



In Pursuit of a Medical Diploma.

Necessity is the mother of exertion as well as invention, and the necessity of getting a Turkish Medical Diploma is no exception. Now there may be those who do not appreciate the value of a Turkish Diploma out here, but they are hardly to be found in the ranks of the Doctors, whose work has been stopped for lack of one. And so it transpired that when vacation time came, it seemed best not to spend it in catching butterflies, nor even in digesting heavy Arabic roots, but in the pursuit of big game in Constantinople.

It was an interesting trip from Kuweit to Constantinople. We said goodbye to Mr. Pennings, one fine June evening, and had a beautiful night run on one of the Skeikh's water boats to Fau, which is a small town just at the mouth of the river. All well so far, but against the swollen spring freshets, and a hard North wind, the rest of the trip to Busrah was rather vigorous exercise. We had only a row boat, for the water boat left us at Fau. It took three days, and a part of that time we had to pull the boat along with a rope, to make any headway at all. Three boatmen and one other individual pulled along with the rope. One boatman waded, by the side of the boat, keeping her nose out of trouble. We found our bare feet not as tough as they used to be, and we reached Busrah somewhat the worse for wear. Once arrived, we found we must wait four days for a Baghdad steamer.

A four days' stay in Busrah was decidedly not in the schedule, for my time was very short, still a visit with the Dr. and Mrs. Cantine is compensation for a good deal. Thursday night we got on board, for Baghdad, and six days later we had our first look at that city of ancient romance, but present mud walls, narrow streets and dirty children. At Amara there was an hour's visit with Mr. Moerdyk, and we almost wished it might have been four days. The C. M. S. Mission is the only Protestant work in Baghdad. Dr. Johnson and those with him appear to have about ten times the opportunity that they can overtake. From him I learned that there is the choice of two routes from Baghdad, the carriage road to Aleppo, taking eighteen days, and the Post to Damascus, ten days. We were warned that the Damascus trip is a hard one, but "Young Doctors rush in where angels fear to tread," and we went with the Damascus Post.

Of course, there were certain supplies to get for the ten days' trip, but the cuisine bears little resemblance to Delmonico's, and the supplies were comparatively few and cheap,—some flour, some rice, some bread. Out of my inexperience, I added some dates and cheese. Four skins for water were another necessity. If I had known then

what the inside of those water skins tasted like, I should have made a desperate effort to wash them out, but "Where ignorance is bliss it is folly to be wise."

Friday night we were off, about half an hour after sundown, and thirty-six hours later we rode into Hit, having been in the saddle about thirty hours of that time. Hit is the last point on the river. Here we fill our water skins, change our camels, and prepare for the desert ride of seven days to Damascus. This time, however, we had to wait a day at Hit, because there was only a single fresh camel ready, and we needed two. One for the postman and one for myself. It was in Hit that I saw the most lonely man that I met on the trip. A single isolated Protestant Christian, from up in the North country, around Mardin, he was working for the Irrigation company, and holding fast to his confession, even in the face of considerable persecution. We had prayers together, and I promised to look up the question of expense to Beirut College, for he wanted to send his boy there next year. Monday morning bright and early we were off. We watched the sun rise over the city of Hit, now some distance away. Hit is built on quite an eminence and its one solitary minaret is visible for a long distance. Four hours from Hit we passed through Kubeisa, a little village clustered around a small water supply, and from there on we set our faces to the West till we came to the next human habitation, which was to be Damascus itself.

The desert between Baghdad and Damascus, is as monotonous a piece of country as can easily be imagined. For the first three days, the soil was apparently of the same character as between the Tigris and Euphrates. Roughly half way across, there are two wells, separated by rather less than twenty-four hours' riding. Everything utterly bare and desolate. The landscape as flat as a parlor floor, a great part of the time, as far as the eye can reach, not the least roll discernible. Not a sign of a human habitation, and indeed at first, no sign of life of any sort. On closer observation, however, this last judgment has to be changed. An occasional rabbit, a solitary jereboa, a few sparrows, two butterflies, any number of small lizards of several varieties. Nothing very remarkable, except that such animals can live out in the midst of that dry and empty waste, a hundred miles from any water that we know anything about.

There is nothing poetic in riding a camel, nor is there anything very difficult, provided you get a good one. We did not make any speed records on this trip. The camels went along at a fair walk, just as many hours a day as was possible. In this case, the amount of time in the saddle was a trifle better than eighteen out of the twenty-four, on the average. The postman explained at the



THE EAST GATE, DAMASCUS.

start that he would, of course, be more or less delayed by my presence. I take considerable pleasure in the fact that twice out in the desert, when time came to start in the morning, it was the "Inglese" who woke him up, and started the caravan out. A good deal has been written about the endurance of the Arab. It may not be all myth, but so far I have never seen one, whom an American, who likes to rough it, need fear to measure up against. We all had very fair mounts, and made a very cheerful company as we rode along. There were three of us, the postman, myself and another Arab on his way to Damascus. We took turns at singing, for the crowd's entertainment. When my turn came I contributed from a limited repertoire of Gospel Hymns. The style of music was new to them, and they seemed to enjoy it very much. I wish they could have understood the words.

It was toward the end of June and in the middle of the day the sun was very hot. Looking off to the distance, the layers of air next the ground reflected light like a sheet of water. Often if the landscape afforded a small hill, it would be reflected in surface of this sham lake. Most of the days, the air was perfectly still, for a large part of the day at least, and small whirlwinds were very common. I have counted as many as eight or ten in sight at once. Some very small, but others as clear cut as flexible stove pipes and extending from the earth up to a cloud above. It was very surprising too, as hot as the days might be, the nights were very cold. Starting off in the morning two hours before the sun rose, we rejoiced at its appearance. The same sun that a few hours later was to make us fear sunstroke, even with a topee and an umbrella.

Three days out we come to the first well. To reach it we made a dip to the South for a short distance, coming to a broken rocky country, where the hills seemed to be of considerable size. Leaving the well, we emerged shortly on to a level country again, but apparently on higher ground. From this point on, the country was more rolling and diversified to some degree by hills. The soil too, was of a distinctly different character. For a whole day or more we walked along what looked like the bed of wadi, the ground here being a sort of red sand. And so our camels walked and walked, and walked till one morning the postman said that Damascus was only about twenty-four hours away.

We rode all that day and into the next night till we arrived, just about twenty-three hours. Dr. McKinnon of the Edinburgh Medical Mission has a most beautiful hospital in Damascus, and he received his unexpected guest most cordially. I was palmed off on the head nurse as a tramp, not at all a difficult process. The worst hardship of the trip was going without washing my face for four