



## A Visit to Basrah

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It was like a pleasant dream, only when I woke up it was all true. An invitation came asking us to come to Basrah for a little visit, and as we had the hot summer to look forward to, we thought we would run away for a fortnight. We started off from Kuwait at dawn in a small government steamer and arrived at Fao about 5 p. m. As we were to spend the night there we thought we should like to go ashore for a little walk. There are only two or three buildings there, a Post Office and Telegraph Station, but it guards the entrance to the river and a powerful searchlight plays from sunset till dawn. It was the first place taken by the British on their way up to Basrah in 1914.

The next morning at daylight we were off again. The date gardens on either side of the river looked so pretty and green and were such



INDIAN SOLDIERS IN BASRAH

a wonderful change after our Kuwait desert. We passed a number of launches and monitors, besides several large ocean-going ships, but it was not until we neared Basrah that we got a glimpse of what Basrah really had become. The river was full of ships of every description and all seemed very busy. Two large camouflaged ships had evidently braved the Mediterranean and their weird markings had perhaps saved them from submarines. We passed several quays belonging to different military departments and went alongside Bhoussa Pier. Although it was 1 p. m. and hot there were plenty of khaki uniforms to be seen. No time to be sleeping as in the old Turkish days. Presently we and our luggage were put into a friend's launch and away we went up the creek to the Mission House. On our left a building attracted our interest. We were told it was the new garrison church,

and on the following Sunday we had the privilege of worshipping there morning and evening. Both services were well attended and the Bishop of Lahore preached on each occasion.

We had time for a little rest and then were off to a Y. M. C. A. picnic. From then on the days were quite full. Our friends were most kind in showing us all the wonderful things to be seen. One day they took us in a car to see the different base camps. Beautiful concrete roads have been built and we sped along through the date gardens and then out into the big open spaces full of tents. After seeing the camps at Magill and Makina we stopped at the Makina Club for tea and to listen to the band. One could hardly believe that one was in Basrah.

We spent one morning going over the Post Office and it was most interesting to see the arrangement for each department—Artillery, Engineers, Cavalry, Infantry, etc., and last of all the letters of those who had been moved off to other places and those on leave. Surely there is as little delay as possible in the letters reaching their destination. Then we visited the Censor's Office, a place one has often pictured to one's self and wondered if all the letters really were opened and read or if sometimes they did not let them go through. Each language has its special censor and we were told that the only one they could not read was Welsh, so all the letters written in Welsh, and they are many, have to go to London to be censored. The railroad runs right up to the Post Office and the mails are put into the vans and started off to Baghdad and other places up the river.

Very often about sunset we used to take a walk and usually passed by the Labor Corps Camp. Their tents are in a date garden and the cleanliness and order are wonderful. During the day each tent was rolled up for several feet above the ground and the whole garden was kept swept and spotless. After sunset as we returned from our walk, the men had come from their day's work, and were sitting in groups talking or lying on their blankets resting. One wonders how long it would take these low-class Arabs and Persians to get back to their filthy way of living if they were left to themselves or would they really prefer the clean way. I doubt it.

We spent two evenings at the cinema. I believe there was a moving picture palace in Basrah during the last days of the Turks so that the three cinemas that are there now cannot claim to be the first. The hall is quite large and is almost always well filled. The front rows are filled with Arabs and Indians and behind them the Tommies sit. Then come the boxes and seats where the officers and Red Cross nurses sit. Down in the pit you can have ice cream and lemonade brought to you. The two nights we were there the films were all from America, some of California and some of cowboy life. The Arabs and Indians seemed to enjoy them immensely and laughed heartily at all the funny parts.

One afternoon a friend lent us a car and we thought we would go to see the Shaibeh battlefield. There is not much to see, I believe, just the graves of those who fell there. When we were some fourteen miles out of Basrah, right in the desert, our car broke down. Our chauffeur took things to pieces, screwed and unscrewed everything

he could, but the car wouldn't move. The sun went down and the prospects of getting home became fainter and fainter, when we noticed some tents a little way off. As our road had run parallel to the telegraph wires, one of our number went off to these tents to see if they had any connection with the telegraph. In the meantime two carriages came from Basrah. We stopped them and asked them if they were going back to Basrah that night. In each carriage there was a long narrow box without a lid, one end resting on the driver's seat and the other on the hood behind the back seat. At first they said they were not going back and when we pressed them they said: "No. The funeral won't go back to-night, and besides we have no lights. If you have a lantern with you we might come back for you." All at



A DARWISH AND RIVER ARAB WOMAN IN THE BASRAH HOSPITAL COMPOUND

once we realized that the long boxes were coffins containing corpses which were being taken to Zobair for burial and as there was plague in Basrah we hastened to assure them that we would not need their assistance.

Presently the one of our number who had gone to the camp came back saying that he had been able to wire to Basrah explaining the situation. He had also made the interesting discovery that the group of tents was nothing less than Zobair Railway Station, although it was three and a half miles away from Zobair. A train from Nasiryeh for Makina was due at 8:30. It was then about 7:15 and we sat in our comfortable car waiting for the time to pass. We offered to have a sentry from the station come to guard the car so that the chauffeur could go home but he said his orders were that he must never leave

his car and he could get on without food if we would just send him a drink of water from the station. We were at the station on time and as the train pulled up we were told where to find the first-class carriage. No tickets had to be bought. Our little train puffed its way into Makina and as it drew up at the Station which, like Zobair, was only a group of tents, the Station Master met us saying that a car would soon arrive from Basrah to take us home. It soon came and as we rode home the driver asked us about the breakdown and said he was sorry he could not have taken us but that he had been engaged that afternoon. He intimated that if he had been with us there would have been no breakdown. We sat down to our dinner at 9:30, glad to be safely back but pleased with all our experiences.

Our visit came to an end all too soon. There were more things to see, but we enjoyed every minute of it, and got a little idea of what it means to occupy a country. If British occupation means such a rapid advancement of all that we include under the term "Christian Civilization," one can only hope that the good work will go on.

