

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLE.

A DIARY OF THE WAR.

BY ANON.

(Continued from page 256.)

IN 1918 I had six weeks' leave, my first for four years, so I left my family of sick men and went to India and up to Kashmere for a lovely blow among the hills. I camped out a little beyond Siringar. It was a never-to-be-forgotten run from Rawalpindi in a touring car with my bearer—a naughty old thing I had had for about two years, really an excellent bearer, though sometimes very tipsy. I lunched with friends at Murree. What views of range after range of endless mountains, capped with snow and then on again through forests of every imaginable tree with many birds of gaudy plumage swooping among them and occasionally, an impertinent monkey was to be seen up among the branches! It is a wonderful road, its many precipitous ways leading sheer down to "where the Jhelum flows." For the night, I rested at the Dāk Bungalow at Uri. Although the kansama said there was no room, I ordered my bearer to get out my camp bed on the balcony or anywhere, for it was pitch dark and my wretched driver had brought no lights, and for the last two hours, the chokra had sat on the bonnet of the motor holding my electric torch, the only light we could produce between us. So I certainly was not going to budge an inch more that night. We had run into many a bullock cart, which rest in sidings all the day and meander along the roads by night, carrying their stores and provisions up to Kashmere. I had forty fits I can tell you along those steep ways in utter darkness and the welcome lights of that Dāk Bungalow gladdened my poor nervous self not a little. We were on our way again by 8 a.m. next morning, motoring through avenue after avenue of poplar trees, near Baramulla, with the everlasting snow mountains looking down on us. Nanga Parbat, 26,628 feet high, was beautiful through a haze of vivid blue. Half my leave, I camped out and did some climbs, and the other half, I lazed with friends in a house-boat on the Dahl Lake or skimmed about in our own shikara trailing our hands through the delicious icy water. Further up the lake, one comes to the Nishat Bagh and "beside the Shalimar," those romantic gardens the very name of which conjures up such romance and colouring, and takes one back to the days of the Moghul emperors and their ladies of the harem.

My leave passed all too quickly, but I managed to return to Bombay via Delhi, Agra, Cawnpore and Lucknow, spending a day or so at each. Of course, I was enchanted with each place, though sad, when I thought of the associations with those days of the Indian Mutiny. The Kashmere Gate, at Delhi, they say, is little changed since 1857, when it was blown in by the storming party. I

drove out to see the Kutab Minar about ten miles on the south side of Delhi, with the Kutab Mosque near by, and I passed on the way, interesting old ruins of cities. The Ridge, also of Indian Mutiny historic interest, lies in the other direction, and standing in some lovely gardens, near my hotel, was John Nicholson, as it were, still in command. The Palace within the Fort is so full of costly wonders of such beautiful carvings in marble that one longed to spend days there to thoroughly enjoy everything. Unfortunately, I was alone, and one really never enjoys anything if not shared with others. Then Agra, with its exquisite Taj Mahal. I stood transfixed that night about ten p.m., when I first visited that graceful tomb of Mumtaz-i-Mahal. There was a great moon just rising behind it, casting ghostly shadows around. No one, save Emperor Jahan, has ever raised a shrine so fair. It stands surrounded by trees in a lovely park, and one felt the presence of Allah in that sweet-scented garden as one gazed and gazed from the entrance gateway. I felt I was indeed on holy ground. Two rows of stately Cyprus trees, like silent mourners, lead up to the white marble monument with a channel of water dividing them. Inside the dome, is a white marble screen very delicately carved, enclosing the two tombs of Shah Jahan and his lady, and overhead, the little light perpetually shines, casting mysterious shadows around. I returned next morning to examine more closely all its indescribable loveliness, its mosaics and lacy carvings; and in one small rose I counted over thirty different pieces. Then at night I came again. There is much to see at Agra—Akbar's Fort, with its pearl mosque, designed by Shah Jahan, its gate of prayer, its hall of Public Audience, its Pavilion called the Jasmine Tower, made of spotless marble most beautifully carved, where once lived the lady of the Taj and where her beloved consort breathed his last looking towards her shrine by the river Jumna.

I so wished to see the old, deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri about 23 miles from Agra, founded by the Emperor Akbar about 1570. But owing to some disturbance all motors had been commandeered by Government, in case of need, and I was told it was utterly impossible in my short stay to get there. Nothing daunted, I hired a tonga and went to call on one in authority, told him my tale of woe, said I had just come down from Mesopotamia where I had been for two years, and this was my first leave in four years. I had to say no more. The perfect dear put a gorgeous motor car at my disposal for the afternoon and off I went, taking two sisters who I found at the hotel, leaving the other members of the hotel gnashing their teeth. Fatehpur Sikri is also full of interest, the Diwan-i-Am, the Mahal-i-Khas, the Elephant Gate, and the Pachise Court, where in the Emperor's day, slave girls brilliantly clad, acted as living figures in the game. It would take me too long to tell of all the wonders I saw in these noble cities. I only spent one night at Cawnpore and was haunted with massacre and Indian Mutiny all that night, thinking of the Massacre Gate where so many of our British men and women died, Wheeler's Entrenchment, the Memorial Gardens and the Monument built over the scene of those terrible events where men and women, alive or dead, went down that fatal well, where now the Angel of the Resurrection stands in white marble. Europeans only are allowed to walk in this lovely garden made sad with the

memory of "These are they which came out of great tribulation." I forgot to say, I came across lately, the little babe (now grown into a lovely stately lady in the autumn of her life) whom one reads about in that first letter that got through to England about the Mutiny. It came out in the *Times*, and a copy of that *Times* is in the British Museum now. This little child's father was in the Indian Civil when the Mutiny broke out, and was met at the gates of Delhi and told not to go into the city, and was instructed to take as many ladies and children as he could away. They had several skirmishes with the sepoys and the ladies loaded the pistols whilst he fired them off. Once they were all hiding under a bridge when a whole troop of sepoys marched overhead and the noise they created drowned the sounds of that little babe's crying.

Before leaving Cawnpore, I had to place my bearer in hospital. All India seemed dying that autumn of a bronchial influenza and the doctors thought very gravely of him, so I left rupees to pay for his nourishment and likely burial. A week later at Bombay a kind of hunted hare rushed into my room at 6 a.m., the morning I was embarking for the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. It was the faithful bearer. He had run away from hospital, as he felt better and knew that I was leaving that day.

From Cawnpore, I went to Lucknow for a day or so and stayed with kindly friends. It fascinated me more than I can tell. Here again, the Mutiny associations haunted one. The Residency, the Bailey Guard Gate, now in ruins and covered with my favourite Bougainvillea with a wonderful Indian sunset was a picture not easily forgotten, with the Union Jack flying over all.

I had a lovely calm passage back to my sick boys and a never-to-be-forgotten leave at the back of me.

Next came the rejoicings of Armistice. I was at Amara and I thought the whole Tigris had gone mad. Sirens blew and every steamer shrieked out its loudest for ages. Later, I was transferred to the Base to take over a big general hospital of 1,070 beds, and there I remained another year and three months and had a busy time among my lads.

The big ocean-going steamers came right up to our landing stage and many a convoy we saw off to Blighty. We never let a boat go by without a farewell wave.

Once I was detailed to take up money to pay the staff of sisters at Nasiriyah on the Euphrates side. I left by train one night, and was the only white creature on board. Being a frightened sheep, at the best of times, I hated it. A mass of shouting, screeching Arabs were on the train, and just as we were leaving the Base, a native official popped his head in and said, "If you have any money on you, be very careful of it as this train is robbed most nights." I dithered, and quickly put all I had inside my uniform. Nothing happened, except a breakdown. We sat in the desert for six hours until another engine was procured as our engine had broken something or other. The Arab guard of six men crept about stealthily with their rifles and fixed bayonets hung over their shoulders, looking very villainous in the moonlight.

When I arrived next morning, I delivered the money safely to the hospital there, and was taken later in the day to see Ur of the Chaldees away across the desert, the reputed birthplace of Abraham. A great big mound is all that remains covered at that time with a lovely purple flower. I stole a couple of old bricks with the bitumen used as mortar showing the marks of the straw in between, and there was some writing on them. A professor from the British Museum was there at the time investigating, with the help of many Turkish prisoners, and I waited until he turned his back before I popped the two bits of brick into my pocket!

Next day, headquarters kindly sent me down the Euphrates to Suk-Esh-Sheiyuk where we lunched with a political officer and wandered through the bazar and later went on downstream to see the wonderful, new cutting into the Hamar Lake which was made to enable boats to make a quick trip up from the Base. Returning, we stopped for a few minutes at a native village of reeds and mud. The Sheikh had once been hostile, but he asked us in, and we all sat on our haunches sipping his black coffee. All were well armed and wore sharp knives in their belts which gave me forty fits.

Then on again to Suk-Esh-Sheiyuk. Our launch was a nuisance and broke down several times. Time was getting on, and I was due at headquarters at Nasiriyah at 8 p.m. Some way up river, again something went wrong and we made for the side, while the native tinkered away with the engine. It was pitch dark now, but presently, a gorgeous moon came up from behind the palms and stealthy Arabs came out of the darkness, gazed at us and passed on. Jackals howled in the distance, and away across the river, shots were heard. My teeth chattered! A tug passed by, and I implored my escort, in not very polite language I own, to get their assistance. I knew it would be our last chance but he assured me the motor man could put all right. However, in a few minutes, no sooner were we started off again than some bolt flew out, and our steering-gear was out of action, so we had to turn round and pole down river back to Suk-Esh-Sheiyuk. Soon our poles broke, so we had to drift with the stream. Somehow the gods were good. We passed a dredger in midstream without running into her and managed to catch on to the bushes at Suk-Esh-Sheiyuk and land at the political officer's place. We knocked him up, and his servant kindly got us bully beef and tinned fruit, for we were hungry and it was getting very late. He then phoned through to Nasiriyah, and after prolonged ringings succeeded in awakening the man at the other end, and got headquarters there to send down another launch. Proclaim it not on the house-tops, but we did not get back till between 3 and 4 a.m. to find two kind little sisters with hot drinks awaiting us. That night I left by train for the Base and almost lost my two Ur bricks. About 2 a.m. my carriage door was quietly opened and a native attempted to creep in. I almost stoned him with my bricks, but thought better of it and gave him a taste of my boot instead.

(To be continued.)