. (you have seen the photo of it) it looked very picturesque by night. The interior lit by wax candles & lamps of oil with a wick floating on the surface. The service had already started, the people were all squatting on the floor on mats chanting to the sound of brass cymbals, chairs were brought for us, & we were given each a little feast loaf of bread with crosses stamped on it. & a wax candle, (made with bees wax). The service was a little difficult to follow. There was a sort of holy of holys that only the priest & his acolyte might enter. It had two doors & a window like this.  (The decoration is wood paneling) the priest used to go

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inside & put on various robes & sometimes he'd show what I supposed were sacred vestments, to the people through the little window. One of his robes was a long white garment with a monk like hood; on the breast it had a splendid Coptic cross embroidered in gold thread, & on the back, the same design in red. This was repeated on the hood; it was a wonderful picture when he stood with his silver cross raised to bless the people, the intent congregation crouching at his feet, the whole scene lit by flickering candle light, it made me think of the secret meetings of the Early Christians described in "Quo Vadis" besides the chanting there were readings from the Coptic Gospels, first in the ancient language & then in modern Arabic.

We stayed about an hour. (the service would continue until two in the morning) then made our offerings to the church & departed quietly.

As we were leaving we met the local police officer going his rounds, he insisted on escorting us home, & offered me his horse to ride while he

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 refuse, so I mounted & went on ahead with one of  
 the soldiers, it was a lovely horse, an Arab of course,  
 he was very prancy, probably because <sup>he thought</sup> he'd something  
 very strange on his back. I was home long before  
 the others & I did enjoy it. It seems years since I'd been  
 on a horse.

I received Mrs Child's letter today  
 please thank her for me. The L.H.G. & the two  
 mag's also came. thanks very much.

Love to you both  
 your affectionate daughter  
 Myrtle.

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