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**EGYPTIAN SERVICE**

**1902-1946**



# EGYPTIAN SERVICE

1902—1946

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SIR THOMAS RUSSELL PASHA, K.B.E., C.M.G.

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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## FOREWORD

ONE of my objects in writing this book has been to give an account of a period in Egypt's history which contributed much to the country's development and of which little record has been made : I mean the late Cromer and immediately subsequent period of the English Advisers and their provincial inspectors, especially those of the Ministry of the Interior, which is the equivalent of our Home Office, otherwise the internal government of the country.

Time passes, memories are short, records are destroyed, and many of the present generation are unaware of the constructive work done in those days by the Inspectors. We were happy in our lives as being unconcerned with politics ; our duty was to get the greatest efficiency possible out of the material at our disposal, and to keep ourselves in the background, while helping to build up the great administrative machine necessary to the governing of a country of seventeen million people.

I have tried to keep this book factual, and to express as few opinions as possible on persons or politics. This has not been so easy in the middle portion of the book where I describe my life as Commandant of a city police force, but there again I have kept to facts. Political crime has unfortunately become common all the world over. I have had my share in dealing with it, but my standpoint was that of a policeman whose duty it was to obey the orders of his Minister ; these were to suppress crime, and to bring the guilty to trial.

In the last part of the book I have given the high lights of my sixteen years' fight against the Drug Traffic, into which the Egyptian Government threw its full weight, giving me every facility in its power, thereby greatly strengthening the hand of the International Committee at Geneva and very largely

## Foreword

contributing to the elimination of the Illicit Drug Traffic in Europe.

If at the end I have allowed myself to express some views on the future, I have again confined myself to what has been my objective for the last forty-four years, and to what I have repeatedly urged in my official reports ; that is, to measures for the betterment of Egypt's police and the increased happiness of her people.

In writing a book on Egypt, I may be criticized for not mentioning her modern industrialization, her cotton factories, her spinning and weaving works, her electrification plans and other big schemes. The reply is that I tell the tale of the Egypt of which I have personal experience. The material of the book has been assembled from old diaries and reports written between 1902 and 1946, when I left Government service. I go no further than this.

*Note on Transliteration.*—The system of transliteration adopted in this book is based on the common pronunciation of Arabic and is the one used by the Egyptian Government in the Survey maps, except that the circumflex accent used by them to show where the stress of the voice falls, has been omitted from the text but retained in the glossary. The only accent used in the text is the ˆ representing the Arabic letter *ain*, which consists of a strong catch in the voice.

*The Author would like to express his thanks to the Editor of the "Field" for permission to republish certain material in Chapter 8 ; to Mrs. Nina Colmore for permission to reproduce two of her paintings, and to Major Crichton-Stuart for permission to include one of his drawings ; also to Mr. R. H. Greaves, Major Frank Hurley (of Sydney, Australia) and Mr. Alfieri for photographs which they have kindly allowed to be reproduced.*





OIL SKETCH OF FAMILY SHOOTING PARTY AT WOBURN  
BY LANDSEER, 1828

*On the back of the Landseer sketch there is pasted the following legend written by Lord William Russell :*

*"Portraits in the little sketch of a shooting party at Woburn (by Edwin Landseer) now in my dressing room.*

*The two figures riding are Ld. Spencer and my father, the nearer is Ld. Spencer—the further, in white hat, my father. Next comes my cousin Francis Russell with a cigar and Lord Jersey. I had forgotten the grotesque figure beyond Francis Russell. It is Mr. Chester, a constant visitor known by the nick-name 'Chig.' The very tall man is the Hon. John Talbot—with him my cousin John Russell. Last my brother Charles with his arm upon the shoulder of John Shelley (Sir John Shelley of Maresfield). The long legs striding in front, with two guns, represents Lord Auckland, afterwards Governor-General of India."*

*Wm. Russell.*

## CHAPTER I

### *WHEN I WAS A BOY*

THE first illustration is a reproduction of an oil sketch on panel by Landseer, in my possession, of a shooting party at the family home of Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire in 1828. The figure second from the left in the white top hat, on a white horse, is my great-grandfather, the sixth Duke of Bedford, and the young man with the curls on the right of the picture, with his left arm on the shoulder of another sportsman, is my grandfather, Lord Charles James Fox Russell. The diminutive figure third from the right is Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister of Reform Bill fame. As a record of a shooting party of those days, the picture has always been one of my most treasured possessions, but I sometimes wonder whether Landseer, who often stayed at the Abbey for months at a time, imagined the scene out of his own artist's mind or whether 'Little Johnny', the Prime Minister, and others of the company did actually carry their guns at the dangerous angles depicted: true, the guns were probably Joe Manton muzzle-loaders, but the Prime Minister might have had his mind elsewhere and forgotten to draw the charges or take the caps off the nipples. I would also like to know to what breed the black dog in the foreground belonged: the Clumber spaniels with the head keeper touching his hat in the left background are unmistakable, but the animal in the front might, from the look of him, be anything from a Gordon setter to a mixture of collie, plus lurcher, plus anything.

My grandfather, who was a younger son of the Duke of Bedford and a brother of Lord John Russell, was a great horseman and hunted with the Oakley and other hounds until he was eighty, when he gave up hunting but continued to ride until



## *When I was a Boy*

the day of his death at eighty-six. His ideas of suitable exercise for an old gentleman of over eighty were peculiar ; instead of pottering round on some quiet old pony, he chose always to ride three- and four-year-old hunters, his theory being that young horses had not had time to learn tricks like the older ones and it was on these green youngsters that he would spend his time riding about the park at Woburn, with a basket on his arm, mounting and dismounting to pick mushrooms. I remember so well his spare old figure, in breeches and leggings and grey square hat, exercising his foxhound puppies or inspecting his prize bullocks in the paddock.

He was for many years Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons, with residence in the Clock Tower, with the result that my father, Henry Charles, after being brought up in the country at Woburn, found himself sent to school at Westminster, which must have been a sore trial for a boy of country tastes and upbringing. He made up for it, however, by frequenting the sporting resorts of Westminster where he learned useful, though not necessarily Queensberry, boxing, whilst amongst his haunts were the bird shops of dealers like Hawkins of Great Bear Street, to which he took me many years later. From Westminster he went to Trinity Cambridge, where he belonged, as I did later, to the poor sporting set and was noted for his smooth-haired terriers, which held their own against all comers in Shellaby's rat-pits.

From Cambridge he went to Doncaster to train for the Church under the famous Doctor Vaughan and many was the good story that he had of those days. On one occasion Dr. Vaughan told his class of young curates, who were known as ' Vaughan's doves ', that he proposed to give them instruction in the visiting of sick parishioners. " You will go outside the room," he said to my father, " and I will lie down on the sofa and pretend that I am a sick man. You will then come in as a visiting clergyman and talk to me." My father, who was always rather a wag, waited for a bit outside Dr. Vaughan's study and then came in to find Dr. Vaughan stretched out on the sofa. Not knowing

## *My Wollaton Home*

what on earth to say, he approached the recumbent form and lifting his right hand as if in pain and sorrow, said in his saddest tones: "Anthony! Anthony! Drunk again!"

Having passed his probationary period with, I gather, some difficulty, he was appointed to Lord Fitzwilliam's living at Wentworth in Yorkshire, where he hunted regularly with the Fitzwilliam hounds, and on marrying my mother was given the family living of Wollaton in Nottinghamshire.

We were all six children born at Wollaton Rectory, where my mother died when I was seven. My father never married again and brought us up entirely himself with the aid of a series of governesses, who were a source of intense annoyance to him. The rectory was a charming, spacious old house with a beautiful garden, the pride of my father's life. This old house had not originally been the rectory, but became so when various relatives in succession held the family cure. Wollaton Hall, a vast Italianate palace of Elizabethan date (now become the property of Nottingham city) and its eight-hundred-acre deer park, with its splendid double avenues of lime trees radiating in four directions, and its lovely lake, belonged, with several surrounding villages, to my mother's family, the Willoughbys, who took their name from Willoughby-on-the-Wolds in Nottinghamshire and their title of Lords Middleton from Middleton in Warwickshire. A famous member of the family was Francis Willughby (the old spelling), the naturalist, who died in 1672. This family has always pursued the interests of country life, whereas the Russell family, besides being great landowners, have always played a prominent part in English political and public life.

My grandfather lived most of the year at Birdsall in Yorkshire where he raised a famous herd of Shorthorns, bred all his hunt horses and hunted his own hounds five days a week. He also owned the deer-forest of Applecross in Ross-shire where, in the autumn, he seldom missed a day's stalking on that lovely forest. When he died, my mother's eldest brother, Digby, succeeded and carried on the same traditions, but only came to the Hall at Wollaton for a couple of short visits a year, with the result that

## *When I was a Boy*

my father became the 'squarson', a combination of squire and parson, a type which has now practically disappeared from English country life. As boys, my brother and I had the free run of Wollaton Park and its woodlands, lake and bracken, besides unquestioned sporting rights to everything outside the park walls, and great was our joy when my father came out with us for an afternoon's marauding, each of us armed with a stout ash plant, carrying a bag of ferrets and followed by half a dozen dogs of various breeds. I once saw him arrive just in time for an afternoon's pheasant shoot in the park all dressed up in top hat and Sunday clothes in which he had been burying a parishioner; without wasting time, he sat down on a log while one of the keepers pulled off the black trousers he was wearing and out he stepped in his breeches and leggings, all ready for the shoot.

As a good parson his church was always full, but so was his game-larder. There was nothing that he could not catch; from him we learned the secrets of coarse-fishing, night-lines for eels, bow-nets baited with red peonies to attract tench, wire snares for rabbits, horse-hair springes for rats. "Aniseed for rats, valerian for cats," he used to say. He was a first-class trapper with one habit, typical of him, which was to let all his rat-traps off on Saturday nights so as not to have to kill anything that he had caught on the Sabbath day. He carried this practical application of his religion to daily life in many charming ways. Nothing, such as a book or a vase, must ever be put on the top of a bible; if at family prayers he found an earwig sheltering between the leaves of the family bible he would give it the benefit of sanctuary, pick it up gently with his finger and thumb and deposit it unharmed on the hall floor. All the time that I can remember him he had an early ride every morning before breakfast and occasionally a day with the South Notts foxhounds.

In his time he had been very good with the gloves, and I remember a village fête in the Rectory grounds where he had provided singleticks and boxing-gloves for the lads of the village. My father, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up, was sparring with

## *My Squarson Father*

some village boy, when a butty little man, a complete stranger to us all, asked to be allowed to have the gloves on with His Reverence. Father could not very well refuse, but he quickly realized that he was up against a man who knew his job, and by careful avoiding tactics survived the first round. Not wishing to be knocked about in front of the entire village, especially as next day he was due for his Sunday sermon, my father slowly edged his opponent down the sloping grass lawn to the unseen edge of a sunk fence, where he caught him a good one and knocked him backwards into a bed of nettles at the bottom of the ditch: by the time that the astonished man had recovered his feet and found his way back to the lawn, the parlourmaid had appeared with two mugs of rectory ale, and Parson Russell had again maintained his reputation for skill and tactics in front of his assembled congregation, and made a firm friend of the Ilkeston cabman pugilist who had come over to reduce the rector's reputed pride.

Two fields below the rectory there was a pond of which we had the sporting rights: it was muddy and reedy and a grand place for duck and snipe, besides teeming with big pike, bream and tench. Starting with a .410, I had shot rabbits and even a wild duck on the wing before I was nine. Unfortunately the pond was close to the canal towing-path, and its water-lilies and bulrushes were a sad temptation to passing marauders. At that time we had a huge Great Dane dog whom we had trained to give chase to, but not injure, these trespassers: as we came out of church one rainy Sunday morning, we saw through the telescope that always hung on a nail just inside the rectory front door, a man swimming about in Martin's pond making for a patch of water-lilies that father had surrounded with yards of line, festooned with eel-hooks, to catch the legs of any such naked trespasser. He told us to get the dog and put him on the lead, and, all in our Sunday best, we advanced down the fields in skirmishing order to the edge of the pond, where we found and confiscated the man's clothes. Father then blew his police whistle, and the man swam out on the far side, only to

## *When I was a Boy*

be overhauled by the Great Dane, who mounted guard over him until we could get up to him. We then had a quarter of a mile to do back to the rectory, Father holding the naked prisoner's ear with one hand and his Sunday-go-to-meeting umbrella over his top hat with the other, all in full view of the congregation streaming down the main road from church to their Sunday dinners.

With it all he was a great Christian and a first-class parson, popular, respected and beloved by the whole countryside. My father had one brother, George William Erskine Russell, many years his junior, who was as confirmed a Londoner as my father was a countryman. George Russell held various government offices, the Under-Secretaryship for India and the Home Office amongst others, and was also a well-known writer.

I was nine when I went to Mr. Tabor's famous private school at Cheam in Surrey, where I learned little or no book work but gained much profit from an under-master's deep knowledge of birds, bugs and wild flowers. Regular games were not my strong point and a number of times I got a caning from Arthur Tabor for shirking cricket in favour of hunting for stag-beetles.

From Cheam I went to Haileybury under that famous head-master Edward Lytton and spent six years in Le Bas House under the able care of Mr. Fenning. Here I acquired a fair classical education, was senior officer in the school Cadet Corps, won the heavy-weight boxing, and found ample outlet for my love of birds' nesting and natural history in the unspoilt thickets of Hertford Heath. Behind the school the football fields were bordered with pheasant coverts, let to a city syndicate, and in the summer term I found it a paying business to snare the rabbits that came out at night to nibble the grass on our football fields. To get my snares up in time for seven o'clock chapel I had to get out of the school the moment the gates were opened at six o'clock. One successful morning I was delayed and had to run for chapel with no time to rid me of my burden, and I well remember my anxiety as I took my place in the choir next a master who, thank goodness, failed to notice that while I chanted

## *Cbeam and Haileybury*

the General Confession I had two fat rabbits bulging out of the poacher's pocket in the lining of my black school jacket. Milk, flour and onions could be bought at a cottage on the Heath, an illegal gas-ring was produced from under the floor-boards of the study, the rabbits' guts were disposed of after dark in the basement furnace of the dormitories, and a luscious dish of boiled rabbit and onion sauce changed hands for half a crown.

To cover myself against possible discovery and punishment I took the opportunity one day, when a tea-guest in the house of the Assistant Headmaster, to discuss with him the academic hypothesis of the rights, legal or otherwise, of a boy at school catching rabbits on school property. I found the Rev. Hensley extremely ignorant on the details of the Ground Game Act, and eventually obtained his guileless assent to my theory that, as my father paid for me to be a member of the school, I, through him, was entitled to a share in the rabbits that ate the grass of the Twenty Acre football field. Justified by this unsuspecting assurance, I continued my profitable adventures until I saw detection threatened by the advent of a new keeper with a dislike for schoolboys and a very intelligent retriever dog.

About half an hour's run from the school was the big estate of Balls Park, the property of Sir George Faudel Phillips, then Lord Mayor of London. I made a point my very first summer of currying favour with his head keeper by finding and reporting to him stray pheasant and partridge nests in the hedge-sides round the Skipper Fields, thus gaining his friendship and the freedom of all his woodlands which were out of bounds to schoolmasters and scholars alike, but where I, as a friend, could wander and smoke to my heart's content, and often get an hour or two's ferreting or pigeon shooting.

Those were the days of enormous pheasant battues with celebrated guns like Lord de Grey among the guests, but walking the woods with the beaters I was not impressed with the genuineness of the sport when I came across a stack of wicker baskets in which some hundreds of live pheasants had been brought down from Covent Garden Market to be turned out in the

## *When I was a Boy*

coverts, only to be blown to pieces as they barely topped the shooters' heads.

From Haileybury I went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where I joined the poor sporting set, played rugger in the winter term, village cricket for the 'Pelicans' in the summer, and whipped in to the Trinity foot-beagles in the Lent term, with the added attraction of driving the two-horse brake and sometimes a four-in-hand. Most of my spare time was spent with my terriers and ferrets, driving round the countryside in my dog-cart and clearing the farmers' rick-yards and hedge-rows of rats. An occasional day's fox-hunting with the Cambridgeshire was a luxury that I could not often afford, but perhaps for that very reason enjoyed far more than did the rich young bloods of the Athenæum Club.

My first year I worked fairly hard at classics, which I rather enjoyed. My second year found me drifting along in that pleasant Varsity life, my mind still not made up as to what my future profession was to be: all that I had decided was that I had no intention of staying in England, and my inclination pointed towards the Indian Civil or the Indian Police. In this frame of mind I went home for my second long vacation.

After a week or two at home at Wollaton, we heard that the uncle and aunt were due for their annual short visit to the Hall. This was always an anxious time for me as I had to do everything in my power without being too obvious to so please that kind pair in order to extract from them the annual invitation to stay for a month at their Scotch home of Applecross in West Ross-shire. I think it must have been after Sunday morning church that they walked with us through the Rectory gardens and uttered the magic words.

Applecross sounds so English, but in old Gaelic it is Aberchrosan, or 'the mouth of the river Chrosan'. Of the many Scotch forests I know, Applecross in those days had a particular character and charm of its own and was to my mind the ideal Scotch property. It was hard to get to in those pre-motor days, and once there, we boys were not expected to leave it for about a

## *West Highland Paradise*

month. If you take the Highland railway from Inverness you arrive eventually at Kyle of Lochalsh on Scotland's Atlantic coast and from there you take ship in one of McBrayne's small steamers that go to Stornoway in the Hebrides. After an hour's steaming from Kyle you come off Applecross Bay where the steamer slows down and decants you and your luggage into the row-boat that comes out, if it is fine enough, from the Applecross post-office. To get away from Applecross you reversed the process, sat on the pier at five o'clock in the morning and, weather permitting (which it did not always do), rowed out in the dark and clambered up the slippery ladder of the slowly moving steamer. The only other means of access in those days was to get off the train at Strathcarron, three stations short of Kyle, hire Willy Mackenzie's two horse 'machine' and drive (or mostly walk) for five hours over the pass of the Beallach, whence you dropped down out of the mist to the old-fashioned comforts of Applecross house and its home-farm. The property was 80,000 acres in extent and stuck out like a closed fist into the Atlantic, with nothing except the islands of Skye and the Hebrides between it and North America. Part of its charm as a sporting property was that the road over the Beallach finished at the house with no further roads to the north, thus making the property an undisturbed island of sport. Few Scotch deer-forests can have had the attraction of Applecross, with its old-world traditions, its infinite variety of forest and its views from the 3,000-foot tops right away across miles of the Atlantic to the twinkling lighthouse of Rona.

Past the house to the sea ran a short steep river which could change in a night of rain from a clear trickle among the stones to a five-foot peaty flood with the pools and reaches alive with sea-trout and salmon fresh from the sea. To keep the larder supplied with grouse, we boys would be sent off for the day for a nine-hours' walk round the north coast, where five brace of grouse over the Irish setters was considered a good day.

My constant ambition was to achieve the triple event or red-letter day, which meant a stag, a grouse or a black-cock, and a



## *When I was a Boy*

fish. Three times in several years I did it. Up at six in the dark, a soaking walk round the cornfields on the farm and a lucky shot, sitting or otherwise, at a black-cock or grouse, back to the house for family prayers at eight o'clock, a quick breakfast and off on a deer-saddle for a day's stalking at the farthest end of the forest with a long walk home if successful and the chance, if back early, of a fish from the river in the evening.

Once the triple event began with my tickling a ten-pound salmon in a pool near the house and having to run a fast half-mile to be in time to join the household at family prayers in the smoking-room, where the stuffed heads of royals and hummels looked down upon us from the dingy walls. Once, though not at Applecross, I beat all my previous records. The house was a strict one, Sunday was very Scotch and no sport allowed ; I was due to go south on the Tuesday and was to have my last day's stalking on the Monday. Unknown to anyone, late on Sunday evening I set a dozen night-lines in the loch, baited with fat lob-worms that I had brought all the way from Wollaton ; these I lifted at crack of dawn and was rewarded with three trout and a couple of char. Off to the hill and an easy shot at a stag at midday ; coming back in the evening we tried a difficult stalk on a dead flat moss and eventually got within 150 yards' range of the only good stag in a mob of small stuff and hinds. I had borrowed a double .303 from my host and downed my stag with the right barrel. As we lay watching the effects of the shot an old cock grouse elected to perch himself on a tussock halfway between me and the stag : satisfied and elated that my stag was dead, I told the grouse that he should have the other barrel, drew a bead on him and fired my left. To my enormous surprise, I saw the grouse fall dead, shot bang through the head at ninety yards. The stalker's face was a study. Late that evening I walked in to the assembled family in the dining-room, produced the headless grouse from my pocket and told the story, supported by witnesses, of my record day of 3 trout, 2 char, 2 stags and a grouse.

## CHAPTER 2

### *EARLY TRAINING*

IN September of 1901 I was at Applecross again and, coming in late one evening from the hill, with just not enough daylight in which to dash down to the river for a possible fish or to the Manse cornfield for a fighting duck, I called it a day, bathed and dressed at my leisure and got into the drawing-room early for a quiet pre-dinner glance at the papers. But someone was there before me. In front of the blazing fire I saw a small, dapper, sunburned man warming his coat-tails : he introduced himself as my cousin Percy Machell, of whose existence till that moment I had not even heard, and he explained that he was home on leave from Egypt.

During the next fortnight we saw a lot of each other. He held the position in Egypt of Adviser to the Minister of the Interior, after a long career in the Egyptian Army, where he had raised the 9th and the 12th Sudanese battalions and fought in all the battles of the early Sudan campaigns. I found his stories and accounts of his life and work in Egypt most attractive and must have shown my young and growing enthusiasm, as before the end of his visit he had invited me to spend my coming winter vacation with him in Cairo in order to see the sort of life led by his Inspectors of the Ministry of the Interior and to make up my mind whether, at the end of my Cambridge career, I would like to be a candidate for a Sub-Inspector post which would fall vacant in a year's time, and for which he could nominate me, provided I took my degree. It did not take me or my Cambridge tutor long to decide to seize the golden opportunity and, with a fortnight's special extension of leave, I spent a delirious six weeks in Egypt, accompanying Percy Machell wherever he went.



## *Introduction to Egypt*

I well remember arriving at Port Said with a lot of high-spirited subalterns whom I had met on board the P. & O. steamer and letting off some of my superfluous energy by getting out of the narrow-gauge train and racing the crawling engine, to the great annoyance of its driver and guard. Early next morning I stepped out on to the veranda of Machell's house in Gezira in the early sunshine of a Cairo winter morning, and for the first time saw below me the Nile which was to be the centre of my life for so many years to come.

During my month in Egypt I sampled everything, an inspection trip in Upper Egypt on Machell's official steamer on the Nile, duck-shooting at Qatta, racing and dancing in Cairo, and it is small wonder that my answer was definitely yes when he finally asked me whether I thought I should like to work in Egypt for my living. All I had to do was to make sure of my Cambridge degree and improve my French, both of which I did the following summer, finally reporting for duty in Egypt in October, 1902.

I soon found that Machell had very definite ideas about young men from the Varsities but, luckily for me, the life he insisted on one leading coincided with my own inclinations ; play hard and work hard was what he did himself, and I found no difficulty in doing the same. He was a great believer in thoroughness in everything ; any carelessness or casualness in work was anathema to him ; to pass over something not understood without asking about it, when one could have done so, earned a well-deserved telling off. One of the worst crimes in his eyes was to say that one was unwell ; to say that you felt like death merely drew the unsympathetic reply that there was a vast difference between feeling like death and being dead.

One of the first lessons a sub-inspector had to learn was to acquire, in Machell's own words, " a respectful and alert manner " and, to enable me to do this, I was sent straight away from the delights of the opening Cairo season to the Coastguard Depot at Mex to the west of Alexandria, to be drilled in the ranks and pushed about by native drill sergeants just like any Egyptian

## Early Training

cadet officer joining that service. This was an excellent system as the Coastguards was a different department from the Ministry of the Interior and it mattered nothing to anyone how much of a fool one made of oneself while under their instruction as one would never meet the same men and officers again.

Gordon Morice Bey commanded the Coastguard Depot at the old fort of Mex, known as El-Shafakhana, the hospital, into which it had been converted at some time from its original purpose as one of a string of forts built in the early eighteen hundreds by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha to protect Alexandria from the sea. The fort was surrounded by a deep, dry moat crossed by a drawbridge and stood in the middle of a desolate area of salt swamp and quarry holes between Lake Maryut and the sea.

Morice lived in the O.C.'s quarters in the fort and Armstrong, his second in command, in a cottage outside. Armstrong took charge of me on my arrival and, like a well-trained hostess at home, asked me if I would like to see my room at the fort. I saw it and hoped that my face did not give me away: it was a large, whitewashed room with nothing in it whatsoever. With permission to use the Director-General's rest-room for one night, I went in to Alexandria and returned the proud possessor of a folding iron bedstead, an iron washstand, a tin bath, a chair, some nails and carpenter's tools, and with this *première installation* I spent three very happy and amusing months. Finding my room not quite as uninhabited as I had thought, I instituted a daily hunt and wrote up on the whitewashed wall a game list which included an odd scorpion or two and a few centipedes, besides scores of the usual smaller game. Of feeding arrangements in the fort there were none, and Armstrong and I took our meals together at a Greek café built out on piles over the sea. The first few weeks were fine and warm, but as the winter came on it rained constantly; wrapped in our mackintoshes, we sat shivering at our solitary table with a tarpaulin tented over our heads to keep off the torrential rains that poured through the gaping wooden roof. A grubby Greek boy combined the offices of cook and waiter and served us with an unvarying diet

## *Training at Mex*

of quails and red mullet. Amusement, however, was always to be had in trying him with quotations of classical Homer, betting how many fleas we would catch in our respective napkins, and waiting for a tug from the fishing-lines that we set baited over the veranda and kept tied to our wrists as we ate our simple meal.

From the Coastguard point of view I was a raw recruit who had to be trained from the very beginning, and it would have been quite useless to explain that I had commanded my Cadet Corps at school and knew my infantry drill by heart: anyhow there were two things I did not know, one was the Arabic language and the other was the words of command which were still given in Turkish, a relic from the days of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha. My instructor was a huge Egyptian sergeant without a single word of English, possessed of a voice like a bull and a deep-rooted conviction that the way that he had been trained was the only way to train others. Being the only one that year in the officer recruit class, I received the full blast of this instructor's energy. The first morning at seven o'clock punctually I paraded in tarbush, sweater and flannel trousers and was served out with my first equipment, consisting of leather belt, cartridge-pouch and bayonet-frog: the sergeant then produced a tin of soap, a small dry sponge and a piece of heel-ball. I deduced that his intention was that I should apply the soap to the belt for cleaning purposes and, seeing no water handy, I made a sound like "*moiya*", meaning water, to which the sergeant reacted by shaking his head and saying "*mafish moiya*"—"there is no water". He then took the tin of soap and, with some deep preliminary throat-sounds, proceeded to spit generously into it and show me how to produce the necessary lather with my little bit of sponge. Thus it was on the first day and thus it was every day for the belt and pouches. A week later, having shown myself an apt pupil at infantry drill, I was promoted to a horse and saddlery and nearly fainted at the idea of having to spit for the cleaning of an entire saddle and bridle, but my anxiety was relieved when the sergeant produced a bucket of water for this major operation: "spittle for belts but water for saddles"

## *Early Training*

—and so it was till the end of my training. The only thing about grooming the horse that I thought a little unfair was that I had to groom him in the morning after he had come back all filthy from some other officer's night patrol among the sand-dunes of the seashore. Having passed with credit as a private of horse and foot in a squad composed only of myself, I was then put in as No. 2 in the front rank of a squad of fifty Sudanese infantry recruits whose friendly black hands caught hold of mine and pulled me into place when I missed the Turkish word of command to form fours. No amount of kindness, however, could shut my nose when down wind of my dusky companions as they sweated at physical drill on the march round the barrack square. Finally I was made to drill the squad myself, the sergeant quietly giving the Turkish words of command for me to repeat in a bellow to the squad. I called them to attention and to shoulder arms, but the sergeant was not satisfied and proceeded to demonstrate where my word of command lacked emphasis and how the words should really sound. I, not knowing what he meant, repeated most of it, caution and all, parrot-like, at the top of my voice as a command to the squad, with the result that a humorous black in the front rank exploded with a laugh like a tyre bursting and was led out by the ear in front of the parade to receive a couple of resounding slaps on his rubber face from the enraged instructor with a telling-off for "insulting his English officer".

During my time of training I used to spend several nights every week on patrol with the Coastguard officers, walking along the beach in the dark, visiting the sentries or lying up in the rocks waiting for smugglers to beach their boatfuls of contraband hashish. It was all very exciting and good fun as a complete and utter change from my recent life at Cambridge.

My three months at Mex and Alexandria were crowded with new experiences. I was particularly anxious to go out on a desert patrol with the Coastguard Camel Corps and had, as I thought, fixed up with a German officer named Gaetner, who commanded the force at Marsa Matruh, that he would meet me

## *A Restless Night*

with a patrol on a certain date at El-'Imayid station on the Maryut railway. Full of excitement I took the morning train from Alexandria and arrived punctually at El-'Imayid rendezvous to find no Gaetner and no patrol. I hung about all day thinking that he was bound to turn up, and let the only return train in the day go back to Alexandria without me. As evening drew on, I realized that I was there for the night, and started looking around for accommodation. Near the railway station I saw an Arab camp and presently a bearded sheikh came and offered me the hospitality of his tent but, being new to the country and filled with crude ideas of oriental treachery and danger, I made haste to decline his well-meant courtesy and set about exploring the station building, which consisted of two small rooms, one of them labelled as the gentlemen's waiting-room. Having my ten days' desert stores with me, I made myself a good dinner and with my rugs under me laid myself out for the night on the wooden bench. The first few hours of heavy sleep soon turned into a nightmare of alarms and discomfort. Sensing something in the room, I saw by the moonlight that the intruder was the station cat which kept coming in and out by a broken window in search of station rats ; then weird sounds outside puzzled me, till I got up to see whence they came and found an old Sudanese watchman armed with an ancient Remington rifle and a penny whistle upon which he was murdering the old music-hall tune of *Two little girls in blue*. At my request he ceased his piping and I dropped off into semi-slumber, only to be awakened again by burning pains on my face and wrists. Weary and stiff from my wooden bench, deep sleep eventually possessed me till dawn broke and I gradually realized that something had happened to my face which prevented me seeing out of my eyes ; my wrists, too, were swollen to twice their size. On the wall near the bench something caught my eye, and on examining it I saw a column of squat, brown insects climbing upwards towards the ceiling. I then realized that I was having still another new experience and that these were bugs, and hundreds of them at that : fat as pigs from the meal they had



## Early Training

taken from every exposed part of my person, they were hurrying home with the dawn, calculating, no doubt, that the next evening they would again get their exact range and drop from the ceiling on to the unconscious white man below, whose tender skin was such a welcome change from an everlasting diet of tough, unwashed *Bedu*. I was eager for revenge and, opening my clasp-knife, started harpooning the noisome beasts until, on reaching twenty-five brace, I realized that I was wasting my energies. Later in the day I caught a train back to Alexandria and spent two days in bed recovering from my first experience of bug fever.

While I was doing my training with the Coastguards at Mex, practically the whole conversation, if it was not about leave, pay, or the attraction of the Alexandria cabarets, centred round the principal job of the Coastguards, which was prevention of contraband by sea and land, and particularly contraband hashish. This drug was, and still is, the favourite drug of the Egyptian lower classes, and in those days was produced exclusively in Greece, where the particular variety of hemp plant, *Cannabis indica*, was grown in large quantities, the drug being produced from the resinous flowers of the female plant. Considerable quantities were smuggled by sailing-boats and ships' crews into Alexandria and Port Said and at points along the north coast, but the biggest consignments were landed in Tripoli outside Egyptian territory and carried by Bedouin caravans across the Libyan desert to the Nile Valley. To intercept these bold and well-armed desert smugglers was the main task of the Camel Corps Section of the Coastguards, who had a hard and risky life, mitigated by the good rewards paid on seizures. The Coastguard officers were miserably paid, but they reckoned on adding to their salaries several hundred pounds a year by these rewards. Confiscated hashish in these days was sold by the Alexandria Customs at public auction on the written undertaking by the buyer to export the stuff from Egypt, with the inevitable result that it was often merely taken out to sea and smuggled in again, this time bearing the Government seal. Needless

## *Police Instruction in the Slums*

to say, the Coastguard officers raised no protest against this practice.

Night after night I used to be regaled with stories of these desert fights, the skill of the Bisharin trackers, the bravery of the Sudanese Camel troopers and the rich share-outs of the rewards. Many a cold and rainy night I spent crouching behind rocks on the foreshore waiting for contraband to be landed. By the end of my stay at Mex I was just as hashish-minded as any Coastguard officer and was longing to be in on a big desert show. As I have related, however, my long-hoped-for desert patrol from El-'Imayid failed to materialize through no fault of mine, and, my depot training finished, I had no further excuse for prolonging my period of probation with the Coastguards merely on the chance of another desert patrol.

It was decided that before taking up my appointment as Sub-Inspector of Interior in the provinces I should be put through a month's intensive instruction in the routine work of the Alexandria police. For this purpose and to save me the expense of living in a hotel I was given the rest-room of a small Coastguard fort, named Tabiet 'Adda inside the Gabari dock area. The place swarmed with rats which every night scavenged the earth-closet, and it was no surprise to me to learn that both the previous English occupants of the building had contracted typhoid fever. My days were spent in police instruction at the Manshiya police station near by and my nights till 2 a.m. at the Labban police station in Sisters Street, all the lowest quarters of this cosmopolitan seafaring city. The Labban area contained the registered prostitute quarter called the *Gineina*, where the tariff was as high as a dollar, and the famous Kom Bakir slum, where the recognized price of two piastres (fivepence) was often violently disputed. For sheer squalor, filth and viciousness nothing can have equalled Labban on a wet January night in those years, and I could have strongly recommended it to anyone who wished to cure a nice young man, fresh from England, of any preconceived idea as to the glamour of the houris of the East.

By January, 1903, I was considered to have acquired enough

## Early Training

knowledge of police drill and procedure to start my life as a Sub-Inspector of Interior, which I did in the Beheira Province, with headquarters in Cairo, under the stern and efficient tutorship of George Hornblower, known to all as Burugi Bey, *burugi* being the Arabic for bugler.

I had only been with him a few days when news arrived that Lang Anderson, a prominent citizen of Alexandria, had been attacked and nearly killed by Arabs at El-'Amiriya in the Maryut district, where he had gone to inspect some land. Maryut belonging for administration to Beheira Province, Hornblower sent me off there at once to follow the case, so I went in to Alexandria for the night, the next day taking the early morning train on the Maryut railway for El-'Amiriya. There I found a Turkish police officer in charge of the enquiry. I spent the next three days with him and a force of mounted police rounding up the guilty Arabs. In my hurry to get to the scene, I had brought neither servant nor baggage and so had to share the common food-bowl and bedroom with the Turkish Police Officer, who snored all night, and a Sudanese Officer-in-Command of the Bodyguard on the Khedive's Maryut estates.

It was, therefore, with some misgivings that I heard from Hornblower, who by now had joined me, that His Highness the Khedive was coming out that day to visit his estates. As the Royal train drew up at the station, Hornblower and I stood to attention on the platform and the Khedive asked Hornblower for an account of the case while I, unshaven and dirty, kept discreetly, and as I thought successfully, in the background. On my return to Cairo some weeks later, Percy Machell, the Adviser, told me that the Khedive that morning had presided over a Council of Ministers (at which the Advisers were always present) and had taken the opportunity to criticize English inspectors in general and two in particular: these two inspectors, he said, he had recently encountered in the districts and had found one of them very bad-mannered and the other very badly dressed. I identified Hornblower as the rude one and myself as the dirty one, and felt it rather hard that anyone should fail to appreciate

## *The Cairo Hierarchy*

that my dirt and beard were due to four days' adventurously roughing it in the wild.

As a newly-joined Sub-Inspector of Interior, spending most of my time in the provinces, I should not in the ordinary way have been brought much into contact with the hierarchy of the Government in Cairo or had much opportunity for learning about it, had it not been for two facts. The first was that George Hornblower, under whom I served for my first two years, was a very able man who knew the country and the intricacies of its government system, was a fluent scholar of written and spoken Arabic, was a terrific worker himself and one who took the trouble to explain things to those under him. The second fact was that Percy Machell, the Adviser to the Interior and my chief, was my distant cousin and went further in kindness than many much closer relations would have done by giving me a room in his Gezira house whenever I came to Cairo from the districts during my first year. There at his hospitable table I met all the senior British officials of the day, men like Sir William Garstin, Sir Eldon Gorst, Lord Edward Cecil, Sir Malcolm McIlwraith and many others of Lord Cromer's right-hand men, and by keeping my mouth shut and my ears open I was able to hear discussed all the high politics of those interesting days: this, to a young man of twenty-three just starting his career, was of very great value and enabled him to understand many of the whys and the wherefores of what was going on around him which otherwise he might have taken years to grasp.

My life and work in Egypt divide themselves into two distinct parts: from early 1903 till March, 1911, I was a Sub, later a full, Inspector of Interior in the provinces, while from 1911 to 1913 I was Assistant-Commandant in Alexandria and since then have been Assistant-Commandant and Commandant in Cairo. As it happens, this division of my life coincided with the great change in British policy in Egypt when Gorst, as Consul-General, and Chitty Bey, as Adviser to the Interior, initiated the policy of gradual British self-effacement, which in our case meant the withdrawal of British inspectors from the

## *Early Training*

provinces in 1924. Before describing my life in the provinces I shall try to explain briefly the political situation as I found it, the central government organization, the provincial government and the police of those days. The year-by-year struggle by Egypt for constitutional government and independence will be found fully described in the books of Lord Cromer, Lord Milner and Lord Lloyd.

I shall devote my next chapter to explaining briefly the position of England in Egypt as it was when I joined the Egyptian Service. I shall then attempt to explain three essential features of Egyptian government, the understanding of which is necessary to the reader of this book. They are (1) The Capitulations ; (2) The Parquet ; and (3) The Mudir and his relations with the Inspector of the Interior. In the following chapters I shall describe life in the provinces as an Inspector of Interior saw it in my time, still today so unchanged as regards the life of the people. I shall then describe life in the cities as I saw it, first as Sub-Commandant of the Alexandria Police, and later as Sub-Commandant and finally as Commandant of the Cairo Police.

## CHAPTER 3

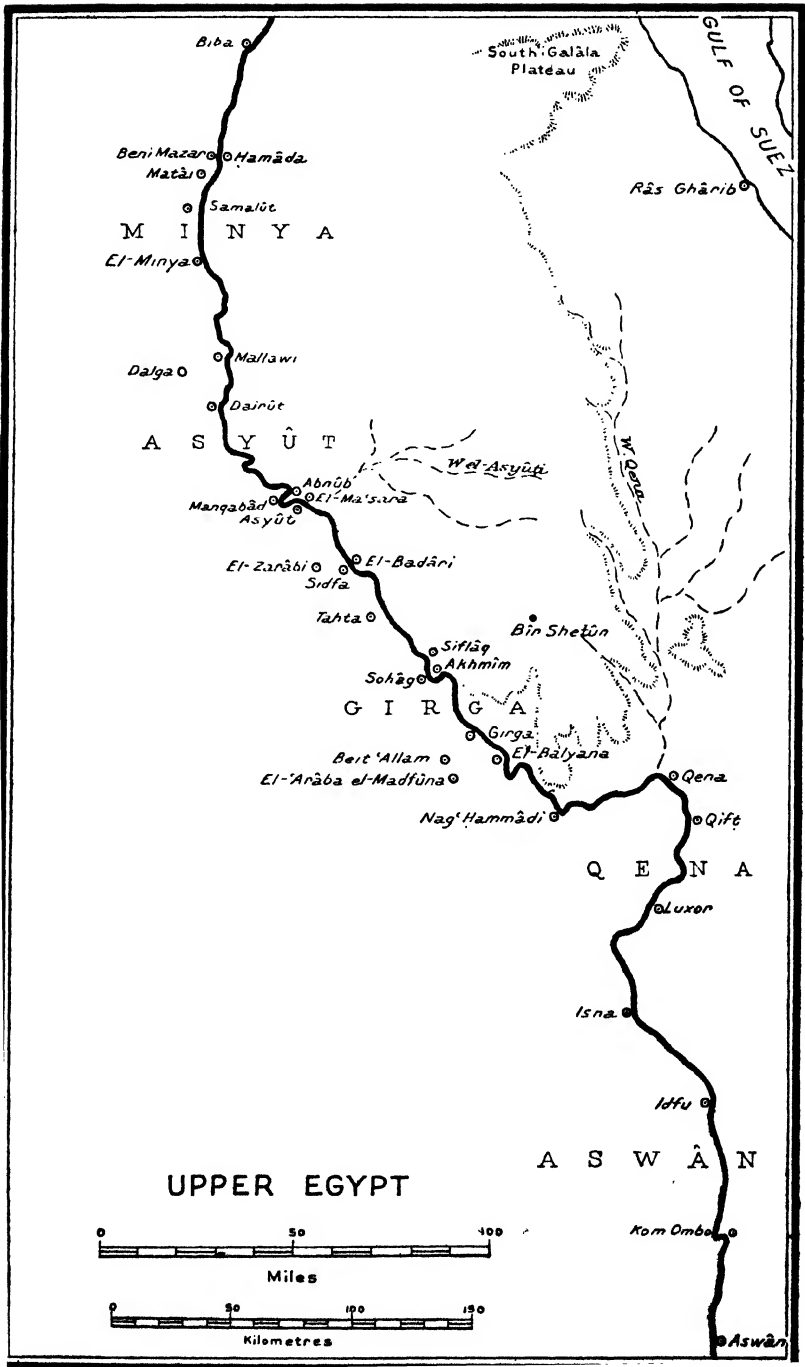
### THE DUAL SYSTEM

THE political situation in Egypt in the early nineteen hundreds is best explained by quoting from Lord Lloyd's introductory chapter to his book, *Egypt since Cromer*. He says :

It may be said then that in 1904 the British Occupation had attained almost unqualified success in restoring the finances of Egypt, and in the engineering achievements which were essential to the prosperity of the country. In both these departments of state activity British officials had taken over the actual control, and in both they had wrestled victoriously with the material difficulties which confronted them. It was not essential in these fields that the people should actively co-operate. If they did nothing more than refrain from obstruction, a very full measure of success was still possible. It was otherwise in departments more nearly concerned with the social and moral life of the people. Here there were problems much more complex to be solved. Was the occupying power to assume a full control of these departments also and force upon the people by executive action new standards of behaviour and new habits of life? This would have been entirely incompatible with the policy of early evacuation and of holding as far as possible a merely advisory position, which the British Government had decided upon and proclaimed to the world. . . .

Such, briefly, was the measure of progress which the British Occupation had secured for Egypt by the year 1904. The departments of Finance and Public Works could claim a very considerable success, the departments of Justice, Education and the Interior had been compelled or had decided to restrict their aspirations . . . and here progress was not so marked.

The Occupation had achieved these results in spite of the fact that it stood outside, and had no openly recognized part in, the Government



## *Composition of the Government*

of Egypt. The British officials were the servants of that Government, the Consul-General<sup>1</sup> was, by legal status, merely one of many accredited representatives of foreign powers. But . . . there was in Egypt an army belonging to the power which he represented—and the happy result of this astonishing phenomenon was that what the British Consul-General said had to be listened to by the Egyptian Government and what their own British servants said had also to be listened to if the same Consul-General so indicated.

Meanwhile the *de jure* Government was at this time divided into seven departments, presided over by Egyptian Ministers. In addition to the five above mentioned there were departments of War and Foreign Affairs. This Council of Ministers was the Khedive's Advisory Council, and the Khedive was the Government fulfilling *de jure* all the functions of governmental authority, except in so far as his powers were restricted by the over-lordship of the Sultan or by the privileges reserved to foreign residents under the Capitulations. . . . There was in each mudiriya (province) a Provincial Council elected upon a universal suffrage. There was a Legislative Council of thirty members, fourteen of whom were nominated by the Government, fourteen elected by the Provincial Councils and others by the more important towns. There was a Legislative Assembly of eighty-two members consisting of six Ministers, thirty members of the Legislative Council and forty-six delegates elected from among those who paid direct taxes of not less than £30 per annum. These two bodies did not have any powers other than advisory except that no new direct tax could be imposed without the approval of the Assembly and, in practice, therefore, their views had as much or as little importance as the Ministers chose to accord them. The same was not the case, however, in regard to the views of the high European officials who were to be found in all the departments. These officials were in theory either subordinate or advisory to the Minister but in the event of important disagreement, behind the official was the authority of the Occupying Power and His Majesty's Government had made it perfectly clear that it expected its views on important matters to be accepted by the Government of Egypt.

A paradoxical feature of Egyptian administration which

<sup>1</sup> Officially styled H.B.M.'s Agent and Consul-General, subsequently High Commissioner and later Ambassador.



## *The Dual System*

showed itself at every turn and which must be explained in advance was the Capitulations. Their history is long and complicated and has been fully dealt with in the books of Lord Cromer, Lord Milner, Lord Lloyd and others, where it is clearly shown what a nightmare they were, with the Foreign Powers clinging to them and the Egyptians fighting to be rid of them. Historically they dated back to the ninth century, when the Caliph Harun er-Rashid (786-809) first granted guarantees and commercial concessions to the Franks. These concessions were continued by the Ottoman Empire throughout the Middle Ages with the purpose of encouraging foreign traders to visit Turkey with the assurance of freedom of travel, inviolability of domicile, independence of Turkish jurisdiction and extra-territorial jurisdiction of their own. By modern times these Capitulations, originally intended as a protection to European traders against arbitrary treatment by oriental rulers, had become an intolerable burden on Turkey and other ex-Ottoman countries like Egypt, who found themselves unable to tax the large foreign business concerns that were flourishing in their midst or to control foreign criminal elements who battered on the country and sheltered themselves behind their Consular Courts, whose powers in criminal affairs were often derisory.

In a cosmopolitan city like Alexandria or Cairo crime cases constantly occurred in which there were accused of several nationalities, each with his own Consular representative and jurisdiction. Occasionally it was possible to get agreement that the Egyptian Parquet should make the inquiry for everybody ; more often, as many different inquiries had to be made as there were different nationalities of accused. In the case of an Italian accused of crime, he and the witnesses for both sides had to be sent to Ancona in Italy for trial ; sentences for crime in the Greek Consular Courts were heard on appeal in Athens, British appeals in Malta, and so on. No entry into a foreign domicile could be made without the presence of a Consular representative, and in the case of Greeks no permission could be obtained for perquisition by night as this under the Greek Constitution was

## *Egyptian Judicial System*

illegal in Greece itself. No wonder that foreign crime flourished and that the police heaved a sigh of relief when these international fetters were removed from their wrists.

The organization of the Egyptian police was, and is, much the same as that of most countries. The basic difference between it and the English police is that the criminal code of procedure, as followed in Egypt, is founded on the Code Napoléon, under which the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences before the courts is conducted by the Parquet, the Government prosecution department of the Ministry of Justice, whereas the police are part of the Ministry of the Interior. When a crime occurs, the first duty of the police officer of the district is to notify the Parquet and then to proceed himself with all speed to the scene of the crime and open the inquiry. The Parquet official usually arrives somewhat later and may either take over the police inquiry and continue it or start an entirely new inquiry himself or delegate the police officer to complete the one that he had begun. In any case, the police officer takes his orders from the Parquet. If after inquiry the Parquet are satisfied that they have sufficient evidence for prosecution, the case is passed to the *Juge de renvoi*, who decides whether or not there is a *prima facie* case for prosecution : if there is not, he files the case as untrue or for lack of evidence, whereas if the *Juge de renvoi* is satisfied that there is a good case against the accused, he passes the case for trial to the Criminal Court, where eventually the Parquet official who made the original inquiry prosecutes the case. This system of dual control has the advantage of checking any irregular action on the part of the police, but it also has the disadvantage of furnishing an excuse to either side for inefficient handling of the case ; to give good results the system needs the best of working relationship between police and Parquet and this is sometimes absent, with bickering and prejudice to public security as a result.

Provincial life was in those days very unattractive for the few Government officials living in discomfort in a small town with no social amenities, no cinemas and no clubs, with no intercourse

## *The Dual System*

of families and nothing to do except work and intrigue. This dullness and discomfort of life in the provinces has been one of the greatest hindrances to the formation of a civil service of quality in the country. For example, a young man of good family decides to enter the police as a career, and after passing through the college finds himself posted for instruction to Cairo or Alexandria : he leads a pleasant and agreeable life for a year or two and then finds himself transferred to some completely uncivilized township in Upper Egypt. When the time comes for him to marry, no Cairo-bred young woman of his social status will consent to such exile, or if for family reasons the marriage is inevitable, with the husband away in the villages and the wife amusing herself in the cities, it soon comes to grief. In the last forty years, however, life in the chief provincial towns has much improved and bears little resemblance to the times of which I write, but there is still much to be done to improve the social conditions of provincial life and thus encourage better elements to join the police and other branches of the administration.

Egypt, at that time as now, was divided into fourteen provinces, the *mudiriya*, each with a Governor, or *Mudir*, at their head : the Mudir was a high official of the Ministry of the Interior and in those days had very wide powers, especially in local administration and public security. Each *mudiriya* was divided into a number of districts, *markaz*, with a civilian police official called the *Mamur* in charge and a force of mounted and dismounted police under his order : the chief police officer of a *mudiriya* was the Commandant who took his orders from the Mudir. As Inspector, one's dealings in the Ministry in Cairo were almost entirely with the Adviser, the English Director-General of Public Security and the English Director of Personnel ; except for introduction on appointment, one was never brought into contact with the Minister, though one might have relations with the Under-Secretary of State. In his province, however, an Inspector was in daily contact with the Mudir, to whom he made his suggestions on the conduct of affairs in the province and, if

## *The Mudirs*

unsuccessful, reported to his Adviser in Cairo who, if he thought fit, took a similar line with the Minister. In extreme cases of disagreement the matter was taken still further, reaching its final instance when Lord Cromer, the Agent and Consul-General, had to 'mention' the matter to the Khedive. Thus our ceiling was the Adviser, but our daily contact was our Mudir, and the success of our relations depended upon the character of the Mudir, on our own knowledge of the province, our tact and our self-effacement. I have always resented the reputation that uninformed and prejudiced opinion ascribed to Interior Inspectors of being mannerless, rough-shod Englishmen, who came into the Mudir's office in cloth caps and smoking a pipe, who bullied their Mudirs and threatened them all the time with adverse reports to the Adviser. In my eight years in the provinces I worked with many Mudirs of varying character, some of the old Turkish type whose direct methods of administration one often envied and kept silent about, some of an elderly, rather spineless type who were only too glad to shift responsibility of decision on to the English Inspector, and latterly the new style Mudir who theoretically resented the presence of English Inspectors in his province, but often lived to admit and appreciate their intimate and often superior knowledge of the district. Never once in those eight years did I suffer from impoliteness from an Egyptian official in my province, and I hope that any that are still alive will say the same of me : we had our differences of opinion, we had our tugs-of-war, but all in the best of tempers, at any rate on the surface. I believe that similar good relations prevailed between most of my colleagues and the Mudirs whose provinces they inspected.

This, then, was the Government organization into which I was introduced at the age of twenty-three as an extremely small cog in the machine. After two years as a Sub-Inspector I became a full-blown Inspector of Interior responsible direct to the British Adviser : as he advised his Minister of the Interior so I, as his deputy, in my smaller way, advised the Mudirs of my provinces.

## CHAPTER 4

### *THE FELLAHIN*

ANYONE studying the statistics of crime in Egypt, as compared for example with crime in England, would put Egypt down as a criminal and disorderly country. If they did not know the country, they would, from the statistics, assume that it was a country where life and property were unsafe and where the Police and Law Courts were inefficient, but they would be wrong to a large degree, and I will attempt to explain why.

I must begin by quoting some figures showing the average number of crimes committed annually in the country during the last five years, and I will then take the figures of murder and attempted murder and divide them into Urban and Rural.

Under the Code Napoléon offences are classified as crimes, délits and contraventions according to the penalties laid down for each offence. Crimes correspond roughly to indictable offences in England and are punishable by death, hard labour for life, hard labour from three to fifteen years, and detention from three to fifteen years. These offences include homicide in all its forms, arson, rape, kidnapping, armed robbery and certain other offences.

The population of Egypt in 1946 was estimated at seventeen million, made up of five million in the towns and twelve million in the villages. The average number of crimes committed annually in the five years of 1940 to 1944 was 7,900, of which 1,800 in the four cities of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Suez, and 6,100 in the provinces. Out of this total of 7,900 crimes there was an average annual total of 2,957 murders and attempted murders, of which 212 were in the four cities and 2,745 in the provinces.

## Crime

The net result from a brief study of these figures is that the commonest crime in the country is murder, either accomplished or attempted, particularly in the country districts ; that 70 per cent. are premeditated and that, of rural murder, 80 per cent. are for reasons of vengeance and 18 per cent. only for gain : figures also show that a murder is attempted or committed every three hours of the day in the country districts and that, of these, 67 per cent. are committed at night.<sup>1</sup> As I have said, 80 per cent. of village murders are committed for motives of revenge, and it is here that lies the explanation of why Egypt is a country of much crime without being essentially a criminal country.

The Egyptian *fellah*<sup>2</sup> (peasant), as one meets him in one's rides through the fields and villages of Egypt, seems to be a peaceful, law-abiding and hard-working fellow with an excellent sense of humour, and the last thing that you would accuse him of would be criminality. A very few days, however, of residence in the districts bring one up against this murder complex. Robbery with violence and cattle-stealing are also rife, but that is largely a speciality of the semi-sedentary Arabs, as opposed to the *fellahin*. Murder is so common that it barely excites comment ; it is a private affair which hardly affects the community. Eighty out of every hundred of these murders are the result of private feuds which in other countries would either not occur or would be settled in the Law Courts. Not so with the *fellah* : the man who commits a murder (or hires someone to do it) is the same peaceful peasant that you saw working in the fields, but with the difference that he has suffered, or imagines he has suffered, some slight against his own or his family's honour and has changed from the genial fellow that he was before into a reckless murderer if his enemy is at hand, or a cold, calculating schemer for future vengeance if that enemy is absent. Regard for the consequences to himself of his projected crime, he has none.

Many of these murders are the result of the *thar* (blood-feud),

<sup>1</sup> These figures were quoted by Mohamed Bey Babli (at one time Director-General Public Security) in a lecture at the Anglo-Egyptian Union in 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Plural *fellahin* ; accent on the last syllable in both words.

## The Fellabin

which is a thing that he cannot escape ; he did not cause it, but his code of honour compels him to carry it on, and he is proud to do so. Vengeance or *intiqa*m, however, for other affronts or injuries, is of his own deciding and forms the shield and buckler of his manhood and his honour. Brought up from childhood to stories of violence, having listened from his cradle to travelling bards telling of the deeds of revenge of 'Antar and Abu Zeid, he almost welcomes an affront so as to demonstrate to the world his manliness in avenging it. By his code, vengeance must come from himself : Government intervention and conviction of the aggressor does not satisfy him and even a Government hanging does not wipe out the thar : as next of kin to the murdered man, he must seek out and kill the next nearest relative of the murderer.

It is curious how vengeance by proxy is accepted as perfectly honourable and in no way a sign of cowardice on the part of the offended person. The explanation of this is, I think, that often the offended person is a man of no experience in murder ; perhaps he does not possess a gun, anyhow he has never killed a man, so, to be perfectly sure that no muddle will be made, he scrapes together the few pounds necessary and hires some 'killer' who is famed as a dead shot and a clever man who lays his plans carefully beforehand and gets away with it, thus leaving the police with still another murder unsolved. I have known cases where every detail of the intended murder has been rehearsed beforehand with accomplices taking the parts of police officers and Parquet officials, so that everyone under interrogation after the crime would be word-perfect in their replies.

If one wished to find excuse for this habit of murder for revenge, one could say that it was a code of honour inherited from the Arabs and that vengeance forms the theme of many of their poems of romance and chivalry : this is true, but the fact remains that the habit is not consistent with the organization of a civilized society. So far no government has been able to eradicate or even reduce it. At present it is left for the individual to decide as to what constitutes the insult which must be avenged in blood : the murder or rape of one of his family might be

## *Absentee Landlords*

considered a legitimate excuse, but a rude word or gesture, a punishment by an employer, a scornful laugh even, would hardly be considered anywhere else as justification for murder. At one time most big agricultural estates in Egypt were run by a Greek *nazir* (superintendent) : today I doubt if there are any left, they have all been either shot or frightened away. Even an Egyptian *nazir* takes severe risks when he tries to enforce discipline on an estate by punishing or dismissing a labourer for laziness or disobedience, often paying for it with his life.

One of the worst social features of modern Egypt is that of the absentee landlords who live in comfort in the big cities, seldom if ever visit their properties and know little or nothing about the fellahin they employ. Country life does not appeal to them ; they have, therefore, never built themselves modern houses on their estates and thus have nothing to replace the comforts of the cities where they live, but it is still more the insecurity of life in the villages that scares them away from their estates. I was recently talking to a rich Egyptian of the pasha class and we were discussing the rareness of the reading habit among upper-class Egyptians : he agreed that they read two or three newspapers a day but that few of them ever opened a book either in Arabic or any other language. I suggested that club and café life was not conducive to the reading habit but added that I should have thought that, without books to read, life in the evenings on their country estates must hang heavily, and that an easy chair and a good book out on a cool veranda would make life so much more agreeable. My friend said at once : “ You don't really think that a landlord in the districts could sit out on the veranda after dinner, with a bright light over his head, do you, and not get shot ? ” I might have thought of that myself !

This vengeance-murder tradition is going to be a still more formidable problem in the future : so far from having improved in the last forty years, it has got worse owing to the jealousies now introduced into village life by political elections and by the infiltration of thousands of modern firearms into the hands of



## *The Fellahin*

the fellahin. In my early days in the provinces the possession of rifled arms was almost unknown in the villages : a few Ma'aza and other predatory Arabs of the desert edge had an old Remington or Martini, but the fellahin of the village did most of their quarrelling and killing with seven-foot quarter-staffs, battle-axes and iron-shod pikes. Gradually, however, shot-guns crept in and police raids for arms tended to make matters worse by disarming the more peaceful villages and leaving them at the mercy of the professional criminal whose guns were better and were harder to find. Today it is the ambition of every young fellow of the villages to own a modern military rifle, English for choice, not necessarily for aggressive purposes but to show his toughness before the girls of the village and to hold his own with the local brigands, many of whom today have repeating rifles and tommy-guns. Thousands of rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition were left on the battlefields of Cyrenaica and Libya and the Arabs of the Western Desert have got rich on the proceeds of smuggling them into Palestine or selling them to the Egyptian fellahin who could at one time get a German or Italian rifle with a hundred rounds of ammunition for a hundred piastres. A stolen British Army rifle might cost as much as five pounds owing to its advantage in giving little or no flash on being fired at night, whereas the Italian rifle illuminated the firer's face when discharged in the dark, thus adding to the risk of identification. Recent attempts of disarming by mass searching of villages and offer of rewards for denunciation have failed dismally and the vengeance-murderer is now most efficiently armed.

What is needed is some form of education or social improvement in the life of the fellahin which will break down their individualism. The fellah trusts no one but himself and perhaps his family ; he generally goes so far as to be loyal to his village though, even there, villages are often split into rival factions : as for adjoining villages grouping together in any form of neighbourliness, the thing is hardly known and much more often they are deadly enemies. If one can imagine the fellahin of a few villages, then of a few districts or even of a province, joining

## *Fellab's Individualism*

together for some common cause, one can visualize the power that they might become. I once saw it on a small scale where the hired agricultural labourers on a large estate claimed higher wages and were refused. In the summer, irrigation water, being limited in quantity, is regulated by the Government by a system of rotations whereby the canals of a district provide water for seven or eight days, followed by a similar number of days with no water. At the end of the dry period the young cotton plants are beginning to droop from thirst. This was the moment chosen by the fellahin in question to declare their strike and refuse to irrigate the cotton fields. The situation for the landlord was desperate, for if left another few days without water his whole cotton crop was threatened with destruction. In this case the Government interfered and afforded police protection to blackleg labour imported from outside and the strike was broken. Had the organization of the fellahin been better and wider, the landlord would have been forced to surrender or lose thousands of pounds' worth of cotton. Disappearance of the individualism of the fellahin would thus revolutionize the relations between property owners and labour.

Rural Egypt is now going through a phase which it has not experienced before. Thirty years ago the village population, including the well-to-do farmers and even many of the notables, was illiterate : many of the younger ones have now received some degree of education and on return to their villages are inclined to look upon the older generation as ignorant old men and to disregard their counsel. In another thirty or forty years the older generation in the villages will be composed of today's boys, with some degree of literacy. Will that generation be content to live under the same individualistic conditions as their illiterate parents did, or will they not probably develop a more civilized life and trust to government to settle their vendettas and village feuds ?

Such social advance of the fellahin can only come after improvement in their health conditions. Successive governments, through their Ministries of Social Affairs, have expressed

## *The Fellahin*

their intentions of effecting a general amelioration of conditions in the villages by the provision of clean drinking-water, the rebuilding of villages on modern lines and the establishment of welfare centres. Such programmes, however, take time and money and are too often interfered with by changes of government, but what is still more fatal to reform is the obstinacy of the fellah and his inability to understand what is being done for him ; he continues to go his own way, insists on drinking from the canals even when clean water is provided, prefers to sleep with his cattle in his mud-hut instead of in a modern cottage and refuses to take the most elementary of sanitary advice. Equally bad is their present financial situation. Whereas the war has brought great wealth to the merchants and speculators of the towns, it has left the bulk of the rural population even worse off than they were before owing to the rise in price of foodstuffs and materials. An exception to this is the labourer class of certain parts of Upper Egypt who have always been accustomed to leaving their villages during the Nile flood season when their fields are under water, and to work for contractors on new irrigation and other works in the Delta. Thousands of these labourers have been brought down during this war, as in the last, to work for the Allied armies on unloading ships in harbour, constructing roads, etc. ; these men were well paid, and instead of squandering their money, sent their wages back regularly to their villages in Asyut and Girga Mudiriyas, where the price of land has now more than doubled owing to the demand.

With this exception, the condition of the fellahin throughout the country is a miserable one, an entire family existing on a daily wage of some few piastres<sup>1</sup> which procures them a diet of maize bread, a little cheese and a few vegetables ; many live on the produce of a minimum holding of land.<sup>2</sup>

The explanation of the present low standard of health of the fellahin is at once tragic and interesting. It is mainly due to the almost universal prevalence of the two intestinal parasitic diseases of bilharzia and ankylostoma from which, according to official

<sup>1</sup> One piastre = 2½d.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5, p. 43.

## *Irrigation System*

figures, 85 per cent. of the male population of Egypt suffer, in addition to a wide incidence of malaria and pellagra, all on the top of general undernourishment. Bilharzia has been endemic in the country for many years but was formerly confined to the northern parts of the Delta ; today, however, it has spread all through Middle and Upper Egypt with the most lamentable results to the physique and health of the fellahin. Forty years ago this plague was unknown in Upper Egypt ; the Sa'idi, the Upper Egypt fellah, was poor but healthy and furnished the finest labour element of the country. How has the alteration come about ? To provide the answer it is necessary to refer to the change in the irrigation system of Middle and Upper Egypt which in forty years has been transformed almost entirely from basin to perennial. Up to 1902 the only perennial irrigation system in Egypt was operated by the Delta barrage, twenty kilometres north of Cairo ; this had been built in 1861 by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha with the aid of the French engineer Linan Pasha ; above this the water was led off into a number of large canals which, with a network of smaller canals, supplied water all the year round to the five thousand square miles of the Delta. During the season of full flood these sluices had to be kept wide open to allow the swollen waters of the Nile to escape by its Rosetta and Damietta branches into the sea. Upstream of the Delta barrage (that is to say everywhere south of Cairo as far as Aswan) the cultivable land of the Nile Valley was divided by strong earth banks into a series of basins, many square miles in area, connected with the main river by regulators. At high Nile these regulators were opened and the flood water admitted to the basins, where it was allowed to stand until it had thoroughly soaked the land and deposited its silt, after which it was drained off and passed back once more into the river. Such basin lands were then sown, the crop gathered, and the land left fallow until the next year's flood. By this system of irrigation only one main crop could be grown annually, though a summer catch-crop could be raised at great labour by lifting water by hand from the river or from shallow wells dug in the basin lands.

## *The Fellabin*

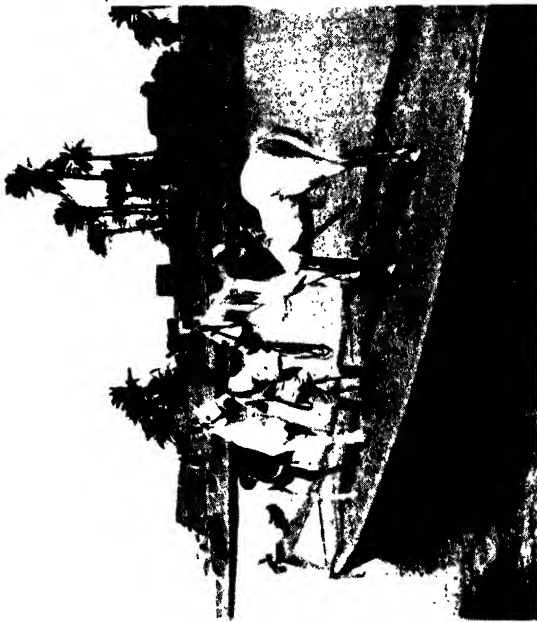
Meanwhile the larger part of the flood water escaped into the sea and was lost.

It was then that the great scheme of the Aswan Dam was brought into being : by this scheme the surplus water was stored up as the Nile fell and passed down as required to the distributing barrages of Asyut, Isna and some years later Nag' Hammadi, to supply perennial water by a vast system of canals of free-flow water to the whole of Middle and parts of Upper Egypt, thus enabling the owners to crop their lands all the year round. To carry off this perennial irrigation water after use on the land an equally elaborate system of draining canals were made, emptying into the river and the lakes. It has since been proved that the natural fall of only ninety metres from Aswan to the sea is not enough to carry off the enormous extra amount of irrigation water now put upon the land and that the subsoil water-table has risen to a dangerous degree, to the detriment of cultivation and, as will be shown, of health. A vast plan was therefore made, and is gradually being carried out, of erecting a chain of pumping stations the whole length of the country to assist the more rapid flow of the drainage water on its way to the Mediterranean.

The first result of the perennial irrigation of Middle and Upper Egypt and of the resultant insufficient drainage has been that the bilharzia and ankylostoma infections, which are waterborne, have spread from the Delta, where they have been long endemic, to Middle and Upper Egypt where they were unknown. Under the old basin irrigation system in Upper Egypt the land lay fallow for the summer months and was so cauterized by the burning heat of the summer sun that shell fish left behind by the flood survived with difficulty ; once, however, that the land was under irrigation all the year round, the bilharzia germ and its water-snail host spread rapidly from the Delta to the south, with lamentable results to the labour capacity and general health of the country.

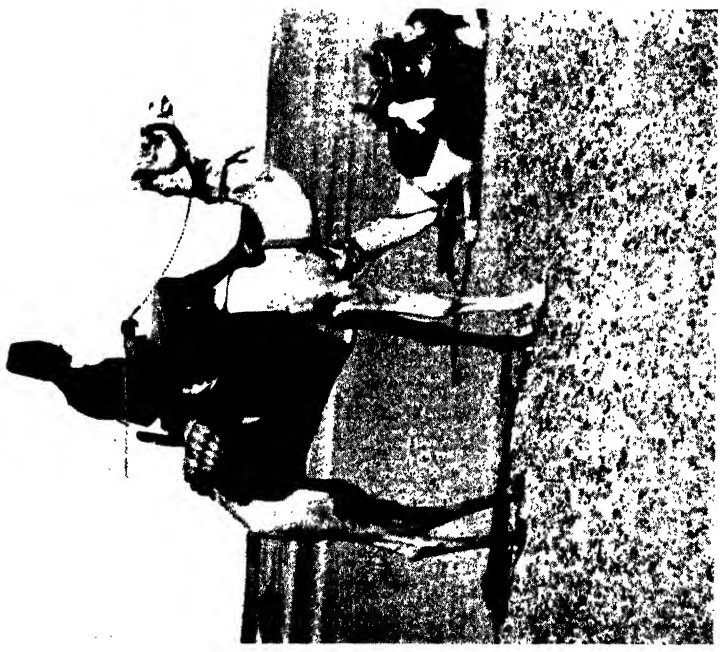
While not in themselves fatal diseases, bilharzia and ankylostoma sap the energy of the person infected and leave him anæmic, inert and apathetic. In the old days of basin irrigation





CROSSING THE YUSEFI CANAL

THE AUTHOR ON OASIS TRIP, 1906



## *Ravages of Bilharzia*

Middle and Upper Egypt produced the finest manual labour in the whole of Egypt or perhaps anywhere. Port Said had the reputation of being the fastest coaling station in the world with its thousands of Sa'idi labourers swarming like ants up the ships' gangways and tipping the coal into the bunkers. Coal has now been replaced by oil and the loss of this particular labour efficiency is not felt as it would otherwise have been, but in every other branch of labour the working energy of the Sa'idi has greatly deteriorated.

It was when I took up the question of drug addiction and its causes that I was drawn into this national problem. In the early days of my life as an Inspector in Upper Egypt, there was no such thing as drug addiction, nor was there such a thing as bilharzia. The late 'Ali Pasha Ibrahim, the famous Egyptian surgeon, Rector of Fuad I University, told me how in those days he discovered an isolated case of bilharzia in Asyut to the great interest of the Public Health authorities : today Asyut and the rest of Upper Egypt are rotten with it.

Drug addiction among the fellahin of Egypt is largely, to my mind, the result of the prevalence of these enervating intestinal parasitic diseases. With his inside full of blood-sucking worms the fellah has lost a large amount of his labour capacity and much of his virility. I was anxious to obtain some official figure of this loss of labour capacity which everyone admitted, but which nobody could assess accurately. It struck me that the people who ought to be able to give some comparative figures were the contractors whose business it was to take annually thousands of labourers from Upper Egypt during the flood season, when local work in the fields was at a standstill, and transport them to the Delta for the digging of new canals, the cleaning of old ones and for the loading of the cotton crops on to ships in the ports. I calculated that these contractors, who paid by piece work, would probably have their books and accounts for many years back and would be able to tell me what work a good average Sa'idi labourer could do per day in the old days as compared with today. I therefore drew up a questionnaire and sent it to



## *The Fellahin*

some twenty of the biggest contractors. The majority of them answered, and on taking the average of the figures given, the reply was that, whereas thirty years ago an average Sa'idi labourer could shift at least six cubic metres (six tons) of dry earth a day, now a contractor was fortunate if he could find men capable of shifting three and a half to four cubic metres. The natural result of this loss of bodily strength was the search for a stimulant to replace not only the wage-earning capacity lost but also the loss of sexual capacity which among primitive people is the man's standard of honour and esteem.

It might have been thought that so widespread an infection as bilharzia would have been equally prevalent in both sexes, but such is not the case. Owing to the difference in their daily habits, the female population is less liable to infection and thus maintains the full vigour of its health while a high proportion of the male population suffer from debility and loss of physical and sexual strength to counter which they are constantly on the search for a stimulant.

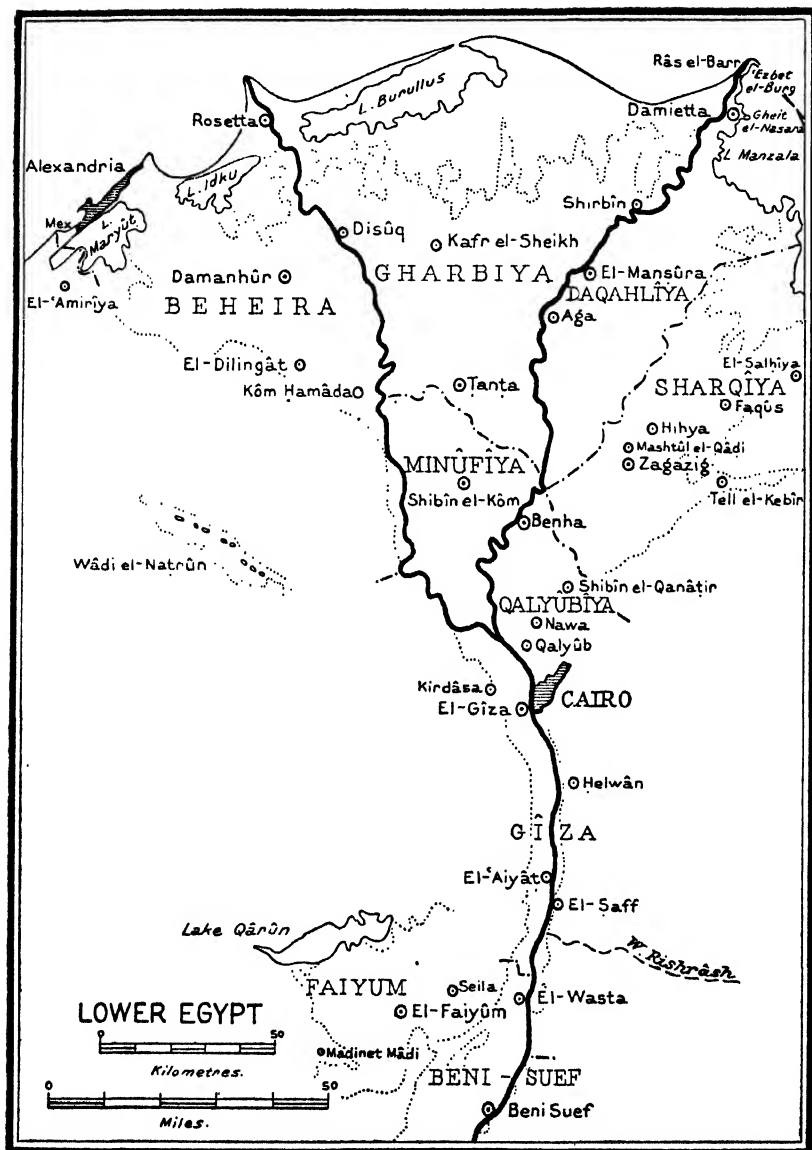
The Government has succeeded by its preventive measures in putting such difficulties in the way of the illicit drug trade that the price of what gets through has risen to a point out of the reach of the fellah. Unable to afford hashish or heroin, he took to a new habit, the drinking of stewed tea. I have in my earlier annual reports made statements about the disastrous effect on the health of the fellahin of the constant drinking of this bitter brew, but I have been told by the Public Health authorities that if you boil and reboil tea a sufficient number of times you will evaporate from it all the toxic elements and reduce it to a perfectly harmless liquid. But all I can say is that anyone with modern experience of the villages of Egypt knows that the fellahin of recent years were ready to make any sacrifice to buy this so-called 'black tea' and that the result of this addiction on both their pockets and health has been lamentable.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The situation has now considerably improved owing to the Government insisting on all teas being packeted, priced and banded before sale, thus preventing the heavy adulteration that was taking place with loose teas.

## “ Black ” Tea Habit

Today the fellahin are even mixing their cigarette tobacco with the dried leaves of the *hyoscyamus* (henbane) which grows wild in Upper Egypt ; and so it goes on. The desire for drugs remains and will remain until the cause of this desire is removed. Get the health of the fellahin back to where it was forty years ago and the desire for drugs will largely cease. The change of the irrigation system resulted in the spread of bilharzia and ankylostoma throughout the country, insufficient drainage assisted this and produced favourable breeding-grounds for the malaria mosquito, and the two together are, to my mind, the main cause of drug addiction in the country. Though we have reduced the drug traffic, we cannot stop it so long as the desire for drugs remains : that desire will remain so long as 85 per cent. of the males of the country are infected with these diseases, and these diseases will continue to be prevalent until the drainage projects are completed.

Until the fellahin are freed from these diseases they will be content to remain in their present state of apathy with little desire and no capacity for change or improvement. Dispel the cause of that apathy and the fellahin will become an element that will count in the life of their country as something more than mere tillers of the soil. The fellah has learned a lot in these last few years and if he can sink his individualism and join with his brothers in a common cause he may have a very much bigger share in the future of his country than he has at present.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE INSPECTOR'S DAY

THE main task of the Interior Inspector was to know the villages of the Mudiriyas to which he was appointed, the fellahin that lived in them and the *'omdas* that controlled them.

Egypt has a total population of some seventeen million,<sup>1</sup> of which twelve million are in the villages and find their living directly or indirectly from agriculture; these twelve million are and always have been the backbone of Egypt. The total area inside Egypt's political frontiers is one million square kilometres, of which 32,000 square kilometres are capable of supporting a fixed population by agriculture. Out of this total cultivable area of 32,000 square kilometres, two-thirds is owned in holdings of five acres and upwards by 6 per cent. of Egypt's total landlords and the other third is owned by the other 94 per cent. Over a million and a half smallholders find a living off a plot of land of one third of an acre, i.e. a piece of land not bigger than a double tennis-court with its run-back. Some of these, of course, also hire some other bit of land. Besides these one and a half million that actually possess some land, there are roughly a million who own nothing, but either rent land or work for hire.

Villages vary in size from three or four thousand inhabitants to twenty thousand; they also vary considerably in character according to whether they are situated in Upper Egypt with its dry climate or are in the Delta with its frequent winter rains. The houses vary accordingly, those in Upper Egypt being built largely of stone obtained from the close-by desert, whereas the houses of the Delta villages vary in building material from crude, sun-dried mud-bricks in the more southern parts, to kiln-burned

<sup>1</sup> Estimated figures for 1946.

## *The Inspector's Day*

bricks in the more rainy north. The big landlord today has his house in Cairo or some large town : if he has one at all on his estates, it is not in the village but in a separate detached hamlet, called an 'ezba. In the village proper all the better class houses, such as those of the 'Omda, the village headman and the more prosperous inhabitants, are at the north end of the village to catch the prevailing wind.

The average village will have a few better class buildings, but the so-called houses in which the bulk of the population live are really little more than hovels where the peasant and his cattle repair at night for shelter. We think of a house as the life-centre of a family, where the members meet for meals, gather after sunset to read and chat, where they sleep in beds and spend three-quarters of their lives. Not so the fellah and his house ; he is part of the soil, he and his cattle leave for the fields at sunrise and do not return to their night shelter till sunset : as he cannot afford fuel for lighting, his evening meal is usually a cold one and in an hour or so the family are fast asleep, wrapped in quilt or blanket on the dry mud floor of the one main room, while the cattle sleep in the courtyard. The slightly better house has an upper floor, reached by an outside stair, with a couple of living-rooms and a flat roof where the family sleep in the summer and where they store their grain and maize stalk and cow-dung fuel. Houses cling to each other like the cells of a wasp-comb ; privacy there is little or none ; sanitary arrangements do not exist except at the mosque, and in most villages every drop of water has to be brought by the women from the river or nearest canal.

At the head of this community is the 'Omda, who is the representative of the Government with a number of duties for which he is not paid but is partly remunerated by exemption from certain taxes, from conscription of his sons for military service and by certain other privileges. He has some small judicial powers and his seal or signature is necessary for all legal and financial dealings of the fellahin of his village. Below the 'Omda in the village hierarchy come two or three sheikhs of the village, each respon-

## Village Officials

sible for a *hessa*, into a number of which the village is divided. The 'Omda's right-hand man for public security is the *Sheikh el-Ghafar*, the chief watchman, with his ten to a dozen armed *ghafirs*<sup>1</sup> who are supposed to be on guard all night and usually work all day on their own account.

The next most important person in the village is the *sarraf* or Government finance clerk ; it is he who knows every man's land holding and who collects the taxes and any other payment due to the Government. In Upper Egypt in the days of basin irrigation it was the *sarraf's* business to re-measure each man's holding after the flood water had been drained off the land ; he was a familiar sight with his long *qasaba* (measuring-rod)<sup>2</sup> walking the boundaries and checking the measurements from his unfailing memory as he laid his rod end over end on the drying mud. Each village also has a *hallaq* (barber), who is the village agent of the Ministry of Public Health and as such is responsible for the registration of births and deaths and who often does a bit of amateur doctoring on his own account. If the village is on the river-bank the ferryman is quite an important person ; he gets no salary, but takes an occasional handful of produce from his passengers and, like the sheikh of the village mosque, makes his big collection at harvest time when he goes round the threshing-floors and collects a basket of wheat from every owner.

An interesting character found in many, but not every village, is the '*Omdet el-Muzar'yin*, the chief cultivator ; he is not an official but is the recognized wise man on all questions of agriculture. With many of the fellahin too stupid to think for themselves, he advises them when to sow, when to irrigate and when to reap, following the Coptic calendar and as such is an important factor in the life of a village. This village organization has changed little, except for names, since Byzantine times.

The 'omda system certainly has its faults, but it forms the basic foundation of village organization and it is difficult to see how it could be replaced. A typical Upper Egypt Mudiriya like

<sup>1</sup> *Ghafir*, night watchman ; plural *Ghafar*.    <sup>2</sup> Three and a half metres.

## *The Inspector's Day*

Asyut is divided into seven police districts (*Markaz*) and has two hundred and seventy villages, each with its 'omda. It can thus be easily seen that the 'omda is the keystone of all provincial life and administration. 'Omdas were and still are appointed and dismissed by a commission presided over by the Mudir, consisting of the local Chef de Parquet (Public Prosecutor), three elected notables and the Interior Inspector. It is easy to understand that the chief duty of a provincial Inspector of Interior was to know the 'omdas of his district, carefully to study all cases of disciplinary prosecution and to have clear opinions in cases of replacement and appointment. A good 'omda meant good village administration and a contented people, whereas a bad 'omda meant crime, trouble and constant friction. To obtain this knowledge entailed visiting every village of one's district, in those days on horseback, making the personal acquaintance of each 'omda and forming an opinion as to his value.

My Adviser, Percy Machell, insisted on our keeping a special village history book and entering in it the 'omda-history of each village of our inspectorate so as to be able to hand our own knowledge on to any new inspector in case of our transfer. I personally always tried, in addition, to have an opinion on the sheikh el-ghafar, who with his force of night watchmen was responsible for the armed protection of the village and its fields.

The police strength of a Markaz varied according to its size ; if it were a large one, there would be perhaps ten mounted and the same number of dismounted police in the main Markaz and a force of half that size in each of one or more sub-police stations or outposts in the more distant parts of the district. The police were volunteers on five-year contracts and were recruited from men who had finished their five-year period of conscript service with the Egyptian Army : they were mostly illiterate, drew the wretched pay of £3 per month and were non-pensionable. The mounted police, drawn from the Egyptian Army cavalry and mounted bodyguard, were a much smarter and more efficient body of men with long-service sergeants who were often great

## *Inspector's Duties*

characters and very much a power in the land. The dismounted police were inferior to the mounted in quality and were mostly used as orderlies, escorts and as foot-patrols at night.

The first big innovation in the policing of the provinces was in 1906 when, as related in detail further on, I formed the nucleus of a Sudanese Camel Corps police to deal particularly with desert and desert-edge crimes of cattle-stealing and an increase of armed brigandage, especially in Upper Egypt. This force gradually became the corps d'élite of the provincial police, being tougher and more dependable than the fellahin policemen, and was eventually brought up to a strength of seven hundred men.

If an inspector's first duty was to know the 'omdas of his Mudiriya, his second was certainly to see to the discipline, equipment and efficiency of the police of his districts. At the end of the year the Inspectors had to write confidential reports on all the police officers and administrative officials of their districts. It was also useful to know the value of senior officials of other departments working in their districts. Government administration has always been greatly complicated by questions of family relationships among its employees and here the English Inspector was of great value, as his views were naturally uninfluenced by any such considerations. His other strong point was that, with the aid of his predecessor's note-book, he often knew more about the 'omdas and village histories of his province than did the Mudir who, owing to frequent transfer, seldom had time to learn his province thoroughly. In those days, happily for us, political parties had not yet started and villages and provinces were not split into factions by elections and party strife.

Our Chief approved of our playing hard when off duty but he was a hard taskmaster when we were at work. Any attempt on our part to semi-settle down in the comparatively comfortable capital town of a province was instantly repressed, and if our weekly reports showed record of more than a couple of consecutive nights in the same place, an explanation was immediately called for. I spent on the average about twenty-four days a month in my districts and six days a month in Cairo,



## *The Inspector's Day*

where I had a small room in a flat belonging to three friends and was known to the other occupants as 'The Lodger'.

Upper Egypt summers were no joke : at that time ice and electric fans did not exist and Markaz rest-houses hardly lived up to the idea of repose that their name would suggest. The seats of midday trains were blisteringly hot, stirrup-irons on long rides burned through the soles of your boots ; there were no motors in those days and everything had to be done on horse, camel or donkey-back. Rest-houses were like ovens at night. Qena was the worst place of all in the summer with frequent midnight temperatures of over a hundred Fahrenheit and swarms of sandflies whose Arabic name means 'the silent eater' and which penetrated any mosquito net of a mesh wider than butter muslin. The rest-house there was a primitive mud brick affair of three small ground-floor rooms inside a derelict garden with a high wall round it that effectually kept off any breeze there might be. One of our methods of getting some sleep on the worst of these nights was to go out on a long mounted night patrol, to return tired out at two or three in the morning, to swallow off a good inch of whisky in a glass of tepid water, soap one's face and hands and cover them while still wet with Keating's insect powder, sluice the hot bed down with a jug of water and drop off into an exhausted slumber inside one's muslin net before things had time to dry. But it did us no harm. We kept fit and well ; never having heard of bilharzia we bathed in the river every day, ate cucumbers and melons from the fields when we were thirsty, rode hard and worked hard. The exhausting summers were made up for by winters of a perfect climate. I was particularly fortunate when I was in Upper Egypt in having a small police steamer of my own, many of my police stations being on the east bank of the river and difficult of access from the railway. What delightful weeks one spent ! The boat could accommodate four at a pinch and for several winters one of my sisters would come out from home and spend six weeks or so with me between Asyut and Aswan. She would ask a friend and I would ask a friend and the world was at its

## *Provincial Service*

best, tying up at nights where we liked, camels and horses to ride when we wanted, plenty of work, plenty of sport and everyone glad to see us. Machell kept a very close eye on the health of his Inspectors, largely from a business point of view. Government leave conditions were good and he never allowed anyone to stay out for more than two consecutive summers without going home. He paid us, he said, to have clean English eyes and would tolerate no slackening of standard so easily resulting from too long a sojourn in the Egyptian climate. Once or twice a year he would do a tour of inspection in the provinces with the inspectors in attendance : his grasp and efficiency were a lesson, but I admit that by the end I generally heaved a sigh of relief, if I had got through without being caught out for some piece of unforgivable ignorance. I count myself lucky to have had in my inspectorate every province in Egypt in turn. When I was finally transferred to the Alexandria Police in 1910 I had inspected almost every police-station and outpost in the country from Alexandria to Aswan, including the Western Oases, and I knew the Western and the Eastern deserts well. There remained two small stations that I had not visited, one south of Abu Simbil in Nubia and one on the Mediterranean coast at Burullus : in the following year I visited them both and thus, I think, completed a record that no Englishman or even Egyptian official had held before me and certainly never has since.

Life in provincial rest-houses was entertaining and instructive, though not always too comfortable ; in our Interior houses one met doctors, sanitary-inspectors, veterinary and cattle-plague inspectors. In the provincial capitals like Asyut, Tanta and Zagazig one enjoyed the hospitality of the resident English judges, the irrigation and railway officials and their wives. In this way the Interior Inspector heard everybody's shop talked and soon acquired a wide Arabic vocabulary of the technical terms of all other Government departments. I was always particularly glad in Upper Egypt to find myself sharing a rest-house with the medico-legal experts such as Dr. Nolan. Nolan was a genius at his work and most excellent company with his crime histories.

## *The Inspector's Day*

One day at Dairut he was sitting at the Mamur's table inspecting registers when he saw a revolver bullet lying in the pen tray. He asked the Mamur what it was, and was told that it was the bullet with which the son of a local notable had committed suicide. A sad case, crossed in love, etc. Nolan asked to be shown the revolver from which the bullet had been fired and this was produced from the official cupboard. A look or two down the barrel was enough for Nolan, who pointed out to the astonished Mamur that the bullet had the marks of five lands to the right, whereas the revolver produced had five to the left and, therefore, could not have fired that bullet. General consternation ensued until subsequent inquiry proved that the verdict of suicide was perfectly true but that the relatives, on finding the corpse, had noticed that the sad deed had been done with a brand-new revolver : realizing that this would be confiscated by the authorities they had unclasped the stiff fingers, salvaged the new gun and closed the fingers again over an old and valueless revolver.

On one occasion I was riding along a canal in the Faiyum province and saw the peculiar sight of a half-clothed white man standing in the canal scooping up handfuls of water and throwing them on to the canal bank. Closer inspection proved that this was Dr. Nolan engaged in trying to recover the slugs fired from a gun in a recent murder case. Egypt with its thousand cases of shooting, poisoning and sudden death has been the training-ground of many of the world's best medico-legal experts like Sydney Smith,<sup>1</sup> Glaister,<sup>2</sup> Lucas and Nolan, and it was a privilege to be able to see them working in the field.

Life in the provinces was of constant variety. At some time or other we had to deal with every conceivable matter in the life of Egypt. Prevention and detection of crime was our daily

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Sydney Smith, C.B.E., Regius Professor of Forensic Medicine, Edinburgh University, was principal Medico-Legal Expert to the Egyptian Government.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. John Glaister, Regius Professor of Forensic Medicine, University of Glasgow. Medico-Legal Expert to the Government of Egypt, 1928-32.

## *Desert Inspection*

and nightly work, but so was the supervision and the assisting in the carrying out of the work of all other Government departments. Every administration was bound, in case of difficulty, to come to the Mudir and his organization of mamurs, police and 'omdas for assistance in getting their orders carried out. If the Nile flood was dangerous we helped to see that the bank-watchers were in their places ; in times of cholera or bubonic plague we helped to inspect the sanitary cordons : outbreaks of cotton-worm saw us tramping through the fields to see that the leaf-picking groups were at work ; epidemics of cattle-plague gave us long days with the veterinary inspectors inoculating the fellahin cattle, and locust visitations found us in the desert organizing armies of labourers to kill the growing hoppers. Every day had something new. If I wanted to give someone a sample of the work I would take him for a couple of days to Abnub or Badari and guarantee him his choice of a murder or two, a false-coining case perhaps, a night patrol through the villages and an hour or two's relaxation shooting quail or sandgrouse.

Skimming through my diaries of those years I find entries of such things as a thirty-six-day camel trip to the Western Oases in 1906. John Wells, Inspector-General of Mines, was in charge of the trip and was concerned with the exploratory work of the Corporation of Western Oases Company ; Lindsay Bury of the Irrigation Department was studying the artesian wells of the oases, and I was inspecting the police work, social conditions of the villages, etc. This was my first experience of serious camel-riding. We spent twenty days covering the distances between oases at an average pace of four miles an hour for ten hours a day and the other sixteen days doing our respective inspections in the four oases. Today such a trip would be done by car in a quarter the time. In 1907 pneumonic plague was rife in Girga province and I find a description of going round the plague cordons and village disinfection gangs with the Scotch doctor of the district whose white drill suit was so covered with plague fleas when I met him that I thought he was wearing khaki.

## *The Inspector's Day*

I remember asking him what precautions one could take against this fatal disease and his laconic answer that one should keep up wind as much as possible.

In those days there were English judges resident in the chief Mudiriya towns where there were Criminal Courts. At Asyut, Judge Clapcott and I worked up for the use of police officers a small handbook of the colloquial names of camels, cattle, donkeys, goats, etc., according to their ages, colours and shapes of their horns; we also worked out over a measured quarter-mile the average walking pace of all domestic animals as compared with the pace that the same beasts could do when beaten into a run by escaping cattle thieves. I find one entry that furnishes a warning against judging of the efficiency or otherwise of any particular police officer in charge of a district by the frequency or rareness of murders in his criminal statistics. At Abnub there was a big backwater of the Nile just under the police station, while at Dairut there was an irrigation regulator on the Ibrahimiya Canal between the police station and the railway. Dead bodies from the south had a way of lodging up in these places and if pulled out went down in the district registers as murders of unknown origin; the police in order to keep their record clean kept a punt pole handy and pushed the corpses off into the stream again. "*Hat el midra*" or "Bring the punt pole" had a very special meaning in those parts.

When I was transferred to the Delta in 1909 I spent as much time as I could during the winter months in the marsh country round the lakes of Manzala and Burullus which teemed with wild fowl of all sorts and gave one wonderful shooting, while the province of Sharqiya provided many a day's sport hawking gazelle and hares with the Tahawi Arabs in the Salhiya and Tell el-Kebir deserts. I see that I noted that the tracks of the battle of Tell el-Kebir were still as clear as when made in 1882, the wheel-marks of the guns having filled in with light-coloured drift sand, thus making them easy to follow. I remember telling Carter Wilson<sup>1</sup> about this and about the village mosque at

<sup>1</sup> Director of Personnel of the Ministry of the Interior.

## *Napoleon's Transport Tracks*

Salhiya where the doorposts are two old cannon taken from the neighbouring Napoleon's fort. He told me that when he had been Inspector of Interior in that district some years before he had been shown the tracks of Napoleon's wheeled transport made on the march from Salhiya to Qantara en route for Syria in 1798. Much of this desert is damp and salty with no drift sand to efface deep-cut tracks.

Of the two halves of the country I much preferred Upper to Lower Egypt in spite of the greater summer heat of the former. Most of the Delta is like a huge market garden without features and with the same character throughout, whereas Upper Egypt is a narrow strip of cultivation on both sides of the Nile with the great deserts to east and west. When one felt bored with nothing but fellahin one could always explore some lonely island in the river or take one's camel for an hour or two's ride into the desert where one at once felt oneself miles away from the crowded villages of the cultivation.

## CHAPTER 6

### *DESERT LAW*

IN those early years of my inspectorship in Upper Egypt, cases of theft and murder were just as common among the Arabs as among the fellahin. Arab tribes, like the villages, have at their head an 'omda who is appointed by the Government and who, for this honour, has many responsibilities and no pay. A big tribe like the Ma'aza has two 'omdas, one for the tribe's head-quarter village in the valley, in this case Hamada in Minya Province, and one for the tribe itself whose individual members may be scattered anywhere in the Eastern Desert from Suez to the Sudan frontier. Though poor and insignificant today, these Eastern Desert tribes, such as the Haweitat, the Ma'aza, the Muteir and Bili, are small offshoots of powerful tribes of the same name in Sinai, Palestine and Arabia and still preserve the customs and traditions of their mother tribes where law and order are kept according to Bedouin law and not by the written codes of constitutional governments. Outside interference is resented and if they are left to themselves their tribal justice is good, but difficulty arises when the Bedouin settles on the edge of the cultivation and comes in contact with the village populations of the valley and the law that governs them.

The first duty of a Bedouin 'omda towards the Government is to report all crimes occurring in his tribe, and to arrest the criminal and hand him over to the provincial authorities. Had the valley authorities been efficient in the deserts and able to enforce their written law throughout these wide areas, the Bedouin 'omda's task would not have been hard, but such was not the case. Bedouin feuds went on, murder followed murder, and camels were stolen by one tribe from another and back



ABU RUSAS " JUMPING AT GEZIRA CLUB, 1907  
WATERING GOVERNMENT CAMELS





## *Salt Monopoly*

again in endless retaliation, the Government being helpless to stop it. Left to their own tribal law, the Arab tribes concerned would not have allowed this state of things to continue as such feuds make desert life dangerous and uncomfortable for all. Many of these feuds arose directly from the clash between Bedouin ideas of duty to the tribe and valley ideas of duty to the Government. Up till 1904, for example, the salt trade was a monopoly given by the Government to a foreign company. Salt is a necessity of life and is found in many places in the Eastern Desert. In support of the monopoly, salt, other than the company's, was considered contraband and the Upper Egypt prisons in those days were full of wretched fellahin and Arabs whose only crime was being found in possession of salt they had gathered in the desert where God had placed it for them.

A chain of Coastguard patrols was stationed throughout Upper Egypt and spent their time patrolling the desert salines to prevent these so-called thefts : every patrol had its expert Bisharin trackers who were recruited in the Sudan and lived in barracks with the Sudanese troopers, but local guides were indispensable and had perforce to be recruited from the Arabs of the districts.

According to Bedouin etiquette, government employment for a specific purpose covers a man against vendetta or vengeance resulting from his action as a government servant, but only so long as he plays the game and recognizes this gentleman's agreement. Should he, for instance, be engaged as a guide, he should guide to the best of his ability, but should he go beyond this and act as tracker, or volunteer information against his own tribe or take a share in rewards, he is considered as having broken the rules of the game and renders himself liable to tribal vengeance as soon as he leaves government service, or before, if possible.

In Minya and Asyut provinces, one soon found that cattle-stealing was a common feature of the daily life of the fellahin and a very unsatisfactory one from the government point of view as but few cases were reported to the police at the time of occurrence, with the result that arrest and conviction of the

## Desert Law

thieves were practically never obtained. The reason for this was that in all cases the robbers were Arabs and the victims fellahin. I suppose that one has to be a fellah oneself to understand the fear that a few lawless Bedouin can inspire : it is perhaps easier to appreciate the Arab's point of view that the fellahin and their fat cattle were expressly invented by the Almighty to keep the sons of the desert supplied with those things that the desert lacks.

The cultivated land in Upper Egypt consists of a strip of country, some ten to fifteen miles wide, on the west of the river and a bare mile or two, in most places, on the east bank. The fellahin villages are largely in the middle of the cultivation, while the Arabs live in rough hutments on the desert edge. Those on the west are of Tripolitan or Tunisian origin and generally of a more sedentary and less adventurous nature than those on the east bank, like the Ma'aza, the Muteir and the Bili, who are of Arabian origin and while having a home of sorts on the edge of the cultivation, spend most of their lives grazing camels and goats on the semi-mountainous desert between the Nile and the Red Sea.

It was these Eastern Desert Arabs who did all the cattle-stealing and terrified the fellahin. Cattle were stolen for the sake of the ransom that they would fetch ; 50 per cent. of the value was the figure generally demanded and generally paid and woe betide the foolish peasant who reported his losses to the police. Most of the raiding was done in the winter when the nights are long and driven cattle can go a fair distance without water : it is then too that the fellahin keep their cattle on the grazing in the fields away from the villages, themselves living in *zaribas*<sup>1</sup> beside them. This was the season when the Arab raiders had their chance. Armed and contemptuous, they raided in when there was no moon, cut out two or three beasts and made straight for the Eastern Desert, swimming the Nile with inflated skins supporting the unwilling cattle. Once the desert was reached the thieves knew that no fellah would dare follow, for to the villager it is the unknown land full of dangers and devils

<sup>1</sup> A *zariba* is a temporary hut made of maize stalks.

## *Police Camel Corps Patrols*

where he will die of thirst and where wild beasts will devour him, while to the Arab it is home, with its rocky *wadis* leading up from the cultivation and its water-holes known only to himself. All he has to do is to load the stolen cattle with a few bundles of pilfered clover, take them up some miles into the desert and send down for the ransom. Should the owner be foolish enough to report his loss to the police, the cattle are either slaughtered and the carcasses abandoned, or the beasts are driven along the Thieves' Road to the next province and disposed of at some neighbouring cattle market.

This was how I found things in 1906 and one of the first things I did was to cross the river one day at Minya and climb up the cliffs to the east past the cemetery in the hillside and over the top. Within an hour I had come to the famous Darb el-Haramiya or Thieves' Road, which runs through the desert, parallel with the Valley, for a hundred miles from Asyut northwards to Hamada in Minya province where the Ma'aza tribe have their headquarters opposite the town of Matai. The road consisted of scores of parallel tracks and even I could pick out the suspicious footmarks of cattle and horses from among the scores of legitimate tracks of camels and donkeys. During the next few weeks, I cut this road at various other points east of the valley and found a serious state of things. The solution was not far to seek. In 1904 both the Salt Monopoly and the Coast-guard Camel Corps which enforced it in the deserts had been abolished, thus leaving the deserts unpatrolled. So long as the Provincial Police had only horse patrols, so long could the Arabs defy them and make a perfect get-away every time—into no-man's-land. Within a few weeks I had persuaded my Ministry to allow me to recruit a Police Camel Patrol of twenty-four men and camels, later to be increased when the preservation of desert game was added to their duties.

I based them on Asyut to start with and sent half of them as soon as trained to Minya so as to have a patrol at each end of the road, a hundred miles apart. The trackers were, of course, the most important element of the patrol and these were

## *Desert Law*

recruited from the Bisharin tribe of the Hamedorab of the Sudan, it being obviously impossible to have confidence in any local Arabs. Every Bishari can track, but these men were selected for their reputations as the best trackers of their tribes. Guides necessarily had to be local men and it was in making my first selection that I formed that intimate acquaintance with the Eastern Desert that was to give me some of my happiest days in Egypt.

The first patrol that I went on was sent out on the 5th of May, 1907. We started as a visiting patrol from Abnub and followed the Thieves' Road, going north for a day and a half until we got to Wadi Barsha which leads up from the valley into the desert from the village of Barsha just opposite Mallawi. Here Hamed, the head-tracker, spotted the tracks of a cow and a donkey being ridden up the wadi; the cattle tracks were fresh and every now and then we could see where the riders had got off and walked. Hamed picked up some broken twigs showing that the thieves were beating the unwilling animals with the bough of a tree; the droppings also were green showing that the animals' last food had been clover, proving their valley origin.

To lighten the patrol and quicken our pace we left our baggage camels to make their way down to Barsha and ourselves rode hard for eight hours, the tracks bringing us down by then to the cultivation at a village called Matahra. Here followed some pretty tracking by Hamed along a canal bank and through the fields till finally he brought us to the Nile where the foot-marks showed where the stolen beasts had drunk and been driven back again into the desert. It was useless trying to follow the tracks in the dark, so we curled up on the ground as best we could for the night after sending a man across the river to a nearby railway station to telegraph ahead to the police at the Sheikh Fadl outpost, fifty miles to our north, to intercept the thieves who were obviously making for Hamada, the headquarters of the Ma'aza Arabs and a veritable hornets' nest of brigands.

Our second night out is a hideous memory. Macnaghten,

## *The Thieves' Road*

my Sub-Inspector, and I were both pretty well done in from the heat and could eat nothing. Besides some biscuit and chocolate, I had brought a water melon which we soon eagerly devoured whereas Macnaghten's sole contribution to the commissariat was a bottle of some filthy Russian liqueur made, I remember, of pears, after indulging in which we were both extremely sick and Macnaghten made the night doubly hideous by waking with a yell to say that some enormous bird of prey had been sitting on his chest and threatening to tear out his vitals. Up at 4 a.m. next morning from our stony couch, we were away as soon as it was light enough to see the tracks and with one short halt of an hour at midday, rode our camels as hard as we could push them for eleven hours until at 4 p.m. we found ourselves once more down in the cultivation some eight kilometres south of Hamada. Hours earlier Macnaghten had sworn that he could see the tall chimney of the Sheikh Fadl sugar factory, but this again had to be put down to hallucination produced by that Russian liqueur. We had come down through the one and only pass that leads from the top desert and it was here that the local police officer, on receipt of our message, should have held the road to intercept the thieves, instead of which he had asked the Sheikh of the Ma'aza for a guide who had naturally led him everywhere except to the right spot.

Following the footmarks into the fields the trackers brought us to a buffalo calf tied up in a patch of clover and here we lost time puzzling out the line, only to prove eventually that the calf was not ours but merely a substitute placed there as a Bedouin trick to deceive us. Our tracks then followed a main road passing a flour mill where dozens of grain-carrying donkeys had come and gone and so hopelessly fouled the track that much to our regret we had to confess ourselves beaten. It was very exasperating as the stolen cattle had been only just ahead of us and had the Sheikh Fadl police officer done his job with intelligence, we should have established the new patrol's reputation with a fight and a capture on its first essay.

The first thing I did when we got to the river was to put

## Desert Law

my head right in and have a warm but welcome drink of the muddy water of the Nile. We then commandeered a fishing-boat and crossed the river to Matai on the railway-line where, with an hour to wait for a train for Minya, we cast about for somewhere to rest. Judge our surprise and delight when we found a Greek café where the proprietor produced draught beer off the ice at a piastre ( $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ ) a glass ; Macnaghten and I poured down glass after glass until by the time the train came in I fear that our steps were hardly those of Interior Inspectors, nor was our behaviour, when on reaching Minya we stormed the Irrigation rest-house demanding food and drink from a scared inspector whom we did not know and who obviously took us for bandits or lunatics.

Opposite Girga in Upper Egypt on the western edge of the cultivation is a village called Beit 'Allam and thence runs a desert road for some six camel days west to the Oasis of Kharga. Some of the villagers of Beit 'Allam from time to time cross by this road carrying wheat, maize and pomegranates to the oasis which does not itself produce these commodities. One October day four villagers set out with six laden camels and started to climb the steep pass that leads up from the cultivation to the top of the valley escarpment. One of the camels had a load beyond its capacity and could not climb the pass so the men lightened it, leaving half the sacks and crates on the ground, and took the camel and the rest of the caravan to the top of the pass. On arriving there they rested and while they were breaking their fast they were approached by a Bedouin named 'Awda who was coming in from the desert and was taking the pass to descend to Beit 'Allam. Khalifa, the leader of the fellah caravan, knew 'Awda and asked him to lend him a hand, and together they descended the pass with one of the stronger camels. Arrived at the bottom 'Awda, the Bedouin, was joined by two other Arabs who all helped to load the jettisoned goods on to Khalifa's camel and eventually the fellahin and their camels cleared the top of the pass and at nightfall outspanned beside the desert road.

## *Desert Murder*

Off at dawn the next day, they had been two hours on their way when shots rang out from behind some rocks on their right. Voices called to them to drop their goods or be shot, but Khalifa, a stout-hearted fellow, shouted to his comrades to stand firm as "the rest of the caravan was coming up behind". The bluff was useless as the Arabs knew there was no "rest", and a shot to show they meant business was fired, wounding one of Khalifa's men.

Khalifa, armed only with a stick, left his camels and ran forward to engage the robbers, but dropped with a bullet in his stomach. The Bedouin made off and Khalifa's party picked him up, abandoned their baggage and rode at top speed back the way they had come. Sorely wounded, Khalifa could not endure the agony caused by the lurching of the camel and was left on the road while his comrades pressed on to the valley and told the tale to the 'Omda of the village, who telephoned the police. On hearing the news the police commandant at Sohag wired to Asyut for the Bisharin trackers of the Police Camel Corps to be sent him by train with all speed and at midday next day, on borrowed camels, the police took up the hunt. The baggage was found intact and was sent in to the valley: the plucky Khalifa was found still alive and was sent in, only to die on arrival.

The police reported that the tracks in the sand showed as clear as a photograph the sequence of events. Khalifa's rush forward, the ambush of the Arabs in the rocks, the print of a knee where someone had knelt and aimed, the empty Remington cartridge case and the footprints of the retreating robbers. Sticking to the footmarks, the Bisharin trackers led the patrol for seven hours to where the robbers' camels had been waiting for them; by dark the tracks had brought them back to the edge of the cultivation and with the dawn they were followed south to some Bedouin tents near Beit 'Allam whence the caravan had originally started. It was then learned that 'Awda and his two companions had already come in and gone straight to the 'Omda of the village and told him that there had been murder in the



## *Desert Law*

desert and that, fearing to be falsely accused, they had come in to report themselves to him.

The three Arabs were arrested, and the inquiry began. Several old shotguns had been left in studied carelessness in the Arabs' tents but no trace could be found of the Remington that had fired the fatal shot. Khalifa, before his death, had named his aggressors whom he knew quite well as they were camped near the village, but curiously enough he included a fourth when all the tracking evidence proved conclusively that the attackers were only three. He even named this fourth as 'Aid, but no 'Aid could we find even among the relatives of the accused. That he should have thought his aggressors were four instead of three was easily understood if the scene is visualized; heads and guns seen popping up behind the rocks are difficult to count and the natural instinct to improve a story or some unknown history of an enemy named 'Aid probably accounted for this elaboration by the dying man which eventually weakened our case.

The Parquet then proceeded to test the evidence of the trackers. A group was made of some twenty men including the accused, a suitable sandy island was selected on the other side of the river and the parade was made to walk in line; then they were shuffled and another set of tracks produced and finally still a third set. To test the trackers the Parquet, rather too cleverly, had made one of the sandal-footed accused take off his sandals and walk bare-footed while another of the quorum was made to wear the sandals that were not his. Brought up from out of sight across the river, Hamed, the head-tracker, picked out the three tracks that he had followed in the desert: the second set gave him no difficulty and after a careful study of the third layout, he pointed out the barefoot track as that of one of his desert quarry, whereas the sandal track, though showing the sandals seen in the desert tracks, agreed neither by stride nor throw of the foot with the track of the foot that had worn them at the scene of the crime.

The Parquet expressed themselves as completely satisfied with the trackers' evidence and the accused were maintained under

## *The Desert Tells its Tale*

arrest. I came up from Cairo at this point and heard that the entire village of Beit 'Allam, through fear of reprisals, was preparing to protect these Arabs who had murdered their own village kith and kin and that they had even subscribed the money needed to provide a lawyer for their defence.

Posing as an inspector of the Agricultural Bank, I rode into the village and there was told a dozen tales of the wickedness of the people who were inventing these cruel accusations against their Arab friends and neighbours. I was determined to know the truth, so returned to Asyut and took a camel patrol and trackers and rode heel on the line, thus with my own eyes following the story as written a week before in the tell-tale desert sands.

The story was quite clear and showed that the Arabs had been grazing near-by in the desert when, for some reason, they had left their camels and gone down the pass on foot, intending to return to their tents, and had met the fellahin coming up. Seeing a chance of loot, they had lent a treacherous hand to help the villagers and then had slipped ahead during the night to build a parapet of rocks at the top of a hillock overlooking the road. Traces of lentils and some ashes showed where they had cooked themselves a meal as they waited for daylight to bring their victims into the ambush.

There were the tracks of the fellahin and their laden camels coming slowly along till suddenly the tracks halted and scattered and the footmarks of one man could be seen running towards the rocks on the right, just as the police report had said. The whole scene of the ambush and murder was written clearly on the ground. Hamed at one point showed me where in their retreat the Arabs had turned round to look over their shoulders and seeing no one in pursuit had done a step dance of unholy glee. If ever men were proved guilty by track reading it was 'Awda, 'Awad and Muhammad Selim. Having satisfied myself of the truth, I came down the pass and started across the valley for Girga : as we passed Beit 'Allam village the 'Omda came out to welcome me and invited us to descend while he prepared

## *Desert Law*

coffee for us and food and water for our camels. Thirsty and tired as I was, I told him in no mild terms what I thought of his village of four thousand men who were so terrified of a handful of Arabs that they were doing all they could to disprove the charge against Khalifa's murderer. I cursed his village, calling it the 'harim' of the Arab murderers into which I would not enter nor let my camels drink the water of his cowardly village.

In spite of the excellence of the trackers' evidence and the complete satisfaction of the Parquet with the tests they had made, the accused were eventually acquitted in Court, the judge remarking that he was unable to believe the trackers' evidence as "no one could track on rocks"! Khalifa was thus left unavenged.

Every fellah and Arab in the district knew that the accused were guilty and any Bedouin would have convicted them on the tracking alone. Sick and disgusted, I sent for those Arabs whose total number did not exceed twenty and gave them a solemn warning that the next time we met them in the desert the court would be a summary one with no Parquet inquiry and no clever lawyers for the defence. In actual fact they were a family of the 'Awazim tribe whose territory was south of Isna and who therefore had no business in Girga, so I gave them a week in which to clear out or risk meeting us again. A month later I sent a patrol to look for them, but not a man was left of this band of parasites who for long had terrorized the neighbourhood.

It was after this case that I succeeded in getting some of the judges and members of the Asyut Parquet to interest themselves in tracking. I invited them to come with me on to the desert behind Asyut town where we invented tracking conundrums and then brought in the Bisharin trackers to solve them. I was lucky at the time to have with me my best tracker, Hamed, who had the rare ability not only of following and reading a track, but also of being able to explain his conclusions in suitable words.

To a desert Arab it is all obvious : as a child he had wandered

## *Tracking School*

further and further every day from his parents' tent and learned their footmarks and those of their camels and goats ; every day of his life he would be trusting more and more to the accuracy of his observations. Whereas we Europeans know a man by his face, a desert Arab knows him by his track and as they truly say : "The desert cannot lie." In getting away from the scene of a crime an Arab will sometimes try to deceive a pursuer by wearing his shoes backwards on but no desert Arab would be deceived for a minute by such a trick as the weight of the body is always on the forepart of the foot unless the track is that for instance of a woman with child, when the weight is thrown back on the heels. Pressure and depth of the track tell a lot as also do length of stride, throw of the foot and style of walking. When it comes to differentiation of camel and other animal tracks, then the town or valley man can only wonder at the uncanny skill of the Arab who can pick out from a hundred others the track of the beast that he is following and will recognize it again even after the animal has been lost for years.

A textbook example that I used to give in these parades in illustration of the importance of pressure was that of two men walking side by side and then of the same two men doing the same but carrying a burden between them when the inward pressure of the feet towards the centre was easily seen in the track.

They used to tell a story about two Bisharin named Farag and Libab who grazed in the wide Eastern Desert each with his own family and herd of camels. One day Farag saw on the ground the track of Libab and not having met him for many months he set off on the track, leaving his camels at graze, on the chance of picking up his friend. After some time, on turning a sudden corner of the wadi, Farag almost ran into a group of the peculiar round dome-shaped tents that the Bisharin use when accompanied by their families in the camel milking season. Not wishing to intrude, Farag returned to his grazing camels with the intention of seeking his friend some other time and meet they did the very next day when Farag found himself confronted

## *Desert Law*

by a furious and murderous Libab who demanded what Farag had been doing prowling round his tent where his wife was in residence. Neither man had seen the other but the footmarks told the tale and nearly led to murder.

Tracking tests by Parquet or police need to be carried out by experienced persons, if a true test of the tracker's skill or evidence is to be obtained. In the Beit 'Allam test just described, the Parquet thought they were very clever in taking off 'Awda's sandals and putting them on to one of the group collected for the trials and were much struck when the tracker quietly spotted 'Awda's footmark but explained that in the desert this foot had been wearing sandals which, he had then pointed out, were now on the foot of another. To the tracker the thing was child's play. Brought across by boat to the scene of the test, Hamed, unobserved, had started his work at once : there on the ground at the ferry were the tracks of the three Arabs he had followed in the desert with the footmarks of their police escort beside them ; then came a confused mass of tracks of a dozen or so individuals being herded along like sheep and finally the European boot tracks of the police officers and Parquet officials. Keeping a close eye on the Bedouin tracks, Hamed had watched how they had been arranged in line in the parade and how they had again been put to one side with their escort while the officials discussed the combination of the next set. Then Hamed must have noted with amusement the scene where the sandal-shod Bedouin had been taken out from among the accused and made to take off his footgear and give them to a fellah. There in big type were all the hesitations and difficulties of a man putting on a footgear entirely strange to him and then the new procession with the 'father of sandals' barefoot and the 'father of bare-feet' sandalled. To Hamed the thing was elementary but to the Parquet official it was marvellous, and he was completely convinced of the truth of the evidence given by the tracking, though he little realized how that evidence had been arrived at.

I did eventually get tracking evidence accepted in court but, just as in finger-print evidence, a judge is justified in requiring

## *Tracks on a Cairo Roof*

other evidence in support. When in a dilemma, however, the existence of people called trackers is occasionally a great comfort to baffled investigators. A robbery case occurred in Cairo in a house in the Ezbekiya. The usual police inquiry was made on the spot and no result arrived at. The Parquet then arrived and took charge of the inquiry and questioned the servants of the house. The point turned on whether or not any of the servants had that night gone up a certain staircase leading to the roof. They all categorically denied having done so.

Completely flummoxed, the Parquet then rounded on the police and asked why the trackers had not been brought in : the obvious answer was given that the case gave no opportunity for trackers as footmarks could hardly be expected on floors and concrete roofs. Listening to no excuse from the police, the Parquet ordered the trackers to be brought and the astonished Hamed, head-tracker of the Camel Corps, was brought in from the Depot and asked to solve the mystery of the crime. Stone staircases and Kidderminster carpets were not a hopeful ground for desert craft, but luck took the police and the hopeless tracker to the flat roof of the house, the only approach to which was by the staircase up which every servant had denied having gone on the night of the crime. Gaining the flat roof, Hamed gazed about him in despair till his eye lighted on a patch of sand which the family had put there for scouring the cooking-pots. Sand was something Hamed understood and a quick glance over it revealed a footmark, clearly one of the same night. The early morning dew, smoothing the impress, told the tracker that that footmark had been made before midnight. Away we went to the nearest desert at 'Abbasiya and tracking sets were made of the three servants mixed with those of a dozen casuals brought in for the purpose. With no hesitation Hamed identified one of the servants' tracks as identical with the footmark found in the sand on the roof and, faced with this denunciation by a wizard of desert craft, the Upper Egypt servant gave in and admitted that he had been up that staircase on the night in question. This confession led to a clear case against the servants. While

## Desert Law

gratified by proving the case, I yet resented the smug satisfaction of the Parquet gentleman with his textbook knowledge as he rubbed into us the practical value of tracks and police tracking.

When I was inspector in Qena in 1908, a feud had been going on for years between the Ma'aza and the 'Ababda tribes. No one in the Government had bothered about it, but mining industries were being opened up on the Red Sea near Quseir and the companies complained to me that they were being severely handicapped as 'Ababda labour from Qena and the Valley could not reach the mines in question, because the Ma'aza shot them up every time on the way across from the valley to the Red Sea.

On inquiry, I found that there had been *damm* (blood feud) between these two tribes for several years. It had started with an 'Ababda guide employed by the Coastguards, tracking and helping to arrest a number of the Ma'aza Arabs and camels engaged in stealing salt. For this the Ma'aza awaited their opportunity and later shot the 'Ababda guide. The guide's son, in duty bound, took up the feud, killed two Ma'aza, a father and a son, and for this two 'Ababda in their turn had subsequently fallen to the rifles of the Ma'aza. The Ma'aza maintained that they had been perfectly justified by desert law in shooting the original 'Ababda as when paid as a guide, he had helped to track the smugglers and had taken some of the seized camels as his reward. My sympathies were aroused as the 'omdas of the two tribes in question were unable to deal with the case under desert law, which was not recognized in Egypt, and at the same time no true Arab would accept a valley law court sentence in settlement of a murder or theft inspired by a blood feud, treating such a sentence as unwarranted interference by a third party in a purely family quarrel.

My chief, Percy Machell, agreed with my suggestion that the only way to settle the matter was to revive the old custom of a Bedouin court which would command the respect of both sides. I therefore sent for the 'omdas of the tribes concerned and announced that six months from that date a *Maglis*

## *Bedouin Law*

'Urfi<sup>1</sup> or Bedouin court would assemble at Qena, that they themselves should select the assessors and that meanwhile the feud must cease pending the court's decision. Six months later, on the 23rd of January, 1909, the litigants met at Qena. For several days I watched the company assembling, some by train and some by camel, groups of Ma'aza and groups of 'Ababda meeting in neutral territory, distant and distrustful, but with weapons sheathed, anyhow for the moment.

It fascinated me to think of the thoughts and the talks of these desert men coming in from three points of the compass with thirty, fifty, a hundred years of desert history fresh in their minds, all assembling by mutual accord at government invitation to settle the blood feuds and the tribal quarrels which, however exciting for the young bloods of the tribes, had made desert life a complicated and uneasy business. For years no Arab of either tribe had been able to cross the other's desert: request to do so was unthinkable: attempt without consent was only possible by force or stealth and the former meant big trouble for everyone. Even when in my company on a government patrol, I have seen two Ma'aza guides approaching a water hole in 'Ababda territory, one doing a cautious stalk, while the other covered him with his gun, each fearing an enemy shot from the jealously guarded well.

Here at last each could state his case. True Bedouin law would decide and statements would be accepted as based on tribal honour. For once each claimant would have a fair hearing. Unlike the Egyptian Courts with, as the Arabs said, their avaricious lawyers and their judges who in their ignorance of the pure Bedouin Arabic, listened through interpreters and consulted large books, here was a Bedouin court that they all understood and trusted. Prospects of justice and desert peace filled the minds of these desert men as they met that day at Qena.

Besides the actual murders, there had been a dozen or two camel raids in which other free-grazing camels had been captured, besides those of the Ma'aza and the 'Ababda, and claimants and

<sup>1</sup>'Urfi: sanctified by custom.



## *Desert Law*

counter-claimants seized the opportunity to straighten out their tangles. Every tribe in the Eastern Desert from Cairo to Suakin was represented, while the chosen assessors were the most respected Bedouin sheikhs from all over Egypt, including the Western Desert tribes of Awlad 'Ali and Jawazi.

I let them choose their own site for the court and naturally they chose the desert edge east of the town, close to the cemeteries where the shrine of Sheikh Sayyid 'Abder-Rahim, the local saint, was marked by an old boat that hung under some shady thorn trees and which was yearly carried round the town in solemn procession at the festival of his birthday. There has probably been a sacred boat there since the days of the Pharaohs.

For privacy and shelter we had put up big Arab tenting. By the morning of the hearing some two hundred silent Arabs had assembled and were waiting. Some had come with hawks on their wrists and greyhounds at heel. Bisharin were there with their fuzzy mops of hair and shovel-headed spears and round shields. Arms were handed to retainers and left outside the court, and the assessors took their places. The Mudir of the Province, the President of the National Courts, and myself, were given seats as guests, but otherwise we were of no importance. The court sat all day, while countless details of raids and counter-raids were gone into, questions of blood money, questions of ownership, all remembered in the fullest detail in those Bedouin minds, but by the evening no decision had been arrived at.

During the night, in their own tents, they went into sub-committees of ten from each side and when we reassembled in the morning, 'Ali Mustafa, the 'Omda of the 'Ababda, announced that he abandoned his claim for the murdered guide, and Mara'i Hasaballa, the 'Omda of the Ma'aza, promised to agree to the 'Ababdas' other demands. The score now was two murders all with still a complicated account of camels stolen. The bill eventually totted up, blood money and camel values added together and written off against one another and the balance was reduced to some dozen or so camels due to the 'Ababda. After a quiet consultation the 'Ababda announced that they gave





SACRED BOAT AT THE TOMB OF SHEIKH  
SAYYID ABD ER-RAHIM AT QENA  
FARAFRA OASIS

SHEIKH SELIM ET-TAWIL  
VILLAGE MARKET IN UPPER EGYPT,  
1906

## *Forgery of Tribal Marks*

up their claim, whereupon the president of the assessors recorded the agreement arrived at and after reciting a few verses from the Koran, the two reconciled 'Omdas embraced in the centre of the assembled tribes, and the business of the Maglis 'Urfi was finished. I blush to say that I then had the courage to get up and make a speech in my halting Arabic, urging them all to respect their desert etiquette without which desert life became impossible. After many mutual expressions of friendship and esteem, the company broke up, shock-haired Bisharin mounted their beautiful camels and with their impatient dogs gambolling at their heels, everyone started off back to his desert home.

That pact made in 1909 remained unbroken until 1914, when the Frontiers Administration was formed and took over desert affairs. The first thing they did was to establish official Bedouin Courts, and since then inter-tribal quarrels that arise are settled quickly and not allowed to grow into deadly feuds.

Unhappily for the Bedouin, they form only a small minority of the population of Egypt. Those Arabs that own land and have waxed rich like the Lamlums and the Masris of Minya province have become persons of influence and political importance, but the desert man, who interested me, had no champions, and Ministers already fully occupied did not welcome any additional problems. Though far from ever having caught 'Arabitis', that fatal mental disease that affects so many Englishmen in the East and unbalances their judgment, I was attracted by the life and problems of these primitive people, whose independence, manliness and sportsmanship were a welcome change from the poor fellahin of the villages.

The old order was breaking down, desert manners had ceased to exist and nothing efficient had taken their place. I was riding one day down the Wadi Asyuti returning from a shooting trip and had with me old Sheikh Selim et-Tawil, the headman of the 'Arab Muteir. Where a side wadi joined the Asyuti, we picked up the fresh tracks of a number of camels and men. Selim knew the tracks at once for those of men of the Haruba, a small half-breed tribe of Arabs who live by poaching ibex and

## Desert Law

wild sheep and who are of no tribal standing. Riding on top of their tracks, we came to a place where they had outspanned at noon and there on the ground was the *wasm*, the tribal mark, of the 'Arab Muteir, Selim's own tribe; the mark is their exclusive camel brand and represents the *mahjan*, the hooked camel stick. I realised what had happened and casually said to Selim something about some of his people being ahead of us, upon which the old man boiled over and cursed those Haruba with phrases that would have shrivelled a mummy. And it was enough to make him curse; here were a dozen or so of these miserable Haruba, not even true Bedouin at that, coming down from Selim's own desert and signing themselves on the sand as members of his tribe in order to impress anyone who might be following into thinking that they were Muteir. To Selim it was the same as forging a signature to a cheque and my sympathies were entirely with him when he cursed the Government for having deprived him of his power to protect his tribal honour. Report to the Parquet? What satisfaction could he get there? There would be nothing written in the books of the valley law courts making illegal the use of another tribe's *wasm*. Oh! for the good old days when he would have collected twenty stout men of his tribe and given the Haruba the punishment they deserved!

It was just the same with water rights. In the good old times, there was no objection to an Arab passing through the desert of another tribe and perhaps watering so long as he followed custom by asking permission and perhaps giving a sheep. Now Arabs were fighting their way through, and there was only trouble and discomfort for all.

A good illustration of the breakdown of Bedouin Law was the affair of Selim et-Tawil's camel in 1906. In April of that year the Prince of Wales was visiting Cairo and a Bedouin race meeting was organized in his honour at the Gezira Sporting Club. The inspectors were told to send down to Cairo the best camels, horses and examples of local industries from their respective provinces. I collected several hundred Bedouin camels at

## *The Great Camel Race*

Abnub, selected the three best, which belonged to Sheikh Selim et-Tawil, the 'Omda of the Muteir Arabs, and sent them off the same day to ride the two hundred and thirty-five miles by the Thieves' Road to Cairo. They covered the distance by hard riding in four days and just gave me time to take them round the course a couple of times the day before the race. The next day the Sporting Club was a wonderful sight : most of Cairo and hundreds of Bedouin from all over Egypt were there and at three o'clock thirty thoroughbred camels faced the flag of a somewhat bewildered starter.

As he went down to the post the boy riding Selim's best camel came up to me at the rails and demanded to have the riding cane I was carrying in my hand to bring him luck and victory in the race. The boy rode strictly according to my instructions and hung well back from the jostling scrum at the start, the second time round he was lying fifth and then he started to come away, winning eventually by several lengths. The rider jumped off his camel, executed a frantic war dance in front of Princes and Pashas, and embraced me effusively on both cheeks, while at the same time I got some very sour looks from the Tahawi Arabs of Sharqiya, old friends of mine who own first-class camels, and who never forgave me for bringing down an unknown camel from the south and depriving them of the victory that they thought assured.

But my story is not concerned with the race so much as with the subsequent history of Selim's camel. After the race Selim went back home by train and left the lads to ride the three camels back slowly by the desert the way they had come. While passing along the Thieves' Road through the Ma'aza country east of Minya, Selim's own camel, the winner of the race, went dead lame and, on the local Ma'aza offering to look after the sick animal, Selim's men left him in their charge and continued the journey back to Abnub on the other camels.

After a day or two Selim made inquiries about his sick camel and soon learned that the Ma'aza had played him a dirty trick. They had no intention, they said, of returning the camel as that

## *Desert Law*

camel's grandfather had been a Ma'aza camel stolen in a raid many years before by Selim's tribe, the Muteir, and they were therefore merely balancing the account. Poor old Selim was heartbroken and very angry. That camel was the apple of his eye, he had refused to sell him to Prince Kamal ed-Din for any price, and now, after winning the royal race from all the camels of Egypt, those sons of dogs, the Ma'aza, posing as friends, had looted his camel, and what could he do ?

He came to me and poured out his tale : it was hopeless to report to the police or the Parquet. What could the Parquet do even if they understood the case ?

A month or two passed in vain negotiations with the Ma'aza, and then one day Selim came to me at Asyut, his head wrapped in a voluminous shawl, looking a picture of misery, and told me a long story of some peculiar illness from which he was suffering, finally begging me to use my influence with the Mudir to get him two months' leave from his official duties as 'Omda of the Muteir tribe. Knowing that Selim had never been sick in his life, I explained to him that it was false tactics on his part to try to deceive me, whereas if he told me the real trouble, I might help him to circumvent the Mudir and get him the required leave. Selim then admitted that he was not sick at all, but that he had heard that the Ma'aza had got his camel somewhere down on the Red Sea coast and that he meant to have him back with the help of a dozen or so of his best young bloods. I persuaded the Mudir that Selim was a sick man, and the leave was granted. Two months later I saw him back again at Asyut, thinner and browner, but obviously a happy man. I asked him after his health and with the Bedouin equivalent of a wink, the old boy told me he and his men had carried out the raid only to find that the famous camel had been shipped to Arabia and sold to some Arab chief on the other side of the Red Sea. I condoled suitably with him on the unsuccess of his sick leave when the old man burst into a flow of Bedouin Arabic and explained how the trip had been by no means wasted in that, in place of the pedigree camel lost, he had cut out and looted eighteen good she-camels

## *Sheikh Selim et-Tawil*

after a first class scrap with their attendant Ma'aza graziers. His sick leave finished, Selim had reported himself to His Excellency the Mudir and once again had taken up his official duties as guardian of law and order in the desert to which he was assigned.

Dear old Selim, that curious mixture of true Arab gentleman and complete humbug! He came with me on my first desert patrol which combined duty and hunting. Every night, quite close to my tent, Selim would say his prayers and, in a very audible voice, would intercede with the Almighty to send me an ibex the next day. "Oh God! send us an ibex, send the Inspector a big one," he would groan, and the very next day, on a track so old that even I could not be deceived, Selim, swearing it was fresh, would go forward with busy energy to spy over the wadi top and come back with the best possible reproduction of grievous disappointment to say that just over the further cliffs he had seen the biggest ibex in the world galloping away in the distance. Having experienced the same sort of thing with Scotch stalkers, I did not blame him, but in future trips I left him in camp to go on saying his prayers and wish us good luck as we set out in the mornings.

Already in 1906 he was an old man, so my surprise can be imagined when he turned up again in 1927, just as I was starting out on another desert trip. I had engaged some Muteir Arabs and camels for my baggage and when we arrived at the rendezvous in the Asyuti, there was old Selim just the same as ever, the same old husky voice, dignified, white-bearded, heavy-looking on the ground but as light as a boy in the saddle, nor had his seventy years lessened the awe in which his tribesmen held him. As we left camp in the morning there was Selim rising from his knees to wish us good hunting, and there again in the evening to greet us with wishes of good return and, on coming down from that trip, I spared the time to stop an hour on our way in to Asyut at his modest house on the desert edge, thus sealing a friendship of over twenty years which only ended with his death at eighty-seven in 1944.

He and his camels were brought back to me very vividly



## *Desert Law*

some years ago. One winter morning in Gezira my servant, with my early tea, told me that two Bedouin on camels were asking for me at my front door. I went down to see a wild-looking old man with an odd tooth or two in his front jaw, a smart-looking ten-year-old boy and two beautiful Bedouin camels. As I walked out into the road, the Arab ran forward with hoarse, raucous greeting and embraced me while I, not wishing to offend by non-recognition, played for time. Gradually from dialect and type I placed him as Upper Egypt and then it dawned upon me that this wizened old man was the boy who had borrowed my cane and ridden the winning race in 1906. He then explained that realizing he was getting old and nearing death, he wanted once more to see me and show me to his son ; he had therefore ridden down the same desert road, over two hundred miles from Asyut and, God be praised, had found me.

I had them cared for for the night and next morning, I on my horse and they on their camels, rode the race again : round the course we went, the old man tense with memory and the small boy silent and entranced as the oft-told tale was re-acted. That done, I sent them under guidance to the Zoo to furnish that small Bedouin boy with a fund of stories of beasts and monsters that would make him king of story-tellers in his tribe. That finished, after slipping a pound note into the small boy's hand, I asked the Bedouin what I could do for him. The father took the note from the boy, kissed my hand with his scrubby mouth and murmured, " You have filled my eye ; I now die happy and my boy has seen you ; I go back to my desert an honoured and a happy man." I gave him a Camel-Corps escort to take him to my boundary, lodged him with my police at the furthest point of my command and sent him on his way with my blessing.

El-Ghagari, or the Gipsy, as they called him, was, I fear, a well-known bad character but, none the less, his visit was a pleasant episode. With no ulterior motive, asking nothing, he was just a primitive man with a wish to see again one whom he had liked many years before ; in my busy Cairo life it brought

## Law of Desert Trees

back to me again the pungent scent of the desert herbs and I felt again the brotherhood of those who are sons of the wide places where manhood counts and where friendship can be made and kept whatever the status and whatever the breed or creed.

Twenty-five years ago in the wadis of this Eastern Desert there were fine old *seiyal* trees, the *acacia tortilis*, a kind of mimosa with trunks two feet thick that may have taken a hundred years to grow in the scanty soil of those rocky wadis. These trees provided shelter for man from the heat of the sun and browsing for his camel : and as such were tribal property. A dead branch was anyone's property, but woe betide anyone who cut a green bough. Then came the gradual death of tribal law and, with the war, the increased value of fuel. 'Ababda and Muteir started cutting these old trees and burning them for charcoal to be sold in the valley, with the result that there is hardly a *seiyal* tree left to-day in the whole Eastern Desert. Up till 1916 there was a famous group of these veteran trees on the Qena-Quseir road : they formed a welcome patch of shade in that blazing desert and many a flock of sheep on their way from the Red Sea to the Nile had been fed on the leaves stripped by hand from those fine old centenarian trees. One day an 'Ababda, a bolshy Bedouin, cut and charcoaled one of these trees. 'Ali Mustafa, the 'Omda of the 'Ashabab, the section of the 'Ababda concerned, dealt with the man under Bedouin law and condemned him to a fine of thirty camels, calculated at the rate of one camel for each bough cut as thick as a man's arm. That was the last tribal sentence given and today there is hardly one of these *acacia* trees left.

The old life of the quiet places is rapidly disappearing and the desert is no longer the land whose charm consisted in its inaccessibility, its primitiveness, and at the same time, its veiled menace to the unwary. Motor-cars today scar its surface with their indelible wheel marks, no one has the time for talk with the occasional Arab, with the result that all contact has been lost and desert intelligence has become a matter of a few shouted remarks in place of the leisured exchange of yarns round the

## *Desert Law*

blazing night fire of acrid brush-wood, with the shadow-play of the camels' heads on the wadi cliffs behind.

Luckily for the ibex and the sheep there are still large areas of the Eastern Desert where cars cannot pass, where the ground is not fouled by the clinging stink of grease and petrol and where he who would penetrate must have time in hand and rely for his wayfaring on the leisurely camel and the trusted Arab guide. May this country long preserve its character and its fauna to the exclusion of modern man in a hurry and to the delight of those that love the silence of these prehistoric valleys.

## CHAPTER 7

### BRIGANDAGE

BRIGANDAGE in a small way was common throughout the country but every now and then it became a serious affair when a band of some twenty or thirty bad men leagued themselves together and terrorized a whole district. The leader of these organized bands was nearly always a half-bred Sudanese, (*muwallad*), the 50 per cent. of black blood just giving that extra bit of ruthless courage that made the Sudanese-fellah such a dangerous hybrid. Probably the parts of Egypt with the longest brigandage tradition were Balyana and Nag' Hammadi, just north of Luxor, and here again Sudanese half-breeds have always been the leaders. In 1902 it needed the summary methods of Birch Pasha, the famous Interior Inspector, to break up the notorious gang led by 'Abd el-'Ati, who for years had been tyrannizing the Balyana district and terrorizing among others the wealthy but timid Butros family.

Sugar-cane is the staple crop of this part of Upper Egypt and there are estates with many hundreds of acres of unbroken sugar-cane cultivation without a road through them. Cane grows fifteen feet in height and when planted close, with its long ribbon foliage makes a tangled forest almost impossible to penetrate. 'Abd el-'Ati and his gang lived in the cane and from its cover harried the surrounding country. Birch organized an army of police and village watchmen and systematically drove the cane fields till finally the brigands, finding themselves cornered, took refuge in one of the large pigeon-cotes that are such a feature of this district.

Surrounded by high walls, these huge pigeon houses stand like Moorish *qasbas* on properties of the local landlords who, in the days before chemical manures, made fortunes from the guano

## Brigandage

of the countless thousands of pigeons that roosted in their cotes, daily filling their crops on the beans, lentils and barley of the fellahin who were not allowed to own pigeons themselves. Crenellated on top, loopholed on the outside and scaffolded within, these cotes formed an ideal Fort Chabrol to the brigand mind, but Birch saw his chance and soon had them ringed round at a safe distance by his numerous though none too valiant forces. With no need for hurry the besieging army waited for the thirst of an Upper Egypt summer to do its work. Caught like rats in a trap, the brigands made a sortie, only to be met with a hail of shots from Chassepots and Remingtons. Leaving the situation well in hand, Birch handed over and left by the night train for Cairo to report.

That night a curious thing happened ; wisps of smoke were seen emerging from the topmost nesting holes and soon the entire pigeon-cote was ablaze. Desperate men tried to escape, only to be driven back, and with a desultory salvo of exploding ammunition behind them and a cloud of whirling and frightened pigeons above them, 'Abd el-'Ati and his gang perished in the crackling flames.

Peace reigned in that district for many years till 1907 when, on return from my English leave, I was sent for by my Adviser and ordered to proceed that same evening to Nag<sup>c</sup> Hammadi, where a new gang of brigands was terrorizing the country. Passing Minya and Asyut on my way south by the night train I picked up the twenty-four Sudanese Camel Corps Police that I had formed the year before and on arrival at Nag<sup>c</sup> Hammadi ignored the local police and put the Sudanese in charge of operations. The chief brigand, Mirsal, was a local half-bred Sudanese whose reputation for daring and callousness had collected round him some forty local rascals who spent their nights holding up outlying hamlets and villages for ransom and their days in riot and wantonness with liquor and kidnapped women, varied by organized daylight shoots round the neighbouring pigeon-cotes. Out of sheet bravado, Mirsal never carried a gun and ruled his pirate crew with a *rhino-kurbash*.

## *Brigands in the Cane*

The presence of the Camel Corps put heart into some of the local inhabitants and by next day I had found two villagers who had recently been kidnapped by the brigands, kept prisoner in the sugar-cane and released on ransom. In this impenetrable forest, the only paths are single-file tracks along the narrow irrigation channels. The trembling guides showed the greatest unwillingness to re-enter their recent prison, but the presence of the large numbers of police reassured them and presently we were following along one of the main water-channels leading into this nine-hundred-acre jungle. The guide now showed where the path had been blazed by the brigands making knots of the sugar-cane leaves, the direction zig-zagging now right, now left, up the subsidiary water-ditches. Hamed, the Bishari tracker, led the way with the unhappy guide in close custody, myself following and behind me a number of police officials and the Parquet agents ; from the look on their faces and the angles at which they carried their revolvers I realized that my back was in serious danger and I ordered them all, much to their relief, to return and wait for us outside the cane. After some quarter of an hour of this Indian-file advance we came to a large opening in the cane which had clearly been the brigands' lair, but alas ! it was empty. I learned afterwards, that it was only that night that they had cleared out on hearing that the Sudanese Camel Corps had arrived at Nag' Hammadi. Leg-of-mutton bones and empty mastik bottles showed that the brigands had done themselves well, thanks to the terrified servility of the village sheikhs who themselves had provided the food.

Information as to the movements of the brigands was difficult to get while the reign of terror lasted and the daily beating of hundred of acres of sugar-cane on the offchance of a capture was exhausting and unremunerative. One day, however, we got information that the gang was living in a big sugar-cane plantation an hour's ride west of Nag' Hammadi. The difficulty always was to bring our forces up to the covers to be drawn without warning of our intentions getting ahead of us to the brigands. It happened to be just on full-moon and I was discussing the

## *Brigandage*

feasibility of trying a night attack in which we should arrive unobserved. We could be pretty sure that anyone found in the cane by night would be a brigand, which was not always so by day. Then I remembered that one of Messrs. Thomas Cook's tourist steamers was due to arrive at Nag' Hammadi the following evening. I arranged, therefore, with Cook's local agent that he should ask the police to have ready some thirty riding donkeys for his tourists, who wished to go on a moonlight picnic in the neighbourhood. The following evening the thirty donkey boys paraded with their donkeys and were promptly locked up in the courtyard of the police station until it was getting on for midnight when two by two the Sudanese Camel Corps men slipped quietly away on their donkeys to meet us at a rendezvous at some distance from the cane field. Having got the men into position round the cane all the ghafirs of the neighbouring villages were brought along and formed into line as most unwilling beaters. It is difficult enough to keep beaters in line in daylight on a grouse moor, imagine then the task of working thirty or forty frightened ghafirs twenty yards apart, by moonlight, each man having to push his fully loaded rifle ahead of him to fend a way through a tangled forest of fifteen foot canes with the possibility of suddenly coming on the brigands in their lair. The Sudanese were in their element, each man with a kurbash hanging from his wrist, a sheath knife on his left arm, a handy coil of rope round his waist and a cartridge ready in his front teeth to drop into the open breach of his carbine, but not so the ghafirs who were frankly terrified.

At one moment I thought I had a brigand in front of me as I heard a swishing in the cane just ahead ; putting on speed I could just make out a man's form in the moonlight and with a jump on to his back I had him over on to the ground only to find that he was a ghafir who had got out of line. Though the bag that night was nil, the Sudanese took the opportunity to establish a reputation of roughness when they found a near-by group of Arab tents and by the time I got there they had every man trussed up and receiving a sound flogging with the kurbash.

## *Insurance Racket*

Several weeks of this sort of work had got the troopers savage and some vicarious suffering inflicted on suspected harbourers made the brigands so unpopular in the district that they cleared out and scattered all over the country, some of them even going as far as the Beheira province near Alexandria. Once the terror of Mirsal and his gang was broken, we were able to collect enough evidence against him and fifteen of his gang to get them a hundred years' penal with hard labour between them.

The famous Matrawi of Beheira was of a different type : he was a Bedouin of Tripolitan origin and was at the head of what would today be called a 'racket'. The bad men of Beheira province were always Bedouin of sorts and the wise landlord who wished to protect his property employed as ghafirs men from the local Bedouin tribe. Matrawi organized things in such a way that if you wanted value for your money you got your ghafirs through him, whereas if you wanted trouble, well, you trusted to the ghafirs supplied by the Government. There was one thing to be said for him, and that was that his was a well-run business, and once 'insured' at Matrawi's your cattle, crops and buildings were safe : it did not necessarily follow that you ever saw a ghafir on your land, perhaps merely an empty tent would be put up, but that was your 'cover note'. I myself have spoken to a twelve-year-old Bedouin girl camping by herself on land in Abu Hummus and been told by her that she was one of Matrawi's ghafirs.

In 1910 the Government instituted throughout the provinces Brigandage Committees who passed sentences of deportation to a concentration camp in Kharga Oasis in the Western Desert on hundreds of local bad characters throughout the country. Legal evidence other than previous conviction was not essential but great weight was given to repute. When the Beheira Commission tackled Matrawi, no one could be found to give evidence against him : a step, however, was gained by finding that one of the big European land companies had for several years entered in their books a sum of several hundred pounds as subscription



## *Brigandage*

to the Matrawi racket. Matrawi's arrogance led to his own downfall. Called up by the Damanhur police authorities on some excuse, he fell foul of them and committed a technical assault on the police for which the Courts sentenced him to a short term of imprisonment : when the time came for his release, every Bedouin in Beheira knew that Matrawi, while under arrest, had had to submit to a certain form of assault on his person which by them was considered as bringing disgrace solely on the victim. Matrawi came out a broken man and was later sentenced to five years in the Kharga concentration camp, where he died.

I was fated one day to make very personal acquaintance with a Sudanese half-breed whose career was typical of how a tough could terrorize a whole countryside. One April day in 1909 I happened to go on inspection to a district police station in Qalyubiya, and on arrival found everyone in a state of great excitement. A man had just come in and given information of the location in a village half an hour away of one 'Ali Farahat, half-bred Sudanese, a local brigand and a bad man generally, who after being sentenced to imprisonment for life for murder had recently escaped from the convict prison at Tura. The senior district officer was away, so his next in command took charge and quickly paraded his available police : these he divided into a plain-clothes force armed with revolvers, who were to go ahead with the guide and locate the house, while we would follow on close behind with a uniformed force of half a dozen mounted men.

The half-hour's law for the advance party being up, we rode out to the village only to find our plain-clothes force stranded at its entrance owing to the disappearance of the guide, whose courage had given out as he approached nearer to Farahat's lair. We had been told the name of the owner of the house where Farahat was hiding and an innocent small boy, encouraged by two piastres, officiously volunteered to show the way which led up a narrow lane from the outside of the village. I took post on my horse at the mouth of the lane where I could see what the

## *Village Terrorization*

police party were doing at the other end and at the same time could watch the south edge of the village.

I could see that the police party had stopped at a door at which they were knocking and demanding admission, when suddenly a thing like a large baboon dropped off the roof of the house in front of me within two yards of my horse's nose. I had previously seen Farahat's official photograph, in fact I had it in my pocket, and there was no mistaking this six-foot-two negro, bare-headed, clad in a short linen shirt and carrying a carbine in his right hand. At my shouted summons to stop, he turned his yellow eyes to have a look at me over his shoulder and continued running. I was riding a troop horse and was armed with a single-loading Martini-Metford carbine: not daring to fire pistol fashion with one hand for fear of hitting one of the scores of fellahin sitting sunning themselves on the village edge, I kept my horse some fifteen yards behind him and shouted that I should shoot if he did not put up his hands. I then noticed ahead of me a house that jutted out at a right angle from the village alignment and would thus catch a bullet should it go astray. I dropped the reins on the horse's neck and taking both hands to the carbine took careful aim to one side of his head as a final warning to surrender. At the shot he jinked right-handed up a lane and I followed five yards behind to find that he had stopped round the corner and had got me covered with his carbine. Not having had time to reload my weapon, I gave him everything I had which was a swinging blow with the butt-end on his negro skull; at this moment up dashed a mounted policeman who had been galloping behind me and we were off our saddles and on to the dazed black, with his hands held, before he could use his loaded Remington. The next to arrive were the plain-clothes police all panting from the run and shaking with excitement and the next thing I knew was that one of them, whether from nerves or intent I never proved, had let off a Webley revolver from just behind my back, the bullet missing my ribs by a couple of inches and landing in Farahat's groin. As he collapsed like a wounded gorilla, pandemonium broke

## Brigandage

loose and scores of shrieking village women threw themselves upon him and would have torn him to pieces with their avenging hands, had we not beaten them off. His sinister reputation was such that he had been living free in the village for many months, no one daring to denounce him ; he had taken possession of another man's house, evicted the owner but kept his wife, and when we caught him, he had five golden sovereigns in his pocket. He afterwards told me that he had been drinking heavily over-night and during the morning and was too muzzy to shoot me as he had intended.

As the Arab proverb says : " When the cow falls the knives become many," but I thought it hardly playing the game when the head of the village watchmen, who for months had not dared to arrest Farahat, started knocking the fallen black about and boasting of his share in the victory : I remember my satisfaction as, with my temper well up, I picked him up bodily and threw him into the filthy village pond and later officially dismissed him, his men, and the village 'Omda from their posts.

Farahat, guarded by a police escort, was taken on a hurdle to the Qalyub hospital some fifteen miles distant where I watched the doctor probing for the bullet in his ilium ; sweat poured off him but not a sound did that negro utter, and next day I saw him walking handcuffed and unassisted down the Qalyub station platform on his way back to Tura convict prison where he died fifteen years later. As a matter of fact he missed death on that April day by a millimetre as my carbine bullet had taken a large chip out of one of his great elephant ears as they flapped in his laboured running.

The history of Farahat's escape from prison was that he had been given good conduct work as a mechanic in the prison pumping station on the river bank. While so employed, he had been able to get in touch with a Sudanese woman among the local population which always surrounds a convict establishment and battens on the inevitable corruption of its warder staff. With her assistance he had got possession of a quantity of the seeds of *datura stramonium* which are used all over the East to



Hamed.

10-7-39

M.A.C.



"CAPTAIN HALL"

From a painting by Mrs. Nina Colmore

HAMED, THE HEAD TRACKER

From a drawing by Major Crichton-Stuart



## *“ Datura Stramonium ”*

drug an intended victim. Crushed and mixed in the midday ration, shared alike, it seemed, by the warder and the calculating ' trusty ', this powerful drug put the warder to sleep while Farahat made good use of the workshop tools to file through his leg irons and swim the Nile to freedom. Once clear of his prison, he made his way back to the Qalyub district with the determined intention of murdering a local notable who had had the courage to give evidence against him in his latest murder and thus been instrumental in getting him a life sentence.

## CHAPTER 8

### *POLICE DOGS*

It was not until 1936 that the Egyptian Police decided to experiment with a method of crime control which was to give them much needed assistance in overcoming their greatest difficulty in crime detection, which was the unwillingness of the public to give evidence against brigands and murderers. The Palestine Police had for some years been training and using Doberman Pinchers, obtained from South Africa, and had found them gifted with wonderful noses and intelligence but at the same time very highly strung and temperamental, which made it necessary for each dog to have his own particular British constable handler.

At the Police College in Cairo we had a very keen young Egyptian officer named Elfi, who had spent several of his leaves studying dog work in England and Germany. Elfi had the good fortune to pick up an exceptionally good Alsatian dog, named Captain Hall after his former English owner. A kennel was gradually built up composed entirely of Alsations, and some Egyptian policemen were trained as handlers. At one time the kennel had six fully trained dogs which, though first class in every way, never reached the amazing intelligence of dog Hall. An epidemic of biliary fever set in a year or two later and, undiagnosed by the veterinaries, killed off most of the trained dogs, including Hall. With this disastrous experience behind them the Police College has since rebuilt the kennel and several first-class dogs have been trained, but none of them has ever equalled Hall.

This dog was three years old when we got him, and although born of untrained parents he took to the work at once. In 1938 he was taken out on no less than one hundred and seventy cases

## *Dog Hall*

of provincial crime during the year. In thirty-two cases the man identified by Hall at once confessed to the crime, in twenty-four cases the man identified by the dog admitted that the tracks were his but denied the crime, while in eighty-five cases the man pointed out by the dog denied that the tracks were his but was proved, by subsequent investigation independent of the dog's evidence, to be lying. It was soon clear that no dog could continue working at this pressure without suffering from it, and he had to be reserved for only the most important cases. By then his year's hard work had produced the most extraordinary effect among the fellahin throughout the country. In many cases his mere appearance, as he walked from his van to a parade of suspects, was sufficient to make the guilty person throw up his hands in confession and beg for the dog to be kept away from him. So far from any attempt ever being made on his life, as might have been expected, dog Hall was the most popular police officer in the country and drew crowds of several hundreds to see him relieve them of the criminals they feared but did not dare denounce.

The stories of his various cases are many and remarkable, including those where he was able to follow a scent several days old, or even on a tarmac road over which motor-cars had been passing for some hours after the scent had been laid. One of his most famous cases intimately concerned myself as, by his help, we were able to find and convict three Arabs who murdered my favourite shikari while on a shooting trip with me.

If you motor by the desert road for an hour and a half south-west of the Giza Pyramids, you will arrive at the escarpment of the Faiyum depression. Away to your right you will see the shimmering waters of Lake Qarun, all that now remains of the vast lake which in ancient times occupied most of the 1,700 square kilometres of what is now the fertile province of the Faiyum Oasis. To anyone who likes to work for his sport and is satisfied with a moderate mixed bag, the Faiyum is a delightful change from a Cairo office and to it I motored with my wife, one January day, to spend the five-day Bairam holiday at the



## *Police Dogs*

Irrigation rest-house at Seila. The rest-house stands on raised desert ground on the eastern edge of the cultivation and from it one can motor in an hour or so to any part of the province. An hour's gallop in the morning on the shingly desert, two or three hours in the afternoon on some neighbouring marsh shooting snipe and teal, tea and books till dinner-time and a healthy day has been spent when one seeks an early bed, undisturbed by the shrill music of distant jackals hunting in the night.

I had arranged to be met on arrival by my favourite shikari, an odd little man called Guda, who knew every bit of snipe ground in the province and was himself a first-class snipe shot. Owing some land of his own, Guda was in easy circumstances and shot more for his own pleasure than for profit.

We decided overnight that we would make a day of it on the Sunday and combine shooting with sight-seeing, by motoring across the province to its western edge where there are a number of shallow, grassy snipe pools and also the recently excavated Ptolemaic temple of Madinet Madi, some four kilometres out into the Western Desert from the small village of 'Ezbet Kashif. This village is populated like most of these desert-edge villages in the Faiyum by a rough type of Arab of Tripolitan descent. By half-past twelve I had picked up some twenty snipe and gave in to my wife's urgent request to motor off and improve our minds by visiting the temple. Guda, having no use for Egyptology, suggested that while we were away, he would take a walk round some ground near the village and drive the snipe over to a bigger marsh that he pointed out to me to the south. Allowing an hour and a half for temple and lunch, we arranged to meet him at two o'clock at the southern marsh. While shooting in the morning we had picked up an Arab, 'Abd es-Sattar by name, who was walking about on the marsh with a gun in his hand and who greeted Guda as a friend. We finished up shooting close to the small Arab hamlet of 'Ezbet Kashif, and I told 'Abd es-Sattar to come with us to Madinet Madi to point out the best going for the car over the desert. Ten or twelve minutes brought us to the temple and another quarter of an

## *Disappearance of Guda*

hour sufficed to explore it ; ten minutes for the return and on arriving at 'Ezbet Kashif I asked 'Abd es-Sattar where we could find a shady spot for lunch : he suggested a small garden belonging to the sheikh of the 'ezba and there, at the sheikh's invitation, we outspanned and ate our luncheon.

When the meal was over, we walked out to the near-by marsh, but found no Guda. Impatient of waiting, I and 'Abd es-Sattar walked it up without him and added another half-dozen snipe to the bag. Being anxious to get back to Seila for tea we returned to 'Ezbet Kashif at about three o'clock, but found no news of Guda ; we imagined that he had gone further afield than he had intended and had missed the rendezvous. Leaving word with the sheikh of the 'ezba and others for Guda when he should return, we motored off back to Seila and late tea.

Inquiries by telephone next day informed us that Guda, with whom we had intended shooting, had not returned to his house at Itsa village, which seemed odd as the distance was small and as his family said that he never slept away from home without giving notice in advance.

On Tuesday I had the Itsa police rung up several times for news, but the reply was always that Guda had not returned. In the evening my police chauffeur came in with the local police gossip that Guda must unquestionably have been murdered and that the local police at Itsa were hesitating to search the Arab villages where we had been shooting for fear of a row. I rather doubted the rumour at first, but by Wednesday I had become seriously uneasy and told the local authorities that I intended coming out myself in my police capacity to take charge of the inquiry. On Thursday morning therefore we motored to Itsa, where I gave my evidence to the Parquet official in charge of the inquiry and motored on with him and the police forces to 'Ezbet Kashif. Unwilling still to give orders outside my command, I left it to the local police to decide what to do. The police trackers had by now turned up, but had not been able to do anything as no one could give them a line to start tracking on. My wife then remembered that the day we had been

## *Police Dogs*

shooting she had been watching us with field-glasses from the road on the farther side of the marsh and had seen Guda run out of the marsh on to a dry spit of sand to pick up a bird and, sure enough, there we found his track ; later on the track was found again on a bank near the village with an empty cartridge-case from his gun, proving that he had been near the village. Unfortunately I had an important official dinner in Cairo that night and at one o'clock I left the local police to their own devices and motored off to Cairo with the parting remark that I should expect results without further delay.

It seems that after I left at one o'clock the police officials took no particular action and returned to the nearest police station for the night. Meanwhile the police Camel Corps patrol went questing about on its own and made a wide cast on the cleaner desert half a mile west of the village. Here they picked up the tracks of three men and a donkey going due west in the direction of Madinet Madi, but not on the usual line across the desert. The Bishari tracker, with that uncanny instinct of the desert man, decided that the tracks were suspect and noted that one of the three men was lame in the left leg and that the donkey was laden. Some four kilometres out he saw from the tracks that one man had left the others and had unsuccessfully tried to dig in the hard desert surface. On went the tracks, leaving Madinet Madi to the left, heading due west for the limitless Western Desert where no man goes. Another four kilometres and the tracks stop and the tell-tale sand shows where the donkey's burden had been laid on the ground and then carried to a spot where the surface showed signs of having been recently smoothed over by hand.

A few minutes' digging and Guda's naked body is found buried a metre deep in the desert sands. A Sudanese trooper on a fast Bishari camel is detailed to ride in quick to the nearest village telephone and give the news to the police station. The orders in reply are that the police officials and the police dog Hall will come out first thing next morning and that meanwhile the Camel Corps patrol will guard the body and its grave.

The burying of the body naked was a natural precaution

## *A Grim Vigil*

against the possible eventual finding of some of Guda's clothes which, had he been buried in them, would have been unearthed and scattered around by devouring jackals and hyaenas : actually the clothes were found buried some fifty metres away. In a pitch-dark night with a cold north-west wind blowing the camel patrol settled down to their vigil. The Bishari tracker later described to me the screaming chorus of some fifty or sixty jackals which surrounded them all night drawn by the scent of the opened grave and how the patrol shared the night in one-hour watches till the morning came and the disappointed corpse-snatchers slunk away home to their dens.

Early next morning the police officials arrived on the scene and with them the famous police dog Hall and his handler. Investigations had by now discovered that a year previously Guda had had a quarrel with some Arabs of this self-same hamlet over some sporting rights. Desert-edge gardens are often let out for the bird-liming of winter migrants, and Guda had outbid the local Arabs for a garden and thus earned their enmity. The names of these Arabs had been given to the police by his family and they were brought out under arrest to the scene of the burying.

News of the finding of the corpse had also reached Guda's relatives, and a crowd of them accompanied the police party. To satisfy the investigating Parquet official of the correctness of the trackers' evidence, the police officer in charge, after sending the tracker away out of sight, formed up a parade of some twenty people including the three suspected Arabs and marched them out in line : the parade was then shuffled and marched out again in different order. The tracker was then brought back and quickly picked out the three suspects, one of whom was lame, as being the men whose tracks he had followed in the desert.

It is now the turn of the dog Hall. The parade is formed up again with suspected murderers and mourning relatives standing side by side in line ; the dog is taken by his handler to the carefully guarded grave where the three men's tracks can be clearly seen. Straddling the dog between his legs, the handler presses

## *Police Dogs*

his muzzle down on to footmark No. 1, and holds it there for some seconds ; the dog then starts at the right of the line, walks slowly and deliberately along the front of the parade, turns at the end and comes back behind it as though he were inspecting a guard of honour, and then makes straight for the Arab whose scent he recognizes, seizes him firmly by his robes and gives tongue.

With hardly a pause the dog is taken back to the grave and given the scent of track No. 2 ; down the parade he slowly walks and once again seizes his man. There is still one more person to be identified. Hall takes the scent of track No. 3, and without hesitation seizes the skirts of the third accused, the man with the lame left leg.

Named by the relatives, identified by the trackers and picked out by the dog, the lame man was on the point of collapse and confession : the dog handler asked permission to repeat the test on him, but the Parquet Officer was convinced by the evidence and could bide his time for the confession.

The police party now headed for the cultivation with the tracker ahead following the five-day-old spoor of the returning donkey. For the first seven kilometres the ground was soft and still showed the track, but at a kilometre from the desert edge, sand and gravel gave way to flat rock and here dog Hall was brought in again. Given the scent from the donkey's last visible hoof mark, Hall took the line over a mile of stony country towards 'Ezbet Kashif, where he got on the ground fouled by the tracks of the village flocks and herds and getting fouler still as he approached the village ; distressed by the long strain he still slowly puzzled out his line, took it half round the outer wall of the hamlet, turned in and along the village street, sniffing at each doorway in turn, till he found the house he wanted where he gave tongue and demanded admission. Hall was right. It was the house of the lame man, the donkey was there and a mat was found in the house on which Guda had been thrown and strangled. With his nerve completely gone the lame man quickly broke down under cross-examination and confessed to

## *Arabs break their Coda*

having helped carry the body but denied having taken part in the murder.

The case is interesting from various points of view. The first is the unparalleled audacity of these Arabs in murdering in broad daylight a man in the employment and company of a senior police official like myself. It seems that when we set off towards the temple, 'Abd es-Sattar handed to Guda his outer robe and asked him to put it in his house in the hamlet. Guda went in to the village to do so, met the accused in the lane and was invited by them to take coffee in their house. Careless of the risk he was running, Guda entered and was promptly throttled. Little did we think, as we sat eating our luncheon that day in the sheikh's garden, that our little friend's strangled body was lying in a house not fifty yards away. The method of murder is also interesting. Arabs generally murder by shooting, while fellahin generally use a knife or a club; throttling is unusual, but was perhaps used in this case to avoid the noise of a gun-shot. What, however, would strike anyone familiar with the East is the gross abuse of the much-vaunted Arab hospitality. Guda was a guest, I was a guest, and the hosts strangled my servant. The desert-edge inhabitants of this part of the Faiyum are a rough and lawless lot, murder is common and the provincial police are frightened of them. One explanation of the complete disregard by the accused of the traditional code of Arab behaviour may be that these Rimah Arabs are not true Arabs at all but are of Berber origin with a mixture of fellahin blood and diluted standards of behaviour.

The tracking was a good example of the great value to the police of first-class Bisharin trackers. Often on most unpromising ground these true desert men display an extraordinary flair for guessing what a man is going to do and proving that he did it.

The hero of the piece was undoubtedly dog Hall, and the quality of his nose was most remarkably demonstrated. In this case the tracks with which he had to deal had been made four and a half days earlier, and lay on dry, stony desert in bright,

## *Police Dogs*

sunny weather with a strong north-west wind blowing. On the parade his remarkable intelligence was shown by the way that he successfully took a scent, found his man, dismissed that scent from his mind and took another, and this not twice but three times within a few minutes. Actually his task was made unnecessarily difficult by the officer omitting to remove from the parade, as he should have done, each accused as soon as identified. His scenting powers and determination were well shown in the way that he stuck to the last half-mile over the worst possible scenting ground until he brought it to a finish at the murderer's house. It must, too, be remembered that the donkey had been taken out of the house every day since the murder and had walked down the same village street and out to its work in the fields, thus leaving a fresher trail each day on top of the older one : in spite of this the dog stuck to the old line and refused to leave it for the fresher scent of the same animal. The exhausted condition of the dog at the finish was clear evidence of the strain that it was to puzzle out that faint line from the hundreds of other overlaid cross trails. It was largely thanks to dog Hall that the three murderers were convicted and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Another remarkable case by the same dog occurred in the Sharqiya province where a village woman of Faqus district was attacked by two unknown thieves and robbed of her gold ornaments while she was walking along a country road. As it happened, Warrant Officer Ibrahim 'Abdalla, the trainer of dog Hall who was kennelled in Cairo, was born in this woman's village and the reputation of the dog was known to her and everyone. Determined to get possession of some piece of property belonging to the robber to help in the subsequent identification by the dog, she kept the struggle going long enough to enable her to snatch a leather wallet from one of their pockets. The robbers ran off with their loot and the woman made straight for the nearest police station where she reported the case to the officer in charge, produced the leather wallet and accused as her aggressor whoever should prove to be its owner,

## *Dog Hall picks his Man*

at the same time telling the police officer that, if he could not find the owner, dog Hall could.

The first thing found in the wallet was an official electoral card bearing a man's name ; this man was promptly arrested in a neighbouring village, denied owning the wallet, admitted that the electoral card was his but stated that he had lost it four months previously. Further examination of the contents of the wallet produced two small linen packets, one containing a lock of hair and the other some finger-nail parings, obviously a love-charm. At this point dog Hall and his trainer, Warrant Officer Ibrahim 'Abdalla, were sent for from Cairo, but hearing that the case had occurred in his own village he asked to be excused the invidious task and sent his assistant trainer in his place. The police had by now rounded up all the local bad characters from the surrounding district and paraded them with the owner of the card in their midst. The dog handler then gave the dog the scent of the wallet and led him to the parade. Slowly and quietly the dog walked down the front line of the squatting men, back again behind them, hanging his head with a look of almost boredom on his face ; once more the dog passed along the front line when he suddenly turned and leaped on to the shoulder of the owner of the electoral ticket. His trainer, to make certain, took him away a time or two, but the dog was not to be denied and seized his victim again with increasing ferocity. The inquiring officer then proceeded to deal with the lock of hair and nail-parings. The sheikh of the village was instructed to have search made in the neighbourhood for any girls suspected of having been on friendly relations with the accused, it being a well-known custom among the fellahin for a girl to give to her friend a curl of her hair and some cuttings of her finger-nails to wear as a love amulet. The accused obviously had a gay reputation in the neighbourhood and half a dozen girls were produced by the village sheikh and made to sit down in a row on the ground. Hall was then given the scent from the love-charm and solemnly passed down the line of paraded girls, carefully sniffing their hair until he found the girl he wanted,



## *Police Dogs*

who promptly confessed that she had given the love-charm to the accused on his promise to marry her and that the wallet seized was the one in which, before her own eyes, he had placed the amulet four months previously.

The identification of robber No. 1 soon led to the arrest of his accomplice, who proved to be a well-known criminal with a number of antecedents of robbery with violence and other crimes.

Two points in this case are specially noticeable: the first is that the amulet containing the girl's hair had been in the wallet for four months. It is true that it was inside the wallet and not in the open, but it is remarkable that after that lapse of time the dog should still have been able to scent the girl from it. The other outstanding feature of the case was the quickness with which the peasant girl's brain worked in prompting her to get possession of some object of the robber for use in a subsequent dog-trail.

That a good police dog can deal with a false accusation as well as a true one is demonstrated by the following Hall story. A report was received at a police station in Lower Egypt that a certain village postman while on his postal rounds had been set upon by some thieves who had sprung out upon him from a field of sugar-cane, had fired at him without hitting him, had then robbed him and left him bound by the roadside where he had been found. The police rounded up all the bad characters of the district, but the postman failed to identify any of them as his aggressors. Meanwhile dog Hall and his handler had been telegraphed for from Cairo and arrived by car. The plaintiff pointed out the footmarks of his aggressors and where they had come out of the cane fields. The dog was promptly given the scent of the tracks and taken to the parade of the local bad men. Once down the line was quite enough for Hall, who would have nothing to do with the men paraded and, with a deep bark, turned off the parade, seized the plaintiff postman by his coat sleeve and refused to let him go. The postman fainted clean away, and a curious scene took place as the police officials

## *Dog Hall proves the fraud*

poured buckets of water over him to bring him round and dog Hall stood straining at his leash ready to seize him again the moment he should recover.

On regaining consciousness the unfaithful postman admitted that he had faked the case, that the tracks were his, and that he had staged the alleged robbery so as to persuade the Postal Administration to transfer him elsewhere from his present district where he was heavily in debt to many people. The faking of the case was bad, as all the knots of the postman's bonds were in front of his body and his tarbush, unlike the rest of his clothes, was free from mud ; but all the same, had it not been for Hall, the case would probably have gone down as yet another unproved crime.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE DESERTS

THE total area of the Kingdom of Egypt is a million square kilometres ; of this, 10 per cent. is under cultivation, whereas the other 90 per cent. consists of three barren deserts.

The Libyan or Western Desert stretches out westward from the Nile Valley for five hundred miles to the frontiers of Cyrenaica and, with the exception of the coastal belt and of some six inhabited oases, of which Siwa is the biggest, is devoid of human habitation or grazing. The Eastern or Nubian Desert lies between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea from Cairo to Aswan and consists of a maze of rocky wadis with a chain of mountains running steeply up to several thousand feet above the Red Sea shore, to form a watershed sloping gradually for a hundred miles to the Nile Valley.

The Sinai Desert is an inverted triangle of land, half plain and half mountain, whose southern half lies between the Gulfs of Suez and 'Aqaba and whose northern half is bounded by the Mediterranean.

Looked at from the hunter's point of view, deserts divide into those where animal life exists and those where it does not, this depending on the amount of rainfall, and therefore grazing, that each desert gets.

As a sportsman's playground the Western Desert can be dismissed in a few lines. A hundred or more years ago rain was more frequent and grazing must have existed in considerable quantities and oryx, addax and ostrich were found in its northern areas. With the gradual desiccation of the desert, the consequent drifting of the sands and the advent of motor transport and modern rifles, the fauna of the Western Desert, by the beginning

## *Three Deserts*

of this war, had been reduced to a fair number of Dorcas gazelle, some rare Loders gazelle and a very occasional visit from a lone Barbary sheep from the distant southern Oasis of 'Uweinat, while two hundred miles south-west of Alexandria the cliffs of the Qattara depression gave harbourage to a few pairs of cheetah that lived on the hares and gazelle of that desolate country. It remains to be seen what, if any, of these desert fauna can have survived five years of disturbance by thousands of military motorized vehicles and their hungry, well-armed crews.

The Sinai Desert, with the mountain masses of its southern half, at one time afforded good ibex hunting for sportsmen who were keen enough to climb the seven-thousand-foot mountains of Serbal and Tarbush, sleep on the top and, with the dawn, hope for a downward spy and a shot at a forty-inch ibex. Heavy toll, however, must have been taken in these war years by the local Arabs, every one of whom is a born hunter and today has a stolen army rifle and as much ammunition as he wants.

As for myself, it is the Eastern Desert that has always attracted me and has given me my best moments of sport and adventure. This Nubian Desert, as I have said, is the area between the Nile and the Red Sea, with a total length of six hundred miles from Suez to the Sudan frontier and an average depth of a hundred and thirty-five miles as far as Aswan, south of which it widens out to three hundred and fifty miles. Its main feature is a series of mountain masses which lie some twenty-five miles from the Red Sea shore and which rise steeply to peaks of over 5,000 feet at Gabal Dokhan and Gabal Abu Harba, 6,400 feet at Gabal Qattar and 7,200 feet at Gabal Shayib. This broken chain of mountains forms the great watershed which spills its rare rains eastwards for a short twenty-five miles to the Red Sea and westwards for a hundred and thirty-five miles to the Nile Valley. In prehistoric times rain must have been heavy and frequent to cut out the huge wadis like the Wadi Qena which rises in the Northern Galala a hundred miles east of Minya to reach the Nile a hundred and fifty miles further south-west at Qena : for a hundred miles of its course this now dry river has carved its bed

## *The Deserts*

through the sandstone desert, leaving to the west, a cliff face twelve hundred feet high. Surmount this cliff if you can—and you can only do it on foot—and you will find yourself on a plateau from which start the big wadis that drain west and south to the Nile, and which the geologists tell us in still earlier times, before the Nile Valley was formed, continued far into what is now the Western or Libyan Desert.

At varying intervals of years, these wadis and their tributaries come into temporary spate from some winter rainstorm and carry down a five-foot flood, sometimes to reach the Nile Valley, but generally to die in the thirsty sand as the wadis widen out in their lower reaches. A permanent desert scrub, with yards of rope-like roots, maintains a precarious existence in the wadi bottoms on a bumper drink one year and perhaps nothing for the next seven, and this is the permanent grazing to which the sheep and ibex must trust for existence. That bushes or game manage to exist at all in the dry years must depend to a large extent on the dew which falls heavily of nights even in the summer.

Forty years and more ago when I first knew the desert east of Asyut, rain fell somewhere or other most winters, ibex were plentiful and the Barbary sheep existed in fair numbers in one particular area. Hunters too were few. Then came spells of dry winters, five years without rain, then a shower, then another five years without, and so on, ending finally with seven years' drought which nearly finished off the sheep: just in the nick of time in 1930 we had the first of three good winter rains and the desert fauna was saved for another spell.

A few days after the spate has passed the marly banks of the wadi sides are showing a tinge of green as millions of dormant plant seeds spring to life after years of patient waiting. A month later the desert is 'blossoming like the rose'; with clumps of lush wild spinach with its scarlet flower-heads, wild horse-radish with its pale mauve flowers and mustard-hot root that the wild sheep love, yellow-bobbed herbs that make the Bedouin's tea, dandelions, hairy-stalked bugloss or borage, dozens of things that





LEADING OVER A SAND DRIFT, 1906

## *When the Desert Blossoms*

the botanists call 'ephemerals', all rushing up from the ground, bursting into flower, hurrying to complete their life cycle and sow their seed before the scorching summer heat shrivels their tender stalks and roots to death. The tough old permanent bushes, too, get sappy and green, some burst into leaf and flower at once, while others of the *genista* species reserve their blossoming for the coming summer : everything has had its drink and is happy.

This wealth of plant life brings with it the Bedouin and his grazing camels, and the ibex betake themselves for safety to the distant wadi-tops where food, though not plentiful enough for the grazing camel herds, is good enough for them. These green years must make up for much of the casualties of the years of drought when ewes go barren and Arabs take heavy toll of the thirsty ibex by setting their foot-snares round the few water-holes that still last out : full of life from the new grazing, every ewe gives birth to twins, and if the rain falls early in the winter she will have a second family in the same year.

The 1914-18 war years, however, had changed things ; the local Arabs had taken to hunting for profit and were cutting down the hundred-year-old desert acacia trees and burning them for charcoal to sell in the valley. I therefore persuaded the Government to increase the Upper Egypt police Camel Corps and formed a special game-preservation patrol to put a check on Arabs like the Haruba who during one summer had snared a hundred head of ibex over the last surviving water-hole.

In normal years the habit of the sheep and ibex is to come down to these wadis during the night and feed till dawn, when they make their way up the face and lie up for the day on the top desert overlooking the wadis, safely out of the way of the few grazing camels and Arabs that may pass through, and ready to come back down to their grazing as soon as darkness falls. The ideal, from the hunter's point of view, is to find an area where there has been rain a year before and when there has been no other rain in the surrounding desert ; all the game is then concentrated on the favoured area and water can be found for



## *The Deserts*

oneself and camels, thus eliminating the greatest problem of these trips. How different the desert is under such conditions ! There is life everywhere, every bush is in flower and the bees and butterflies are hard at work : the new-washed bed of the wadi is a mass of tracks of lizards and desert mice, while chats, larks and chiff-chaffs are everywhere. It is a joy to be alive, with clean ground for tracking, no worries, good companions and sport ahead. The same country in the years of drought is as depressing as the other is pleasant : every drop of drinking water has to be carried and carefully rationed, there is not a bit of green grazing for the camels and the whole trip is based on their capacity to do without water for at least ten days.

Of all the strenuous and uncertain forms of hunting, I doubt if there is anything to beat ibex-hunting in this Nubian Desert. Motor-cars, I am glad to say, are of no use, and the whole trip must be done by camel and on your feet. Water, guides and trackers are the three prime necessities. Before doing a trip the wise man sends an Arab scout round the country a month beforehand and bases his water and hunting plans on his report. If your projected trip is in a green year, you can base yourselves on one of the temporary water-holes which still hold the spate water from which the camels can be watered with ease : if the year is a dry one you must carry your own drinking-water for the whole trip and limit your range of hunting so as to send your camels after ten days or so to one of the few permanent holes like the famous Bir Shetun. Next in importance are the guides : they must be local Arabs who know not only the main wadis but who can also take you by day or night over the tops from wadi to wadi : it is no joke to be left out on a freezing night in a shirt wet with sweat after a ten-hour day in the hot sun. Such guides are rare, and in all my years I only knew three men on whom I could rely completely. It is foolish to treat the desert lightly, a slip might break a leg or worse and entail a week's delay till a doctor could be brought up, so reserves of food, water and medicines must be taken.

Having made certain of your water supplies and your guides,

## *Bisharin Trackers*

you have done all you can for your personal safety, but you still have your hunting to ensure, and this will depend on your trackers. Any desert Arab can track more or less, but they cannot compare with the Bisharin trackers of the Camel Corps Police who are recruited as experts from the Hamedorab and other subsections of the Sudan Bisharin who are all individually first class at the job.

Once on a track, speed is essential, if you are to catch up during daylight. Having fitted his stride to that of the ibex, the tracker puzzles it out step by step at a jog-trot on easy ground, and slowly where the tops are a pavement of flat flints sunk into a clay surface : here, often for hundreds of yards at a time, the only suggestion of a footmark is where the ibex has trodden on the edge of a flint and loosened it in its setting. All you can do to help is to cast well ahead when you can see some soft ground where even you can spot the track, then with a wave of the hand you lift the trackers on and gain valuable time. Where again your expert tracker is essential is in dating the tracks found at dawn in the wadi bottom : he will say whether the track is under the dew or over the dew and decide accordingly as to how far ahead of you your game may be, and thus gauge your chance of catching up in daylight. The tracker, too, is the most interesting member of your party if you can get him to open out : many trackers cannot explain what they are doing, but Hamed, my chief tracker, who was with me on every trip I did, could make the tracks talk and almost show you what the animal was thinking about.

A good instance of this occurred one day when I was out on patrol in the Western Desert with nothing particular in mind or in sight. I was aroused by Hamed, pointing out to me the track of a *warran*, the Monitor lizard. These beasts run to about three feet in length and, while perfectly harmless, have with their crocodilian appearance a curiously ferocious aspect. Hamed called my attention to the tracks and to the odd things that they were doing. The beast had been quietly trekking along seeking his food when a certain nervousness and uneasiness began to show

## *The Deserts*

in his footmarks : these signs quickly developed into those of panic, and the lizard was dashing here and there, jinking, propping and then . . . all signs of the lizard ceased and three feet on each side of his last foot-mark were two tracks in the sand as if a hand with outstretched fingers had made a scooping sweep. Eye-witness evidence there was none, but desert knowledge and experience took its place and we realized that we were reading the history of a minor tragedy of the desert and that those finger-marks were the imprints of the wing-tips of an eagle that had been hunting our lizard friend and had, with one quick swoop, borne him aloft like Elijah of the Old Testament and perhaps fed him in pieces to his baby eagles in some distant eyrie. As the Arabs say : "The desert cannot lie," and the tell-tale sands had once again left the record of a tragedy that no eye-witness had seen but which Hamed made live before my eyes.

With water and guides guaranteed, trackers whose qualities you know, good camels and good dogs, in you plunge into this desert sea, a self-contained unit brimming with health and hope and prepared to walk ten hours a day for the sake of a pair of forty-inch horns.

The hunting is of a nature peculiar to itself. The country is vast, the head of game small, the wadis twist and turn every few hundred yards and to spy every fresh length of wadi with the field-glass is simply a waste of time as, in the first place, the game is not there during the day, or if it is, is lying up in the rocks five hundred feet above you where not even an Arab's eye can see it, unless it moves. In the second place, you cannot use a field-glass from a camel's back ; when you halt him he won't stand still like a horse but swings and squirms his neck, making spying from the saddle impossible, and to get off your camel on every turn in a wadi entails a lengthy and noisy proceeding on the part of the camel which may scare game over a mile away. Spying is equally useless if you are travelling the tops that lie between the big wadis where you might search for a month of Sundays and never see a living thing. The one and

## *Ibex hunting*

only method is tracking. The game feeds in the wadis at night and leaves for the tops in the morning : the hunter's business is to be on the move at daylight, each man leading his camel to work off their frozen stiffness of the night and, with the trackers lined across the wadi, carefully examining the ground for traces of the previous night. If game exists at all in the neighbourhood, it will be in the wadis that you will find the tracks and, when found, you must decide whether these are fresh enough and of a size to make them worth following.

An hour or more may be spent following the footmarks from bush to bush where a few hours ago they had been grazing, until the spot is reached where with the dawn the ibex or sheep had decided to leave the wadi and seek the safer shelter of the top desert. At this point you say good-bye to your riding-camels, load up with rifle, camera, food and water for the day, give orders to a guide as to where, with luck, he is eventually to meet you with the riding-camels and up the face you go in your rope-soled shoes and settle down to following the track. On the rare occasions when your luck is in, after several hours' hurrying at the fastest pace you can manage, you will be closing in on the track with your nose in the wind : twigs nibbled and dropped are wet at the broken stalk, droppings are moist and warm ; excitement is tense : be wise now and leave the tracking to your men and walk on the toes of your rope-soled shoes, casting your eyes well ahead, with your rifle ready ; remember the dead silence of the desert and that a rattling stone can be heard a mile away. Then, if the fates are kind, you may, if you are very lucky, catch a glimpse of your ibex as he wakes from his noon siesta and dashes off at your sound, giving you a galloping chance at three hundred yards, immediately to oversight himself in the most amazing manner. It is all a question of luck. Walk and work as you will, you can make sure of nothing. In any other form of hunting your first consideration is the wind, but in this desert hunting, once you are on tracks, you are at the mercy of chance, for the tracks wander along, turning now this way and that, according to the grazing, sometimes up wind,

## *The Deserts*

sometimes down, but stick to them you must and trust to luck that when you do get within distance of your game you will be approaching it with the wind in your face. Nor must you be unduly disgusted with fate if, after hours of hard work, you find that your ibex had got your wind long before and gone off at the gallop. It is largely for this reason that I have always adopted the Arab method of having with me one or two couples of their hunting dogs. In a country where you can spy and stalk your game, there is no necessity for dogs, but in this Eastern wilderness my experience is that good dogs are an absolute necessity if you do not wish to eat your heart out with despair when, more often than not, you see the ibex you have tracked all day going off at a gallop at half a mile with the hated stink of man in his nostrils. There is also the risk of wounding when your only chance has been a long snap shot at the gallop, and it is then that a good dog will quickly save a wounded beast from getting away to die a lingering death. I soon learned not to let the dogs run loose as the Arabs do, with the inevitable result that, hunting on their bellies, they always cut out and kill some wretched little kid or female : instead, I had them led on the leash in proper greyhound slips and only loosed them when I had flushed or wounded warrantable game that I could not approach otherwise.

The dogs in themselves were a fascinating study, varying in skill and character, wild as hawks on the first meeting with the white man and gradually becoming tamer until the maximum of friendliness was reached one night by one of the bitches pupping in my tent. In type they are like a cross between a Saluki and a Shetland collie, cream to sandy colour, hard as nails, with wonderful feet, good noses and possessed of amazing speed and sure-footedness as they scramble up or down the precipices that flank the wadis. While valuing his dog, the Arab makes no pet of him, keeps him hungry to make him hunt, and if he loses him leaves him to follow on or die. I have only once known an Arab stay behind to look for his dog, and this was an old Ma'aza Arab called Fereig whose dog, Ghoneimi,

## *Bir Shetun*

though famous on game tracks, was quite unable to follow his master's track by scent and was waited for accordingly.

Bir Shetun, with its never-failing supply of sweet water, was the pivot of many of my trips and is one of the most romantic features of this desert. It is the only permanent hole in this waterless area in a radius of a hundred miles to the north, east or south. Geologically it is a fault in the floor of the Wadi Shetun. If you are following this shallow rocky wadi down from where it starts to the north, you suddenly come to a narrow crack in the rock floor and down below you at seventy feet you can see the water. This cleft widens out to some ten yards in width and continues south for forty-five yards with an average depth of water of twenty feet. The deep reservoir thus formed has no doubt been hollowed out from prehistoric times by millenniums of occasional rainstorms pouring down from the desert above and cutting their way through some softer rock. From the top the only approach to the water is by a rock staircase of about ninety steps, cut at some time by man and leading to the southern end of the waterhole, after which the wadi gradually widens out between two-hundred-foot cliffs until two hours later it joins the main Wadi Qasab, some five hours' ride from the Nile Valley. Camels can be watered at Shetun by bringing them up the lower wadi from Wadi Qasab but they must then return the same way they came as there is no way out. If the waterhole is approached from the high-level desert from the north, water can only be brought to the camels by the men climbing down the stair and bringing the filled water-skins up to the camels on their backs, or by a bucket and forty feet of rope, which no Arab ever possesses. The amount of water in Shetun varies slightly according to the rains, but has no relation to the rise and fall of the Nile. On one of my visits there had been no spate down the wadi for seven years, and after measuring the depth with a hundred-foot length of rope and a bucket, we calculated that there were forty-six thousand gallons of clean, sweet rain-water stored in this interesting chasm. It has never been known to dry up and, even after a seven-year-old drought,

## *The Deserts*

was little lower than when we last saw it, the reason being, no doubt, that the water is in almost perpetual shade and is thus not exposed to evaporation.

As can be imagined from this description, such a permanent water is of vital importance to man and beast in this desert : there are other holes of varying capacity and endurance, all depending on how far the water is hidden from the summer sun, but none of them are permanent and none of them have the clean, sweet, sand-filtered water of Shetun.

Until I got my game preservation patrols going, Shetun and a subsidiary waterhole near by, called Shitayyin, or Little Shetun, were the favourite places for the snaring of ibex. Whereas most desert animals do without water and trust to damping their tongues with the dew off their grazing, the ibex need real water at least every fifteen days, which means that they must visit one or other of these waterholes. The hotter the weather the more insistent they naturally are on getting their drink, and the poaching Arab waits for July and August when the desert is fiery with heat and the ibex are on the rut and thirstier than ever.

The poacher's method is primitive, simple and effective. Having selected a waterhole showing recent tracks of ibex they build a dry wall of rocks round it to prevent the ibex reaching the water. After a few days the ibex collect in the neighbouring hills, panting for the water they can smell but not reach. The hunter then makes an opening in the stone wall and sets his snares in the gap. The trap consists of three component parts. First of all the hunter digs a hole in the ground in the centre of the doorway he has made, and inserts into it a tin such as an old tobacco tin : on this he lays loose a spiked ring some seven inches in diameter. These rings are made by his women-folk by taking three or four eighteen-inch twigs from the fruit cluster of a date palm, macerating them thoroughly by soaking and pounding them, forming them into a seven-inch diameter hoop and then binding the hoop round and round with a narrow strip of raw goat-skin. They then take some eighty to a hundred three-inch spines from a bough of the ever-useful palm tree,

## *Ibex snaring*

pierce the flange of the leather-bound hoop with an awl and push the spines in to form a concentric ring of tough needle-sharp spikes finishing just short of the centre and slanting slightly downwards : the raw hide in drying grips the base of the spikes and holds them firm. On the top of this spiked ring the hunter lays a thick noose made of soft, plaited goat's hair and anchors it with a length of brass wire to a neighbouring rock : many of the rocks near the waterholes have large but strong water-worn holes in them like a stone sponge and through these he threads and ties his brass wire. He then proceeds to cover up his snare with a layer of small dry camel-droppings and over this spreads a light sprinkling of sand. Having set two or three snares in this fashion, he then departs to some comfortable camping-ground, some hours away, well down wind of the waterhole and bides his time. Within a day or two the scent of the hunter's hands and tracks has worn off and the ibex, maddened by thirst, comes hopefully down from the surrounding cliffs where he has been waiting and goes nosing round the stone wall until he finds the opening ; one step into the gap and down goes his forefoot through the noose and the spiked ring into the hollow beneath. It is here that the cleverness of the ring comes in. If the trap consisted only of the hair noose, the animal would step through it and withdraw his feet without running up the slip-knot ; now, however, the spiked ring comes into play : it is underneath the noose and wider than it in diameter, the ibex, therefore, cannot withdraw his feet with the six-inch ring on his ankle, and, as he plunges and kicks to rid himself of the gripping spines, he merely tightens the noose and seals his fate.

These poachers trap for profit : shot game is no use to them as the meat will not keep and their object is to get the beasts down to the valley alive so as to sell them for a pound or more apiece to the local notables. An hour's ride down-wadi of Shitayyin we found the poachers' camp where, sheltered under the cliff, was a neat little stable of half a dozen small stalls with stone partitions, softly bedded down with grasses where the snared ibex were kept alive until enough had been caught to



## *The Deserts*

make it worth the three days' journey down to the valley. Lying in one of the stalls I found a pair of cup-shaped blinkers, neatly made of plaited palm-leaf, with which they hood the captive ibex to prevent him struggling and knocking himself about. Being a bit of a poacher myself, I could not help a feeling of sympathy and admiration for these desert hunters, but the toll they took was terrific and I did everything I could to stop this snaring by sending a camel patrol every fortnight in the summer to visit these waterholes where alone this snaring could be done, and where the identity of the poachers was easily proved from their footmarks. This Bedouin snare, sometimes called the wheel-trap, is an example of the perfect primitive trap; it figures in ancient Egyptian tomb paintings and is still used today in an enlarged form in East Africa for larger game: nothing can improve it, and after thousands of years it remains the perfect snare for its purpose.

A point of interest about snaring was that nothing except ibex was ever caught over the water. I have never seen gazelle tracks or sheep tracks at the water and was assured by the hunters that, in fact, they do not come to the water and are, therefore, never caught in the snares. Gazelle are snared in the wide-open wadis by setting a smaller type of the same snare in the places where they stale and defecate: like dogs they smell out these places and leave their droppings there. As for the sheep, they neither visit the waterholes nor the staling grounds and the only method of capture is by running them down with half-bred Saluki dogs which, unfortunately, is all too easy, and has by now resulted in the almost complete disappearance of this picturesque animal.

An interesting variety of ibex snaring as told me by Hamed, my head tracker, occurs in the Bisharin mountains of Gabal 'Elba, north of Suakin. Here the ibex travel certain paths in the mountains, and in these paths the hunters set their traps, but the ground being all rock the spiked ring cannot be used and no peg can be driven in to hold the snare. It is therefore tied to the middle of a four-foot stick which is wedged in between the rocks to take the first jerk. If an ibex puts his foot in the noose,

## *Hyrax or Coney*

the first tug is enough to tighten it up and either the stick holds him firm or off he goes with it hanging at his heels : he then goes galloping madly over the mountain until sooner or later the stick gets jammed among the rocks and he is brought to a standstill. Here comes in the cunning of the hunter. The country is all rock and carries no footmarks ; how then can the hunter follow his ibex in its wild career over the mountains ? The method is as follows : the stick to which he ties the snare is from a tree called the *dada*<sup>1</sup> which has a thickish bark with a strong aromatic smell : as the ibex gallops off with the stick swinging from his heels, the stick bangs against the rock and there leaves behind a bit of its white bark : not only does the hunter see this and follow accordingly, but he can also tell how long before the ibex has passed by the strength of the smell of the shred of bark clinging to the rock.

It was in these Eastern Desert wadis that I first came across that curious little animal the *wabr* or hyrax. Almost as big as a large guinea-pig, this coney of the Bible, first cousin to the hippopotamus, lived in colonies in the fissures of the cliffs wherever there were clumps of desert acacia trees which formed their only food. The Psalmist knew him and the ibex well when he sang : " The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats and the stony rocks for the conies." Sometimes on turning suddenly round some wadi corner one would see two or three of them tumbling quickly out of a thorn tree in answer to the warning bark of a sentry who was always on guard, sitting up on his hind legs like a prairie dog. Nobody wanted to shoot them but we were anxious to capture some alive for the Cairo Zoo ; twice we succeeded in doing so by jumping off our camels and seizing them as they made for home in the rocks, after slipping on a leather glove as some protection against their sabre teeth. The Arabs did not molest them as they valued their guano which found a ready sale as manure for the melon crops of the valley. In an old-established colony the urine and droppings filled up the fissures in the rock below their living quarters and could be

<sup>1</sup> Wild Olive : *Olea europaea*.

## *The Deserts*

picked out with an iron spike in lumps like hard transparent amber studded with round, black droppings. With the ruthless cutting down of these seiyal trees for charcoal, the coney has now disappeared and the desert has once again lost one of its primitive inhabitants.

I had yet to gain my experience of this desert when for the first time in 1906 I took my newly formed camel patrol to the famous Bir Shetun, fifty miles east of Sohag. As we approached the waterhole I saw a wild-looking Arab clothed in a dirty blanket and a nervous smile who made himself known to us as Nasir Hasaballa of the 'Ababda tribe, occupied in grazing his camels and, at the moment, engaged in catching desert partridges<sup>1</sup> with figure-of-four traps. He struck me as an engaging and intelligent fellow and my talk soon veered round towards the birds and beasts of the desert and particularly to the presence or otherwise of ibex and wild sheep which I had been told existed in those parts. Having watered our camels, Nasir volunteered to guide us back to Asyut, and on the way pointed me out the tracks of ibex, sheep and hyrax. This fired my ambition and, regardless of his possible lack of all other qualities, I promised Nasir to take him on as a Government guide if, under his guidance, I should shoot an ibex two months later when I foresaw the chance of six days' local leave during the Bairam Government holiday.

A cold winter morning of that December saw me ferrying across the Nile from Sohag to take the Siflaqi pass up the face of the Nile cliffs into the Eastern Desert. Being tied for time, I was determined to go light, so took only two policemen, Hamed, the Bishari tracker, and Nasir, the guide, prepared to do my own primitive cooking and sleep in the open. On the second day I saw a small ibex and killed him : on the third day, thanks to the Saluki dogs with us, I shot two ibex of thirty-eight and thirty-nine inch respectively, and a small sheep : the fourth day I got another sheep and was back at Asyut on the sixth day.

Looking back on it now after forty years, which have included

<sup>1</sup> Cholmley's Sand Partridge.

## *Nasir brings me success*

ten shooting trips in that desert, I can only ascribe the results of that first trip to beginner's luck. I have twice spent three weeks of hard labour in that country without firing a shot and others that I have sent there have done the same.

Anyhow Nasir, the Ababdi guide, got his job all right and accompanied me on many a subsequent trip. Lazy by nature where routine work was concerned, he was a marvel after game, possessed an uncanny instinct for direction, was as happy in the dark as in daylight, impossible to tire and possessed of a fund of fables, stories and songs, which made him welcome company of a night round the brushwood fire, when he would tell us tales of the unicorn and the golden rose that grows in the desert and is beloved of the ibex. Of course no one has ever seen the rose but the proof of its existence is the fact that, if you examine the inside of the front teeth of the lower jaw of an ibex, you will see that it gleams with the gold of the desert rose that it has eaten. That it sometimes does so gleam is quite true, but the prosaic explanation is that the so-called gold is a deposit of tartar caused by the desert water. By a curious coincidence on my return from this trip I found in the *Field* an account of the self-same legend of the ibex and the golden rose told by the native hunters of Kashmir.

In those days my best fellow sportsman in the country was George Burnett-Stuart, who was Inspector of Finance in the provinces and shared a flat with me and others when in Cairo. We entered into a solemn compact that we would keep our ibex knowledge to ourselves and never tell a soul where we went on our trips. In course of time, naturally, it did get known, but we always talked loftily about those far distant Red Sea hills and the impossibility of anyone getting there. He and I did four trips together with varying success and one year I took Ronald Graham <sup>1</sup> of the Agency, who never forgave me for not finishing off a good sheep that he had creased and which recovered and got away.

In all those years the only other people who have hunted ibex

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Ambassador to Italy.

## *The Deserts*

on this desert have been three parties of British officer friends whom I equipped and sent out with the police Camel Corps patrol, one of them getting a fine 45-inch ibex.

My longest and most strenuous trip was in 1920 with Douglas Baker when for twenty-one days we pursued elusive sheep and ibex and finally ended up with a good sheep of 18 inches. My last trip was in 1927 with Billy Henn<sup>1</sup> and Jasper Blunt,<sup>2</sup> when twenty-two days of hard labour resulted in some small ibex and a 20-inch sheep which I was lucky enough to get. The outstanding feature of the trip was the endurance of five of our camels: we had calculated on watering our camels and selves halfway through the trip at a certain waterhole, but when well into the desert we heard that it was dry. It looked like having to abandon the trip, but we decided to do the next seven days on foot, keep five camels with us to carry our food, water and kit, and send the rest back to the river to water and bring back a further supply for ourselves. True to plan the baggage camels met us on the seventh day with a further supply but not enough to give a proper watering to the five camels that we had kept with us. All we could afford them was a bucketful each, and on this these wonderful animals lasted out till we finished our trip and got back to Asyut. Two of the five were Bedouin camels, while three of them were Government Bisharin camels: by the time that they watered at the Nile the three Government camels had done eighteen days and the Bedouin camels twenty-two days without watering except for the bucket apiece that they got halfway through the trip, and this with travelling every day and no grazing.

Soon after my first introduction to the Asyutiyat country and its wild game I began to hear that I was invading a piece of territory that was looked upon as the special hunting reserve of Prince Kamal ed-Din Hussein (son of Sultan Hussein) and that I was incurring his displeasure by my hunting forays. I had my own ideas on the subject of rights-of-way in the desert and

<sup>1</sup> Now Chief Constable of Gloucestershire.

<sup>2</sup> Later Military Attaché in Athens.

## Prince Kamal ed-Din

continued in my evil ways until one day, by chance, I met the Prince himself in Cairo in the house of Sir Alexander Baird, at Matariya, when I took the opportunity to tell him of my experiences. I soon found that his bark was much worse than his bite, and often afterwards he would send for me to his palace, start off with some furious complaint against the police and then keep me for an hour with coffee and cigarettes showing me his sporting trophies and desert records. I knew that he had an ibex reserve of his own in the Eastern Desert not far from Cairo where he had shot most of his best heads, but I angled in vain for an invitation to visit it and did not actually do so until after his death in 1932.

Its name is the Wadi Rishrash and it is one of the many hundreds of rocky valleys that rise in the Eastern Desert and when the rare rains fall discharge their flood waters into the Nile Valley. To reach the wadi the motorist drives for forty miles south from Cairo along the eastern bank of the river until he reaches the village of Es-Saff; he then turns due east into the desert foot-hills, enters Wadi Rishrash at its mouth and arrives at its head in another twenty miles.

Prince Kamal ed-Din was 'a great hunter before the Lord' who loved the solitude of the deserts and spent much time and money exploring and mapping them and in hunting the desert game. In the course of his many wanderings in the Eastern Desert he had noticed a bend in this Wadi Rishrash where the local Ma'aza Arabs had planted some date palms and where there were other signs of the existence of subsoil catchment water. He induced the Ma'aza to hand over this bit of country to him, and dug a ten-metre well down through the stones and gravel to the rock floor of the wadi. He built a one-room house, put a pump on the well and planted half an acre of *sant* trees and vegetable garden. Two hundred yards away he cut a trough in the limestone foot of the wadi cliff and connected it with piping to the well head, to serve as a drinking pool for the ibex. Around this chosen spot he gradually pushed out his control over some hundred square miles of country and guarded it with

## *The Deserts*

half a dozen armed Albanians who, imported direct from Albania, spoke no Arabic and being a Prince's servants had only the most summary methods of dealing with any poaching Arabs that were rash enough to enter the sanctuary.

For twenty years the Prince maintained the reserve like the apple of his eye and none but his cousin, Prince Yusef Kamal, and a few honoured guests were invited to visit it. When the Prince died in 1932 I realized how important it was that the twenty-year tradition of sanctuary should be maintained without a break. I appealed, therefore, to His Majesty King Fuad, who ordered that everything should be maintained as before and preserved as a sanctuary under the control of the Frontiers Administration. A month later Colonel Hatton of that Department and I decided to visit the wadi and four hours motoring in a desert Ford brought us to the 'Prince's Garden' as the Arabs called it.

Ibex come on rut in October when the desert is still fiery with summer heat and the animals are at their thirstiest. The Eastern Desert at this time had just gone through five years without rain and we knew from the Albanian guards that we should find a goodly collection of beasts drawn from hundreds of miles around to this small Paradise where, and where only, water, grazing and resident females could be found in safety.

I was anxious to film some good heads and sent word to the guards three days in advance to keep the animals off the water until our arrival. When we got there at 4 p.m. we found that the men had built us a stone hide some thirty yards from the water-trough into which we crept, only to find the water in shadow from the seven-hundred feet cliff to our west. We could see numbers of ibex away up the eastern cliff coming out from the shelter of the rocks where they had been hiding from the summer sun but decided to postpone our photography to next morning's better light and posted a man to stand guard all night near the waterhole to prevent the ibex drinking and departing in the dark.

Dinner in the open outside the house with a cool night breeze



WADI RISHRASH : THE PRINCE'S HOUSE AND GARDEN FROM THE EAST  
SIWA OASIS





## *Wadi Risbrasb*

blowing down the silent wadi was a delight after the heat of Cairo, and as soon as it was finished we wandered down to the water-hole with field-glasses and electric torches. The eastern hillside was soon seen to be alive with ibex waiting to get to the water. One felt it somewhat unkind thus to prolong their fast, but realized that if we let them drink during the night, they would all be off and away before we could get a chance to film them and that a few more thirsty hours would not harm them unduly. We lay on the ground close to the water-trough and listened to the queer sounds of the night, the plaintive mewings of the kids, an occasional shrill whistle from a startled ewe and the rattle of stones as some old ram changed his position in the rocks above us. I then turned on my powerful electric torch and at once the scene became weird and uncanny as the beam caught the eyes of the waiting ibex. Focusing the torch on a shadowy form, the Zeiss glass showed one old ram after another lying in the face, and, as they turned to gaze at the unaccustomed light, their eyes caught the beam and threw it back enlarged like some phosphorescent monster of the deep. The effect of the whole hillside studded with these great glow-worms was indescribable as they flickered off and on, here a pair like head-lights, there a single spotlight that blinked and faded as the beast turned its head away. As I followed the ray of the torch with the naked eye the rocky face glowed with twinkling light like some Sicilian hill-town seen from the sea at night, then the glass picked up the detail and showed up individual bodies with their shadows thrown on the white rocks behind and those topaz eyes staring back at us.

Still talking in whispers we sought our beds and at daylight were up and eager to return to the scene, but here we had to be patient as the best light for photography is not until about an hour after sunrise when the eastern sun strikes the tops of the western cliff and throws a reflected light down on to the wadi floor.

Getting into the hide by half-past six we still had half an hour to wait during which the watcher kept up a shower of pebbles

## *The Deserts*

to prevent the beasts rushing the water. At seven o'clock I judged the light to be sufficiently good to release the water and start filming, as a serious fight which I wanted to record was going on between two rams a hundred yards up the hill-side. Their horns were locked and both of them were down on their knees and I just had time to fix the telescopic lens and get off a dozen feet of film before they broke. Now with the smell of the water in their nostrils the ewes and kids lost all fear and came running to their drink.

I crept quietly out of my hide and took my tripod down to the wadi-bed within fifteen yards of the water. Then began an absolute invasion of ibex, down came the rams one after the other, each beast took a few nervous looks around and then knelt and drank ; from a few yards distant one could see every movement, down he goes on his padded knees, in goes his nose into the water and for a minute all fear is conquered as the cold water slips down that burnt-up throat ; the flanks heave, the belly swells and life and strength return. One beautiful ram let me get within ten yards of him with my kodak and fearlessly continued drinking with his nose well into the trough and his yellow eyes still fixed on me.

Then gradually the mood and scene changed ; with their bellies filled and their throats moistened, ibex spirits rose and bucks relaxed to have a friendly horn match with another, kids behaved as kids should and pranced and side-stepped, crashing their baby horns in playful combat, while the weary ewes just gazed at their young ones and with a bored expression repelled the amorous advances of the younger bucks.

Down the hill they came in twos and threes till at one moment there were fifty ibex in view, soon the big rams, their thirst quenched, started to reascend the face till all that was left was a view of their horns silhouetted against the skyline as each took his way over the pass to the neighbouring toplands to wait his time for another drink next day or to set forth on his hundred-mile trek back to his distant home with instincts and nerves once again alive to every danger. Once out of the ' Prince's Garden '

## *A Desert Sanctuary*

he is the wild beast again, one whiff of a man at a mile, the rattle of a stone or the burble of a camel, and he is off. With luck he wins safely through to his native range of hills and passes the winter in solitary state fully occupied in his search for grazing and occasional water, leaving his wives to look after themselves and drop their kids in March.

As the summer draws into autumn, instinct drives him once more to seek a mate, and off he goes on his annual journey. Somewhere in his mind is the memory of the safety of the Wadi Rishrash ;<sup>1</sup> it may take him ten days or twenty days to get there and every minute of it he must be on his guard, but once there he knows that he will find peace, security, water, grazing and houris. No more need to worry about man ; in Rishrash there are men, smelling as bad as elsewhere, with mules, camels, motor-cars and other noisome things, but in Rishrash they do no harm ; that hated smell does not mean yelping dogs achase or sudden stinging wounds. No, Rishrash means peace and plenty and, if they think like man, one can imagine the sigh of relief of an old ram as he arrives weary and thirsty at the passes overlooking the ' Prince's Garden '. Down below him are clusters of palms and sant trees, men walking about, camels at graze and a wind-mill on the well creaking in the breeze, but he knows they are all part of the Rishrash and will do him no harm.

Yaqub, the head Albanian guardian, had been in charge of the reserve for twenty years and could point out individual rams that he could recognize from previous seasons. Talking one day of the distance that ibex will travel when on rut, he told me that one year the Prince shot an ibex that he noticed to be limping ; with him at the time was an old Ma'aza Arab who ran forward at the shot to cut the beast's throat, and as he did so, shouted back to the Prince, " You've got old Splay-foot." On the Prince's asking him what he meant, the Ma'aza pointed out that one forefoot of the ibex was deformed and told how he had known the animal for several years in the Southern Galala hills,

<sup>1</sup> Today, by orders of His Majesty King Faruk, the Rishrash is closely guarded and remains the one safe refuge for ibex in the country.

## *The Deserts*

how he had often tracked him and finally had got a shot at him with his old smooth-bore muzzle-loader, only to hit him in the forefoot, splitting his toe but not frightening him out of the country where for two more years the Ma'aza had seen the tell-tale track of his old friend. From the Southern Galala to the Wadi Rishrash is a good hundred miles as the crow flies, but the ram with his lame leg had made nothing of that in his desire to meet again his lady-friends of the Rishrash.

## CHAPTER 10

### SNAKE-CHARMERS

DESERT trips played a large part in my life in those days ; no sooner was one trip finished than we were looking forward to the possibility of yet another next year. They were, however, considerable undertakings ; it was difficult to get time for them, they cost a good deal of money and were always subject to cancellation if important work cropped up at the last minute. But life in the provinces held many other interests of a sporting nature which could be pursued in the course of the daily work. One of these semi-sports was snake hunting. No one could live as long as I did in Upper Egypt without constantly coming across the snake-charmer or, to be more accurate, the snake-catcher, whether plying his trade in the villages and clearing people's houses of snakes or entertaining the tourists at Luxor with an exhibition of his skill. I knew Musa, the famous snake-charmer of Luxor, well and during the first Great War arranged for him to come down to Cairo for a week which we spent hunting all the likely coverts round Cairo. I later found that there was a very expert snake-charmer named Hagg Ahmad resident in Cairo and for several years, until his death, I used to take him out by car to places of my own choosing and try to learn the secrets of his art.

Snake-hunting could be carried on from Cairo just as well as in the provinces and I was helped by an unusual Englishman called Bain who used to write to *The Egyptian Gazette* under the name of 'Fluker' and who in 1919 published a booklet called *Egyptian Snakes and Snake Charmers*.

Fluker had been an inspector in the Egyptian Markets Company and, while in this employ, had travelled the country for

## *Snake-Charmers*

several years. Later he joined the Cairo Police as a constable and came under my command. Fluker was a remarkable fellow with an inquisitive mind, a good command of colloquial Arabic, a passion for fishing, and possessed of unusual knowledge of such things as black magic as practised by Egyptians. His book consists of descriptions of his personal experiences of snake-charmers, of his partial initiation into the profession, of arguments for and against the genuineness of the trade and of other people's answers to statements made in his press articles. On reading his book again after many years, I do not find that he and I differ very much in our opinions. This I take as comfort to my soul, as Fluker was a born investigator with a great deal more time at his disposal for experiment than I had. Actually I don't think that I ever compared notes with him over snake-charming and each of us gained his own experience independently of the other. I did, however, help him, as he says over the publication of his book by giving him some photographs which I had taken (and which I regret having lost) of Hagg Ahmad catching and handling a five-foot cobra out in the fields behind Giza.

The first and obvious question that one is asked, when the conversation turns to snake-charmers, is whether or not they are genuine. My answer to this is that they are and they are not, according to what is demanded of them and to the nature of the company before whom they are asked to perform. I have seen scores of snakes caught by these men in circumstances where fraud was impossible, whereas at other times I have suspected, and even been certain of, imposture.

As subjects for investigation these men are very difficult: they are specialized in their profession, which has unquestionably a semi-religious side, and they are past-masters at not giving any revealing answer to questions put to them. It has often been suggested to me that I should try various tricks on snake-charmers while they are performing in public in the hopes of exposing them as frauds. But I have always refused on the grounds that it would be a dishonourable thing for a person in

## *Powers of the Snake-charmer*

my position to do as the man is earning his living and that even if he is not a genuine snake-charmer, he is, anyhow, an extremely good conjurer.

Before proceeding further let us be clear as to what we mean by snake-charming and decide whether that is the right expression to use. Charming means influencing by something agreeable, and when applied to snakes, implies that the snake-charmer so influences the snake that it leaves its refuge and comes out into the open at the call of the charmer. From my own experience and that of several other careful observers, I do not believe that any so-called snake-charmer can do this. I once put the question to Hagg Ahmad and asked him whether he could make a snake come out into the open to him, to which his reply was that neither he nor any other snake-man could do so and that anyone who claimed to be able to do this was a liar. He maintained that he could locate a snake within a few yards by scent, that by whistling to him he could make the snake hiss at him and emit a stronger scent and that, by the exercise of will-power and chanting combined he could so mesmerize the snake that it remained transfixed where it was and did not attempt to slip away and, finally, he said, he could see the snake's eyes.

We will take each of these claims separately and examine them. Anyone who has kept tame snakes knows that they do have a very distinctive sour smell which clings to the hands some time after you have handled them. The hole or place in a thicket where a snake lives must obviously smell strong of the snake's body and excreta. Why should we doubt the power of a snake-man to smell out a wild snake just because we cannot do so ourselves? No doubt primitive men have a much finer developed sense of smell than we meat-eating, tobacco-smoking, wine-drinking, house-bred humans have and these snake-men, with their abstemious habits have kept this and other primitive instincts alive and developed while we have lost them. I have often watched Hagg Ahmad questing along a thick garden fence or tangled ditch and seen him pause, turn back into the wind and feather like a spaniel to a spot where he



## Snake-Charmers

has at once found a snake which he had passed over when walking down wind. As regards his claim that his whistling makes the snake puff itself up and hiss, I should think this is quite likely and, for all I know, a snake's breath may have the same distinctive smell as the snake's body. Is it unlikely also that these men can feel the presence near them of a snake in the same way as some people say they can sense the presence in a room of an unseen cat? I was hunting one day with Hagg Ahmad round some old farm buildings in Giza. As I opened the door of a harness room he walked in beside me and at once said that there was a snake somewhere in the room; he then pointed to a wooden locker with a broken lid that ran the length of the room against the wall and proceeded to open it; he threw out some old harness, an old sack or two and other rubbish and then dived his hand in again and brought out a four-foot snake.

Some knowledge on the part of the investigator of the habits of snakes is essential. To start with, snakes hibernate during the cold months and lie up in their holes for several months without feeding: it is, therefore, unreasonable to expect a snake-charmer to find snakes in the winter, whereas once the warm weather has come, the snake issues forth in search of food and leaves his tell-tale track behind him. Sloughed-off skins show where snakes have changed their winter coats and tracks in the sand or dust fix the time of their recent passage. One must know also the types of snakes that frequent different kinds of country. Cobras, for instance, feed mostly on rats and are therefore generally to be found near water and cover that rats would frequent; the Cerastes, or Horned Viper, on the other hand, lives on stony or sandy ground on the desert edge where lizards and beetles can be found. It is the same with each species of snake; when, therefore, the snake-charmer produces you a cobra in the desert and a cerastes in your garden, you may conclude that it was not nature that placed them there.

Out of the twenty-seven varieties of Egyptian snakes, those most commonly met with in gardens are Clifford's Snake (Arabic: *Arqam*), the African Beauty Snake (Ar.: *Abu Seyur*)

## *Egypt's Snakes*

and the Flowered Snake (Ar. : *Azrud*). These are all non-poisonous. Near to water in the fields and cultivation are found the Cobra (Ar. : *Nashir Haje*) and the rare Carpet Viper (Ar. : *Ghariba*), both of which are highly poisonous, while in desert country the common snakes are the Horned Viper (Ar. : *Haya*) and the Javelin Sand Boa (Ar. : *Dassas*), the first highly poisonous and the second harmless.

The anatomist will tell you that snakes do not possess ears, either visible or rudimentary, that the snake-charmer's incantations cannot be heard by the snake and are therefore powerless to influence him. But is it not possible that snakes experience some reaction to rhythmic vibration? The Indian snake-charmers use a reed pipe in place of the incantation of the Egyptian charmers and by swaying to the music as they play, induce the snake to do the same. That they too can catch wild snakes I saw clearly demonstrated years ago at the Gezira Sporting Club, where a big cobra was discovered by some golfer hunting for a lost ball in the bamboo scrub that grew in front of what was then the G.O.C.'s house. A boy was sent running to the Gezira Palace Hotel and returned with an Indian snake-charmer, who quickly proceeded to stalk and capture the five-foot reptile.

Another argument for the scent theory was shown one day when we wanted to play some tricks on Hagg Ahmad. I asked him to let me blindfold him and take one of the snakes already caught and put it down in the grass somewhere near and see if he could locate it. He refused saying, merely, that it was an unfair test and I think he was right, as a snake away from its own habitual surroundings would have the minimum of scent to betray it and would not wait to be fixed by the charmer's voice. That the charmer's eyesight is highly developed and experienced is obvious. He knows what to look for and where to look, and once trained to it, he can pick out from the tangled grass or creeper the two black eyes of the snake as he lies motionless at the entrance of his hole. Time and again Hagg Ahmad tried to point me out a snake's head before seizing it, but never once have I been able to see it, much to his amusement.

## *Snake-Charmers*

Incidentally, if a snake-charmer locates a snake in thick cover, it will be its head and eyes that he sees : he then has to calculate where its tail will be and after seizing it through the back door to gradually pull and wriggle it out from the roots round which it is coiled and throw it clear into the open. It is here that the use of his cane comes in. Holding the stick in his right hand, he stalks the cobra as it squirms away in the grass and makes it stop and sit up facing him, coiled like a watch spring, ready to strike. After teasing the snake for some minutes, he brings his cane down hard on the snake's neck and presses it to the ground ; he then transfers the cane to his left hand and with his right seizes the snake with thumb and forefinger behind the head, squeezing the jaws open ; he then lets the snake strike at a bit of his robe and draws off the venom in drops of viscous yellow matter.

Conversation in the Turf Club one day turned on snake-charming : I was telling of some of the feats of Hagg Ahmad when a member named Dray, who had much local knowledge, challenged me and undertook to prove that all snake-charmers, including Hagg Ahmad, were frauds.

Discussion waxed warm and finally Dray offered to bet me five pounds that he would expose Hagg Ahmad if given the chance. I took his bet and a few days later a carefully-selected jury of Turf Club elders assembled out at Bulaq Dakrur in the garden next door to Dray's place. I had arranged for Hagg Ahmad to report to my house, and drove him out to the rendezvous in my car.

The first thing to do was to strip Hagg Ahmad, which we did in decent privacy, there being several ladies in the field, and assured the jury that there was nothing concealed in his clothes. Then came the question of his leather bag, which every snake-charmer carries, containing usually one tame cobra rendered harmless by having had its fangs broken : in with this he puts any snakes that he may catch. The jury wished the bag examined to make sure that it had no concealed pockets inside capable of hiding a snake. I told Hagg Ahmad to take

## *Hagg Ahmad and the Jury*

out his pet cobra and then put my hand into the bag intending to turn it inside out in front of the jury but Hagg Ahmad seized my hand to prevent me doing so. I expostulated with him, pointing out that his action would only rouse the suspicions of the jury and make them think that he had something to conceal : his explanation was that he feared that I might get a poisoned hand as the bag was filthy inside and I might prick my finger on some broken snake's tooth left lying in the dirt at the bottom of the bag.

Having turned the bag inside out and satisfied the jury that it was empty, I asked Dray to tell me how exactly he proposed to unmask Hagg Ahmad, to which he replied that we would notice that when Hagg Ahmad set in to discover a snake, he always kept his left side and arm close up against the cover in which he claimed that the snake was lying and that he would never allow anyone to come between his left arm and the cover. The reason for this was, he explained, that Hagg Ahmad, at this moment, would be holding a snake coiled up in his left hand ready to transfer it by a lightning cross-pass of his right hand to the spot in the cover from where he would then produce it. He therefore, proposed to seize Hagg Ahmad's left hand at the last moment and disclose the palmed snake. My reply to this was that I could not agree to this violent method of exposure with its possible risk to Hagg Ahmad and I would call the bet off and pay the wager. We all then agreed to go on with the exhibition and to let Hagg Ahmad work without forcible interference. Hagg Ahmad proceeded to draw the garden and produce three or four non-poisonous and semi-poisonous snakes in his usual style, to the accompaniment of loudly expressed opinions of unbelief from the doubting Dray. I noticed that Ahmad was getting nervous when suddenly he struck an attitude in the middle of the lawn, ripped off his one and only garment and, gibbering like an angry ape, declared that he would work no more when he was being called a fraud and a liar by Mr. Dray. Ahmad was really angry and it took me some minutes of patting his quivering shoulder to quiet him down, re-clothe him and

## *Snake-Charmers*

persuade him to continue the snake hunt. We started off again with someone carrying the leather bag and with instructions to keep twenty yards away from Hagg Ahmad to avoid any suspicion of collusion. On we went, trying one likely cover after another, but not a sign of a snake could we find. Leaving the garden, we carried the hunt into Dray's territory and for a quarter of an hour Ahmad and I searched and sweated, but all in vain. I pointed out to him that things were really getting serious as the deductions of the jury would be obvious if he failed to find and that both our reputations were at stake. He was by now muttering prayers to the Almighty. "God, send me a snake. God, send me a snake," he kept repeating and held on to my hand in his nervousness. I was as worked up as he was at seeing the jury smiling at our continued failure, and was on the point of calling the day off when, at the back of Dray's house, I saw a potting shed with rubbish and flower-pots lying about. I headed towards it with the muttering Ahmad when suddenly, while still some yards away, he sprang to life with a shout of approaching victory. "There's one here," he said. "Come along, ya Basha, there are two snakes here." He threw back his right-hand sleeve and ran the ten yards or so that separated us from the rubbish heap on which I could see an old iron kitchen range lying. Like lightning, Ahmad dashed his hand into the ash door at the bottom of the range and drew it forth with two snakes quivering in his grasp. In his excitement he waved them in the air and then, with a snap of his jaws, he bit off the two snakes' heads with his front teeth and spat them out at Dray's feet. This gesture was indicative of Hagg Ahmad's worked-up feelings, as snake-charmers are never willing to kill their captured snakes.

I thought that this striking test would satisfy Dray, but it did not and he declared himself willing to repeat the test any day in the desert, the conditions being that Ahmad should locate a horned viper and that he, Dray, would pick it up, being certain that the snake had been 'planted' after having its teeth broken off. On putting this to Hagg Ahmad he agreed but only on

## *Scotch Doctors believe*

the condition that he was supplied with a document signed by the judge that he was not responsible for Dray's death. On the other hand, he said that we could strip him to the waist, tie his left arm down to his side, and he would capture a cerastes or any other snake with his right hand only : the jury, however, did not agree to the test as being too dangerous for both Dray and Hagg Ahmad.

One of my best hunting grounds in Cairo used to be along the banks of the canal that runs north and south through the garden suburb of Ma'adi. South of the town the banks of the canal were covered with a thick tangle of tall, grassy reeds which were a certain draw for a cobra. During an International Medical Conference one year I took three visiting Scotch medical professors on a snake hunt there and was able to show them Hagg Ahmad at his best, with a total bag of two cobras and seven other snakes. Though by nature and nationality suspicious, these Scotch doctors were convinced of the genuineness of the display. Another good rendezvous was the ruined Pink Palace on the Cairo-Suez desert road. This palace was built about 1850 by 'Abbas I. It is now a complete ruin, with cellars and cisterns half-filled with crumbled masonry and drift sand, making an ideal home for the desert varieties of snakes, which feed on mice and lizards. It was here that I once caught Hagg Ahmad up to some sort of trick. We had gone out there for a picnic lunch, after which we proposed to turn Hagg Ahmad loose and have a thorough snake hunt of the ruins. I carefully instructed him to wait with the cars until we had finished lunch as I did not want the ground disturbed until we were ready. While we were still eating, I caught sight of Hagg Ahmad's head over one of the ruined walls and found that contrary to my orders he had been prowling round the ruins : he naturally denied that he had done so until I pointed him out his own footmarks in the sand when he had to admit that he had been scouting ahead.

On this Cairo-Suez desert road there are a series of old towers which were built in the early 1800's by Muhammad 'Ali as signal towers between Cairo and Suez ; most of these towers

## Snake-Charmers

have fallen, leaving only three partially intact. The first is built in to the outer wall of the old Egyptian cavalry barracks at 'Abbasiya, while the second and third are still well-known landmarks eight and fourteen kilometres out along the road to Suez. In the neighbourhood of this third tower some five specimens have been found of a rare snake commonly called the Black Cobra and known to science as *Walterinnesia Aegyptiaca*, after Dr. Walter Innes of the Egyptian School of Medicine who was the first to find it in Egypt. No other specimen has been found in other parts of Egypt, though I have been told that it exists in Iraq and Arabia. It is a beautiful snake, very dark green in colour, up to five feet in length, but without the spectacled head of the common cobra. That a snake of this almost black colouring should be found living many miles out in the yellow desert is contrary to all the laws of protective colouration ; add to this its rarity and the fact that all the five specimens have been found within a few miles of the third tower and one might be excused in giving them an origin of romance. I like to think that some snake-charmer of past days was returning from the Holy Places of the Hedjaz by this old pilgrim road carrying with him two black cobras that he had obtained in Arabia and was bringing back as rarities to Egypt, and that somehow in the night, while camping at the third tower, these snakes had got loose and later reproduced their species in this strange habitat, to the confounding of modern naturalists.

One of Egypt's most poisonous snakes is the Carpet Viper. This handsome snake is fortunately rare and is found almost exclusively in the Faiyum province to the south-west of Cairo. One of them nearly cost Hagg Ahmad his life. Sitting in my Cairo garden one day he told me the story. The Cairo Zoo at that time had lost their live specimens of the Ghariba and had given Hagg Ahmad an order for some new ones. He was hunting for them in some waste land a mile or so from the village of Roda in the Faiyum province and had eventually located a couple of them. He caught the first one with no difficulty but got bitten in the thumb when picking up the

## *Hagg Ahmad misses Death*

second. Knowing this snake's deadly nature, Hagg Ahmad started to run with all his might to the Roda police station which he could see in the distance and burst in upon the police officer with his arm already swollen up to the size of his leg. Asked his business, he told the officer that he had been bitten by a poisonous snake, only to be told to go to the devil and look for a doctor elsewhere. To help Hagg Ahmad in his work and to protect him against over-zealous police officials, I had the year before provided him with an identity card bearing his photograph and a recommendation from myself. On seeing this the callous officer sat up and took notice, telephoned to the hospital at Faiyum and an hour later Hagg Ahmad had had his thumb slashed open and an injection of anti-venine administered. After vomiting blood for several days, he was discharged after twenty-four days in hospital where his life was saved with difficulty. His doctor told me afterwards that only one of these self-inoculated Rifa'is could possibly have survived such a poisoning. As Hagg Ahmad told the story, stroking his shrivelled thumb, I asked him how he could have been so careless as to get bitten, and with a sad smile on his thin face he explained that, in fact, it was his own fault as his mind had been wandering when it should have been concentrated on the snake, instead of which he was thinking sadly of the little baby that his wife had just given birth to and who had died a few days before.

Hagg Ahmad died a year or two later, like most of these Rifa'is, from the bite of one of his own cobras. His main business was the collecting of live snakes for the Zoo and for a firm in Alexandria who exported snakes alive to Italy for scientific use. He would get as much as a pound for a big cobra and wandered all over the country in search, particularly of the rarer poisonous species.

Snake-charmers who work the tourist trade always render harmless any poisonous snakes they may catch by snapping off the poison fangs. This is done by letting the snake bury its fangs in a piece of cloth and then jerking them out: a snake, however, cannot kill and eat his food without these teeth and,



## *Snake-Charmers*

deprived of them, will only live for a few weeks. If the buyer wishes to keep the snake alive, he must ensure that the fang-teeth are undamaged. A man like Hagg Ahmad having caught a cobra would therefore proceed to 'milk' him. Behind the two fangs of a cobra there is a poison sac: when the snake strikes, the poison is pressed out of the sac and flows along the fang through a hole in its base. To 'milk' the snake he lets it strike at his robe or a piece of rag until the poison sac is emptied of its contents. Once drained dry, according to Hagg Ahmad, the sac would need a fortnight to fill up with enough venom for some ten lethal bites. Hagg Ahmad had no doubt been careless and had forgotten to re-milk this particular cobra, with the result that in spite of his self-inoculation the bite proved fatal.

I was able to learn a good deal about Hagg Ahmad's life history from a certain Hasan Bey Rifa'i who was one of the few Egyptians that I have known who, after being educated at Oxford, decided on his return to serve his country by undertaking the onerous part of 'omda of his native town. Rifa'i Bey served in the British Army in the 1914 war, under a soldier-friend of mine, Jasper Blunt, who was as interested as I was in the snake cult.

As I have said before, all snake-charmers belong to a sect called the Rifa'i which, like other professional guilds, has strict rules of admission and oaths of secrecy. Hasan Bey Rifa'i, though possessing the same name, had no connection of any sort with the Rifa'i sect but, by sympathetic and discreet talk, persuaded Hagg Ahmad that he actually had, and thus induced him to give him facts that he otherwise would not have divulged, and it was a tragedy that Hagg Ahmad died before we really got to the bottom of his craft. Putting our joint information together, Hagg Ahmad's history was as follows.

He was born of a poor fellah family in a small village in the Bilbeis district, where his father died while the boy was still in his teens: his mother married the village carpenter who ill-treated the boy. Ahmad preferred roaming the fields and





MY 20" SHEEP IN THE ASYUTIYAT, 1927

ON THE ALERT

## *Rifa'i-initiation*

catching animals to learning his stepfather's trade. At one of the annual *mulids* (fairs), at Bilbeis, little Ahmad made the acquaintance of a certain Sheikh el-Bayumi, a wandering juggler and snake-charmer. Ahmad soon made up his mind that he preferred the adventurous life of Sheikh el-Bayumi to that of his stepfather and ran away from home to join him. Bayumi took the boy with him to Cairo, where he lived somewhere near the Citadel and for several years the boy accompanied him in his snake-catching expeditions among the rocks and disused tombs of the Muqattam hills, where he was allowed to watch Bayumi at work, but never allowed to touch a snake unless its teeth had been drawn. By conviction, and also in the hopes of marrying his patron's daughter, Ahmad decided to become a Rifa'i and to go through the rites of initiation without which no one can become a professional snake-charmer or acquire the necessary immunity from snake-bite. The basis of the novitiate training of a Rifa'i is abstinence, meditation and self-inoculation. Having put himself under the care of a sheikh of the sect and having paid the fee laid down, the novice retires into seven days' solitary confinement, at the full moon, for meditation. This is followed by a month's fasting and sexual abstinence. During the solitary meditations, certain passages of the Koran are repeated as well as the recitation of long incantations where appeal is made for protection from the evil spirits controlling animals and reptiles. During the seven days' confinement only milk and vegetables may be eaten and no meat. At the same time a most rigid régime is followed of inward and outward treatment with cobra poison, taken inwardly as a potion called *teryaq*, and outwardly in the form of an ointment called *balsam*. These two words are of Greek and Latin origin meaning antidote and liniment respectively, and were introduced into the Arabic language in early times. *Teryaq* is composed of cobra venom, the juice and rind of fresh limes, and spices. These are pounded together and left for forty-eight hours in a bowl made of rhinoceros horn and the mixture must be made fresh every day by the sheikh. The *balsam* is made of cobra venom, snake fat,

## *Snake-Charmers*

palm oil, aromatic oil and spices. These ingredients are mixed together into an ointment and rubbed into the body of the novice. A thimbleful of teryaq is taken after the dawn prayer, and the dose increased every day up to seven thimblefuls on the seventh day : it is important that the teryaq should be left in the open to get the morning dew. As for the balsam, the sheikh comes every night during the seven days to rub this into the body of the novice, reciting at the same time some incantations to give moral support. Once entered as a fully-qualified Rifa'i, the snake-charmer repeats this same process every year, retiring from the world for a month to acquire spiritual strength and physical resistance.

From everything that I have seen, the snake-charmer firmly believes in his power over the snakes and I certainly believe that he has it. The nervous strain entailed in dealing with a difficult snake is easily seen as the voice of the charmer changes from a simple injunction to a hissing threat, and when the struggle is finished the man is in a state of sweating exhaustion.

The experience gathered by Rifa'i Bey and myself convinces me that the requisites for a successful snake-charmer are : (1) Complete confidence in his own powers over the snakes ; (2) Keen eyesight to recognize and to see the snake's eyes ; (3) Highly-developed sense of smell even to the extent of telling one species of snake from another by the scent ; (4) A conjurer's quickness of wrist, thumb and forefinger to enable him to seize a poisonous snake ; and (5) The power of mimicry. These men maintain that during the mating season the female has a hissing call to the male, and that by imitating it, they can make the male snake put his head out of his hole.

As for the snake-charmer's incantation which I have referred to, I think we can safely say that this is part of his professional patter when performing before the uninitiated. It may give him confidence, at the same time it imposes on the audience, but I am sure that he does not use it when snake-hunting on his own for commercial purposes. As Fluker wrote of the incantation :

It is impossible to reproduce in black and white the rolling grandeur

## The Snake-Charmer's Incantation

and magnificence of this Arabic poetry, and only those who understand Arabic well will be able to imagine the amount of dignified and at the same time impassioned command that the speaker infuses into the rolling words.

For the sake of readers of Arabic I have put as an appendix an English transliteration of the Arabic chant which Fluker so well describes : the nearest I can approach to it in English is thus :

I appear to thee as if the earth were riven and fell upon thee.  
If thou art a stranger, thou comest to me.  
But if thou art the Dweller of this Place,<sup>1</sup> do not come out.  
Avoid harming me ; by the permission of God and His Signs,<sup>2</sup> and  
of Moses, the spokesman of God, I conjure you !  
Come out through the door, thou art safe by the safeguard of our  
Lord Solomon, ruler over men and Jinns, ruler over the warning  
serpent and the rabid gecko !  
Fall down and descend, you are safe.

That a snake-charmer can and does mesmerize his audience to a considerable degree, I have proved to my own satisfaction by trying to keep my eyes fixed on that mysterious left hand, while the charmer, to the accompaniment of his sonorous exhortation, with his wand in his right hand is directing the eyes of his audience to another spot of his own choosing ; I have felt my eyes obeying his instructions and being drawn away against my will from the point that I was determined to watch.

Most people have a natural dislike of snakes, this possibly being a wise dispensation of nature on the principle that the only safe snake is a dead snake. It is hard, though, on the harmless grass-snakes who thus suffer at the hands of the ignorant for the bad name given their tribe. I personally experience no unpleasant feeling when I touch a snake any more than when

<sup>1</sup> The Arabic word used means the *genius loci*. On entering a strange place, one should ask permission of such spirits saying : "*Dustur, ya Sahib-el-Mahal*" ; such spirits go about in the shape of serpents and so snake-charmers have to be very careful not to irritate them.

<sup>2</sup> Of the signs of God, the Koran, the chief.

## *Snake-Charmers*

I touch any other reptile, though on one occasion I wondered if I had not made a mistake and been unduly familiar. During one of the six long summers without leave of the 1914-18 war, an Egyptian princess rang me up and begged me to bring Hagg Ahmad down to her house at Shubra as the servants had seen a cobra on the back door steps, and were terrified. Her house stood on an artificial mound laid out in terraces in the middle of a large garden in the sixty-acre park where had been the palace of Prince Aziz Hasan. On the Prince's death, the palace, built on the river-bank, had been pulled down. Much of the park had been allowed to go out of cultivation and had become the haunt of so many birds and beasts of prey that, at the Princess's request, I once organized a campaign for trapping the numerous foxes and mongooses that lived in a thicket of bamboo jungle and devoured her chickens and farm produce.

It was a hot day in July and, knowing the Princess's hospitality, I suggested bringing a few English friends to witness the hunt and pass the evening away from the heat of Cairo. As usual, I did not tell Hagg Ahmad where we were going, and had him come to my house by appointment. We spent a good hour of that hot summer's evening hunting the ruined palace and out-houses, picking up five or six small snakes as a result, but could find no sign of bigger game. However, at the Princess's request we had one more look for the reported cobra at the kitchen door, and actually did find a specimen of the Arqam or Clifford's Snake, which probably had been the cause of the alarm. Knowing that it was a non-poisonous snake, I took it from Hagg Ahmad and was handling it when it bit me in the right wrist; I made light of it, mopped up the two beads of blood that showed at the two neat little puncture marks on my wrist, and suggested that the séance might be considered as closed. As we walked back to the house, I found myself half jokingly wondering to myself whether I was so sure as to the snake being of a non-poisonous variety. Of course I was sure. Was I quite sure? What was that curious feeling in my wrist? Surely the skin felt curiously tight? I found my left hand holding my right wrist, and

## *Imagination plays a Part*

communicating to my brain the growing suspicion that my wrist was swelling. I compared the two together, and found the right one to be the fatter. I began to feel uncomfortable. By the time we reached the Princess's house, I was sweating and feeling sick. What I wanted, I knew, was a good strong drink to pull me together, but politeness would not allow me to cut short the necessary preliminaries of allowing the Princess to show off the old Turkish treasures of the house. Sincerely hoping that no one was noticing my state of nerves, I smoked cigarette after cigarette until at last the kind Princess asked if anyone would like a drink, and five minutes later the butler appeared with a bottle of whisky and a trayful of the biggest tumblers that I had ever seen. He started pouring for me and I let him pour, half an inch became an inch and a half before I told him to stop and swallowed it at a gulp with a bare two inches of soda. As the welcome spirit coursed through my body, I pulled myself together, realizing with a feeling of relief that I had let my imagination get the better of my reason.



## CHAPTER I I

### GIPSIES

ANOTHER interesting study that I was able to pursue in the provinces was that of the gipsies. I got hold of what literature I could on the subject, and was lucky to pick up a copy of Sir Richard Burton's rare work : *The Jew, the Gipsy, and Islam*.

In the early years of his adventurous life, while a subaltern in the Bombay Army, Burton was quartered in Sind, and later he was British Consul in Damascus. All this time and during his travels in Africa, South America and Europe he was always collecting material on the gipsies with a view to putting it together one day in book form. The work, however, was never completed and remained in the shape of notes until edited and published by Wilkins in 1898.

Burton quotes at length from the works of the Orientalist, Von Kramer, who in 1860 published his studies of the various gipsy tribes in Egypt and gave a vocabulary of some hundred words in the different dialects of each tribe. Burton was convinced that gipsies all over the world had a common origin in India, and that the difference in the dialects now spoken was caused by their long sojourn in the various countries through which they had passed in their migrations. Burton's chief research colleague in India was Captain Newbold, who wrote : " Since my visits to the banks of the Indus I am more than ever convinced that from the borders of this classic river originally migrated the hordes of gipsies that are scattered over Europe, Asia and North Africa." Burton went further, and maintained that all gipsy tribes originated from the Sindhi-tribe of Jats of the Indus Valley.

Von Kramer specialized in the gipsies of Egypt, and it was

## *Gipsies the World over*

from his vocabularies that I extracted a number of words collected by him from the Nawar gipsies of Syria and the Ghawazi gipsies of Egypt, known to the fellahin by the unpopular name of *Ghagar*. These strange folk, however, call themselves *Halabi*, thus claiming Aleppo<sup>1</sup> in Syria as their place of origin. Many of the words still used today by these ancient folk are of Hindustani and Persian origin, the rest of their dialect consisting of Arabic words twisted and altered to make them unrecognizable to the ordinary listener. It always struck me as remarkable that no Egyptian that I ever met knew one single word of this gipsy language. I have seen a couple of gipsy accused standing in front of a police officer engaged on an inquiry and heard them talking to each other in their peculiar thieves' talk without the police officer being able to understand a word.

A little sympathy, a little understanding, a little wise expenditure of money and what an intelligence corps could be made of these wandering parasites by police officers with initiative.

Wherever you travel in Europe and the East you will find gipsies of some sort, known by various names but similar everywhere in habits, appearance and professions. Originally no doubt their language was distinctive and common to the different branches of the race, but, anyhow in Egypt, most of this has been lost and replaced by an argot of Arabic in a disguised form. As tinkers, basket-weavers and donkey-doctors, they fill a useful rôle, as chicken stealers they are a menace to any village, while their women-folk engage the attention of the household at the front door with their display of cheap jewellery for sale, or with cards or cabalistic signs drawn in the dust tell the fortunes of the credulous peasant, their light-fingered men-folk get busy round behind, scatter a few grains of drug-soaked barley and silently empouch the family chickens. They are curious folk, so similar all the world over, and yet with one so basic a difference. Try any gallant advances with your European tzigane and a violent or perhaps bloody lesson will be learned. Cross the water into Asia or Africa, and the gipsy woman sells her

<sup>1</sup> Aleppo : Arabic *Halab*.

## Gipsies

favours to the highest bidder while the complacent husband turns aside or plays the procureur for his wife.

Eighty years ago the Ghawazi were still of importance in Egypt; they lived in a special quarter below the Citadel and provided the best dancing girls of the country. Some of them married into Egyptian families, and I knew of a Ghawazi woman married to a village 'omda in Aga Markaz, who retained her quality and was one of the characters of the district, ruling the village with a rod of iron and providing a more than adequate substitute for her henpecked husband.

Burton, who may himself have had gipsy blood in his veins, remarks: "The outstanding peculiarity of the gipsy's eye is the far-off look which seems to gaze at something beyond you, and the alteration from the fixed stare to a glazing or filming over of the pupil." Elsewhere a writer says: "When the eye looks at you, it looks through you and then glazing over, seems to see something beyond you." People who knew Burton always remarked on this peculiarity of his own eyes.

Things have changed in Egypt since Burton wrote, but it is still as easy to distinguish the gipsy from the Bedouin or the fellah. I often ran across these folk in Upper Egypt, sometimes as sorcerers and tellers, for a price, of hidden treasure, and sometimes as passers of false coin. Once, to my amusement, they brought an action for assault against a villager who had followed the trail of feathers of his stolen hens right up to the gipsies' tent, and given the thieves a sound beating!

Early in January of 1909 I had the misfortune to get sunstroke at Aswan which laid me up for a month in Cairo and later induced my chief to transfer me from Upper Egypt to the Delta. My transfer deprived me of a rare opportunity of studying an episode in the life of a band of gipsies who had for some time been attracting considerable attention in Asyut. Just at the time that this gipsy crowd was slowly trekking through that province, there happened to be an outbreak of cattle plague and the slaughtering of horned cattle was strictly forbidden. The mob were moving north, some fifty souls or

## Gipsy Poker

more with their camels, goats, sheep and donkeys, staying a few days at each village and living by their customary activities. For some reason or other a quarrel had broken out which divided the gipsies into two factions. Instead of settling their quarrel by violence, the rivals contented themselves with challenging each other to a game of bluff and counter-bluff. Like poker players, the chief of faction A proclaimed that he was a better man than the chief of faction B by, say, four camels : faction B 'saw' him and immediately leader A slaughtered the four camels : finished with their camels they went on to donkeys, sheep and goats, with the result that the police had to intervene as the village fellahin followed up these sacrifices to salvage the slaughtered meat, which they could not otherwise obtain.

The Halabis had by now reached the village of Zarabi, west of Abu Tig, and had thoroughly upset that district, so we sent out a police force to round them up and bring them to Abu Tig en route for the Government Headquarters at Asyut. Their cattle finished, the rival parties were by now 'seeing' each other for handfuls of coin and the local excitement and disorder grew great as the money was thrown into the canals bordering upon their route. The motley crowd was eventually escorted by the police into Asyut and the leaders summoned into the presence of the Mudir, who called upon the rival champions to cease their quarrel and make peace. Promises were given and as quickly broken, and the casting of money on the waters continued, whereupon ruder orders were given to these Romany *chals*. The following day a deputation of two ragged tatterdermalions asked audience of the Mudir ; they were admitted to the presence and one of them produced and deposited on the Mudir's table a leather bag. He explained that the bag and its contents were the price of peace ; he asked no receipt nor did he express a wish as to how the money was to be utilized : he simply left the money on the table, made a deep salaam and left.

The bag actually contained four hundred golden sovereigns. It was just put on the table and left by a pack of beggars whom

## *Gipsies*

no one would have accused of owning four hundred piastres between them. True to their bond, the tribe moved peacefully north, passing from village to village and no doubt recovering the cost of their sporting sacrifices at the expense of the simple fellahin.

I ran across their kind again in the Delta districts of Aga and Simbillawein by which time I had memorized some of the vocabulary from Sir Richard Burton's book. Valuing my personal reputation as a Government official, I hesitated to be seen too often frequenting their tents, but many were the conversations I had with them and their womenfolk. Physically their women were attractive in a bold, flashy way, and under the guise of begging or fortune-telling, they made good use of their dark-eyed charms. One girl went so far as to ask me to buy her baby, and great was her surprise when, in good Romany, I said that I already had a quiver full.

The effect on them of a few words of their own particular tongue was interesting in the extreme: an amazed silence, creeping curiosity, whispers and nudges and finally an invitation to dismount and accept the hospitality of their tents, which I now regret that I bashfully refused.

## CHAPTER 12

### ALEXANDRIA

JUST before I married in 1911, the post of Assistant Commandant of the Alexandria Police became vacant : I applied for it successfully, and took over my duties in March of that year. For a young married couple the settled life in a city in Government Quarters (in this case over a somewhat noisy police station just outside the town) had considerable advantages compared with the restless existence of an Interior Inspector in the provinces. After eight years of a wandering life in the Egyptian provinces it was to a very different world that I now came. Alexandria with its docks, its Bourse and its large cotton industry is the Manchester and commercial centre of Egypt, whereas Cairo has always been the seat of Government. Cairo with its Citadel and magnificent ancient monuments is essentially an oriental city, while Alexandria has little Eastern character or remains of her Hellenic origin, and strikes the newcomer merely as a bustling Levantine port and business centre. As you drive on arrival through the dock areas, you might think yourself in Marseilles or Naples, with cobbled streets rattling with cart traffic and seething with dock hands and labourers of all kinds and colours. The character of the centre of the city, with its fine streets and buildings, is definitely European. From there you emerge into the Greek quarter with the rich houses of the cotton kings. Following the coast along the Corniche road, you drive farther and farther east through miles of country villas and gardens until you reach the royal palace of Montaza.

When I went to Alexandria thirty-five years ago social life consisted of two main elements, the solid, old-fashioned British merchant princes of the Levant, and the more modern million-

## *Alexandria*

aire Greeks with their luxury houses and their Paris-gowned ladies. Italian was the lingua franca of the shops and of the Berberine servants of the big houses, and one's own correct but country Arabic marked one as a provincial.

The organization of the police of the cities was different from that of the Provinces. Each city was under an Egyptian Governor corresponding to the Mudir of a province, but the police were under an English commandant with a certain number of English personnel. My Commandant in Alexandria was Lewa<sup>1</sup> Hopkinson Pasha who, with his delightful wife, had made his large old house in its big garden the popular social centre of Alexandria.

During my two years in the Alexandria Police I had plenty of excitement, such as the passage through the city of the Holy Carpet on its way by sea to Mecca, which the previous year had caused serious disorders. Hopkinson Pasha went on home leave the first summer, and I was left in command. In 1911 the Moslem population was in a state of excitement over the Italo-Turkish war in Tripoli, and the European colonies in a state of nervous tension. One day an Arabic paper published the news (afterwards proved to be false) that the Turks had retaken the town of Tripoli from the Italians. From the time of the Romans Alexandria has been notorious for its disorderly mobs, and as the welcome news spread through the town like fire through a cornfield, demonstrating mobs began to form in the dock quarters, spreading very soon to the adjacent workmen's districts. Almost before we knew it, crowds of several thousand roughs were surging up the streets towards the centre of the city and the European quarter. In those days the pick of my police was my Mounted Troop and they were kept busy till late that night charging and breaking up the mobs. The temper of the crowd was more elated than aggressive to start with, but the inevitable happened as they came through the Hamamil quarter, which was inhabited largely by low-class European prostitutes and their Greek bullies. I was down

<sup>1</sup> Lewa = Brigadier.

## Tripoli Riots

there myself, more or less successfully controlling the crowds, when I heard an odd shot or two. Within a few minutes bullets were ricocheting off the pavement with every other balcony holding a Greek or other Levantine letting off his revolver into the native crowd below. It was no place to stop in and I had to retire until I could get up my European plain-clothes men and put them through the houses to stop the indiscriminate shooting. It was a glaring example of the abuse of the Capitulations; one saw the Egyptian police trying to deal with this scum of the Levant, every man of them with a gun in his right hand and his *demotico* (nationality papers) in the other, ready to claim immunity from Egyptian police jurisdiction if interfered with.

Having smashed every street lamp and shop window in the Manshiya quarter, the mob reached the central square of the town in front of the Bourse, but there my mounted men had room to manoeuvre and the demonstrators were driven back into the side streets. I noticed one particular café that kept up a steady fire on the police with slabs of broken marble-topped café tables interspersed with revolver shots, so I called Ingram Bey, my number two, to get a force ready and together we charged across the square and fell upon the enemy. I then found myself facing an enormous Sudanese armed with a chunk of marble table-top, and I landed him one on the jaw, with the result that I dislocated my hand and finally laid him out with a good Whitechapel upper-cut with my knee in the groin.

Within a few days things quieted down and routine police work took the place of suppressing riots, but there was always good fun to be had for a young policeman in the underworld of the Alexandria slums. Bimbashi Ingram was head of the C.I.D., and his chief detective officer was an Italian named Giovanini: they were both experienced sleuths and many were the sporting evenings I had with them raiding gambling dens, false-coining plants and other haunts of crime. Giovanini in action was the quickest thing imaginable, whether dealing with the savage bulldogs guarding a *tripot*, or wrestling, as I once



## *Alexandria*

saw him, with an armed smuggler, both their automatics going off as they rolled in the gutter together. Perhaps Giovanini's prize performance was one night when an armed lunatic barricaded himself into a second-floor flat and defied arrest. Through the front door keyhole the police could see the madman sitting on a chair facing the door and holding a cocked revolver in each hand ready to greet the first policeman who was unfortunate enough to be ordered to enter. The fire hose was tried on the windows from the street, but the angles were too acute to be effective, so armed police and firemen with their axes and crow-bars were assembled on the landing of the flat, and preparations made to batter in the door. Meanwhile Giovanini had climbed some few steps of the steep stairs leading to the flat above and pointed out that the glass which should have been in the fan-light over the door was missing. Suddenly, before anyone realized what he was doing, Giovanini had dived head first through the empty space over the door, dropped straight on to the armed man, seized his guns and pinioned him, much to the relief of everyone, including the Commandant who was preparing to lead the attack.

There was at this time a lot of hashish smuggling from Greece. While on the sea or on the coast, its capture was the business of the Coastguards, and it did not come into our police competence until it had entered the city. Occasionally we got early information which we intentionally did not hand on to the Coastguards, hoping that the stuff would get through their control and drop into our waiting hands, thus giving us a very welcome bit of Government reward money.

A certain 'Abd el-Qadir el-Gailani was one of the biggest smugglers of the time, and we heard one day that he had sunk a big cargo of hashish in waterproof sacks off the coast. Ingram decided to trust no one with the information, not even his officer Giovanini, and for several nights he and I watched the shore hoping that 'Abd el-Qadir would fish his stuff up and make his run. On the second or third night Ingram, from his hiding-place near the beach, saw 'Abd el-Qadir's empty carts

## *A Big Hashish Run*

go down towards the shore and soon after return, but his experienced eye could see that the traces were slack, which meant that the carts had not been loaded and that our friend was just trying it on, hoping that if he were being watched, the watchers would jump at the bait of his empty carts and show their hand.

A couple of nights later, I was turning in to bed when Ingram's messenger reached me and told me to come quickly. I slipped a Burberry on over my pyjamas and arrived to find a pretty scene. 'Abd el-Qadir's gang had made their run of some seven hundred kilos of hashish and got it safely up from the shore into the stables of a house next to the villa of the Governor of the city. Ingram, dressed as an Arab, had watched it up from the beach, but had been uneasy at seeing a Greek fisherman also watching and following. Once assured that the stuff was safely in its hiding-place, Ingram took his time, got up his forces and with a rush we broke in and held everyone covered. What then was our astonishment to see the Greek fisherman with a party of ruffians closing in at the same moment from the opposite direction ! We then realized that it was Giovanini and his men who, equally suspicious of the disguised Ingram, had been trailing the gang on his own account and had coincided to the minute with our final pounce. Our luck was great as besides seizing the seven hundred kilos of hashish, we had arrived just at the moment when 'Abd el-Qadir, the biggest smuggler of the day, was paying one of his very rare visits in person to inspect the quality of the seventeen-thousand-pound cargo. His arrest with all his chief men was something to be proud of.

Seizures like this did not often come our way, but raiding hashish-smoking dens could be organized any night when one had time and took the place of the rat-catching of one's youth ; actual danger there was little, as fists did more work than fire-arms, but an occasional drawing of a knife and the risks of a broken neck as one scrambled over roofs in the dark gave plenty of zest to the chase.

In early 1912 I was delegated from the A.C.P. to take charge of the Anti-War Contraband operations from Alexandria to Mersa

## *Alexandria*

Matruh during the Turco-Italian war in Tripoli. My wife and I spent several enjoyable weeks living in Coastguard rest houses, often over the stables, all along the coast where the carpet of wild flowers on the winter rains is a marvel of beauty.

Most of my work was Camel Corps work, and to it I brought my famous camel, Abu Rusas.

One of the lucky days of my life had been in 1907 when I met Robin Paul, of the Sudan Survey, just back from the South and at the moment desirous of selling his thoroughbred camel, Abu Rusas, the 'father of bullets'. This was a Monasiri camel and came from the Bayuda desert to the south of the Fourth Cataract in the Sudan and already had a big reputation as a long-distance racer. It can only have been Paul's Irish persuasiveness that can have induced the original owner to part company with a camel of such repute. Abu Rusas owed his name to having been hit as a colt by the bullet of some raiding Dervishes who were trying to capture him, and which had left him with a hernia that stuck out like a tennis ball from his belly and made him difficult to girth.

Till he was three years old Abu Rusas had never been roped, and had run loose with the other grazing camels of the tribe. A party of raiding Dervishes spotted him one day and recognizing his quality, made up their minds to capture him. Carefully watching his habits, they found that every few days he and the other camels would visit a water-hole at the head of a narrow and rocky wadi, and here was their chance of cutting him out. Spying from a distance one day they saw the camels enter the wadi for their drink; two mounted men were quickly posted at the mouth where it debouched into the open plain, two more horsemen a hundred yards out, and yet another two right out in the plain.

The camels, having drunk their fill, led by the three-year-old came down the wadi to find their way barred by the mounted Arabs. Abu Rusas charged straight through them and quickly out-distanced the second pair: the third pair, posted out in the plain, now took up the chase on their fresh horses, but soon



POLICE MOUNTED TROOPS COMING DOWN FROM CITADEL BETWEEN THE  
MOSQUES



## *My Jumping Camel*

found themselves being left behind. One last and only chance remained, to wound and stop the fleeing camel ; reining in his horse, one of the Arabs took a flying shot with his Remington, but the bullet only caught the camel low in the stomach, which merely added to his speed. The raiders had been defeated and Abu Rusas kept his liberty till the next rutting season, when his rightful owner played the Delilah trick on him and lassoed him as he courted the female herd.

I was never too certain how much to believe of Robin's list of the camel's qualifications, especially as regards jumping and polo-playing which he included, but it only took me one ride to find out that his hurdling capacities at any rate had not been exaggerated. Camels as a rule will not jump at all ; they were not made for it and wisely refuse to try ; some after lengthy training will stumble in their gallop over a two-foot obstacle, but Abu Rusas jumped like a horse. My main schooling ground was on the sandy edge of the desert at Asyut behind the cemeteries. Here the fellahin plant a large number of medlar trees called *nabq* and, to protect them when young from the nibbling goat, they enclose a plantation of young trees with a four-foot wall of mud brick topped with another twelve inches of dry thorn bushes. I soon got Abu Rusas to fly these walls in his gallop ; the going suited him, the falling was soft enough to suit me, and with a mouthful of green *nabq* tree as a reward for Abu Rusas we would ride home well contented with our hour's amusement. Once while we were on patrol in the villages, some fellahin began cheeking Hamed, the Bishari tracker, about his fuzzy-wuzzy shock of hair, and when we chased them to teach them manners they took refuge in a threshing-floor surrounded with a high *zariba* of dead thorn bushes ; a touch with my heel and Abu Rusas flew his fence like a hunter, landing on the top of a pile of grain while the rude men, astonished beyond measure, dashed out of their sanctuary to soil up to their necks in the only refuge, the village pond, where even Abu Rusas could not follow them.

After I had owned and ridden him for a couple of months,

## *Alexandria*

I brought him down to Cairo for his first visit to civilization and stabled him at the Veterinary Department in the town. At that time I was sharing a flat with two other men in a side street near the centre of the town. The day after my arrival I told Hamed, the Bishari tracker, to bring my camel round to my flat and from there I rode him down to the Sporting Club at Gezira. In those days there was a steeplechase course of natural hedges alongside the flat course and I selected one particular jump in front of the grandstand for my first trial of Abu Rusas as a steeplechaser : he flew the four-foot fence like a bird with never a check, and on landing went straight on in his gallop. Pleased with our mutual performance, I rode him back to my flat and told Hamed to bring him round again next afternoon. Again Abu Rusas and I repeated our star turn in front of a considerable audience and rode back to Cairo still more pleased with ourselves. As I crossed over Qasr el-Nil Bridge, feeling that he and I understood each other, I twisted the headstall rope round the front pommel and ordered him to take me home. I sat perfectly still with my legs crossed on his neck, without touching the head-rope, and Abu Rusas took me at his long swishing trot, the black and red tassels of his saddle-bags swinging like a highland kilt, past the barracks, past the Savoy Hotel, down Shari' Qasr el-Nil until he came to the side street immediately before the National Bank : here with no guidance from me he turned to his right, forty yards down he turned to his left into my street, and in front of my door without a word from his rider, he stopped and knelt down on the asphalt road for me to descend ; an extraordinary performance for a desert camel in the strange surroundings of a modern city. As Hamed used to say, " Abu Rusas was wiser than most men." Meanwhile Tom Browne, the well-known black and white artist, had heard of my performance at Gezira and persuaded me to repeat it next day to enable him to take some photographs. This I did without accident, though the slipperiness of the grass on the race-course made the performance rather risky. Browne made one of his drawings from the photograph

## *Abu Rusas forgets Himself*

and it appeared as a full-page picture in the *Illustrated and Sporting Dramatic*.

From then onwards I rode Abu Rusas on all my desert patrols and a great character and a great gentleman he was. While with me in the Western Desert he came on rut about April that year. One day I had ridden him out on to the desert some ten or fifteen miles from Dab'a to shoot some specimens of the uncommon Calandra lark which the Zoo wanted. The larks found and shot, I handed over my gun to my Arab guide and holding the birds in my right hand, was pulling with my left hand on the head-chain to make him kneel for me to mount when with a 'wouf' like a bear he turned on me and seized me by the left wrist; as luck would have it his three-inch tusks missed my wrist and went clear through my coat and shirt sleeve. With the amazing strength that a camel has in his neck, he swung me clear off my feet about man-high from the ground with the full intent, most probably, of dashing me to the ground and crushing me with his pad. I yelled to the Arab to club him with the gun-stock, but before he could do so, I got my right fist in heavily on to his nose; if it hurt him as much as it hurt me I can understand why he dropped me so quickly. My hand had been slowly recovering from meeting the jaw of a buck nigger in a big riot a fortnight before in the Manshiya square of Alexandria, and now for a second time it was put out of action, my knuckles cut on the camel's teeth and my signet ring pinched on to my finger. As for the Calandra larks, they were unrecognizable to anyone except a coroner.

Furious with Abu Rusas, once safely in the saddle I gave him some stinging cuts with the rhino-kurbash, an indignity he had never suffered before, and we covered those ten miles home in record time. Hamed was waiting for me at Dab'a but on my telling him the story he put all the blame on me. He pointed out that as the camel was on rut, he was not responsible for his actions, and that it was I who had been in the wrong in not watching him more carefully when mounting. To this I rejoined: "All right, Hamed, you shall take him for a punishment



## *Alexandria*

ride tomorrow to Maghra and back. Parade at 7 a.m., go to Maghra and be back next day." Maghra is an oasis with a brackish lake seventy-five miles as the crow flies to the south-east of Dab'a where I had a Sudanese Camel Corps post whose duty was to prevent war contraband camels watering there.

At 7 a.m. next morning Hamed paraded before me alone with the camel, his saddle-bags loaded with cones of sugar for the Sudanese police of the Maghra garrison. Punctual at sunset the following evening Hamed was back with a more respectful Abu Rusas, having covered the hundred and fifty miles of very rough desert in eighteen hours' riding. Hamed related how that on arrival he had begun to unload his camel-bags, when the Sudanese, seeing a trickle of white powder leaking out of the corner of the bags, exclaimed: "Why have you brought us flour? We have plenty of that; what we told you to bring was sugar." Camels on rut are rough to ride; the Dab'a-Maghra route is no racing track, and seventy-five miles of fast travel had reduced those twelve-inch cones of sugar to powder.

I rode Abu Rusas all through the Tripoli campaign and after I joined the Cairo police in 1912 I made him over to the Asyut patrol and rode him whenever I got away for a shooting trip in the Eastern Desert. The last time I rode him was in February, 1919, when I took a patrol out to the Oasis of Dunqul, west of Aswan, and on return from it caught nearly the last train to Cairo before the March riots started. I later sold him to a notable of Kafr ez-Zayyat on condition that he did no more work and merely went to stud. I had him regularly inspected and the old boy eventually was put under at the venerable age of twenty-two. He was far and away the best camel I ever rode. Beautifully built with a head like a lion, he was truly a king among camels, and did he not know it! On patrol he had the priceless quality of courage and leadership. Refusing to allow any other camel to precede him, he would slip along into unknown country in his long smooth trot with never a backward glance. Any familiarity when at graze from younger camels he resented,

## *Arms-running into Tripoli*

but never to their hurt. One show of his three-inch tusches was quite enough to enforce discipline.

The best foal that he ever sired was one got by stealth, for while I had him I never let him serve mares, as doing so was likely to spoil his temper. On one occasion, however, Hamed was riding him on patrol near Asyut: it happened to be a Friday and, passing the village mosque at Bisra, Hamed thought that he would like to say his midday prayers. The guide to the patrol at that time was Nasir Hasaballa, whose early history is told on page 114, Chapter 9. While Hamed was saying his prayers, Nasir, who was riding his own she-camel, quickly stole a service off Abu Rusas, and the resulting foal, conceived under such exceptional circumstances, faithfully reproduced the beauty and qualities of his sire.

I was altogether six months on this delegation, and during that time I had several experiences of interest. The trouble started with a cleverly managed raid by the Turks from Tripoli into Egyptian territory to take over a hundred camel-loads of arms and ammunition that had been landed on the coast by the connivance and arrangement of a Coastguards Officer, who went over to the Turks with the arms. Escorted by a Turkish force, the smugglers got clear away with the loads and after missing an Egyptian Camel Corps patrol by half a mile got safely back to Tripoli. Soon after this it was reported that certain Senussi Arabs were preparing to raid into Egypt and seize the railhead at Fuka. To deal with this threat, the Ministry of the Interior collected all its available police Camel Corps from the Mudiriyas and railed them up in all haste to Dab'a where the narrow-gauge railway began.

I was sent up to find out about a large collection of camels that had been seen near the coast at Dab'a. Hamed, my head tracker, and I spent an interesting day stalking and observing through my field-glasses this herd of several hundred camels which we spotted in the neighbourhood of a big threshing floor where a large number of Arabs seemed unusually active. After watching from a distance for some time, I made up my

## *Alexandria*

mind that there was something fishy and returned later with a strong camel patrol to investigate. On the face of it, everything seemed natural and everyone appeared engaged in the normal business of threshing and winnowing barley and chopping the straw, but when we started turning over the huge mounds of chaff and straw, we found, hidden beneath, scores of newly-stuffed camel baggage-saddles. The camels and saddles were being got ready for a further consignment of arms that was already at sea and due to be landed at this spot for running into Tripoli. We confiscated the camels, some four hundred in number, and heard afterwards that the arms shipment had been diverted.

It was on this day that Captain Hubbard of the Interior had his famous argument with the stationmaster at Dab'a. Hubbard had arrived with some of the Camel Corps with orders to push on by rail to Fuka as fast as possible. He applied to the stationmaster at Dab'a for trucks and an engine on the narrow-gauge line, but was told that no rolling stock was available for the moment. Hubbard, whose Arabic was slow and temper quick, thought that the stationmaster was wilfully obstructing him, and after letting fly the few Arabic swear words that he knew, lost his temper and gave the stationmaster a resounding smack on the face. Now, what Hubbard had forgotten, if he ever knew it, was that the Maryut railway line was the private property of the Khedive and that the railway officials were his private servants and not Egyptian Government officials. Next day there was a proper row, and Cairo ordered me to make an inquiry. The stationmaster seemed to me to be quite a decent type of fellow, and I could not blame him for feeling sore. Hubbard too, on his side, had something to be said for him as he was working practically under active service conditions and had to get his force to railhead with all speed. I determined to gain time if I could, so I transferred Hubbard, and delayed sending in my report to the Residency for as long as possible. Meanwhile we heard that Lord Kitchener was very annoyed about the incident and intended to sack Hubbard.

A few days later the Khedive came out from Alexandria in

## *Trouble with the Stationmaster*

his special train to inspect the Maryut estates, and on slowing up at the station noticed drawn up on the platform a curious sort of guard of honour composed of a tall soldierly British officer, half a dozen odd Camel Corps police, and a bugler who sounded the Khedivial salute. The Khedive called the officer up and asked him who he was, to which Hubbard, who stammered badly, replied: "Your H-H-H-Highness, I am C-C-Captain Hubbard who smacked your stationmaster's face. L-L-Lord K-K-Kitchener wants to sack me, and I appeal to Your H-H-Highness to protect me." The Khedive was so amused at being appealed to against the all-powerful Kitchener that he intimated in the proper quarter that he wished no more done in the matter of Captain Hubbard and the stationmaster.

Hubbard had been in the Guards and was a first-class drill instructor which endeared him to the Sudanese police, who love nothing so much as army drill. Besides stammering he was a victim to asthma, which necessitated the constant application of an atomizer to his nose. His other claim to fame and local popularity was his passion for cock-fighting and a quaint figure he made strutting about the Coastguard station with a game-cock under his left arm and his right hand busy pumping spray into his nostrils.

I was not to get through this Western Desert control myself without criticism. Besides the anti-war contraband work from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh, I was also nominally in charge of the Passports Office in Alexandria Police Headquarters where everyone who wished to enter Tripoli overland from Egypt had to apply for a visa. Egypt, it must be remembered, was neutral, but her sympathies were entirely with her co-religionists, the Turks. Instructions were left very vague and no penalties were enforced on persons arrested while trying to enter Tripoli without permission. My patrols caught an Egyptian, an ex-Coastguard officer, on three separate occasions trying to get across the Maryut desert to join the Turks. As passport officer I saw every applicant myself and very soon noticed that most of the so-called colonists and merchants applying

## *Alexandria*

for visas for Tripoli were typical Turkish non-commissioned officers. Naturally I had no proof of their true professions and having no specific instructions I used to give them the benefit of the doubt and pass them through. One day there were half a dozen in front of me explaining that they were grocers and butchers and what-not when suddenly I called them to attention in Turkish, and up they sprang like ramrods !

The next day a fellow came in and said he was a barber : I said, " Yes, oh, Barber, but where are your tools ? " He excused himself by saying that he had left them outside, and half an hour later returned with a razor, a bit of soap, a shaving brush and a towel. I signed him up as a barber and thought no more about it till three weeks later I received an important-looking envelope with the Residency stamp on it containing a letter from Lord Kitchener requesting a reply to a report against me from Colonel Snow, the Coastguard officer in command of the frontier.

The report stated that Colonel Snow had noticed for some time that Russell Bey, in charge of the Alexandria passport office, had obviously been very negligent in the carrying out of his duties and had been letting through, as colonists, persons who obviously were not what they pretended to be. For instance, a man had come through to the frontier with his passport signed up as a barber. He, Colonel Snow, suspected him and had put him down to shave one of the Coastguard men, with the result that he cut the man's face all to pieces, from which it was clear that instead of being a barber the man was a Turkish officer in disguise. Thinking that the less I said the better, but being somewhat young and fresh, I replied to Lord Kitchener, acknowledging Colonel Snow's report, admitting that I had given the man in question a visa as a barber, but that the fact that Colonel Snow had proved that he was no barber did not prove that he was a Turkish officer in disguise, as he might well have been a baker. That was the last thing I heard of it, and I do not think I saw poor Snow again before he was treacherously shot by the Senussi in 1914.

## CHAPTER 13

### CAIRO

AFTER two years as Assistant Commandant of the Alexandria police under Hopkinson Pasha, I was transferred to Cairo in 1913 in the same capacity under Harvey Pasha. Before recounting my life in the Cairo police, I think that this is the place to give a general account of the Egyptian police (more particularly of those of Cairo), their value as the guardians of law and order and schemes for their improvement.

Different countries have different types of police. In some countries the police are looked upon as the servants and representatives of the public, whereas in others they consider themselves to be the masters of the public. In the one, the police have the full support and assistance of the citizens, whereas in the other the average man fears the police and avoids them. In the cities of Egypt the upper classes in the past tended to ignore the police and the lower classes to fear them, but now all classes look more to them for assistance (especially the motoring public) and expect efficient service from them. Up to a few years ago, Egypt had always used the cheapest possible material for her police forces. Egyptian police, both mounted and dismounted, have always been recruited on a volunteer basis from army reservists. Every Egyptian is liable theoretically (with certain exceptions) to ten years' conscript service in the armed forces unless, before the ballot, he has paid the exemption fee of £E20.

Military service is traditionally unpopular and every one, except the very poorest of the fellahin, manages to produce this small sum in order to avoid serving as a soldier. Having finished his five years' conscript service with the colours, the

## Cairo

soldier goes to the reserve for another five years, at the beginning of which time he may volunteer for service in the police, with the result that the police are recruited from the poorest and most ignorant classes in the country. An advantage of this system to the Government is that the police recruit brings with him the high standard of discipline and physical development that he has acquired during his five years' army service. Today none but literate recruits are accepted for the police, which is a big improvement on the past. A cadre of constables has also been formed (amounting in Cairo to a strength of 265). These consist of young men with certain educational certificates who pass two years in the Police College and on posting rank as equivalent to non-commissioned officers with the possibility later of being promoted to officer rank. This cadre was formed to replace the European constables who were employed in the cities particularly on traffic duty. On the whole these Egyptian constables have been a success, but as a body, though better educated, they have neither the discipline nor the physique of the ex-army man.

Besides the volunteer beat policemen there is in Cairo a force of 1,500 conscript police who are serving their compulsory five years' service in the police instead of in the army. These men furnish all guards on Government treasuries, supply prison and court escorts and are the Command's fighting troops in case of riot. With the deterioration of the standard of health in the villages, this force, though good, has not got the fighting quality that it had twenty years ago. The pride of the eye of the Cairo police is the Mounted Troop, composed of 280 ex-Egyptian Army cavalry men, all with long police service. Mounted on the best quality Syrian Arab stallions, they have often shown their value in street riot work, while their smartness on parade and in tournament is a pleasure to see. In 1934 I had the honour of taking twenty-four of them to London, where they gave a display at the Olympia Horse Show and were reviewed by King George V at Buckingham Palace.

Considering that the police have always been grossly under-

## *Working Conditions*

paid, the standard of honesty has been very high, which I attribute to the village code of behaviour under which they were brought up, and which they bring with them to the cities. For social life to be possible in primitive villages of several thousand inhabitants there must be common consent as to daily behaviour. It would be no good for a fellah to go to a distant police station to complain that a neighbour has insulted his wife or that someone's donkey has eaten his clover. If he did, he would get short change from the overworked police officer of the outpost. Village life is governed by an inherited and unwritten code, whereby certain things are not done. To a fellah certain things are 'aib, or shame; to the townsman of the same class the same thing might be a calculation as to whether he could do it or not without being found out. I fear, however, that the standard of pecuniary honesty which in the past has been high among the city police, is being undermined by the inadequacy of the pay. It is today quite impossible for a married policeman to exist on the pay that he receives. In the old days the city policeman could count on certain remittances in kind from his village; today his village is as badly off as himself and can spare nothing.

The Ministry of Social Affairs in 1946 made, at my request, a detailed survey of the living conditions of 400 married police families in Cairo. This report more than bears out what I have constantly said about the miserable economic conditions of the police, and strongly supports my repeated demands for a pension system (which at present does not exist), for free housing in Government cantonments, for free medical and educational facilities for police families, and for better payment.

As regards the standard of efficiency of the Egyptian City police forces, in spite of shortage of men and of motor transport, the police work of the four cities of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Suez is of sufficiently good quality to cope with the class of common crime that exists today: the methods, however, of the criminal are always improving, and it is essential that police improvement should precede that of the criminal



## Cairo

and not follow it. Here it must be remembered that in Egypt the investigation and prosecution of the more important cases of crime are carried out by the Parquet with the police understudying to them. Here the quality of the trained Parquet investigator is on a high level as is also the technical work of the lego-medical department. It is not new scientific gadgets that are wanted to improve police work so much as a general improvement in the service conditions of officers and men whereby a better class of Egyptian will be encouraged to join the force. In the provinces the standard of police work and equipment is inferior to that of the cities, and for various reasons. Criminal investigation in the villages is much more difficult owing to the unwillingness of the fellahin to come forward in evidence for fear of reprisals. The next main difficulty, which it is to be hoped is a temporary one, is the number of modern firearms which have got into the hands of the fellahin and Arabs.

As a consequence of this increase in crime, without a proportionate increase in police, Parquet and law-courts, great delay ensues before cases are brought to court, and a vicious circle is created. The police complain that the law is no deterrent when they have to wait months and even years for final sentences, while the judges complain that they are overwhelmed with work, that the cases brought before them are badly prepared and that witnesses forget their evidence and are unreliable. This unsatisfactory condition of affairs is to my mind the inevitable result of the preoccupation of successive governments with the national struggle for independence. Interest in social reform and public security in the provinces has had to give place to party and national politics in which the best brains of the country have been constantly engaged. Now that the national battle has been won there is no reason why the Ministries concerned should not concentrate their abilities and their budgets on the internal reforms which are so necessary and which alone will render the soil of Egypt unfertile to the menace of communism which is daily becoming more serious.

To return now to my transfer to Cairo ; this was promotion

## *Harvey Pasha*

for me as the Cairo Command was senior to that of Alexandria. The Cairo Police was at that time commanded by Lewa Harvey Pasha, a gallant old Scotsman who had fought as a subaltern in the 42nd Highlanders at Tell el-Kebir in 1883, served in the Gendarmerie under Baker Pasha, and commanded both the Alexandria and Cairo Police successively since 1888.

I soon found that as Assistant-Commandant to Harvey Pasha I was in a much less interesting position than I had been under Hopkinson Pasha in Alexandria. I had my definite province which included the discipline of the men and N.C.O.s, inspection, up to a point, of the Mounted Troop, the Guard Company and the Fire Brigade ; but everything of any importance was kept by Harvey Pasha in his own hands, and I realized that I was a very unimportant officer.

Harvey Pasha's most trusted official at this time was a civilian of Levant origin, who held the important post of Director of the Political C.I.D. While on leave in England I had stayed with Percy Machell, who had by then retired from Egyptian Government Service, and he warned me to be on my guard against this man.

I soon found Harvey Pasha to be a martinet of the old school, who always dealt with discipline cases himself, the officer being brought before him by the Director and not by myself, as I had the right to expect as Assistant-Commandant. Sometimes an officer in trouble would come to me and beg me to listen to his defence, as he knew that the Director had his knife into him. I had plenty of my own work to do as Assistant-Commandant and seldom came into personal contact with him ; when I did, he was friendly and polite even to the extent of occasionally offering me an expensive cigar. I soon noticed, however, that he, and not myself, was the man of confidence of the Commandant. I therefore made no attempt to gain instruction in higher politics, kept to my routine work and bided my time.

Little did I know that within three years I was to be involved in a fight to the death with this man in one of the most

## Cairo

important graft cases ever to have been prosecuted in Egypt, and a case in which he thought himself quite safe, believing himself to be invulnerable, and his accuser, as he stated in court, 'childish and irresponsible'.

The Government, in the first years of the 1914-18 war, was very nervous of pro-Turk influence in the country, and in 1916 all Turks and Turkish sympathizers were being arrested in Egypt and sent to Malta for internment. Harvey Pasha was regarded as the Ministry's specialist for the whole country in these matters, and any decision he came to was accepted and acted upon without question. In all these matters the Director was Harvey's right-hand man, and his power in the country was very great in consequence. He was feared and courted by everyone, and in spite of his growing reputation for dishonesty no one dared denounce him.

It was never possible to prove how much he had made by graft during his service, but it must have amounted to a very large sum of money. His system was elaborate and careful, payment always being made in coin and not in banknotes, which it might have been possible to trace. The sources of income were varied and numerous, ranging from free supplies of poultry and vegetables from the market to a tax on police officers for promotion. It was, however, the War that brought the golden opportunity of big money. Egypt, though a poor country, had many rich citizens. Besides those in the cities there were numbers of rich provincials with large estates and less education; it was mostly from these country folk that the Director amassed his wealth. The threat of denunciation as sympathizers with Turkey, with the risk of consequent banishment to Malta, was quite enough to extract sums of a thousand pounds and more from these easy victims. I well remember watching him at a big national fête in the Ezbekiya gardens attended by hundreds of town and country notables: he walked about among them like a sleek cat, occasionally extending his finger-tips to touch the outstretched hand of some rich provincial with, at the same time, the look of a butcher at a stock show sizing up the weight

## Graft

and value of a fat beast. A friend and I watched him for some time and could almost see him calculating how much money he could extort from his victims.

I often wondered in those days how long I should be able to carry on as sub-Commandant without being drawn into conflict with my Chief over the frequent cases of what seemed to me unjust disciplining of police officers on this man's advice and over the political arrests of rich people that were being carried out constantly all over the country. I had known many of these during my previous years of service in the provinces, and many now appealed to me to help them, but in vain. All that I could do was to appear to keep on friendly terms with the Director and see how things developed.

Early in 1916 an incident occurred that set me thinking. The Director's right-hand man in the Cairo Police was an inspector named Muhammad Mahmud of the rank of Bimbashi (Major). Returning to my house one day I saw a small parcel on the hall table addressed to my wife and, on opening it, found to my astonishment a pair of large diamond ear-rings. My wife was away in Alexandria at the time and till she returned a couple of days later I did nothing, thinking that possibly she might know about them. On her return she disclaimed all knowledge of the jewels. I then asked my servants who had brought them, to which they replied that it was Muhammad Mahmud's orderly. Now I knew Muhammad Mahmud to be the Director's right-hand man in everything, and my curiosity was aroused. That night I went to dine with Sir Ronald Graham (then Adviser to the interior) and his wife, and I showed the jewels to her. Next morning I had Muhammad Mahmud up and asked him for an explanation, which was that he had heard that my wife had been inquiring in the Bazaar for diamond ear-rings, to which I replied that he had been misinformed. A small incident in itself, but it left me wondering.

In October of that year it came to my knowledge through devious channels that one of my Egyptian police officers from Khalifa district had pawned his wife's jewellery to obtain forty

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pounds which had been demanded of him by the Director as the price of recommending his promotion to Harvey Pasha. I obtained proof of the pawning and other details, and confronted the officer with the facts. I broke him down and got his account of the approach made to him, and eventually made him agree to a plan by which, not having got his promotion, he was to demand his money back and afford me an opportunity of seizing it in transit, thus helping me to prove the corruption. A few days later to my annoyance he reported that as a result of urgent insistence, Muhammad Mahmud, through an intermediary, had consented to refund the money and had actually sent it to him by the Director's house orderly, without any chance being given of laying a trap such as I wanted. My disappointment, however, was reduced when he told me that Harbi, the orderly, had only refunded thirty-nine pounds, and had insisted on retaining his fee of one pound. Here I saw still a chance, and I instructed the officer to press his importunate claim to the maximum, to demand the return even of the one pound, and to keep me informed of the proposed method of return. He had a difficult time with the gang, but eventually reported that it had been agreed that he should recover his pound by calling that evening on a certain officer in the 'Abdin police station who had been instructed to refund it. Sending for my English inspector in charge of the district, Bimbashi Teall, we ascertained by telephone that the go-between was in his office. We then brought in our officer, established and recorded the fact that his pockets were empty, and then sent him in a taxi with Bimbashi Teall to within walking distance of 'Abdin Police Station. Teall then sent him in to see the intermediary, waited twenty minutes till he emerged and brought him 'in bond' to where I was waiting, when he produced from his pocket the one pound that had just been refunded him.

The next morning I had a most difficult and unpleasant interview with my Commandant. I was told that I was young and inexperienced, that such false charges were common, and that I must do nothing to cast aspersions on the Director whom

## *Baiting the Trap*

he trusted completely and who, owing to the nature of his work, had many enemies wishing to harm him. I replied that I was convinced of my facts, and must ask permission to carry out my plan to prove them.

My plan was this : to call up the 'Abdin officer and demand his explanation of having paid one pound to the Khalifa officer the previous night ; next, to arrest and detain the Director's orderly, Harbi ; and last, to arrange with the Telephone Company from the moment of the arrest to tap all telephone calls between the Director in his office and his wife in their house. The Commandant at first refused to allow any such plan, but, on my insistence, gave way on the condition that I must personally conduct the whole inquiry, take down all statements myself in my own handwriting and keep the entire investigation secret. After arranging the timing with the Telephone Company, who undertook to put an operator on to tap the two telephone numbers, I ordered the 'Abdin police officer to be sent to me at Teall's office. The officer was brought before me and I asked him point blank why on the previous evening at seven o'clock in his office at 'Abdin he had given one pound to the Khalifa officer. He turned deadly white, and the perspiration started pouring down his face. I warned him to reflect before speaking, and told him that his only chance was to tell me the truth. Clutching the table for support, he began to speak with difficulty and collapsed into a chair. In the course of a painful scene, I laboriously extracted from him a semi-coherent admission of his having been the intermediary between the Khalifa officer, the orderly Harbi, and the Director's wife in the paying of the forty pounds and in the eventual refunding of it. By the time I had extracted this information, which was of the utmost importance to me, he was in a complete state of collapse, and I left him for further questioning later, feeling that anyhow things had started well. I then returned to my own office and reported to Harvey Pasha who ordered me to send for Bimbashi Muhammad Mahmud and take his statement.

The non-stop inquiry of Harbi, Muhammad Mahmud and

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others that followed lasted many hours, and was concluded by the operator from the Central Telephone Office handing in his written record of the conversation that had taken place between the lady in her house and her husband in his office. I at once realized the importance of sentences like the following :

*She* : " Harbi, the house orderly, has been taken to prison."

*He* : " Russell and his people may question you. Deny everything."

*She* : " I've sent for M. (Muhammad Mahmud) to come and see me."

*He* : " Russell has been warned, I think. He has just gone off."

*She* : " What about Harbi? He is a good man, you know, and will never betray us ; he said he will always be loyal to us."

*He* : " Oh, don't talk to me any more ; wait till I come home."

*She* : " Don't be late. Say you're sick. I'm afraid for you."

I wrote to the Director telling him to send his wife to me at my office, to which he replied that she was very unwell from shock and would I mind taking her statement in her own house. This request I refused, but added that if he liked to come with her he could do so. I knew that I was in for a difficult time with this determined and clever lady, so I took the precaution of posting the police doctor downstairs with smelling salts and brandy. I then called her in to my office with Bimbashi Teall as witness. Her husband tried to insist on being present, but I directed him to await his turn in a further room, and posted my orderly over the door with instructions that he was not to leave it. First, by a series of elementary questions, I got her to state that she had been alone in the house all the morning and from there had rung her husband up several times on the telephone. I then took her through the various telephone conversations as reported and asked her explanation. Her tactics in reply were exactly what I expected. From cautious hesitation she worked up to excited and repeated retraction of her own statements. She then tried cajolery and feminine charm with which she was well provided, and flatteringly added that I was such a gentleman, and she, being a weak defenceless woman,

## *Springing the Trap*

did not know what she said. Her next move was to lay one entreating hand on my arm, while with the other she made a grab for my papers. Threatening to call an orderly to keep her quiet, I opened the door on to the corridor and found her husband, in spite of my orders, sitting on a chair just clear of the door-mat from where no doubt he had been listening to my interrogation of his wife. Sending him back to his room, I finished my interrogation of the lady as best I could, but she refused to sign her statement so I directed her to return to her house and she left. At the same time I had sent for the Director to be brought from his room to mine. As he came down the corridor, his wife rushed back from the head of the stairs, caught hold of his arm and said: "They've overheard us on the telephone, Russell Bey asked me a lot of questions and I don't know what answers I have given." The recorded telephone conversations played a very important part in the subsequent trial, but it took some persuasion to convince the Armenian telephone operator, who had to be called in evidence, that he and his family would not suffer from the vengeance of this all-powerful official.

Then followed many days of strain and anxiety for me. I took statements with no clerical assistance, owing to Harvey Pasha's insistence on secrecy, from a dozen different police officers who, with one exception, courageously told me the truth about similar payments which they had been compelled to make to obtain their promotions. I also interrogated a number of provincial notables and obtained from them statements in confirmation of what some of the officers had told me about their paying large sums for political protection. During all this time the Director was still in office with, so far, undiminished power, and it did not take me more than a walk or two in the dark from my office, to find out that the Cairo Detective Force was busy in attendance on myself.

A night or two later an old acquaintance from the provinces, who had that evening volunteered a statement to me, sent me word to say how he had been followed on leaving my office,



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and questioned as to what statement he had made to me. The next night I baited a trap and sent out a witness, followed at a double distance by my own sleuth hounds. I was still in my office when they returned with the catch, consisting of one of our regular detectives who had been trying to contact my witness. My treatment of him was somewhat unkind. Next morning I had in the officer who had detailed the wretched detective for the overnight duty and the officer admitted that he had done so by the Director's orders. I then issued a warning to all and sundry that any more attempts at shadowing me or my witnesses would result in serious consequences, and as a result I was able to carry on the inquiry unmolested until the day when the authorities were convinced of the truth of my indictment of the Director and suspended him from duty.

The case was then handed over to the Parquet for investigation. For long weeks I was daily cross-examined by the Investigating Magistrate and seven of the leading Egyptian barristers of Cairo. The inquiry was based largely on my handwritten interrogation, and by Egyptian procedure I was not allowed to refer to a pocket-book or a written note of any description, and had to give my evidence entirely from memory. This was a very great strain, but I had the considerable advantage of being able to insist on my interrogation being conducted in English, thus gaining plenty of time to think out my answers, while the questions were being translated into English from the Arabic, which I perfectly understood. I was under this searching fire of cross-examination for several days for a grand total of twenty-six hours, finishing up more dead than alive at ten o'clock at night on Christmas Day. But turkey and plum-pudding had been kept hot for me, and my heart was cheered by a kindly message, confirmed next day in an interview, from Sir William Brunyate, the Judicial Adviser who told me that he considered my evidence unshakable and that the case was now amply proved. He congratulated me on my handling of it and on the way I had given my evidence to the Investigating Judge under such

## *Merchant Princes of the Desert*

difficult circumstances. As he said, the strength of my case lay in its complete veracity which rendered it watertight. As I was no longer wanted by the Parquet I took three weeks' leave and, with my wife and a friend, spent it on a strenuous and successful ibex-shooting trip in the Eastern Desert. With fresh air and ten hours' walking a day I soon got over the nervous strain of the past month. Three weeks later I brought my camel patrol back to Asyut, where the first person to greet me was the Egyptian Commandant of Police of the province, who gave me the welcome news that the Director and his wife had been arrested and imprisoned pending trial.

The case came before the Criminal Court some nine months later, and again I had to go through a grilling that made my head ache. All my police officer witnesses played the game and stuck to their previous statements, and the Court finally found the accused guilty of corruption, and sentenced him to five years' imprisonment and his wife to one year. During the trial the old story of the diamond ear-rings was brought up in an attempt to discredit me, and Counsel for Muhammad Mahmud advanced the theory that I had refused the present on finding that the diamonds were of insufficient value. This revelation of the complete corruption of the able man in whom he had placed implicit trust was a bitter blow to my kind old chief, Harvey Pasha.

Two and a half years afterwards, in the black days of the March, 1919, riots, I had need in Cairo of a stout-hearted and loyal police force, and I had it. I was fortunate while still second-in-command to have been able to lift this menace from the lives of these good fellows, and to receive as thanks their loyal support when in March, 1918, I took over command from my retiring Chief.

\* \* \* \* \*

Police work was not all concerned with crime, and in a city like Cairo brought one curious contacts and acquaintances. Many people came to one for help, especially during the two

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world wars. One of these contacts was to develop into a lifelong friendship for me.

In the early days of 1914 I was entering my office one morning when I noticed a Tripolitan Arab standing about in the courtyard of police headquarters. I stopped and spoke to him to ascertain his business and from this chance meeting began an acquaintance and friendship with him and his family that I count as one of the most pleasant memories of my Egyptian life.

I found that he was one of the Bishari<sup>1</sup> family who originate from the Jalo Oasis in the hinterland of Tripoli, and are well-known merchants of ivory, ostrich-feathers and skins. Up to the time of the 1914 war this family brought their trade goods every year from Central Africa to the Cairo market where Haselbach, a German, was the principal ivory buyer; the ivory and feathers came mostly from the Lake Chad area. After making up their caravan at Jalo, the merchants would take their way slowly across the desert, touching at Jaghbub and Siwa, eventually to reach Farafra Oasis and strike the Nile Valley at Kirdasa near the Giza pyramids. The caravan arrived and the ivory disposed of, the Bisharis would buy cloth, tea, and so forth, and as soon as the camels were rested, would load up again and start back on their long trip home.

During that winter of 1914 they had started from French Equatorial Africa, and after some months had eventually reached Farafra Oasis to find, to their astonishment, that all the world was at war, and that British troops were in occupation of the four Western Oases of Kharga, Dakhla, Farafra, and Bahariya. After being detained there some time by the military authorities, they decided to bury their ivory in the oasis and come to Cairo to find out what was happening to the world and the ivory market. Shortly after this the British troops evacuated the Western Oases, the Senussi occupied them and the Bisharis' ivory lay buried there until 1916 when the Senussi were finally driven out.

During that period the Bisharis were stranded in Cairo unable

<sup>1</sup> The name *Bishari* has no connection with that of the Bisharin tribes of the Eastern Desert.

## *Stranded Bedouin*

to get cash or credit for ivory which they could not produce, and which, in any case, was by now completely worthless as being a luxury article ; with the world under war conditions, ivory and feathers interested nobody. To make matters worse for them, Haselbach, the German ivory dealer who might have helped them out of their troubles, had been interned by the British. The Bisharis thus found themselves friendless and in straitened circumstances. It was then that 'Abdalla Bishari came to the police to see if he could get any help or sympathy. His story interested me and I set to work to see what I could do for them. We had at that time an organization for giving financial assistance to persons who found themselves stranded by the war, and I was able to obtain for the Bisharis and their men a humble allowance of a few piastres a day. For wealthy merchant princes of the desert this was a pitifully small alimony, but it was enough to prevent them from starving and to allow them to settle in one of the villages near the Pyramids, where they remained for three years. On the reoccupation of the Oases by the British in 1916, the Bisharis were able to recover their buried ivory and bring it to Cairo, where they eventually disposed of it for less than its purchase price. Finally in 1917 the Sudan routes were opened once more to merchant travel and the Bisharis were able to return by rail to Khartum and thence back home by El-Fasher and Abesher to Wadai.

During their forced stay in Egypt I saw a lot of 'Abdalla and his brother Ibrahim and was able to make things somewhat less unpleasant for them, services which, though small, were rewarded by a charming friendship. For several subsequent years, the Bisharis continued to pay their annual visit to Egypt and their first call on arrival was invariably on me in my office where, over a cup of coffee, we would discuss events since our last meeting, and 'Abdalla and Ibrahim would produce some attractive token of esteem, sometimes a cushion of curious leather-work from Kano, or a Tubbu spear from Mirzuk, and once a bundle of wild ostrich feathers which they explained, with apologies, was all that their poor desert could produce.

## Cairo

Duvelroy, of Bond Street, pronounced these to be of excellent quality, though not so big as the farmed feathers of Cape Town and the Bisharis' present ended up as a beautiful fan for my wife, and two, nearly as fine, as wedding presents for relatives. A little civility of theirs which had a peculiar charm was a Christmas telegram that I received annually from such places as Kano or Sokoto bearing to me the good wishes and remembrance of these desert gentlemen.

A year or two later I was riding one day with my wife and a friend along the desert side, north of the Pyramids, when I saw a bunch of camels couched on the sand under the palm-trees. From a distance I could see that the men with them were strangers and suggested that we should ride across to them to see what they were. They were obviously a caravan newly arrived from the West ; their camels were thin and travel-worn, the men Western Arabs and alongside the weary animals were bales of goods sewn up in rawhide covers. I greeted them in their own dialect and was quickly surrounded by a group of dignified but suspicious Arabs who answered my questions with Bedouin briefness but showed no signs of unfreezing. I guessed who they were, asked the news of the West and especially of my Bishari friends. When I mentioned the names of 'Abdalla and Ibrahim el-Bishari, the whole atmosphere changed, aloofness became curiosity and head wrappings were removed the better to hear this stranger talk. Immediately the courtesy of the camp was ours : willing hands held our horses and dignified Arabs held our stirrups, asking us to dismount and honour them with our company. Corners of the skin bales were unstitched and ostrich feathers presented to the ladies as we were shown the elephant and rhino ivory, and all the time one could see their curiosity rising. Eventually I made our excuses as sunset drew on, and calling for our horses prepared to depart. The dilemma of our hosts was apparent ; they so far did not know exactly who I was, and their good manners prevented them from asking the question direct, but they were clearly determined, before we left, to identify this Englishman who knew so much

## *Ibrahim's Carbine*

of their affairs. Then suddenly one of them had a brain-wave. As he thanked me for the honour we had conferred upon them by our visit, with the most perfect manners, he requested me to tell him to what address he might come to repay the call. My reply was that I should be honoured to receive them at any time at Police Headquarters, when with a raising of eyebrows and a quickening of voice, the spokesman said: "Is Your Excellency 'Rusk'?" I told him that the right pronunciation of my name was Russell and not Rusk, and that I was the Commandant of the Cairo Police, whereupon the most delightful scene of welcome and friendship took place. My name was called out and repeated through the camp, and soon every camel-man and retainer was shaking my hand. I had been accepted. Not one of them had I met before, but every man of them knew of me from the war-time stories told to them by their relatives, the Bisharis. Next morning my office was made picturesque by a state visit of these Saharan notables of perfect manners and dignity.

A year or so later Ibrahim el-Bishari himself turned up. The Italian occupation of the Tripolitan coastline had added to the difficulties of the Bisharis' annual migration, but in spite of it they had got through with their laden camels. First came the state call on me at my office, then the visit to my house with old 'Abdalla Kahal, their trade agent in the Muski; then after selling their camels at Maryut, another visit from Ibrahim who came to me with two requests to make; he proposed to return by rail to the Sudan and asked from me a favour; he said he wished on his journey through the Sudan to take a rifle with him for self-protection. To this I replied that sale of rifled arms in Egypt was forbidden and that he would not be able to buy a rifle in Cairo unless he got it in the contraband. His ingenuous answer was that he had a rifle all right, and when I asked him where it was, he said: "Buried two days west of the Pyramids." His request included a permit from the Frontiers Administration to prevent his being interfered with when bringing the rifle in through the Egyptian Desert. I said I would

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do my best and at the same time gave him a chit to my Pyramids police officer to take over the rifle, should it be brought in.

Some days later my officer at Mena rang up to say that a wild-looking Arab had arrived with a carbine and a hundred rounds of ammunition with a note from me and what was he to do with the gun? My answer to him was that he should wrap it discreetly in a blanket and send it to me at the Governorate, which was done, and examination of the weapon soon showed that I was dealing with an Italian military carbine, rusty but serviceable. Being busy at the moment I stood the rifle up in the corner among some rolled maps near my office table and went on with my work. Next morning I received an unexpected visit from the Italian Minister on some affair connected with drug trafficking, and my attention to the subject under discussion was somewhat distracted as, behind the Minister's chair at three-foot distance, I could see that Italian rifle, taken, no doubt, on some battle-field of Tripoli. Our conversation finished, I escorted the Minister to the door and breathed a sigh of considerable relief. A day or so later, Ibrahim came in to ask if I had got his permits and I told him of the diplomatic trouble into which he had nearly got me.

All being well that ended well, Ibrahim, as far as I remember, returned to his home with his coveted rifle and I forgot the incident until a year or so later when my office orderly announced the visit of another Western Desert Arab. In came a smart young fellow who announced himself as the son of my friend Ibrahim and, in course of conversation, I referred to the story of his father, the Minister and the carbine, upon which the lad burst into the rare laugh of the Arab and declared that from Alexandria to Lake Chad many a desert camp-fire had been made gay with the story of Ibrahim and his Italian carbine.

For a year or two longer the Bisharis continued to travel the Sahara route, but the continued advance of the Italians into the interior made the journey more and more difficult until eventually it was no longer possible to bring laden camels through at all, and even unladen camels could only cross the

## *Grandfather's Pistols*

last fifteen days of waterless desert if they were lucky enough to strike a spell of cold winter weather. Their eighty-year-old grandfather was one of the last to escape from Jalo before the Italian occupation, and had settled down in a house on the desert edge near Kirdasa. On his last visit to me the old gentleman presented me with one of his most cherished family heirlooms, a beautiful bell-mouthed blunderbuss with the finest gold and silver inlay, one of a pair that had belonged to his father and grandfather before him.

A year or two later my son John came to stay with us on leave from Cambridge, and my wife, he and I rode out to call on the old man, who promptly presented him with the other blunderbuss, an act of affection that I accepted with pride and appreciation. The grandsons still carry on their trade, and this very last winter one of them drove three hundred of their young camels, bred in French Equatorial Africa, right across the desert to Dakhla Oasis, taking seventy days on the trip and losing a hundred of them on the way from lack of grazing.



## CHAPTER 14

### CAIRO'S UNDERWORLD

UP to a few years ago two of the regular tourist sights of Cairo were the Red-Blind quarter of the Wish<sup>1</sup> el-Birka and the Wasa'a. The first of these names, which means the *Face of the Lake*, dates from the time when the present Ezbekiya garden (which takes its name from the Mamluk Emir Ezbek) was actually a lake. In those days the Mamluks had their palaces round the edges of the lake whose levels rose and fell with the Nile flood and which was dried off and planted in the winter. In the early eighteen hundreds the Wish el-Birka, Clot Bey Street and the area up to the beginning of the Muski Street formed the European quarter with its hotels and foreign consulates. Visitors arriving from Alexandria by Nile sailing boat disembarked at the port of Bulaq and rode or drove through the bean fields and fruit gardens till they reached Shepheard's caravanserai and the other hotels of the Ezbekiya quarter. Later the Wish el-Birka lost its respectable character, and became the European prostitute quarter, and continued as such until 1924, when the Government closed down the brothels and restored the district's respectability.

A curious illustration of the changes that Cairo has seen in the last fifty years was provided a few years ago. One day at Police Headquarters we were clearing out some old files when we came upon a letter signed by Fenwick Pasha, Commandant in 1894. It was addressed to the Police Officer commanding the Ezbekiya District and ran as follows :

I beg to call your attention to the loose herds of swine that are

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<sup>1</sup> More correctly *Wagh el-Birka*.

## *Red Light Quarter*

constantly to be seen wandering about the streets of the Ezbekiya District ; these swine come from the native huts on the waste land near Qasr en-Nil Palace. You will call upon the owners of these swine to keep them under control and prevent them wandering, under pain of confiscation. I may add that they were recently seen eating a dead baby in Clot Bey Street.

When I joined the Cairo Police, the Wish el-Birka was actually an excrescence of the Wasa'a and was a tolerated, though not officially licensed, prostitute quarter. It was populated at this time with European women of all breeds and races other than British, who were not allowed by their Consular authority to practise this licensed trade in Egypt. Most of the women were of the third-class category for whom Marseilles had no further use, and who would eventually be passed on to the Bombay and Far East markets, but they were still European and not yet fallen so low as to live in the one-room shacks of the Wasa'a which had always been the quarter for purely native prostitution of the lowest class. Here in the Wasa'a Egyptian, Nubian and Sudanese women plied their one shilling trade in conditions of abject squalor, though under Government medical control. Thirty years ago a stroll through its narrow and crowded lanes reminded one of a zoo, with its painted harlots sitting like beasts of prey behind the iron grilles of their ground-floor brothels, while a noisy crowd of low-class natives, interspersed with soldiers in uniform and sight-seeing tourists, made their way along the narrow lanes.

Up till 1916 the Wasa'a had its king, a huge, fat Nubian named Ibrahim el-Gharbi, who could be seen every evening sitting cross-legged on a bench outside one of his houses in Shari' Abd el-Khaliq. Dressed as a woman and veiled in white, this repulsive pervert sat like a silent, ebony idol, occasionally holding out a bejewelled hand to be kissed by some passing admirer, or giving a silent order to one of his attendant servants. This man had an amazing power in the country ; his influence extended not only into the world of prostitution, but was also felt in the sphere of politics and high society. The buying and

## *Cairo's Underworld*

selling of women for the trade both in Cairo and the provinces was entirely in el-Gharbi's hands and no decision of his as to price was ever questioned.

In 1916, when the town was packed with thousands of Dominion and Home troops, Harvey Pasha decided to take drastic action to clear up the scores of free-lance girls and catamite boys who had sprung up outside the licensed quarters. One of his first orders under Martial Law was to establish an internment camp at Hilmiya and to throw into it any of these long-haired degenerates that we could find. In a couple of nights we rounded up about a hundred of these pests, but I noticed that the famous el-Gharbi was not among them. There was only one man in those days who could touch anyone as big as this king of the underworld, and that was my chief, Harvey Pasha, who cared nothing for beys or pashas and had a temper like a box of fireworks. Next morning in the office I asked him innocently whether el-Gharbi was to be exempted from the order, and found to my astonishment that he had never even heard of him or of his sinister reputation. He barked out an order to have him arrested at once and brought to his office, while I took cover and awaited the coming storm. Half an hour later an officer arrived, leading by the hand what looked like a huge negress, clad in white samite, her golden anklets and bracelets clinking as she minced down the corridor. I followed them into Harvey's office and for a moment feared I had imperilled the life of my choleric chief, who blew up like a landmine, demanding what the hell everyone meant by bringing that disgusting patchouli-scented sodomite into his presence, and with a bellow of rage sent him below to be stripped of his female finery, put into handcuffs and thrown into Hilmiya internment camp among his youthful imitators.

Knowing that el-Gharbi had thousands of pounds in cash and jewellery in his house in the Wasa'a, I put a guard on it. Going round on a quiet inspection in mufti a night or two later, I asked one of his native girls why el-Gharbi was not sitting as usual at the receipt of custom, to which she loyally replied that

## *Vice Squad*

he had had to go to his village on urgent private business and had asked the Government to guard his treasures in his absence. El-Gharbi spent a year in the camp and was then relegated to his village. Some years afterwards he was prosecuted for some of his evil deeds and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, during which he died. This was all some thirty years ago, but ill-fame lasts a long time, and lately, while travelling on the Sudan steamer from Halfa to Aswan, I asked the name of a village we were passing and was told it was Wadi el-'Arab, "where el-Gharbi came from". His removal was not altogether a blessing for the brothel organization of the country. He had the reputation of being good to his women and fair, though severe, in his justice. Deprived of their king, the women had to find other protectors, without whom, however brutal they may be, a prostitute all the world over is lost and helpless. It was the same situation, only worse, in the Wish el-Birka district with its foreign women and their foreign pimps, thriving on the protection afforded them by the Capitulations. The native bully was subject to Egyptian criminal law and could be brought to book if he went too far in a profession that had to be recognized in a country where prostitution was legal and licensed, but the European souteneur had little to fear from Egyptian law, being subject only to his consular jurisdiction with its feeble legislation and often indifferent officials. These lieutenants of the white-slave traffic were well organized with their headquarter offices in many ports and cities of Europe, and our police attempts to control them were made still more difficult by the refusal of their women to complain against them for fear of vitriol or the razor.

In order to get as much interest as possible out of my work, I spent most of my time on crime cases and specialized in raiding illicit hashish dens and gambling clubs. Such things were not on as big a scale as they had been in Alexandria, but I found plenty to occupy me, with a first-class huntsman in the person of Bimbashi John Phillips, of the Ezbekiya Police, and Giuliano Santo, an Italian detective officer, as his whipper-in. The Bulaq and Ezbekiya quarters held our favourite covers and rough

## *Cairo's Underworld*

houses were both expected and experienced in these slum areas inhabited by tough Sa'idis and Cairo's underworld, among whom were a certain number of foreign subjects.

The Capitulations held us up almost indefinitely in dealing with unlicensed brothels run by foreigners. One particular house of some size and popularity defied Bimbashi Quartier, our chief detective officer, and myself for months by ringing the changes on the nationality of the padrona. Police could not enter a foreigner's house without the consent and presence of the Consul or his representative. When we arrived with the French consular cavass to demand admission from the French padrona, the spy-hole in the front door would be opened and a husky voice announce that Madame Yvonne had sold the business to Madame Gentili, an Italian subject, without whose Consular representative we could not enter. Next week we would arrive with the Italian cavass to be met by another change of nationality of the padrona. Piqued beyond the ordinary, Quartier one night assembled seven Consular cavasses at the fast-closed door, and one by one the fictitious landladies were defeated, entry obtained and the law enforced. Another of these rascals was a French Algerian dope-seller who for long defied us until at last, accompanied by the French Consular cavass, we besieged him one night and put so much fear into him that he jumped for safety from the roof of his hashish den and broke his leg in the process. For months afterwards he would sit at his front door, while his wife trafficked within, his bandaged but long-mended leg stretched across the threshold as witness to the brutal atrocities perpetrated by us.

One particularly sporting evening was afforded us by a big gambling-den in Shari' 'Imad ed-Din. We studied the place for several weeks by sending agents in to play and soon got to know the plan of defence against a police raid. This consisted of a scout in the main street in front of the building, another at the ground-floor entrance to the block of flats with an electric alarm bell to the first-floor flat which was camouflaged as a scent factory but was actually the tripot. The door in the flat, besides

## *The Green Table*

being locked, was heavily barred from the inside by two strong hook bars and was also provided with a spy-hole. We also learned that the management was in direct telephone contact with their Consul, who lived just over the way.

The place annoyed me for a long time till I evolved a plan of attack which I thought would work but which would depend for success on accurate timing. On the chosen night I got the loan of half a dozen English Tommies who came rollicking down the street as if in drink, and at zero hour exactly, picked a quarrel with, and bonneted, the street scout. At the same moment two things happened : a prison van, going as if on its normal duty down Shari' Malika Nazli, jinked suddenly down a by-street, pulled up at the flat in 'Imad ed-Din and vomited forth a dozen tough policemen armed with axes and crowbars who knocked out the ground-floor doorkeeper, rushed the staircase and attacked the door of the flat. Simultaneously a fire-engine pulled up under the flat windows and within a few seconds the raiding party were up the ladder, on to the balcony and had smashed their way with their axes through the windows and into the room. I was with the stair party and we found ourselves held up, in spite of sledge-hammers and crowbars, till we had broken through the hinges of the doors and got them pivoting on the hook-bars. The gambling-room was a grand sight. Some forty or fifty white-faced Levantines were seated at the bare table, with brass-helmeted firemen standing over them with fire-axes in their hands, like bulldogs over bones ; no sign could we find of the roulette table, only a trail of playing cards and counters leading like a paper chase down the corridor to the end of the passage where they had dumped the green baize table-cloth that had evidently carried away roulette table, cards, counters and all. But still not a trace of the table. We searched that place for an hour, tapping the walls, pulling up floorboards, but all to no purpose, when suddenly Harry Archer, my second-in-command, noticed that the left-hand jamb of the entrance door of one of the rooms was just out of the true. A probe or two with a chisel showed that the jamb consisted of an

## *Cairo's Underworld*

iron frame which slid on oiled rails in and out of an inner cavity in the wall, and there was the roulette table standing on its edge in a nest of baize and cotton wool. In the rush and panic of the alarm they had slid the panel into position but failed to push it right home. The faces of the gamblers were a study as we returned to the gaming-room carrying aloft the precious table which had cost them fifty pounds to make and another ninety for the cache. Fines for gambling offences in those Capitulation days were ridiculously small, but we made up for it this time by confiscating every stick of furniture and fitment in the flat, and felt that we could at last afford a good laugh at the management and their protecting Consul.

One night a Bessarabian Jew named Moritz Spiegel was found murdered in his house just off the Wish el-Birka area. Murder was not uncommon in these quarters, and no undue excitement was caused as everyone knew that Spiegel was concerned in the white-slave traffic, whose quarrels and disciplinary methods do not concern the outer world. To the police, however, a murder is a murder, and inability to discover the author is a blot on the professional copy-book. Spiegel's closest associate in the same trade was known to be a Bulgarian Jew named Sindnicow, more commonly known as Yanko. Search for this man proved unavailing and it seemed clear that he had fled the country. The usual descriptive sheet and photograph was circulated by post to all international capitals and a close watch kept on the Poste Restante for any letters that might come from Yanko or his associates to the sorrowing wife whom he had left behind. Two months later a letter was intercepted with the Mexico City postmark on it, addressed to a known associate of Yanko's in Cairo. It was found to be from Yanko himself, asking for news of his wife and containing instructions to send her via Paris to Mexico City and to cable to a certain Dobrovitski of that city. A cable was therefore sent to the Chief of Police of Mexico City warning him that Yanko was now using the name of Dobrovitski and would probably receive letters through the Poste Restante in that name.

## *Backstairs Extradition*

Weeks passed with no news till one day we received a cable from the Chief of Police of Mexico City to say that he had arrested Yanko and was holding him at our disposition. The difficulty then arose that there was no extradition treaty between Egypt and Mexico, but I decided to send a police party to that distant land on the chance of being able to retrieve our murderer and teach the 'Traffic' a lesson. I therefore wired to the Mexican Police to hold the man pending the arrival of my police, and selected for the mission a Spanish-speaking French-Algerian constable named Cohen and a British constable named Croft.

A week later Cohen and Croft left Cairo, furnished with a request for extradition from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with every possible letter of introduction that we could think of. Passing through Paris, they ascertained from the Mexican consular records that Yanko under the name of Dobrovitski had obtained from the Consulate a visa for Mexico on an alleged Ukrainian passport.

My constables reached Mexico, and at a first interview with the Inspector-General of Police, Cohen led off by presenting him with five hundred Egyptian cigarettes and some brass shell cases inscribed "Jerusalem 1916". He then opened the subject of his visit. The General received my policemen with the greatest courtesy and explained that, in spite of his earnest desire to hand over the accused at once, there were a number of difficulties in the way which, however, he hoped to overcome. He explained that the accused was in the hands of the Courts and had three lawyers working to obtain his release, on the grounds that he had committed no crime in Mexico and that there was no extradition treaty between Mexico and Egypt.

A week later the General confirmed the probability of the Courts ordering the release of Yanko, but undertook to re-arrest him every time that he was let out until Cohen should be ready to take him over and embark. Cohen by this time was running short of money and was finding it impossible to get second-class sea passages for themselves and the prisoner on any boat leaving Mexico within a reasonable time.



## *Cairo's Underworld*

Next day Yanko was released by the Courts and immediately re-arrested by the police, who now began playing hide and seek with him : no sooner had the relatives and lawyers drawn blank in their search of one prison than the police popped Yanko in there. They warned Cohen, however, that they could not continue this game for long. Cohen by now, through the good offices of the German Consul in Mexico City, had managed to get passages on a German boat sailing in a couple of days' time from Vera Cruz to Plymouth. Cohen's report then continued :

There still remained the biggest difficulty of all, namely, how to get the prisoner past the Immigration Authorities at Vera Cruz, and in this the General said he could not help us and that we must rely on our wits. His instructions were for us to leave Mexico City and he would send the accused in a fast motor-car in the custody of two of his agents to join the train at an intermediate station named Tepespa. We left therefore as arranged and at Tepespa station the agents and the prisoner joined us. Before leaving Cairo I had obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a sealed official letter to the Mexico Foreign Affairs asking them to facilitate the extradition of the accused on the chance that they might agree, even though there was no treaty of extradition between the two countries. This letter the General had insisted that we should leave with him and not present to the Mexican Foreign Affairs, the result being that we were left with no official document at all to warrant our arrest of the prisoner, or to show that he was being extradited to stand a charge of murder in Cairo. On arrival at Vera Cruz I decided to leave Constable Croft with the police agents and the prisoner while I went on board the ship and tried to arrange with the captain for the prisoner's accommodation. After handing him the personal letter from his friend the German Consul in Mexico City, I explained all my difficulties to him and asked him whether he could accommodate us on board that night. The captain said that he would empty one of his big store rooms that had an iron door and a padlock to it and that we could use it as a lock-up for the prisoner, but that he could not have it ready before the next morning. I had therefore to put ourselves up for the night in a hotel and to keep the prisoner with us in our room, the police agents having by now left us to return to Mexico

## Turning the Blind Eye

City. Everything went off all right and next morning we made our way to the docks and tried to mount the gangway on to the ship, but here the Customs police stopped us and informed us that we must first go through the Immigration Office and have our passports duly signed by them, just the one thing I wished to avoid. However, I had to chance it, so I took the prisoner, without handcuffs, to the Immigration Office and through good luck and *savoir faire* completed all the formalities and obtained the precious visas on the three passports. We then went straight on board, locked the accused up in the empty store-room, and breathed a sigh of relief. Our optimism, however, was rudely shattered at midday when the chief steward went round the ship to inform everyone that they had to go ashore to pass through the office of the Chief of the Immigration Office, as he wished to check the names on the sailing list. In giving the name of the prisoner to the Shipping Company I had carefully not given his true name of Sindnicow, nor his assumed name of Dobrovitski, but had put him down as Abraham Meshullam. Croft and I then went ashore, had our names checked on the shipping list and went on board again, anxiously waiting for the ship to sail: a few minutes later, however, we were informed that the Immigration Officer had come aboard and wanted to see me. This officer then pointed on his list to the name Meshullam and asked me where he was. I told him he was on board the ship, was quite safe and O.K. Turning to the ship's officer, he said he wanted to see this Meshullam upon which the officer explained that Meshullam was a prisoner and locked up. I was then asked the reason for his being locked up, and I told him the reasons, to be met by a peremptory order that the prisoner must be immediately released and disembarked, there being no extradition law in Mexico. I decided that my only chance was to throw my weight about and to assume as haughty a tone as possible, so I said that I could not make out who was the head of the Government in Mexico—was it himself, or was it the Minister of Foreign Affairs with whom I had so far been dealing? He then asked me if I had any official documents from the competent Mexican authorities concerning the extradition of the prisoner. Producing a heavily-sealed envelope I said: "Yes, I have, but they are not for you; they're for the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt and cannot possibly be opened by us. If you wish to break the seals and examine the documents contained in this envelope, you will have to

## Cairo's Underworld

give me a signed receipt to say that you have done so, after due warning from me that you have no right to take such action." The officer then said that he wished to bring the prisoner ashore with him, and that he would telephone to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City to see whether what I told him was true or not. I assumed an air of astonishment and grief that he should doubt my word, and to gain time, ordered drinks for him and the eight other officials with him, including doctors, assistant-doctors, assistant-chiefs, clerks and others, and addressed him in the following winged words : ' Before we left Egypt we tried to gather some information regarding Mexico and the Mexicans, but I regret to say that all that we could gather was not at all in Mexico's favour. In fact, Mr. Croft and I had seriously considered refusing to embark on our mission to Mexico as too dangerous, but we thought we would chance it, and sailed. On our ship we also asked some of the passengers about the Mexicans and they gave us a very unfavourable account of them. On our arrival, however, at Vera Cruz we found that the Mexicans were a highly civilized people and that there was justice and splendid government organization everywhere. I, therefore, implore you, Mr. Chief, not to impede our departure, but to let us go on our way with the new and favourable impression that we have gained of Mexico and the Mexicans and not with the old impressions that we had before leaving Egypt.'

After another round of drinks the luncheon bell sounded and I invited everyone to lunch on board with us as guests of the Egyptian Government, wondering at the same time how I was going to pay the bill. We all then sat down to lunch, and, following the custom of the country, champagne and wines were served.

Meanwhile the ship's captain sent me word to get finished with the affair "for goodness' sake", as he wanted to sail at 2 p.m. sharp. At the end of an excellent lunch, the Chief of the Immigration Office wished to shake hands with me and told me that we were *compañeros* and *amigos*, and that he had decided to let us go in peace with his best wishes for our safe arrival at our destination, to which I replied that the magnificent future of the Great Republic of Mexico would be enhanced by the propaganda that we were ready to spread in Europe and in the East regarding Mexico and its wealth. Rising from the table suddenly, the Chief said : " Let us embrace each other, *Compañero*, and may I soon see you back again in Mexico." Not to be

## The Long Arm

outdone, I expressed the hope to see him some day in Egypt, as "mountains with mountains may not meet, but men with men can meet"; the Chief then left the ship, to our enormous relief. As the ship left the quay at 2 p.m. the Chief kept waving to us from the quay, calling out *hasta luego*, which means *au revoir*. The captain of the ship then sent for me to the bridge and, putting out a great paw, shook me warmly by the hand, congratulated us on our success and gave the order that the cost of the luncheon and drinks for these people should go down to the Company.

Constables Cohen and Croft duly arrived at Plymouth with their prisoner. On arrival in London Mr. Norman Kendall, Assistant-Commissioner of Scotland Yard, interviewed them and congratulated them on getting their man out of Mexico. When, however, he asked for details, it seemed that Cohen was not giving away anything until he got his prisoner safely back to Egypt, and politely told Mr. Kendall that he could not go into details! The Yard sent a man with them to Dover and the Paris police waived all formalities for them and took charge of the prisoner until the party left for Marseilles, whence they sailed with their prisoner for Egypt.

The journey across France had to be done on the quiet as the Press had got hold of some of the details. The French police insisted on the party travelling second class instead of third, as Cohen had intended, fearing the possibility of an attempt at rescue by agents of the 'Traffic'. While in Paris Cohen was able to repay the kindness of the French police by helping them to unearth the gang who were issuing the bogus Ukrainian passports.

The murderer was eventually tried in the Cairo Criminal Court and received a sentence of penal servitude for life.

That a crime could be committed by a white-slave trafficker in Cairo and that he could be followed, arrested and brought back seven months later from such a distance as Mexico City gave Cairo's underworld a shock from which it took a long time to recover.

## CHAPTER 15

### MOB LAW

THIS book would not be complete without an account of the internal troubles which immediately succeeded the First World War—and in which by virtue of my office I was to play a responsible and disagreeable part. Disagreeable because, though a policeman is always on the side of law and order, yet one had much sympathy with what was moving the Egyptians so deeply. These troubles were due to a combination of causes ; the culmination of the Nationalist movement in the hands of Zaghlul Pasha, the national hero, was being treated somewhat unsympathetically by a Britain torn with her own post-war worries, making her unreceptive to something that seemed of much less urgency ; and this coincided with a deep sense of injury on the part of the fellahin which I will explain later.

Knowledge of the events of this time is a necessary corollary to the proper understanding of the difficulties faced from time to time by the Egyptian Government.

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

It must have been very hard during the First World War for the fellah of an Egyptian village to understand what was going on in the world outside Egypt. He had been assured by the British that they had taken upon themselves the whole burden of prosecuting the war and would not demand help from the Egyptians. All that was asked of them, he had been told, was that they should not help the enemy, which was easy to understand.

And yet, as the war went on, he found more and more being demanded of him by these same British for reasons that he was



THE HOLY CARPET PROCESSION IN CENTRE OF ALEXANDRIA, 1910  
MASS DEMONSTRATION APPROACHING RESIDENCY, 1919. AUTHOR IN  
CAR WITH AZHAR SHEIKHS



## *The Troubles, 1919*

incapable of appreciating. First he was asked to volunteer for the Labour Corps (which was so important to General Murray in his advance on Palestine), and when he refused, the 'Omda and the Mamur made him leave his family and go against his will into dangers and hardships. Then he was forced to give up his donkey and his camel, without which he could not transport his produce. True, a fair price was fixed by the Army, but by the time it reached him much had stuck to other fingers. In any case no money could compensate for the loss of his beasts of burden, which were irreplaceable, and his resentment against the British grew till it reached a burning heat when his cereal and other crops were also commandeered. From the point of view of the Army all this requisitioning was no doubt necessary, the fault lay in the method of carrying it out.

The fellah had always trusted to the British Inspectors of the Civil Service to see that he was justly treated; now many of the inspectors were engaged on special duties and he was left in the hands of the 'Omda and the local police officials, who, in turn, were urged to further activity by their mudirs. These had been explicitly told by Cairo that they were responsible for meeting the military demands. To excuse themselves, everyone from the 'Omda upwards put the blame on the British, and by the beginning of 1919 the fellahin and working classes were seething with indignation against the British Authorities. It only needed a sudden breeze to bring the smouldering embers to the blaze.

Anyone who understands the Orient knows how inflammable the crowd is and how mass hysteria can seize upon it within a few minutes, especially if any religious issue is involved; from a collection of reasonable individuals, a crowd can quickly become a solid, united mass, capable of any violence and reckless of the consequences.

In February, 1919, not having been out of the country for five years, I had managed to get some local leave and do a short desert trip by camel from Aswan to the Oasis of Kurkur in the Western Desert, followed by a trip on the river in a small



## *Mob Law*

police steamer up to Abu Simbil, with my wife and Walter Roberts, the Interior Inspector for those provinces. On return to Aswan we had intended steaming north to Luxor, but the steamer stuck on a sandbank and, being in a hurry to get to Cairo, we left the boat, flagged the train from Aswan and took the night train from Luxor to Cairo, arriving on March the 7th, to find the country boiling with political excitement over the British Government's rejection of the request of Egypt's National Leader, Sa'ad Zaghlul Pasha, to visit London in order to demand Egypt's independence. The next day, March the 8th, British Martial Law was proclaimed and Zaghlul and his followers were arrested and sent to Malta. Here was the spark needed for revolution. By Monday morning, the 10th, serious disturbances had broken out. These started as student demonstrations, but in a short time mobs of riffraff were smashing tram-cars and street lamps and stoning Europeans and British soldiers.

In mentioning students it is necessary to differentiate between the students of the Government schools and those of the Azhar. The former at that time numbered some ten thousand in Cairo and ranged from small boys of ten and twelve years old to youths of eighteen and nineteen in the higher colleges. The Azharites are theological students of the Azhar University Mosque, the most famous centre of Moslem religious teaching in the world. Before the war they numbered some twenty thousand, drawn from all Muhammadan countries, but the numbers in 1919 had fallen to eight or ten thousand, owing to the impossibility of travel from places like India and Java, and consisted almost entirely of Egyptians. Every Egyptian peasant family tries to get a son into the Azhar, partly because this secures his exemption from military conscription, but also because he has a free bread ration from the mosque. The Azhar students were in those days a turbulent crowd, always ready to make disturbance on any excuse that could be counted a religious one. Though usually not mixing with the Government school students, on this occasion they made common cause with them.

Up till then I had done my best to cope with the disturbances

## *The Troops take over*

with my Egyptian police but, with only a small force at my disposal, I found the situation quickly getting out of control and on Tuesday, the 11th, at 8.30 a.m., I handed over to the British Military Authorities. We had had a bad show the day before when the police had had to take on a big mob demonstrating near 'Abdin Palace. My Mounted Troop had charged them down a narrow street, but unnoticed by us the mob had cut a trench across the road. The leading file crashed into this and brought down the horses behind them, several of which had to be destroyed, while sixteen men were sent to hospital.

During those two days there were incidents all over the native quarters of the town, but the focus was the Azhar Mosque, which formed a most difficult problem. The obvious thing to do was to isolate the mosque by cordons of troops and the Egyptian Army were told off for this duty. It was soon evident, however, that the troops could not be relied upon to oppose the religious students and it again fell to the overworked police to take charge and do what they could to keep order.

After three days General Watson, who was commanding British troops in Cairo, handed over to General Morris and from then onwards I spent half my time in his office at G.H.Q. and half in my own. General Morris was in a most difficult position, for demobilization was in full swing and everything was in a state of flux. There were thousands of Dominion troops on the Canal, busy embarking their horses and equipment for home, and Mena Camp was full of soldiers, but they were not under the Cairo command and it took time to obtain permission to use them from G.H.Q. which was away at Khan Yunes, east of the Suez Canal. The forces actually at General Morris's disposal consisted of the Essex Regiment and some odds and ends of men on leave in Cairo, totalling about nine hundred men. With this skeleton force he had to supply guards for river bridges, water works, gas works, tram depots and a dozen different strategic points and at the same time provide striking forces for dealing with rioters. We had a small picket of the Essex on the Zamalek bridge close to my house. They were

## *Mob Law*

there for a fortnight without relief and thoroughly enjoyed themselves, free from barrack routine and using our house for hot baths and a neighbour's as a reading-room. Our native servants luckily stuck to their work and it was owing to my gardener that the Essex picket was twice forewarned of an intended night attack by the roughs of Imbaba village, on the other side of the river. By skilful and fast displacement of the small forces that General Morris possessed, we managed to keep some sort of control over the town until reinforcements arrived, but it was fortunate for us that the mob's intelligence department did not realize the thinness of our defences.

Meanwhile things were going badly outside Cairo. Student emissaries from the city were being sent all over the country districts, spreading quite untrue stories of wholesale shooting by British troops in the capital. Serious riots occurred at Tanta, always a political hot-bed, centred round its famous Mosque of es-Sayyid el-Badawi. Up till a week before, a company of the Rifle Brigade had been stationed there, but these had been withdrawn for demobilization, leaving the town with no troops and in the hands of a mob, who destroyed Government property, pulled up the railway lines and did other damage. An armoured train was sent down by night and inflicted considerable casualties on the mob. At Qalyub station a mob attacked an express train from Alexandria with a number of European passengers for Cairo on board. They beat an English soldier to death and would doubtless have killed other Europeans, had it not been for the courage of a British officer, himself unarmed, who took a revolver off an Indian medical officer and with this forced the engine-driver to bring his train non-stop to Cairo. Meanwhile, south of Cairo, murderous mobs were holding up trains and hunting for any Englishmen they could find. Dick Graves,<sup>1</sup> an old friend of mine, Inspector of Interior in the Faiyum province, was coming in by train to Cairo and arrived at Wasta junction on the main line, knowing nothing about the disturbances. Travelling in the carriage with him

<sup>1</sup> Brother of Philip, Robert and Charles Graves, the writers.

## Zaghlul

was an American lady doctor from the Faiyum American Mission. As their train pulled in at Wasta junction, they found a surging, yelling mob on the platform. Looking about for a means of escape, they were shepherded by a friendly porter with other European fellow-travellers into a closed truck of a goods train standing by the next platform. Here they passed some anxious moments until the rioters became aware of their presence in the truck and used spear heads and crowbars to effect an entrance. The mob, apparently not yet out for blood, took money and trinkets from the group and passed on. Immediately afterwards the same porter opened the further door of the truck and Graves and Mrs. Akren jumped out and were rushed along the line and hidden in the tool-shed of a railway mechanic who stood guard outside and prevented rioters from entering on the pretext that they had already ransacked the shed and taken all it contained. A few hundred yards away the mob caught an English railway official, who was travelling with his wife, and beat him to death, though they spared his wife and child. Graves and the lady doctor, after several hours listening to the mob hunting for victims, were eventually rescued when the local police arrived on the scene.

By now all telephonic and telegraphic contacts with Upper Egypt had been destroyed as far south as Luxor and the only news that reached Cairo was by way of Khartum and Port Sudan. Reports kept coming in of outrages, of railway stations being burned and of Government, as well as private, property being destroyed all over the country, including bridges, telegraph and railway lines. We were personally anxious about a party of officers and ladies on leave at Luxor, one of whom was a young V.A.D. cousin of my wife's. It transpired that they had taken the last train that got through to the north and had been stopped at Beni Suef in the early morning and taken off the train by the English colony, who knew that the line between there and Cairo had been destroyed. Here, sixty strong, they were beleaguered for three days in a Government rest-house, protected by a party of fifty Sikh troops, whose position was

## *Mob Law*

much improved by the brave action of Judge McBarnet, who drove a car across the desert by night to the Faiyum and brought back a machine gun from another Sikh detachment stationed there. They were fortunate in being able to commandeer a flock of sheep on which they fed until relieved by a steamer sent under escort from Cairo.

One of my worst days in Cairo was on Monday, March 17th, ten days after Zaghul Pasha and the other national leaders had been deported. All those days we had been picketing the Azhar Mosque with a police force to prevent the students coming out to demonstrate. About 9 a.m. a deputation of sheikhs from the Azhar came to Military Headquarters at the Savoy (where I was working) to petition the General to allow the Azhar students to make a demonstrational march through the town. The General categorically refused and I told the sheikhs to go straight back in my car to the Azhar and prevent the students coming out, to which they replied that they would do their best, but much feared that the procession had already started and was making for 'Abdin Square, with the intention of demonstrating in front of the Palace. I took a car and got to 'Abdin Square just as the head of the procession was entering it. The sheikhs at the same time arrived in my car and nervously explained that they had been unable to stop the students, whose temper was up and who were determined to carry out their march through the town. While we were talking, the square was steadily filling and I realized that any attempt to stop the procession by force would result in bloodshed and probably set the whole town off rioting. Up to this point the demonstration had been orderly though very determined, and I thought there was just the chance that it would continue to behave itself if allowed to march. I therefore sent word to G.H.Q. that I would take charge, but that they must pass the word round to leave us alone and let us pass without opposition. I then got into my car with the sheikhs and set off from 'Abdin Square to lead those twenty thousand demonstrators through the centre of Cairo. They were determined to visit each of the foreign legations in

## *The Pied Piper*

turn to register their protest against Zaghlul's arrest and they decided to pay their first call on the American Legation, which was close to the British Residency in Qasr el-Dubara.

As we went through the town thousands of Government school students and others joined in the procession, which completely filled the street and took fifty minutes to pass a given spot. It was terrifying in its size and determination and my sheikhs very soon crumpled up into the bottom of the car, imploring me not to leave them. I realized that though the demonstrators were not out for violence, yet if opposed they would at once lose all discipline and turn into a hysterical mob, capable of anything and liable to be set off by any incident.

After serenading the American Legation and hooting the British Residency, the demonstration slowly wound its way back again into the centre of the town and all was going well, when to my horror, I saw a handful of Australian troops charging down a side street towards us. They were in shirts and shorts and were all carrying hockey sticks and obviously out for trouble. I stopped the car and began to get out. The sheikhs clutched hold of me, imploring me not to leave them, which I promised that I had no intention of doing, but merely wanted to get myself a glass of water from a neighbouring café. Luckily the Australians were still some twenty yards or so down the side street when I got to them and asked them not to make a mess of a good show. At that moment an English Tommy with a rifle appeared out of the blue, muttering they'd killed his pal Bill and he was bloody well going to get his own back! As he put his rifle up, I managed to give it a push and instead of hitting the mob it went off somewhere into the air and nobody was any the worse or the wiser. I handed him over to the Aussies to keep out of further trouble and pacified them for depriving them of their sport by telling them to meet me later on in the Ezbekiya gardens where they were camping, when I would promise them some useful street fighting. I was quickly back into my car and off again without anyone realizing the lesser drama of the side street.

## *Mob Law*

It was a curious feeling, leading this mob through the streets of Cairo. The Azharites did not want trouble and their section leaders often made their way up to me during the procession and asked me if I was satisfied with the discipline that they were keeping in rear, to which all that I could reply was that, so long as they kept order, I would guarantee that they would not be shot up by the troops. I remember thinking that I must have looked like the Pied Piper of Hamelin leading this dangerous mob. Actually it was five-fifteen in the evening when I got the demonstration back to the Azhar after having been standing up in my car since ten o'clock in the morning.

The lesson gained was that under no conditions whatsoever should similar demonstrations be allowed to form in future.

A constant danger those days was from small groups of soldiers moving about the town on their legitimate affairs or on leave and, as by orders, carrying arms. Already irritated by delay in demobilization, the troops were infuriated by the reports of murders and acts of mob violence. There was thus always the chance of individuals starting a riot which might have set the town ablaze. For some days after the big demonstration we had our work cut out holding our police cordon round the Azhar and dealing with sporadic incidents in the city. Up till then the police had not resorted to the use of firearms and had had to deal with these stone-throwing mobs armed only with stout sticks and still wearing their tarbushes which afforded no protection whatever to the head. I then served them out with steel-helmets borrowed from the British Army and had metal shields made for them to be worn like bucklers on the left arm to guard their faces from missiles. Each police party was supported by a force armed with rifles and bayonets.

One day G.H.Q. received information that there was to be a mass rising in the town next day, and proceeded to make their plans accordingly. I assured them that I had no such information and could guarantee that nothing would happen. My assurance, however, did not prevent G.H.Q. from quietly preparing for eventualities. Meanwhile I thought that a show

## *Allenby*

of determination on our part might prevent an incipient riot and I published in Daily Orders that in future the police should use the bayonet instead of the baton. I had at the time two permanent police pickets, each fifty men strong, lying in at the two police stations nearest the Azhar. Early next morning the curiosity of the public was aroused by seeing a procession coming up the Muski Street composed of an open cart surrounded by a dozen mounted police with swords drawn and, roped to the cart, a large grind-stone. On arrival at the Gamaliya police station the grind-stone was unshipped, set up in the Square in front of the police station and with sparks flying, fifty long bayonets were given points like needles and edges like razors. Finished with this police station, the procession with its cavalry escort passed on to Darb el-Ahmar and repeated the operation, with the result, as I had promised the Army, that not an Azhar student ventured to cross the street that day.

On Sunday, March 30th, we heard that Lord Allenby had been appointed High Commissioner and he duly arrived on Tuesday, April 1st. By this time order had been more or less restored in Lower Egypt, but Middle and Upper Egypt were still in a state of riot and chaos. The country in its madness had brought ruin to its own economy. The Upper Egypt railway line had been so thoroughly damaged in so many places that through-traffic was impossible for months. Railway stations and rolling stock had been destroyed so efficiently that the season's onion crop could not be saved and was left to rot on the ground. Agricultural estates depending on pump irrigation were left waterless owing to the impossibility of transporting fuel oil from Cairo and much of the Delta cotton crop could not be collected. Owing to the damage to the Upper Egypt railway line, troops sent to restore order could not go by train and had to be sent by river, and to enable steamers to reach Asyut and other places, the river level had to be raised by releasing from the Aswan dam millions of gallons of water stored there for irrigation purposes later in the summer. By the end of this mad orgy of destruction, for madness it certainly was, the rioters



## *Mob Law*

had to admit that they had cut their own throats at the instigation of irresponsible politicians who thought that by producing a general strike throughout the country they would force the British to capitulate to their demands. I remember, when it was all over, Dick Wellesley, the Interior Inspector, telling me that he had been discussing the disturbances with a venerable old sheikh in Minufiya. Wellesley had been on leave in England at the time of the riots and on his return had asked his old friend how his village had behaved during the troubles. The old man held up his hands in horror at any suggestion that his village had misbehaved and swore by all his gods that not a man had left his work or done wicked things as in other villages. Wellesley, thinking that the sheikh 'did protest too much,' and having certain inside information, continued to press the old man, who finally said that he could not lie to an old friend and admitted, on a promise of secrecy, that his whole village had gone mad in an orgy of destruction and that he had gone mad with them to such a degree that he had taken off his robes and danced a belly dance on the top of a cart in the centre of the village square.

A day or so after Lord Allenby's return, General Bulfin, who had taken over General Command, sent for me and, over the table, handed to me written orders under Martial Law to occupy the Azhar with my police. I explained that my only reserve police force available consisted of some two hundred conscript Egyptians, that an attack on the Azhar would entail a lot of shooting and that, in my opinion, it would be trying the Egyptian police too high and was bound to fail. The General was very angry and told me what he thought of me and my police, to which I replied that I would refer the matter to Lord Allenby. I saw Lord Allenby and pointed out that closing the Azhar meant turning eight or ten thousand hungry and fanatical students on to the streets of Cairo at the worst possible moment. Allenby took me up and said that there were only eight hundred students in the Azhar and that the Rector of the Mosque had told him so. When I pointed out that possibly

## *Bad Days*

not more than eight hundred slept and lived in the Mosque, but that eight thousand others lived outside and drew their daily bread ration from it, he gave me reason and said he would tell Bulfin that I was right.

On the 9th of April I wrote to my father :

Today will, I fear, be known as a bloody day in Cairo's history. General Allenby has acknowledged that our politicians made a mistake in preventing Zaghlul Pasha's deputation going to London, with the result that the town has gone clean mad. The students and lower classes have taken it as a sign of complete surrender by the British and for two days the city has been given over to frenzied demonstrations of joy. I thought there was just the chance of getting through without trouble, but yesterday evening things were precipitated by some British and Australian soldiers getting loose and starting a fight with some Egyptian Army soldiers. Two of my Mounted Troop men got killed by stray bullets and a Fire Brigade man was wounded. There were two bad scraps in the night caused by infuriated Australians getting loose and eight or ten Egyptians getting killed. Yesterday was bad, but today is far worse. The roughs of the town are out, tearing down telephone wires, barricading streets and pillaging. So far British troops have not moved, though they will have to. My police, of course, are as good as unarmed and are of little use against mobs of this size.

During the last hour a number of senior Egyptian officials have gone out to try and stop this. If they don't succeed, the troops will have to start shooting. At the present minute, within ten minutes' walk of this building (Savoy Hotel, British Army Headquarters) a mob is looting and murdering in Shari' Bustan : the cavalry officer has just reported and infantry are taking it on : they will have to clear the houses one by one.

*(Continued on Sunday, April 13th)*

Since I started writing this letter to you last Wednesday, we have been through some very ticklish days. The rioting that was going on on Wednesday was got in hand by the troops, after a number of people had been killed and wounded. Much of the trouble started by low-class Europeans losing their heads and firing at the demonstrators from their houses, with the result that the mob attacked and

## *Mob Law*

set fire to the houses, killing the inhabitants. Some ghastly murders were perpetrated on individual British and Indian soldiers caught in the street by the mob. One of our Egyptian detectives was stabbed to death just near police headquarters by a mob who then danced round his body. Dorothea at the time was doing volunteer typing work at police headquarters and, alone in my car, had come through that crowd only ten minutes before.

The next day, Thursday, was a bad day too. The mob had barricaded streets in various parts of the town and the Military were still trying to cope with things without unnecessary bloodshed. I had to make plans for the funeral of my two policemen who had been killed (one was my mounted orderly who was taking my horse back to barracks). On the morning, things looked so bad that I arranged to postpone the funeral till next day. At 3 p.m., however, when I was getting a snack of food in my house, my O.C. Mounted Troop rang me up on the telephone from the Waqf hospital near 'Abdin Square, where the bodies were, saying that the mob insisted on taking the bodies out for burial and were attacking the hospital. I was just going to ring up the Military for assistance when my officer rang up again to say that some British troops had arrived near the hospital and that their presence was making the mob go absolutely mad and that unless I could get them withdrawn at once, he and others would probably be killed either by the mob or the troops. He also begged me to come down at once. Before he rang off, I could hear the roar of the mob through the telephone. I got through to the Military at once, asked them to take away any troops that were there, got into uniform and dashed off in my car to the hospital. When I got to 'Abdin police station, I saw that the street ahead of me, just before the hospital, was barricaded with iron cradles torn up from round the street trees and beyond it I could see a howling mob of the most horrible-looking roughs I have ever seen. Just at that moment, one of my fire-engines on its way to a fire came up and tried to pass the barricade, but the mob would not let it through.

The hospital, where my men's bodies were lying awaiting burial, was some thirty yards farther down the street, so I walked up to the barricade and proceeded to climb over it. So far from molesting me, the mob formed a sort of bodyguard round me, gave me a hand up over the barrier and escorted me to the door of the hospital where I got a chair to stand on and tried to calm the mob down. It was

## *Mass Hysteria*

quite impossible to make oneself heard and I thought it easier to retire inside and send a police officer to an upper-floor balcony to speak to them from there. The inner courtyard of the hospital was an amazing scene with the corpses laid out and a dense mass of Egyptians of the effendi class all shouting and chanting prayers for the dead. Not feeling myself very welcome there, I went out from the hospital into the square and found myself in the middle of a mob that beggared description. I don't think many people can ever have been in such a mob. It was composed of several thousands of the roughest elements of Cairo, all armed with something, some with knives and some with spearheads, chisels, adzes, tree-trunks, tree-props and so on, and those who had no weapons carried great jagged chunks of cast-iron gratings that they had torn up from round the trees ; the only thing I did not see was firearms. The whole mob was shrieking and yelling and waving their weapons in the air. Many of the crowd, with their heads back and their mouths wide open, produced no sound from their throats except a sort of dry whistle. Others had their beards and chests white with dried saliva and I saw several fall spinning to the ground in fits of mad hysteria.

I had, meanwhile, sent a message off to G.H.Q. saying that I intended to take charge of the funeral procession and that they should warn all military pickets to keep out of sight and let us through.

Well, after some time, fifty of my Mounted Troop arrived with detachments of Fire Brigade and dismounted police to take part in the procession. I had told the mob that they could have their funeral and that I would accompany them and see that the troops let them through, but only on one condition, which was that the procession must be orderly and that no one must carry a weapon of any description. It took me an hour and a half to get the procession marshalled and by the time we were ready to march, the head of the column had reached the Opera Square, over half a mile from the hospital. It was headed by students on bicycles, then came my mounted and dismounted police in formation, then the three coffins surrounded by the mourners, followed by deputations from the Azhar, the schools, professions, tram companies, railway workshops and other bodies and organizations and, after that, for hundreds of yards what had been a disorderly mob now all walking in rows of eights. What they had done with their weapons I never knew, but during the whole proceeding I never saw a sign of one.

## *Mob Law*

Soon after the column started, I had one bad moment as a party of British troops under a sergeant appeared at a cross-road : the whole procession stopped and started to shout defiance, until I got hold of the sergeant and persuaded him to disappear with his men. I naturally wanted to take the procession the shortest way to the cemeteries, which lie near the Citadel, but soon realized that I must let them have their own way which turned a funeral procession into a political demonstration in front of all the foreign legations and consulates, where they stopped to shout their slogans of independence and defiance. I had to walk in front all the way like the Derby Dog, which was no fun in overalls and spurs. Luckily while going up Shari' Maghrabi, we passed in front of the Turf Club where I had a hasty double brandy brought out to me and continued my march. By 6 p.m. the mob was clear of the main town and was getting tired, so I took to my car and started heading for the cemeteries. I was getting bad-tempered by then, and as we went up Shari' Muhammad 'Ali, was particularly annoyed by a long-haired lout in the mob who would keep getting on to the running-board of my car. I stopped the car and told the mob that I would not go another yard with them until they had given the filthy fellow a sound thrashing, which they promptly proceeded to do. At 7 p.m. I decided that there was no longer enough kick in the crowd to make them dangerous and made for home, leaving the funeral to make its way to the cemeteries, which it reached by 8.30 p.m. with no further incident. It was all a very nasty experience, but I was lucky to have been able to get the British troops out of the way at the very beginning, for the mob thought it was my Egyptian O.C. Mounted Troop who had sent for them. This officer told me that the mob had got him surrounded, with their knives at his throat and would unquestionably have killed him, had I not got the troops withdrawn. I felt the effect of it all rather on the Friday, but luckily had a quiet afternoon which I spent in sleep. . . .

A day or two after the 'Abdin Square demonstration, described in this letter to my father, we had a rough morning in the town and from all sources of information it seemed probable that we were in for a still rougher afternoon, with the rumoured possibility of an attack by the mob on the Continental Hotel, as being the place where many British officers and their wives were living. I considered that such an attack was quite probable

## *Funeral Farce*

and decided that I would go there myself to be on the spot, should anything of the sort materialize.

After a quick lunch I went down in uniform to the hotel, made sure that a police force of fifty men was in position in front of it and sat myself out of sight in a corner of the veranda, which was crowded with British officers in uniform and their womenfolk, all rather keyed up by the events of the last few days and the persistent rumours of murders and mob violence. The street below was seething with excited pedestrians attracted by the show of police and the general atmosphere of anticipated disturbance. I had not long to wait before I could see that the street crowds were turning their heads up the street towards 'Abdin Palace while, at the same time, I could hear the ominous but still distant roar of an advancing mob. From the edge of the terrace looking up the street I could see a large demonstration of students and riff-raff completely filling the width of the roadway and just entering the Opera Square from the direction of 'Abdin Palace. I could hear that they were chanting the prayers for the dead, mixed with the usual battle cries of "Long live the Revolution" and "Death to the English", which made me realize that we were again faced with that most difficult problem of controlling a mob without interfering with the funeral behind which it was sheltering. As they came nearer I could see in the middle of the procession a stretcher being carried shoulder high with relays of excited students constantly relieving the bearers. On it came and I could see that the burden was a pale-faced corpse with an arm flopping over the edge of the stretcher.

As the head of the column came opposite the hotel, they drew aside to let the bearers bring their burden to a stop at the foot of the steps while the mob swarmed round them like a bodyguard and, with their heads thrown back, worked themselves up into the state of frenzy that we knew so well and feared with such good reason.

Things were beginning to look nasty, so I thought I would go down to the pavement to give heart to my police who were drawn up two deep at the foot of the steps. Muhammadan

## *Mob Law*

funerals are always touchy things to deal with and even one's most loyal men hesitate to interfere with them. As I walked down the steps I lit a cigarette as much to calm my nerves as to give an appearance of casualness. Standing on the curb, I was, as it might be, at the saluting base as the bearers came to a halt within a few feet of me where they stood belching out their cries of vengeance against the English whom they accused of murdering their fellow-student.

Why I do not know, but something in the appearance of the corpse and the style of the funeral did not satisfy me and I remembered an unfailling test taught me in my early police days in Alexandria where hysterical prostitutes were quickly restored to life and reason by the experienced old Austrian police officer of the Labban Red Light quarter.

Standing on the curb of the pavement, without anyone noticing, I reached out my right hand with the lighted cigarette hidden inside its curved palm and pressed the glowing end on to the down-hanging hand of the corpse, my rapid calculation being that, if it was a real corpse, nothing would happen but if it was not, the proof would soon be forthcoming. Forthcoming it was and that instantly ! With a yell to awaken the truly dead, the false corpse leapt up from the bier to the amazement of the onlookers and the complete discomfiture of the student bearers. The death-like coating of flour fell off his face and the bearers quickly carried away a sore and angry student.

I never told anyone what had caused the corpse's sudden return to life and I am sure that my sleight of hand was unseen by the crowd : anyhow the simple trick taught me by old Frankel had turned a very nasty situation into a complete farce, as the defeated students faded quickly away, followed by the derisory laughter of the mob.

## CHAPTER 16

### *THE LIGHTER SIDE OF THINGS*

DURING the many years of political struggle there were occasional episodes which started by being truly alarming, but which to everyone's relief finished on a note of comedy. The first of these was the Ladies' Demonstration in 1919. The job that faced the London police when the suffragettes resorted to violence was unpleasant enough, but such a weapon in an Oriental country where women were still strictly harim was unheard of and the threat of attack by a mob of Muhammadan ladies made British brigadiers tremble and seek hastily to hand on both the mother and the baby.

In 1919, while I was attached to General Watson at British Army Headquarters in the ex-Savoy Hotel, a deputation of Egyptian ladies came to call upon the General to demand permission to hold a demonstrational march through the city to show their solidarity with the National Movement. General Watson instructed me to interview the deputation and inform them that all demonstrations, either male or female, were categorically forbidden by military order and would be dispersed by force. I did my duty and was met by shrill cries of defiance from the excited ladies : so I asked the Egyptian Governor of Cairo to interview them, which he did with no better success. I reported the results to General Bulfin, then in supreme command, and received final orders from him that the procession was to be prevented at all costs, that I must do it with my Egyptian police and that he would give me some British troops but only in support. Both the General and I could see the grave risk of allowing this obvious trick whereby the mob and any number of students would be able to demonstrate freely by mixing with



## *The Lighter Side of Things*

the ladies and using their presence as a shield against the police and troops.

I made my dispositions overnight and woke next morning with an anxious day ahead of me. Soon after 9 a.m. I was informed that some thirty or forty smart harim carriages and motor-cars were driving up and down Shari' Qasr el-'Aini but that their occupants had so far done nothing to warrant our interference ; however, it was not long before it was reported that the ladies had left their carriages and were marching in a body towards the house of Sa'ad Zaghlul Pasha, the Nationalist leader. In anticipation of this move I had put police cordons ready, but out of sight, near all cross-roads leading to the house, with some British troops well back in the rear. At a given signal I closed the cordon and the ladies found their way opposed by a formidable line of Egyptian conscript police, who had been previously warned that they were to use no violence but to stand still and, if necessary, let their faces be scratched by irate finger-nails. The idea of being attacked by what they considered to be extremely immodest females amused my men enormously and considerable licence was given them by their officers to practise their ready peasant wit on the smart ladies who confronted them. As soon as the trap was sprung, I appeared on the scene from behind the cordon holding the head of the demonstration to find two young ladies, whom I had just interviewed at G.H.Q., engaged in a furious argument with the police. I pointed out to the elder one that she had already been informed by me on behalf of the General that no procession would be allowed and that she and her assembled ladies were wilfully disobeying the General's order.

I happened to have a previous acquaintance with this very modern young Egyptian woman, who was much in advance of her time in every respect and was by no means *bien vue* by the best families. I intentionally addressed myself to her and thus very soon roused the jealousy of other equally smart and beautiful ladies in the procession, who all wanted to talk at the same time and who much resented the assumption by this particular

## *Suffragettes and Ministers*

young woman of the position of generalissima. I therefore admitted them into what had become by then a general discussion and expressed my regret that all I could do was to carry out the orders of a very severe General. I then added that, if they would not mind waiting, I would go to Headquarters and ask the General once more whether he still insisted on forbidding the harim march.

I went off to the Savoy, busied myself with a number of things and intentionally did not return to my ladies for a good hour or more.

I found the poor dears in a sorry condition. It was a hot summer's day. The street into which I had penned them had no shade from the pitiless sun and there was nowhere to sit except upon the hot curb-stones. Some of the more stalwart tried a few more arguments as I apologized for having been so long in bringing them the General's final decision that no procession could be allowed, but it was clear that the majority were beat to the world with their complexions ruined by the sun and their feet blistered by the hot pavement and unaccustomed exercise. I addressed myself to some obvious waverers and asked them if they would like their carriages called up, I having kept all their transport ready at hand behind the cordons. The suggestion was received with obvious relief and soon they were all asking me to call their cars or their carriages which bore them away in twos and threes, leaving nothing on what might have been a field of battle except an occasional powder-puff or tiny handkerchief.

Everyone was relieved : the ladies were relieved and even thanked me : the Ministry was relieved : General Bulfin was relieved and so was I, and thankful as I went home, that threatened tragedy had turned into perfect polite comedy.

A second incident which had a somewhat humorous side to it was the episode of the Helwan train in 1932. We were then in the middle of a strenuous tug-of-war between the Wafd Party, led by Mustafa en-Nahhas Pasha, on the one side, and Isma'il Sidqi Pasha, the Prime Minister, on the other. The

## *The Lighter Side of Things*

Government had forbidden Nahhas Pasha, as Leader of the Opposition, to go on political tours in the provinces and all exits from Cairo were closely guarded by police to prevent his doing so. Foiled in several attempts to get out by road, Nahhas declared his intention of somehow or other getting to the big Delta town of Tanta in defiance of Sidqi Pasha's orders. Our information was that he intended to trick the police force on duty at the main Cairo railway station and board the express for Tanta : extra police precautions were therefore taken and a cordon placed on the station gates to prevent the Wafd members gaining access to the platform. With large numbers of police employed on guarding the odd twelve road and river exits northwards from Cairo, the station cordon was weak and when one day Nahhas and company arrived, sixty or seventy strong, accompanied by a mob of local supporters, the police cordon broke and Nahhas and his followers got safely on to the platform. The Tanta express was waiting to start when the seventy jubilant Wafdists racing down the platform managed to board the last first-class coach and considered the battle won.

However, a combination of Railway Administration and Police brains, spurred on by a lively fear of Sidqi's impending wrath, resulted in a quick uncoupling of the first-class coaches in which the Wafd were victoriously and comfortably installed and the Tanta train left almost on time but without those well-filled tail coaches which remained stranded in Cairo Station.

I was laid up in bed in my house at the time, just out of hospital, convalescing from an operation, but keeping in close telephonic touch all the time with what was going on at the station. I soon heard that another engine had been produced and that the Wafd coaches had been quickly got on the move, but instead of heading north for Tanta, the passengers found themselves going south past the 'Abbasiya military sidings and creaking and squeaking their way along the quarry line that creeps slowly through the cemeteries under the Citadel to follow the desert edge southwards to Helwan where the railway ends. Our orders were that Nahhas and company were not to get to Tanta

## *Stay-in Strike, First Class*

and we thought that after our first failure at the main station, we had reasserted our authority and solved the problem very cleverly. Arrived at the Helwan terminus, the Wafd members were politely asked to leave the train, but their tempers were up and they firmly announced their intention of staying in the train until evacuated by force.

It was at this moment that Sidqi Pasha rang up my sick bed and informed me that the occupation of State rolling-stock by the Wafd could not be tolerated any longer and that they must be made to descend. I was disappointed at his lack of appreciation of what I had thought to be a clever and excellent solution and begged him to allow these unruly passengers to remain in the train until the urge for more comfortable quarters and a desire for an evening meal should persuade them to clear out. Sidqi Pasha, however, would not have it and insisted that they should be made to leave the train at once, either willy or nilly. I pointed out that nilly would involve the use of considerable force against some seventy or eighty people, who included amongst their numbers two ex-Prime Ministers, half a dozen ex-Ministers and as many ex-Under-Secretaries, besides many ex-senators and M.P.s and that, if force had to be used in the confined space of a railway carriage, it was inevitable that some casualties would ensue from broken carriage windows and energetic action on the part of the police chuckers-out. Sidqi Pasha's reply to my remarks was that he was sure that if I went out myself and reasoned with them, all would be well and that they would obey the orders without force having to be used. There was nothing further to be said, so I gave orders for the train to be brought back from Helwan into the Egyptian Army barracks siding at Tura about half-way to Cairo, and for a large force of police to be sent out there. I then arose from my sick bed, feeling a physical and mental wreck, and motored out to Tura. Half an hour after my arrival the train groaned its way into the barrack yard with every carriage window occupied by the heads and brandished sticks of excited Wafdists shouting defiance to the Government.

## *The Lighter Side of Things*

As the train came to a stop, I climbed up from the track into a first-class carriage in which at least fifteen persons of ex-ministerial rank were crowded. It was a hot summer evening, the atmosphere of the carriage was mephitic and the prospects generally unfavourable. I delivered to the assembled company the Prime Minister's order that they should leave the train and proceed to their respective homes. All I got for answer was shouts of sarcastic laughter and the reiterated assurance that having started by train for Tanta they intended to remain in that train till it got there.

I was determined not to use my police force to man-handle a party containing many acquaintances and old friends such as Muhammad Mahmud Pasha and Ga'far Wali Pasha, so I proceeded to appeal to their better feelings to help me out of a very difficult position. "Gentlemen," I said, "I am here to carry out the orders of the Prime Minister, with ample force to do so and do so I must, just as I have carried out many similar orders from you when you were in office. You would, however, be doing me a personal favour, if you would facilitate my task by leaving the train and going home in the thirty taxi-cabs that I have ready for you. After all, the train must be uncomfortable and not too clean. You have made your protest and compelled the Government to threaten to use force. I ask you to be satisfied with that and to let me get back to the bed I have just quitted and where I ought to be at this moment."

A long discussion then began among the company. What with the heat, noise and strain, I very soon began to feel extremely ill. Someone gave me a seat and I crumpled up with my tarbush off and the sweat pouring off me. Only once have I fainted in my life, but that evening I nearly did it again. After what seemed to me hours of noisy discussion, I heard someone remark that the poor fellow had fainted. Nahhas Pasha then produced some smelling-salts from his trouser pocket and pressed them to my nose and presently Muhammad Mahmud Pasha tapped me on my knee and asked whether I was sufficiently recovered to listen. With an effort I said "Yes" and he then

## *Personal Consideration*

said that they were all sorry for me, would do as I asked them, would leave the train and let me go home, but that I was to tell Sidqi Pasha that this was not to be interpreted as obeying his order and that it was entirely out of regard for me. I heaved an inward sigh of relief, mopped my dripping brow and thanked the speaker.

I remember then being helped down the steps from the coach and meeting my police officers, who were anxiously waiting with their tin-helmeted and be-truncheoned police force to know whether it was peace or war. "Peace," I told them, "and home to bed for me." I decided that I must not show doubt of the faithful execution of a gentleman's agreement by waiting to see the Wafdists actually leave the train, so I bade them goodnight and left. I then remembered that, on leaving the house, I had put into my car a large flask of my best liqueur brandy. How good it was and how I enjoyed that drive home in the cool evening along the moon-lit river-side, with the satisfaction of feeling that a very unpleasant situation had been solved without loss of temper or broken crowns !

## CHAPTER 17

### *POLITICAL CRIME*

DURING the last forty years Egypt's history has been marked by two distinct periods of political assassination causing great anxiety to successive Egyptian governments.

It can be safely said that during these years there was no basic difference in the aspirations of the various political parties in Egypt who one and all demanded the abolition of British control and the granting of complete independence to the country, the only divergence between them being that some realized that such a change must be gradual, while others would brook no delay and demanded immediate compliance with their claims.

The Nationalist Movement was started in 1900 by Mustafa Kamel and was marked by the first political murder, that of the Coptic Prime Minister, Butros Pasha Ghali, in 1910. This was certainly inspired by Nationalist Party politicians. Between that year and 1925 two political murders of Egyptian personages of high standing were committed and fourteen others attempted, including an attack on Sultan Hussein in 1915, while twelve murders of British civil officials and British Army personnel were committed and twenty-one attempted. This period culminated in the assassination of the Sirdar, Sir Lee Stack, in 1924, and the arrest and execution of his murderers, with the consequent break-up of the murder-gang who it was proved had also committed many of the previous crimes.

The second period of political murder was between the years 1937 and 1946, during which two Egyptian personages were assassinated and the lives of three others attempted, while there were three murders of British Army personnel and four other







THE H.E. MUHAMMAD MAHMUD PASHA, PRIME MINISTER AND  
FOUNDER N.I.B.

## *The Murder Gangs*

attempts. Thus during the years between 1910 and 1946 there have been two periods of political murder, broken by an interval of a dozen years during which few, if any, political crimes of violence were committed.

As regards the second murder period, the murders and attempted murders have been of two sorts, those committed by Egyptian youths against Egyptian Ministers, including Nahhas Pasha, Dr. Ahmad Maher Pasha and Amin Osman Pasha, and those against officers and other ranks of the British military forces. The murder of Lord Moyne in November, 1944, cannot be brought into the series, as it was committed by Jewish extremists from Palestine against Lord Moyne in his capacity of a British statesman concerned with Palestine policy. As a police case, it was notable for the energy and courage, not unaided by good fortune, which enabled an Egyptian motorcycle police constable to overhaul the murderers as they tried to escape on push-bicycles. Their arrest, red-handed, fixed the responsibility for a crime which, had it been left unproved, might have been attributed to an Egyptian assassin, with serious prejudice to Anglo-Egyptian relations. The Palestine Police must have envied us the fortunate capture of the two murderers.

The murder of Dr. Ahmad Maher Pasha (24 February, 1945) was a suicide murder in which the assassin knew he had no chance of escape. The attempted murder of Mustafa en-Nahhas Pasha (6 December, 1945) might easily have succeeded while the murder of Amin Osman Pasha (5 January, 1946) was bold in the extreme and might have remained unproved but for one Egyptian who recognized the assassin as a youth whose name he knew and whom he had seen hanging about in the neighbourhood of the murder scene. In these three cases the motive was disapproval by the murderers of the victim's friendly relationship with the British Government.

The series of murders and attempted murders of British Army personnel began in March, 1941, and continued up to the arrest of the suspected murderers of Amin Pasha Osman in January 1946; these cases were all of a similar type, consisting

## Political Crime

shooting by three or four persons from a motor-car of officers or soldiers walking in the less-frequented gardens or suburbs.

The first murder period was the most interesting from a police point of view and I propose to discuss it in some detail. The *modus operandi* varied little. A list was made of prominent officials, and their comings and goings between their houses and offices were carefully studied. A suitable place and time were selected and after much rehearsal four or five of the gang, all armed, would be posted up and down the street of the spot decided upon. The selected assassin, sometimes disguised as a newspaper-seller or hawker, would then walk along behind the intended victim and shoot him in the back at point-blank range. Great care was taken by gunmen to see that the street was free from Europeans, police or British soldiers, who might interfere or be eye-witnesses, while risk of any action by Egyptian witnesses was completely eliminated by the public's fear of reprisals. If by chance the street was not clear of possible witnesses at the time chosen, the attack was postponed to another day. The murderer's job was easy as many officials walked daily to and from their offices and were slow to take the normal precautions of changing their route or of walking in company. Merely to carry a gun oneself was very little protection against sneak-shooting. I personally was in the fortunate position of having a Government car which considerably reduced my personal risks. On one occasion I received warning from an old woman who sold oranges at a street corner that a group were out for me and meant to get me on my way to my office. After that I rang the changes on alternative routes to my Police Headquarters. I also let it be known that I was armed and prepared to shoot. I always carried a revolver as more reliable than an automatic and less dangerous to the carrier, and my chauffeur and my orderly did the same. Across the back of the driver's seat was slung on a crutch a sawn-off twelve-bore shot-gun and also a five-foot quarter-staff with a calf's knuckle-joint shrunk to the end, making a most formidable club. I had taken it off a 'peaceful picket' in a tram-strike and on more

## *The Bomb-throwers*

than one occasion the scatter-gun and the club came into riot-action with telling but not lethal effect. Unfortunately Lord Allenby spotted my club one day and stole it off me as a souvenir.

In the early part of the first murder period locally made bombs were used. About the time of the Sirdar's murder we began to hear mention of a case that had happened six years previously, in which a young man while practising with one of these home-made bombs with other extremists, somewhere in the Eastern Desert behind Helwan, had blown himself up. We heard that he had been buried where the accident had happened and it was important to us to find this grave which might produce useful evidence. 'Somewhere in the desert' was a pretty hopeless basis on which to start to look for a hidden grave in that broken desert hinterland, but we decided to try. We divided the area into sections and hunted them one by one for seven months with Bedouin and Camel Corps trackers. Day by day we curry-combed that desert with no results and finally I gave orders that the hunt should be discontinued on the last day of June.

On the very last day of that month a Bedouin boy in our employ, riding back from the desert on his camel for the last time, spotted a small white bone lying on the ground in the bed of a dry watercourse: on working back up the wadi he found more bones and eventually located the remains of a skeleton and some clothing cached in the wadi bed under a pile of rocks. The medico-legal reconstruction of the bomb from the fragments found, and the identification of the body from the bones and the clothing formed a fascinating piece of technical work. The bomb was of the amateur type, composed of a piece of iron piping with screw-cap ends enclosing a metal container filled with picric acid: inside the lip of one end of the piping there was hung a small glass bottle containing nitric acid, closed with a loose plug of cotton-wool. So long as the bomb was kept upright it was harmless, but once out of the vertical the nitric acid oozed into the picric and detonated.

## *Political Crime*

Careful search at the scene of the explosion was rewarded by finding a half of this small glass bottle and other parts of the bomb which had lain undisturbed all those years on the desert top. The victim's clothes were eventually identified by finding two broken bone buttons which, when joined together, gave us the name of a Cairo tailor, and good laboratory work revealed the name of the owner of the suit written in ink six years before on the tailor's tab on the inside breast-pocket.

The identification of this victim, besides being a welcome reward to a long hunt, gave us evidence of great value in our subsequent researches.

During these years, though we could not do much to protect the pedestrian, we learned by experience a great deal as to the various forms of protection possible for Ministers and important personages who travelled in cars. Although useful to open up traffic and obtain a clear road, the motor-cycle constable riding ahead had the disadvantage of announcing to a waiting gun-man the approach of the personage marked down for shooting. I also disliked the armed motor-cycle escort riding on either side of the car to be protected. In a city full of tram lines it is all a motor-cyclist can do to avoid skidding when escorting a fast car and it is too much to expect him to be able at the same time to keep his eye on the crowd and be ready to come into action with his weapon. We found the best form of protection to be the following car, and in this we were borne out by one of the gun-men himself who, before execution, was asked as to what police precautions thwarted them most, and unhesitatingly named the following car.

Unless escorts are looked upon merely as screens, i.e., if they are intended to shoot or arrest the persons attempting the life of the person to be protected, they must be so placed that they can at once move forward and come into action. If they are placed ahead of, or parallel to, the personage, their speed will carry them past the assassin when the shot is fired and by the time that they can slow up and turn, all chance of arrest will be gone. This was clearly demonstrated in the murder in

## *The Sirdar's Murder*

Marseilles of the King of Yugoslavia. From a photograph taken at the time it is easy to see that the mounted police officer had been riding, according to tradition, alongside the rear wheel of the carriage and had been carried forward by his horse's momentum and been unable to turn quick enough to cut down the assassin before he was able to jump on to the carriage and fire point-blank into it. Had the mounted officer been ten yards farther back, he would have been able to strike down the assassin as he stepped out of the crowd and before he could reach the carriage.

The following car should have an armed agent beside the driver and two armed agents in the back, each leaning out on his own side ready to shoot. The essential thing is that the car should follow not less than twenty metres behind the escorted car. If the driver gets too close, the bomb that gets the personage will get him too. With the following car properly spaced, the assassin runs the risk of being shot by the escort, who should come into effective action the moment the protected car is attacked. The driver of the following car must use his brains and not get so far behind the protected car that another vehicle can cut in between him and it. The driver of the protected car must also look well ahead to avoid being held up by anything blocking the road and to have enough time to turn off into a side street if he sees the road blocked ahead.

On the 19th of November, 1924, I was motoring back from my office for lunch and had crossed the Qasr el-Nil bridge over the Nile, when General Congreve's<sup>1</sup> car overtook me coming from the town, hailed me and told me that General Sir Lee Stack had just been murdered in Shari' Qasr el-'Aini near the Egyptian War Office. General Stack, who was then Governor-General of the Sudan and Sirdar (Commander-in-Chief) of the Egyptian Army, was staying for a few days in Cairo on return from leave in England before going back to duty in Khartum. I turned my car back and quickly got to the scene of the crime to find that the Sirdar had already been moved, a dying man

<sup>1</sup> Then commanding British troops in Egypt.

## *Political Crime*

to the British Residency, some three minutes' distance in Qasr el-Doubara.

The Sirdar had been in his office that morning at the Egyptian Ministry of War and was being driven home for luncheon in his car by his English chauffeur, Marsh, with his A.D.C., Jock Campbell, sitting beside him. At the corner where the Ministry of War street enters the main street of Qasr el-'Aini, his car had slowed down for a passing tram and had immediately been attacked by not less than seven gunmen, who had been posted in pairs up and down the street of the spot selected. Jumping on to the running-board, one of the gang had pushed his weapon into the car and fired a number of shots at point blank range at the Sirdar, hitting him three times, while the chauffeur and the A.D.C. were also wounded. In spite of being wounded, the chauffeur got the car moving, chased by four of the gang who fired as they ran. Two Englishmen on a motor-bicycle were passing at the time and were fired on; a beat policeman ran up towards them and was hit in the leg by one of the gang, and some passers-by who attempted to approach were scattered by a bomb thrown by another of the gang, who had ready the taxi into which his confederates jumped and escaped.

While I was issuing orders to my assembled police officers, Sa'ad Zaghlul Pasha, the Prime Minister, arrived on the scene. He was obviously much distressed and asked me whom I suspected and what action I proposed to take, to which I replied that I wanted the immediate offer of a reward of ten thousand pounds for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the murderers, to which he at once agreed.

Of all the murder cases that I have handled that of Sir Lee Stack was by far the most important politically, interesting technically, and requiring the most delicate handling. When it eventually came to court on the 11th May, 1925, the full police story of six months' intensive investigation was told and corroborated in every detail. In spite of the defence put up by the best lawyers in the country, the Parquet produced damning evidence one after the other including the full confession after

## *Police and Parquet*

arrest of one of the accused, substantiating in every detail the evidence of the police. Of the nine accused, seven were sentenced to death by the Egyptian Assize Court ; one owing to his confession escaped the death penalty and was sentenced to life imprisonment, while one was sentenced to a term of penal servitude.

This is all now over twenty years ago, and though the details of this case are a story of extraordinary interest, yet to tell it in full today would rake up past memories which would be bound to evoke bitterness. Looked upon from a professional point of view the ultimate success of the police handling of this case was largely due to the completely free hand given to us by the Minister and the Procureur-General. Absolute secrecy was the first essential ; the whole case hung on a thread and depended on gradually working the weakest minded of the suspects into a position where he would have to confess. A careless word or action might at any moment have given the alarm and destroyed for ever our chances of obtaining proof. Pressure was brought to bear on us from every direction for information as to what was going on but we successfully resisted it, and, for probably one of the few instances in Egyptian police history, the work of the police and Parquet was kept a dead secret.



*THE DRUG TRAFFIC*

I TOOK over command of the Cairo police from Harvey Pasha in 1917 and from 1919 to 1924 had little time to think of anything except political riots and assassinations. It is difficult in retrospect to put one's finger on the particular moment when the seriousness of the drug traffic impressed itself upon us to become, as it did later with me, the motive for a crusade. I suppose the process was gradual and cumulative.

From my earliest days in Egypt I had had to do with the contraband trade in hashish, but one's interest then was more concerned with the fun of the hunt than with any real feeling for those addicted to the drug or anger against the traffickers. The harm it did was no doubt considerable, but one had not begun to think about that. During my years in the provinces I hardly came across the drug problem at all, for the simple reason that it did not exist except in the slums of a few of the bigger towns like Tanta. The fellahin were healthy and happy and needed no stimulant to help them through their labours in the fields or their duties to their womenfolk at home. It was not till I had acquired close-hand experience of the horrors of heroin addiction that I became imbued with a passionate hatred of those who were making fortunes by encouraging their fellow men to destroy their bodies and their souls.

I did a lot of night prowling in those days and knew by heart my way about the slums where the roughs and the cackling laughter of the hashish dens were by now giving place to the emaciated shadows of heroin addicts slinking about round the offal bins. Certain things in one's life leave an impression on the mind never to be effaced. Early in my Egyptian days I

## *White Poison*

saw a Bedouin girl dying of rabies. I never forgot it. Later I was to see rows of human beings in the prison hospital writhing in the agonies of drug withdrawal: this also I never forgot and my hatred of the traffickers grew with the pathetic appeals I received from all classes who came to me begging me to help them to get cured.

It was in 1916 that cocaine began to make its first appearance in Cairo, to be followed later by the pleasanter and more potent heroin, but there was little that we could do at that time when trafficking or possession was a mere contravention with a maximum penalty of £E1<sup>1</sup> fine or a week's imprisonment. The pioneer of the sale of heroin in Egypt was a Cairo chemist, who soon had a nightly queue of high-life carriages waiting outside his pharmacy. I twice entered his shop and while buying some medicine or other, watched the fashionable drug being handed over the counter to the gilded youth of the town. At this time the inspection of chemists' shops was outside police competence and repeated failures by the Public Health authorities to convict this popular chemist began to arouse my suspicions. It was not long before others coveted those profits, and the number of purveyors and addicts continually increased. Prices in those days were comparatively low, a shot only cost a few shillings and the trade, wise in its generation, kept the price down until the vice had spread and caught large numbers of the population in its grip. We even had instances of contractors paying their labourers in heroin.

About 1928 I began to realize that something was happening which was producing a new slum population in Cairo, the like of which we had not seen before. For the first time we heard of the method of intravenous injection of heroin and soon came across its victims. Within a short time we found a new element in our Bulaq slums. In the past the population of this teeming quarter of Cairo had been largely composed of the rough Upper Egypt labourer type who had got left behind in Cairo after his annual migration from his southern village (where there

<sup>1</sup> £E1 = £1 os. 6d. sterling.

## *The Drug Traffic*

was no work during the Nile flood) to Alexandria and the Delta for seasonal work. They were a rough class but healthy and strong.

Now we began to find human wreckage lying about in the Bulaq lanes, pale-faced semi-corpses evidently not of the Bulaq type who when spoken to replied in educated Arabic or even English and admitted that it was the heroin habit that had got them there. The heroin on the market was still fairly pure and therefore strong, and the Bulaq settling-pit quickly filled with the human debris of every class of Egyptian society. One night I netted the whole area and collected a couple of hundred of those pitiful creatures and cross-examined many of them myself. They were from every class, working men, sons of small shopkeepers, cabmen, artisans, clerks from Government offices and even sons of well-to-do citizens. All ruined by heroin. "How could they live?" You may well ask. They did not live, they just existed. Two shots a day cost an addict at that time about three shillings. Some of them were still strong enough to earn a few piastres as casual labourers, but the rest existed by begging or stealing and satisfied what little desire for food they still had by scavenging the rubbish bins, in competition with the cats and kites, outside the back doors of hotels and restaurants.

It was just about this time that police began picking up corpses round about this area. At first we thought that they were merely drug addicts who had died of exhaustion or over-dosing until one day the hospital authorities declared that the cause of death was malignant malaria, and not drug poisoning. Scars on the arms showed that they were drug addicts and investigation proved that an epidemic of malignant malaria had been started, without doubt, by the needle and syringe which had been used on a malaria carrier for an intravenous injection of heroin being used again on the next man in the queue without disinfection. The malaria infection administered was evidently a particularly strong dose due to the habit of the operator of pushing the needle well into the vein and then withdrawing the piston, thus filling the barrel with infected blood and forcing it in

## Prevention

again to satisfy the addict's demand that none of the precious drug should be left behind in the syringe.

Up till the end of the First World War, no one had seen any need for drastic narcotic legislation in Egypt and offences were considered as mere contraventions, with the maximum penalty of seven days' imprisonment or a fine of £E1. Soon after 1920 it became evident that the white drug habit was getting a grip on Egypt and was beginning to spread, especially in the cities. I now began to study the question seriously and to agitate for more efficient and drastic regulations, as under the existing law it was impossible to produce any deterrent effect whatever. Changing of legislation is always a lengthy process and it was not till 1925 that the first effective narcotic law was enacted. This made possession, as well as trafficking, illegal and classified the offence as a *delit* with a maximum penalty of one year's imprisonment and £E100 fine. We had not been idle during the previous years. We had been collecting information and forming an index of local traffickers, with the result that within twelve months of the publication of the new law we had made 5,600 prosecutions under it in Cairo City alone. In those days heroin was fetching £E120 per kilo in the wholesale market in Cairo and we were later to learn that it only cost the European factories £E10 per kilo to produce and was sold to the dealers at the factory door at £E17 per kilo. By the end of 1925 the price in Cairo had gone up to £E300 per kilo and addiction was spreading all through the country. In that year the law was still further improved and the maximum penalties increased to five years' imprisonment and £E1,000 fine.

At the beginning of 1929 Muhammad Mahmud Pasha, then Prime Minister, had become as alarmed as myself at the devastating effect that heroin addiction was having, not only in the cities, but also in every village in the country. The peaceful, happy villages of my inspector days were being rotted with dope and nothing serious was being done to prevent it. Had the damage been confined to the upper and educated classes of the cities I don't think that I should have been so stirred, but

## *The Drug Traffic*

when I had collected what reliable figures I could obtain and calculated that out of a total population of fourteen million possibly half a million were now slaves to the drug habit, and they the backbone of the land, I realized that here was a job worth doing and one that, with the Prime Minister's support, I felt capable of tackling.

After a few earnest conversations with the Prime Minister, my scheme to form a Central Narcotics Intelligence Bureau was approved. The terms of reference were wide. I was to be Director, with the right of selecting my own specialized police staff, with direct access to all Egyptian Government Departments and foreign public security authorities, and to have at my disposal a budget of £E10,000 a year for which I need account to no one.

The objects of the Bureau, hereafter known as the C.N.I.B., were laid down as being :

1. To trace to their source, in Europe or elsewhere, the imported drugs that were now ruining Egypt,
2. To present the facts to the League of Nations,
3. To pursue and prosecute drug traffickers in Egypt,
4. To put, by every possible means, such difficulties in the way of the traffic that retail prices in Egypt would rise to a height beyond the reach of the fellahin.

When I look back now after the eighteen years' existence of the C.N.I.B. I can see how fortunate we were at its inception in 1929 to be able to pick out such an exceptionally efficient team of officers and constables from the Egyptian Police. Douglas Baker, my Assistant-Commandant of the Cairo Police, became, in addition, Sub-Director of the Bureau and provided the Intelligence Office experience that he had acquired during the war. Alexandria at that time was the chief port of entry of illicit drugs from Europe, and there I put in charge of a sub-bureau Kaimakam<sup>1</sup> Jays Bey of the Alexandria Police, whose detective flair and knowledge of the Greek language and mentality caused the eventual downfall of most of the big local

<sup>1</sup> Kaimakam (Turkish) = lieutenant-colonel.

## *Consular Protection*

smugglers. His right-hand man was Bimbashi Burbrook of the Alexandria Police. In Cairo I had a very capable Cretan-Greek Police Officer named Themistocles Marcou (referred to as Marc), to whom more than to any other is due the Bureau's success in its early years in tracing and proving the identity of the big manufacturers and traffickers in Europe.

Indefatigable and clear-headed, with a personality that forced all barriers, Marc was able in his brief visits to Europe to get to the bottom of many an international organization and to submit on return clear and accurate reports on what he had achieved. With Sagh<sup>1</sup> 'Abdel-Aziz Safwat understudying to Marc, Nashed Hanna Bey in charge of the secretariat and archives, and a selected team of European and Egyptian constables and agents, the Bureau soon got to work.

During those early years I had been keeping in close touch with the anti-narcotic work of the League of Nations through Sir Malcolm Delevingne, Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary of State of the Home Office, who for years past had represented the British Government on all the various anti-narcotic conferences and had been an original member of the Advisory Committee on Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs at Geneva. I corresponded with him freely, sending him confidential copies of our seizure reports and taking his advice as to the handling of complicated international cases. Not yet being a Member of the League, Egypt could not be officially represented on the Advisory Committee.

While waiting for our legislation, we had been carefully gathering our facts and preparing to round up certain local dealers who were obviously getting their drugs in large quantities from Europe and whose arrest, we felt confident, would put us on to the scent that would with any luck lead us backwards to the source and origin of their supplies. I was well aware that my first enemy was going to be the foreign trafficker resident in Egypt who, thanks to the Capitulations, was still only liable to the petty contraventional penalties of the Mixed

<sup>1</sup> Sagh (Turkish) = adjutant-major.

## *The Drug Traffic*

Courts while the Egyptian subject, under the new law, was liable to five years' imprisonment and £E1,000 fine. I therefore began by calling in person upon all the principal foreign diplomatic representatives, to whom I appealed to help us in our campaign by applying to their nationals in Egypt the same laws on narcotic trafficking that would have been applied to them in their own country, instead of letting them be tried by, and be liable to the derisory penalties of the Mixed Courts. I met with immediate sympathy and assistance from the various Foreign Ministers, and in the following three years we obtained 334 orders of expulsion of European traffickers out of 444 applied for.

It is hardly possible for anyone who has not had actual experience of them to appreciate the enormous difficulties that the Capitulations put in the way of the police generally, and particularly in the fight against the drug trade. Writing now in 1946 with the Capitulations abolished, I say advisedly that had it not been for the protection that the foreign trafficker derived from them, the narcotic problem in Egypt would never have reached the magnitude it did and the ninety per cent. improvement today could have been achieved in a quarter of the time with a quarter of the expenditure of police time, funds and energy. Even when the goodwill and co-operation of the Consulates and the Consular Courts had been obtained, the traffickers of many foreign nationalities had the great advantage of having nothing to fear from their Consular Courts beyond fines of a few pounds and a few days' imprisonment, owing to the inadequacy of the penalties for narcotic trafficking in their various national legislations.

It was here that the one powerful weapon that the Egyptian Government possessed came into play, namely, the right to demand from the foreign Consuls the administrative deportation of any foreign subject who could be proved to be a real and continuous menace to public order and security. But to have the proofs ourselves, and to convince the consular authorities of the need to take action were by no means the same thing, and

## Hashish

much patience and firmness had, at times, to be used to achieve agreement.

On our side, we had to be moderate in the number of our demands, have our cases proved beyond a doubt and, once decided, resist all attempts at interference in the decision. We fully realized that deportation was a measure of the greatest severity, meaning, as it often did, the complete up-rooting of some Levantine family which perhaps had been established in Egypt for a generation or more and throwing them back homeless on to their country of origin. Severe, perhaps, but perfectly just and the only efficient weapon that Egypt possessed against these parasitic poisoners of her own people.

When in Egypt we talk about *hashish*, we mean the flat cake of compressed resinous powder, extracted from the flowering top (inflorescence) of the female hemp plant of the variety *indica* of the species *Cannabis sativa*. Hashish in the cake or powder form is of a dark greenish, khaki colour and has an oily, heavy smell, like hops. It varies considerably in quality according to the locality in which it is grown. Practically all the hashish that enters Egypt has been grown in the Lebanon and Syria, the best quality being sown in the higher plateau of the Lebanon range on soil that holds its moisture from the rains and mists of those seven-thousand-foot mountains, whereas the inferior grades are grown on irrigated lands in the plains of the Beq'a, between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon, and in similar areas in north Syria.

The seed (known to bird fanciers as hemp seed) is sown in the mountains in mid-March and comes to maturity in August : by then the mountain plants are two or three feet high, while the coarser valley plants may grow to twice that height. As the lower leaves decay and drop off, the flowering tops are found to be coated with a yellow, resinous substance which is sticky to the touch : this provides the first-grade drug. The crop is now carefully reaped and carried to the drying floor where the stalks are laid out separately and exposed to the sun, but not to the wind, are turned over every day for the next



## The Drug Traffic

ten days or so until thoroughly dry and are then carefully laid on large linen sheets and carried to a special shed, care being taken to lose none of the precious powder en route. The threshing shed is built with hard, smooth walls and floor from which the flying dust of the resin can be eventually brushed and collected. No air is allowed to penetrate into the room while the threshing is being done and the sweating, half-drugged workmen have to break off frequently for a breath of air outside. The dried plants having been laid in a heap on the floor, trained men set to work with flails to thresh the stalks and flower-heads. Then follows a succession of operations with sieves of varying fineness, the component parts of the plants being separated and laid out in separate heaps, the quality of the drug diminishing with each successive threshing. Nothing is wasted : the seeds are collected for future sowing, the stalks are ground to powder in a special mill and mixed in as an adulterant ; the threshing is then finished and the cultivator hands over to the exporter. Next follows a series of operations of blending, mixing, classifying and weighing. These done, the powder is packed into small linen bags of varying capacity and submitted to a steaming process in a special cupboard until the powder becomes soft, when the bags are placed in presses and squeezed into flat slabs in which shape they will be sold as *turbas*, varying in weight from a half to two kilos.

The most popular way of indulging in hashish is by smoking it in the *goza* (water-pipe). This consists of a hollow coco-nut shell, generally bound in brass to make it airtight, into the shoulder of which a twenty-inch reed pipe is inserted at an angle of  $45^{\circ}$  as mouthpiece. Into the top of the shell is inserted a metal pipe reaching five inches downwards almost to the bottom of the shell and projecting six inches vertically above the shell, where it is fitted with a small cup of fire-clay.

To prepare the pipe for smoking, the shell is half-filled with water and in the clay cup is then placed a layer of paste called *Hasan Keif*, made of tobacco and honey ; on the top of this is placed a small piece of hashish and alongside it a piece of live



PATCHES OF OPIUM POPPY HIDDEN IN BEAN CROP, AS SEEN FROM THE AIR  
OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION, BEFORE PROHIBITION, 1907



## Opium

charcoal. To start the pipe a servant sucks on the reed mouth-piece until the pipe is well alight, when he hands it to the smoker, who draws the hashish smoke downwards through the metal pipe into the water, where it is cooled and bubbles up into the half-hollow shell to be drawn up the reed pipe to the smoker. It is important to keep the smoke cool and this is done by having relays of pipes ready and exchanging one for another as soon as the water has got warmed up from the charcoal-heated fumes. Hashish-smoking is nearly always done in company; six or seven men sit round a room and pass the pipe round the circle, each man taking a long pull at it and inhaling the smoke deep into his lungs. As soon as the pipe is finished, a new one is supplied and so on till the company is rolling about with cackling laughter or dozing off into insensibility.

Hashish smoking has been a vice in Egypt from time immemorial, but was formerly confined almost entirely to the rougher elements of the slums of the big cities of Cairo and Alexandria and was rare among the agricultural labourer class of the villages. The drug that nearly killed Egypt was heroin, first introduced into the country in about 1920 by a local chemist. Heroin is an alkaloid derived from the opium poppy. The coagulated milk of the poppy-head, when collected and dried, is called crude opium. This is treated with various chemicals and produces, among other alkaloids, morphine. Morphine is then treated with anhydride of acetic acid and converted into heroin, otherwise called diacetyl morphine. Large quantities of crude opium are also smuggled into Egypt and are consumed by chewing and injecting and not by smoking as in the Far East.

Crude opium was produced in Egypt as elsewhere by ringing the green seed capsule of the poppy plant with a sharp knife and rolling the dry coagulated milk (latex) which oozed out into balls. All opium grown in Egypt was supposed to be exported; in 1926 the cultivation was made illegal. For some years after the prohibition, illegal cultivation was rare and then only practised in small quantities by the fellahin to obtain the dried capsules and the seed, the eating of which had always

## The Drug Traffic

been a popular habit in Upper Egypt ; the seed too was commonly fed, like Mother Seigal's soothing syrup, to recalcitrant babies who refused to go to sleep. Once the anti-drug campaign came into full swing, contraband opium began to command a high price in Egypt and clandestine opium cultivation in Upper Egypt began to be worth its risks.

Practically all Upper Egypt cultivation at that time was on the basin system with large flat areas of country sown mainly with beans. Some of those basins were as big as fifty square miles in extent with only little donkey-broad tracks through them, which were remade yearly as the flood receded and the mud dried. Anyone bold enough to risk defying the law had only to sow a patch of opium poppy in the centre of a two-hundred acre field of beans and it was almost sure to escape detection by police patrols or other authorities riding or driving on the main canal banks. With the full sympathy of the local population for the growers, it was next to impossible for the police to get information on illicit cultivation and budget establishments certainly did not admit of marching an army of police across country in the hopes of finding a patch or two of poppy.

For some years I did not take the thing very seriously, but I began to find that the business was growing in proportion to our preventive successes against imported hashish and heroin. It then struck me that here was a great opportunity for the young Egyptian Army Air Force to combine police work with excellent observer training. A patch of *papaver somniferum* when in full flower is a thing of beauty with its four-foot plants of grey green foliage crowned with pale mauve single flowers ; from the ground no patrol could see it, hidden in a six-foot sea of bean crop : from the air the mass of flowers stood out like a white handkerchief on a dark green carpet. The first year the air patrols located the patches and laboriously plotted in the areas on their maps and half a day later the ground forces of the police would still more laboriously try to locate the areas, and when successful, would destroy the crop and prosecute the owners.

## *Profits and Penalties*

Often in an area that had been flown over, we would find fields of poppy where the owners, to avoid the flying eye, had bent down the poppy stalks and buried the flower heads under a handful of soil with the intention of releasing them as soon as 'the tyranny was overpast'. With practice, however, came experience and our Egyptian Air Force pilots soon developed a technique which was both efficacious and merciful. This was to fly over a likely area until a patch was found and then come down low and fly several times round the patch. This conveyed to the fellah owner that his illicit crop had been discovered and that the police would be upon him in an hour or two and imprisonment follow. Summoning, therefore, all possible help, he quickly tore up his treasured crop before the police could arrive and by doing so punished himself, effected our object and saved us the trouble of prosecuting him.

As the heroin habit grew and the addicts got firmly caught by the vice, the dealers increased their profits by adulterating the heroin to increase its bulk in preference to increasing the price and frightening off their clientele. To be a successful adulterant, a powder must be white, smooth and tasteless and those in most common use were powdered milk, quinine powder and boracic powder, but the smaller pedlars in the slums found even cheaper adulterants than these. An agent got news one day that an old woman in the Khalifa district near the cemeteries was selling heroin to the quarrymen and carters who inhabit that rough district. A raid was carried out and the old lady was found hard at work in her house engaged with pestle and mortar pounding up some hard white substance which to the surprise of the not easily astonished police officer proved to be pieces of human skulls. The lady was poor but of an inventive turn of mind and had found by experiment that of all the bones of the human body, the skull, if treated severely enough, could be crushed into a powder sufficiently fine to mix with the small amount of heroin that she could afford to buy. Living as she did alongside the old cemeteries round the tombs of the Mamluks, she had no difficulty in finding an ample supply of ancient

## *The Drug Traffic*

skulls lying about in these early burying-grounds, and then by the strength of her right arm, in producing a cheap adulterant, apparently not too prickly for the horny nostrils of Khalifa's quarrymen.

One of the features of drug addiction in Egypt was the pathetic desire of so many of the addicts to be cured. Rotten with drugs, they were incapable of breaking off the habit themselves and so long as they could earn or steal a piastre, they spent it on this poison. Scores of times men have walked into police stations and denounced themselves as addicts, producing the drugs from their pockets in proof and begging to be put in prison as being their one chance of getting broken of the habit. I had hopes in the early days of our campaign of persuading the Government to establish treatment centres outside Cairo on the lines of the Lexington Farm in America, but I was not successful and one can understand hesitation to attempt the reformation of, literally, thousands of sufferers from a disease which could only be cured by the ministrations of a specialist in each individual case. All one could do was to consider addiction and possession as a penal offence and condemn the victims to terms of imprisonment sufficiently long to break them completely of the habit before they returned again to their old life and temptation. We were often criticized by the medical authorities in England and Geneva for this apparently brutal treatment of what is really a mental and not a criminal condition, but I feel that, under the circumstances, this treatment was inevitable and even justified by the results it produced. Obviously similar treatment in the case of less primitive people would have been dangerously harsh and in some cases might have had fatal results, but it was not so in the case of these Egyptian working men. Their sufferings during their first few days of total deprivation were certainly acute, but they did not die and in a very short time had ceased to suffer or to crave for drugs.

Another illustration of the lengths that addicts would go to in the hopes of being cured was furnished by the discovery by the doctor-in-charge of the Cairo Anti-rabic hospital that a

## *A Desperate Cure*

number of fellahin from a Delta village, who had all been admitted as suffering from suspected mad dog bite, had in fact not been so bitten but were drug addicts seeking a cure. The true story was that a drug addict in the village had been bitten by a rabid dog and after going through the Anti-rabic treatment in Cairo had returned to his village to find to his joy that all desire for heroin had ceased. Other addicts in the village, in their longing for a similar cure, consulted the village barber who, being an ingenious man, fitted up a dead dog's jaw with a steel spring and at decent intervals furnished his addict clients with the necessary lacerations to prove to the local government doctor that they had been bitten by a dog that must have been mad. Deceived by the clever trick, the doctor had sent them on to the Anti-rabic hospital in Cairo where they had each gone through the painful treatment and returned to their village cured of their desire for drugs and justified in their implicit faith in the 'mad dog hospital'. I believe that a similar technique was once employed by an army sergeant in Lahore, who made a lucrative business of getting men sent on leave to the Pasteur Institute in Paris for treatment for imaginary dog-bite.



## CHAPTER 19

### *THE DRUG BARONS*

THE newly-formed Central Narcotics Intelligence Bureau did not have long to wait to put its theories into practice. My policy was to ignore, for the time being, the local retail traffic and concentrate on tracing to their source in Europe the thousands of kilos of heroin that were pouring in through Egyptian ports. I fully realized that the employment of agents in Europe would land us in heavy expenses and would often directly benefit some European country more than Egypt, but I felt certain that it would be a sound investment and one that would soon pay direct dividends to ourselves. Armed with our charter, we were now in a position to begin to make use of the knowledge we had been steadily accumulating, though hitherto unable to use. Dangerous times needed dangerous methods and a start was made by buying into our service one of the most active of the traffickers. Hashish and opium are known in the trade as 'black' drugs, whereas cocaine, morphine and heroin are 'white'. Of the two it was the white drugs that constituted the major danger to the country and we decided that we could for a time ignore the black drug traffic, if doing so would get us on to the white.

The trafficker in question, though he denied it, dealt in white as well as black and we entered into an unholy pact with him that if he would stop dealing in heroin, we would ignore his black activities in return for definite and productive information about the importers of cocaine and heroin. For a year or so he kept the bargain to our benefit, but soon lapsed into his more profitable white drug dealings and, after due warning, had to be caught and deported.

## *The League at Work*

Our first important arrest was of an Armenian named Zakarian who, under cover of running a carpet shop, was carrying on a large wholesale trade in heroin. He broke down under interrogation and put us on to the line that was eventually to lead to so much. Simultaneously with Zakarian, we were able to arrest his chief carrier, who had specialized in bringing large quantities of drugs from a factory in Switzerland. With this knowledge in our possession, I sent Marc off to Basle and at the same time supplied the Vienna police with Zakarian's statement which implicated a certain dealer of Vienna as one of his sources of supply. The very full and able inquiries of the Vienna police and the Swiss authorities proved that the main supply of drugs came from an alkaloid factory in Switzerland and another still larger one in France. Inquiries quickly showed the large extent of the business and I realized that we were up against a vast and rich international organization of the most formidable nature, with the prospect before us of having to fight huge political and financial interests. Dealings between the Swiss factory and Zakarian showed individual bank drafts of as much as £16,000 and £24,000, but we were to see bigger figures still when we got further into the French factory business.

From Switzerland, Marc followed the trail to the factory in France and succeeded in getting access to the Customs and factory registers. He eventually obtained from the Paris authorities an official statement showing that 7,500 kilogrammes, i.e., 7½ tons of narcotics had been exported from that factory in four years and that in one year alone it had sold 4,350 kilogrammes of heroin. It has been calculated by the responsible section of the League of Nations that the legitimate medical and scientific needs of heroin for the world in one year are about 2,000 kilos or two tons, and here was one single factory able, without contravening its national laws, to pour out in one year two and a half times the world's legitimate requirements.

International police inquiries soon began to show the main lines of an enormous traffic from Central Europe to the principal Mediterranean ports and the outstanding fact that, anyhow in

## *The Drug Barons*

Switzerland, the traffic was being made possible and free from risk by the rigidity of the national drug regulations which forbade the traffic in certain named drugs but did not cover exactly similar drugs made from the same raw material under a slightly different formula and given a different trade name. In France it was much the same with, in addition, the point of view that so long as narcotic drugs were exported out of France, it did not concern the authorities to what destination they were consigned or to what usage they were put.

By the winter of 1929 our confidential reports to Sir Malcolm Delevingne had been circulated confidentially to all members of the Advisory Committee at Geneva and it was obvious to everybody that the facts they contained were of the utmost importance and must be examined officially by the Committee. After some manoeuvring to obtain universal consent, the reports were circulated officially to all members and a decision was taken to invite the Egyptian Government to send a representative to attend the next meeting of the Advisory Committee. The Egyptian Government accepted the invitation and decided that, as Director of the Anti-Narcotics Bureau, I should represent them. Egypt not yet being a Member of the League, my terms of reference were thus worded: "To take part in the discussions concerning the traffic in narcotics in so far as they affect Egypt." With this wide mandate I arrived at Geneva in time for the 13th session.

On January 27th, 1930, I made my statement. I was extremely nervous at this my first appearance before the Advisory Committee. Determined to expose the facts, I knew I should be treading on dangerous ground. Untrained in Geneva etiquette, I was saved, however, from having to deliver a too personal assault by a subterfuge which served me well on this and other occasions. Before leaving Egypt, I had presented a full report to the Minister of the Interior in Cairo on the work of the Narcotics Bureau for 1929, of which copies were taken to Geneva for distribution *à titre d'information* to State Members and Press, and thus I was able to bring to their notice in this purely depart-

## *Straight Talk at Geneva*

mental report facts which could not be brought forward directly before the Committee.

The effect of my written and verbal exposure was two-fold on many members of the Committee, one immediate and the other delayed. The immediate reaction was shock that anyone at Geneva should have the temerity to wag the finger of accusation at any country or any person by name. I was told afterwards by a very senior representative that "*un pays quelconque*" or "*un monsieur tel, Monsieur X ou Monsieur Y*" was as far as anyone could possibly go at the League in identification for blame. The delayed reaction was a speedy tightening up of anti-narcotic legislation by Switzerland and a partial rectification by France with a general determination by delinquent countries not to be similarly exposed another year at these public meetings at Geneva.

By a judicious selection of agents in foreign countries, the Bureau was soon being supplied with first-class information on the organization of the traffic in Europe and of the actual movements of big consignments destined for Egypt. More and more evidence was now accumulating that Istanbul was quickly replacing Central Europe as the centre of the drug traffic and had become the source of all the heroin reaching Egypt. Traders were beginning to find things unhealthy in their old haunts in Central Europe, while conditions in Turkey struck their fancy as being particularly favourable to their interests. Here was a country with a large legitimate crop of the best-class opium in the world. The Turkish Government was not tied up, as others were, with the international conventions of Geneva whereby narcotic drugs could only be exported to a foreign country on receipt of an import permit from that country. Finally Turkey had a wide seaboard which facilitated clandestine shipping.

\*In February, 1931, I again attended the Advisory Committee at Geneva and had the unpleasant task of exposing the facts about Turkey. It was rendered easier in one way by the fact that the Turkish Government had already stated that in the first six months of 1930 she had exported abroad two tons of morphine

## The Drug Barons

and four tons of heroin, but it was not so pleasant to have to explain that what she considered to be legitimate export, we, at the League, considered illegitimate. The discussion was rather animated, but the facts were clear, and in the same autumn I got permission from my Government to go in further pursuit of the subject to Istanbul and Ankara where Ismet Pasha received me in the most friendly and hospitable manner. From that date the fate of Istanbul as a centre of the illicit drug traffic was sealed. It lay with the American Minister to Turkey to bring the state of affairs to the direct notice of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who at once realized that not only was Istanbul becoming a menace to the health of the world but also that local addiction was spreading among the officer class of his own army.

Mustafa Kemal ordered the Turkish Government to close down the three big factories and introduced new and vigorous legislation against drug trafficking. Some of the manufacturers, not knowing for the moment where to go, thought they would be safe for a time in certain of the foreign concessions in China and quickly transferred machinery and personnel to that new home. This in turn was shown up at Geneva and the Foreign Powers concerned found themselves again exposed to the glaring search-light of public opinion thrown upon them at the League. One of the essentials for successful business was, of course, to be within easy reach of the raw material, that is opium, while the other *sine qua non* was to select a country where anti-narcotic laws were either non-existent or not enforced. It did not take them long to decide that Bulgaria was the ideal country and within a few months four factories were hard at work, of which the most important was one near Sofia, owned by an influential Bulgarian. The shares of the company were equally divided between a Bulgarian group and a Turkish group. Among the smaller but useful contacts of the latter was the manager of a conserve factory in Istanbul of whose existence we had become aware in 1929, when the Egyptian Customs seized sixty-two kilos of opium, concealed in tins of preserved fruits shipped by

## *The International Gangs*

his company to Egypt. This Bulgarian factory started work at the beginning of October, 1931, and in the first two months turned out 1,500 kilos of heroin which was smuggled out in double-bottomed trunks into Germany and France en route to Hamburg for the American market, and to Marseilles for Egypt and the Far East. A ton and a half in two months is 750 kilos per month and a kilo provides 250,000 medical doses, so this factory was supplying 187 million shots of heroin per month or a double dose for 3 million addicts per day. The C.N.I.B. was able to obtain full details of the working of this factory, including photographs of the laboratories and the annual balance sheet showing the quantities of raw material purchased and heroin exported. At the League meeting in May, I produced these damning documents, with the result that the factories were closed by the Bulgarian Government and the manufacturers again found themselves on the run.

Early in 1931 there existed in Paris a very big organization for the export of white drugs to the Far East and America. The group was headed by a Greek. One of the group fell out with his principals and to spite them informed against them to the French Authorities. The American Narcotic Service were paying particular attention at this time to Central Europe and they quickly picked up the information given to the French and informed the British, Dutch and American Authorities. One of the first facts ascertained by the American Service in this very complicated case was that the group in Paris had received, in the first eight months of 1931, drafts for £250,000 from a partner in Tientsin who, inquiries in Tientsin showed, was a well-known wholesale trafficker in drugs, established in the French International Concession.

While these inquiries into the activities of the Paris group were going on, the Berlin police were busy interesting themselves in the movements of an American national named August Del Gracio whom they suspected of being a drug trafficker but who so far was not known to be connected with the Greeks. On receipt of information that this Del Gracio was due to arrive

## *The Drug Barons*

in Berlin from Istanbul by the Simplon Express on November 30th, 1931, the Berlin police arrested him on the train at the frontier and were fortunate enough to seize with him certain papers which he was trying unsuccessfully to hide under some newspapers as they entered his compartment. With him on the train was another notorious drug trafficker, a Turk resident in Istanbul, who was also arrested. Examination of the papers found with them enabled the Berlin police to seize two hundred and fifty kilogrammes of morphine cubes in a certain warehouse in the free port of Hamburg, whose owner stated that the goods belonged to one Karl Franck, a Russian subject. Further investigation proved that the goods had arrived in Hamburg via Prague in eight cases containing machine parts. The story of the buying and selling of those two hundred and fifty kilos is a romance of its own and will be told later on.

Among the papers found on Del Gracio were some from a notorious drug trafficker, a Belgian subject, part owner of a drug factory on the shore of the Bosphorus opposite Istanbul and recently expelled from Turkey for complicity in a case where four cases of narcotics were seized in diplomatic baggage on the Simplon express.

Up to this point there had been nothing in the Berlin inquiry to connect Del Gracio with the Paris group, but now a chance paper was found among those seized with Del Gracio bearing the word 'ATSOK'. This code word was found to be the telegraphic address of a woman living in Berlin with a certain Afghan national. He was arrested, and on his house being searched an account book was found showing that he was an employee of the Paris group and recording the sending of a large number of telegrams to various destinations. These telegrams were traced by the Berlin police but many of them were in a code that could not be read. Some of the telegrams from the Afghan disclosed the fact that the group had experienced the loss of a consignment of drugs at Tientsin in October, 1931, and it was possible to identify this with the seizure made by the Chinese Maritime Customs on October 23rd of that year,

## *The Key*

of seventy-two kilos of heroin packed in three wardrobe trunks and despatched from Hamburg on the S.S. *Havelland*.

While the German investigations were going on, the head of the group paid a visit to London, where he was kept under close observation until March 4th, when he crossed over to Holland and telephoned to a cover address in Paris that he was proceeding to Switzerland. Before his departure, the Rotterdam police were kept informed and they in their turn passed the news on to Berlin, with the result that he was arrested at Mannheim, while travelling to Lausanne. There was insufficient evidence, however, to convict him of smuggling and he was released.

Meanwhile in Cairo we had received a cable from the British consular authorities in Tientsin saying that the partner had left Tientsin for Port Said en route for Athens. This gentleman duly arrived and was subjected to close supervision. From Port Said he continued his journey by train to Alexandria, where he stayed a fortnight and eventually booked a passage to Athens on a Rumanian steamer. While in Alexandria he kept very much to himself and passed his time having a few flutters on the Exchange. When he had taken train from Port Said to Alexandria, he had left his heavy baggage in bond to follow by goods train to Alexandria where the Bureau and the Customs officials conducted a thorough search of this baggage as if on suspicion of illicit export of gold. There was no gold but there were some extremely interesting papers, more valuable to us than gold or rubies, in the shape of a code-book and a pocket-book. The pocket-book was a perfect 'Who's Who' to the contraband trade and gave the key to the code which he was using in his telegrams to the Paris group and others. These documents were abstracted without the owner's knowledge.

The British and the German authorities were at once informed of this lucky find, and with this key the secrets of many of the documents seized in Germany were unlocked. This code is perhaps the most illuminating document ever seized in connection with the illicit drug traffic. It contained a list of names of



## *The Drug Barons*

members of the gang in Europe, and a list of names of members of the gangs in China and Japan, as also names of various firms well known to us or suspected by us to be suppliers of drugs to the illicit traffic, and those of transport agents whose names had in the past appeared in many reported cases of smuggling. Then followed code numbers for opium and the various drugs and for apparatus for the extraction of the alkaloids and for transforming one into another. Then came a list of shipping lines and code numbers for Mühlhausen, Uskub, Chang-Tchow and Tako Bar. The various forms of deceptive telegrams for misleading the authorities were interesting. In certain cases the word 'Dipl' was added to instructions *re* shipping routes. This obviously was an abbreviation for 'Diplomatic', and pointed to what was a frequent method of cover in the transport of drugs.

To revert for a moment to the partner and his baggage, the full story of his discovery of the loss of his papers is not without humour. Jays Bey, who was directing the operations that led to the seizure of the code and diary, was anxious to have a record of the man's reactions when in due time he should realize his loss. He therefore selected a very astute agent of Greek extraction (whom we will call Sotiris), who took passage for Athens on the same boat and established himself in a near cabin. The day was hot and steamy, the formalities never-ending and the boat crowded. At last the gangways were up, the steamer under way and a gentle breeze blew in through the port-holes. Our agent decided that this would be the moment that his fellow traveller would choose to unpack his light baggage and in so doing discover his loss. Sotiris therefore started the first act of his play by noisily throwing his luggage about, ringing for the steward, shouting down the passage and copying in every way the behaviour of an extremely irate passenger.

Quite soon the traveller reacted, knocked on Sotiris' door and begged him politely to make less noise, as he had had a tiring morning and was lying down for a little rest before midday lunch. Our man proffered his excuses but pleaded justification

## *Crooks Unlimited*

for his wrath as he indignantly displayed the condition in which the Egyptian Customs had left his baggage—everything higgledy piggledy—shirts all unfolded, shoes out of their bags, and ties, socks and collars chucked in anyhow. It really was too bad to be treated like this by a confounded lot of Customs men and on such a hot day too. In reply the traveller said that he entirely agreed with everything that his irate neighbour had to say about the Egyptian Customs as, not only had they treated his baggage in a similar manner but, the dirty thieves, had actually stolen some important papers that he had thoughtlessly left in a suitcase. Anyhow, there it was and the best thing to do was to forget about it and come up to the bar for a couple of glasses of iced beer.

Mutual troubles having thus made a ship's friendship, Sotiris spent the rest of the voyage to Greece sedulously cultivating the other man's acquaintance. Yes, he said, he was Greek by birth, but had not been there for years, having gone out to South America as a young man and made a modest fortune. Now he was returning to settle down in the land of his fathers but with no fixed plans and so far no one to advise him how best to invest his superfluous money. The traveller soon recognized a kindred spirit in our talkative agent and before the ship had reached Piræus had confided to his rich friend that there was no better way of investing his money than in the white drug traffic, in which he held a prominent position and could quote him quite exceptional terms. With promises of speedy reunion our man bade him farewell and took the same boat back to Alexandria to report to the police on the trafficker's reactions to his losses.

In August I received a letter from the head of the Paris group who was on bail from Holland in Athens, to the effect that he wished for an opportunity to make a statement in his own defence. I therefore sent Marc Bey to Athens and a full and lengthy statement was taken from him in the presence of the American Anti-Narcotic Officer from Paris whom I had asked to go there.

## *The Drug Barons*

This statement was full and detailed but, being the statement of an accused man, could not be taken as gospel truth : at the same time it was obviously not apocryphal. It divided itself into two parts, one, the history, past and present, of the world's wholesale drug traffic and the other, the system of payment and protection which made it possible to work on a grand scale. Obviously this second part was not for reproduction but, coming as it did at the time of the Stavisky and Juge Prince murder scandals in France, I passed it on *à titre d'information* to the French Minister in Cairo, but with what results we never knew.

I have referred earlier to the seizure of two hundred and fifty kilos of morphine by the German police in the port of Hamburg. His account of this was probably near the truth, though it must be remembered that he was trying to exculpate himself from any suspicion of share in it. After all, it was a minor operation compared to many of the deals that he admitted to and he found it galling to be accused of a minor operation which had been bungled through the bad technique of others. According to him, a consignment of 400 to 500 kilos of morphine cubes was ordered in 1930 by the well-known trafficker, Del Gracio (known to his friends as 'Little Augi'), from the factory on the Bosphorus, run by the Belgian. Del Gracio paid in dollars and ordered the drugs to be packed in cases containing machine parts. The Belgian promised Del Gracio to dispatch this quantity of drugs through Hamburg to New York, but what he really intended to do was to extract the drugs from the cargo and send only the machine parts to America and in case of being accused by Del Gracio of cheating, to pretend that the stuff had been stolen en route. To make everything easy, the Belgian arranged with the Istanbul manager of a forwarding agency which had the right to send goods across Europe in bond, to despatch the eight cases of drugs and machine parts to a man called Karl Franck at Hamburg. Karl Franck was not admitted into the real plans but was merely instructed to take the drugs out and to try to find American buyers for them : this done,

## *No Honour among Thieves*

he was to repack the machinery parts, send them to America and hand over the bill of lading to Del Gracio.

On receipt of the goods, Karl Franck looked about for a purchaser of the drugs and consulted a fellow trafficker who, by chance, thought of Del Gracio as a likely buyer. When Del Gracio was given specifications of quantities and quality of the goods for sale, he was naturally intrigued with the similarity between the consignment offered to him and the one he was expecting from the Belgian. He therefore went off to Hamburg where his suspicions were confirmed and he found that he was being asked to buy his own property. He did not betray his discovery in Hamburg but returned to Istanbul and tackled the Belgian who was clever enough to wriggle out of it by telling Del Gracio that his lot of drugs and machinery had not yet started from Istanbul and showing him another lot that was being got ready. Del Gracio had to accept this explanation, but was not convinced and consulted others of the fraternity in Istanbul, with the result that he was given an introduction to a certain Afghan in Berlin and left for that city, only to be arrested, as already related, by the German police, as was also the Afghan.

In the first part of his statement, the Greek recounted the activities of the rival groups in Istanbul, the organization of the China drug market, the different methods of obtaining cover and the gradual development of a new sideline in the business, started by a man he named who organized small runs of drugs and then informed on them to the Government for the sake of the rewards. From this they developed a better line still which consisted in blackmailing the drug factories who had to keep them sweet with occasional gifts of quantities of drugs.

The group had in its employ a tough named Carbone Ventura, a Corsican, who had been expelled by us from Egypt in 1924 as a white-slave trafficker : this gentleman was given the role of chief gunman of the gang but history does not relate that he ever used this weapon, he being probably more familiar with the knife. I remember in 1933 when I was due to attend the Annual Advisory Committee on Drugs at Geneva, that I thought

## *The Drug Barons*

it prudent to send Marc ahead to have a look round the town to see who, among our friends the traffickers, might be there in attendance. It had been noticed several times before that gentlemen of the trade attended the public sessions of our Committee, no doubt to get an idea of how prices would rule in the future. Marc replied that he had just managed to catch his connection the same evening for Geneva and had been thankful to do so, as he had found the whole Cannebière en fête on the occasion of the release from imprisonment of Carbone Ventura who, as king of the Marseilles underworld, had been arrested for suspected complicity in the murder of Juge Prince. As it was Marc himself who had got him deported from Cairo as a white-slave trafficker, his wish not to dally in Marseilles can be easily understood.

The Greek was extremely interesting on the quarrels in the trade and also on the methods adopted in the case of important consignments. He explained that groups of his size did not go in for conjuring tricks, that was left to the small fry ; their method was simpler : they merely bought a road by investing a few thousand pounds each journey in bribing customs and police officers the whole way from factory to destination. One of the methods employed by a group whose chief buyer was Del Gracio for getting goods into the U.S.A. was to send them to their New York associates in the baggage of a gentleman of the name of Carlos Fernandez Bacula, at one time Peruvian Chargé d'Affaires in Vienna and later in Oslo. Bacula possessed that priceless document, a diplomatic passport. It is said that during six different trips to New York via Miami, Montreal and other ports of entry, Bacula, who was usually accompanied by one of the gang, brought in no less than a ton and a half of heroin.

On one of those visits, it is said, Bacula was putting up at a New York hotel, having in his baggage a consignment of 150 kilos of heroin that he had brought over under the protection of his diplomatic passport to sell on behalf of Joseph Raskin, the notorious one-time king of the Vienna traffickers. Through

## *Old Lags*

one of his gang, Bacula sent 50 of the 150 kilos to be delivered to a purchaser, retaining the balance as a guarantee for the payment of his rake-off. His messenger returned to the hotel shortly afterwards, bleeding and bandaged, and declared that he had been held up and robbed of the drugs. Shortly afterwards Bacula received a visit from the well-known celebrity of New York's underworld, Jack Diamond, who was later to be put on the same spot where he had put so many others. Jack Diamond assured Bacula that he could recover the stolen 50 kilos and he actually did bring 30, but explained that he had had to sacrifice the remaining 20. Bacula was now getting alarmed for the safety of his 130 kilos. He was not finding his diplomatic passport much good to him in the underworld society of New York. He agreed, therefore, with Jack Diamond that they should be taken to the Central Hotel at 673 Broadway and left there in charge of what Jack described as one of his trusted lieutenants, who, as a matter of fact, unbeknown to Bacula, had been sent by Raskin from Vienna to keep a watch on Bacula. Next day the 'lieutenant' was found dead in the hotel with his wrists slashed and there was no sign of the drugs.

By the end of the inquiry, thanks to the patient piecing together of the jig-saw puzzle by Perrins of the Home Office, Anslinger of Washington, Sirks of Rotterdam and Commissioner Thomas of Berlin, I was able to compare ourselves to an aviator flying above the clouds and trying to make out the country lying below him. As I wrote at the time :

occasional gaps in the clouds gave a glimpse now and then but it is only now that the clouds have rolled away and a clear panorama has been spread out beneath us. We can now see where the rivers rise in the mountains and wind their way to the lakes and oceans : our geographical drug map is clear, the countries of raw material, the manufacturing centres, the railroads and sea routes, the ports of departure and the ports of destination, all stand out. Not only so, but we can also see where rivers and roads have been and have been abandoned. Just as a landslide or an earthquake may alter the course of a river, in the same way some "show up" at Geneva or some new

## *The Drug Barons*

legislation, due to an awakening of a national conscience, has put obstacles in the way of the dope stream and has dried it up or forced it to seek a new channel.

A local non-Egyptian named Elie Chaskes was one of those determined drug traffickers who could not for long resist the tempting profits of the trade. He was arrested in Cairo in 1925 and sentenced to a year's imprisonment for being in possession of two parcels of books, containing heroin concealed in the thickness of their covers, which had been sent to him through the post from Vienna. After his release in 1926 he set up business as a perfume agent and for a time kept out of the traffic. In December, 1929, however, he came to the Bureau's notice again as dealing in drugs on a large scale: other suspects were observed frequenting his shop and on April 3rd, 1930, he was arrested with four packets of heroin weighing one kilo in his possession while another kilo was found in his bedroom. Under interrogation as to the origin of the drugs, he mentioned the name of a certain Joshua Friedman who, he said, was sending drugs to Egypt from Vienna and stated that it was this same Friedman who in 1925 had sent him the parcel of books containing heroin, for which he had been arrested and imprisoned. Chaskes confessed that he had been introduced to Friedman by another Palestinian of Russian origin named Glickman, living in the Cairo suburbs, and that the two kilos now found in his possession had been purchased a few days previously from Glickman at the rate of £E67 per kilo, a sample of which had been handed over to him in the street in a basket of oranges near the Ezbekiya Gardens and the rest in his house at Shubra.

Glickman was already on the records of the Bureau as a drug trafficker and he was therefore arrested after his house had been unsuccessfully searched. He categorically denied all knowledge of Chaskes or Friedman. The interrogation of Chaskes was then completed, as was also that of his wife, who stated that Glickman was constantly coming to their house in spite of her protests to her husband, as she knew that he was dealing in drugs. Close cross-examination of Glickman and confrontation

## *In the Bag*

with Chaskes and his wife soon broke him down and he wrote out a lengthy confession of everything, according to himself, that he knew about the drug traffic. Of immediate importance was his statement that Friedman of Vienna was actually in Egypt at that moment, that he was preparing to sail from Alexandria for Trieste on the following day and that he was in possession of an Egyptian *laissez-passer*. An officer was immediately sent to Alexandria where he obtained a photograph of Friedman from the application form used in applying for a *laissez-passer* and, on searching the ship, identified him among the passengers. On being asked for his name and papers, Friedman gave the name of Seyon and produced a passport made out in that name on Jerusalem with visas of the Austrian Consul in that city. On the grounds of passport irregularities, Friedman was invited to step ashore, was taken to Cairo and closely cross-examined. For a long time he adopted the tactics of complete denial, but had to come into line once he was confronted with Chaskes and Glickman.

One morning Friedman asked for an officer to come to see him in his cell and tearfully made a lengthy confession, most of which was subsequently proved to be true. Putting the three confessions of Chaskes, Glickman and Friedman together, it was possible to reconstruct their methods of smuggling and the identity of their accomplices sufficiently clearly to warrant my sending Marc to Vienna. The result of his visit was that the Vienna police worked the case up in its smallest details, arrested a number of persons and eventually obtained convictions and the maximum penalties applicable under the Austrian law. These were so inadequate that public opinion in Austria was loud in its condemnation of this leniency which was making their capital city into the centre of world distribution of narcotic drugs.

The ramifications of the retail trade were fully brought out in the inquiry and filled our index, and in good time our prisons, with a crowd of petty retailers while Chaskes, Glickman and Friedman as the principals were each sentenced by the Cairo



## *The Drug Barons*

Courts to five years' imprisonment with hard labour and £E1,000 fine each.

Four years later at Geneva I was pestered by the wife of Friedman, who told a pitiful tale of herself and family starving in Switzerland and begged me to get her husband released from his imprisonment.

According to the Egyptian prison code a prisoner sentenced for crime can be released if of good conduct on the expiration of three-quarters of the sentence. This favour, however, was always refused to persons sentenced for drug trafficking.

Mrs. Friedman told such a piteous tale that I prevailed upon the Director-General of Prisons to exercise his powers of clemency and Friedman was released after serving three-quarters of his sentence, only to revert to trafficking within a short time of his release and to again be sentenced to a term of penal servitude.

The inquiries into this case in Vienna and Cairo occupied several months and from it our tree of knowledge of the contraband traffic spread and flourished greatly. An outstanding feature brought out in the confessions of the various accused seemed to me to be the uneasy life they led: unable to trust their fellows, unsure of agreed prices, facing risks of robbery en route, worried by constant rumours of police raids and by the unfair competition of such privileged rascals as Fernandez Bacula, the Peruvian diplomat.

By 1939 we had seen the Drug Barons chased from Switzerland and France, then from Turkey, the foreign settlements of China and lastly from Bulgaria. One country only was left to them and there, I hope and believe, they met with bigger rogues than themselves. Japanese-occupied China soon became, and continued to be, the only country of the world where the increase of drug addiction was a studied government policy. Year after year at Geneva we had to listen to the specious talk of the Japanese delegate: year after year the American delegation and the C.N.I.B. gave chapter and verse showing the state of things in Manchukuo and China north of the wall, but to no effect. Japan had decided upon heroin addiction as a weapon of aggres-

## *Japan Poisons China*

sion and deliberately converted the territories she conquered from China into one huge opium farm and heroin den.

What she did in the war years in the other territories and countries she occupied is now being revealed. One thing, which is quite certain, is that she allowed no competition in the trade from the Drug Barons of Europe. These gentlemen's speciality was export, which, thanks to the war, became impossible. I can only hope that before they were defeated, many of the Japanese officials had themselves become addicts and had suffered some of the misery that they had created for others. Now that the war is finished and victory won, we can leave China to deal with the Japanese poisoners who have deliberately ruined so many of her peasants: their methods will be drastic but the punishment will fit the crime.

## CHAPTER 20

### TRICKS OF THE TRADE

A THING that has always struck me about the drug traffickers in Egypt and Europe was their lack of spirit as compared with the fraternity in America. From all that I was told by American police and narcotic officers, when over there in 1923 and subsequently, it is clear that gang discipline in the States was extremely severe and spilling the beans or any disloyalty by a member of a gang brought quick retribution by knife or gun. The Levantine drug smugglers, on the contrary, were a low class crowd with little toughness or discipline among them. Double-crossers and squealers for the most part, they soon viewed each other with so much mutual distrust that the business became seriously affected. No doubt there were cases of discipline that we never heard of, but in all those years I never came across any example of anyone being put on the spot, as would have quickly happened to him in the States.

I have little respect for the dope traffickers. Had they possessed any enterprise, they could have easily removed me, Baker Bey, Marc Bey or any of us, but they simply hadn't the courage to do so. Shadowing, with occasional blackmail, of course, they tried, but it was done more to discover one's contacts than to intimidate one.

An instance occurred in Istanbul during one of my visits there. I found myself being persistently followed; whether the party so interested in me was police or trafficker I never discovered, but I got rid of him eventually by doubling on him at a street corner and bumping him full in the chest. Another time, while at Geneva, I had trouble with a would-be agent from Istanbul who, in spite of my office's earlier refusal to employ

## *Blackmail and False Bottoms*

him, came to Geneva to force himself upon me, suggesting that he was on intimate terms with the Turkish Delegation and could therefore spy on them for my benefit. Not wishing to be seen in his company, I unwisely wrote him a note of refusal, the consequences of which were a lesson to me never to put anything on paper when dealing with such persons. Eventually the gentleman was induced to remove his inconvenient presence from Geneva for a small money payment, but started blackmailing me on his arrival at Istanbul by demanding a further sum of money to enable him to recover from the police his baggage which had been seized for non-payment of his hotel bill and which unfortunately contained my letter to him. The matter was eventually liquidated by my chief agent in Istanbul, who recovered the letter with the help of a friendly hotel proprietor at a considerable cost to my secret service funds ; no doubt the matter could have been dealt with much more efficiently had my bulldog Marc been with me at Geneva.

In the wide and spacious days of the Paris-Greek group, the heyday of the Drug Barons, no very great ingenuity was used to disguise the goods in transit. They certainly were not openly labelled with their true description, but it had not yet become necessary to use the conjuring tricks of later times and the consigners trusted for safe delivery to wholesale and generous bribery. The Hamburg case, where five hundred kilos of heroin were concealed in machinery parts for a voyage to America, was in those days about the only big case of camouflage with which we had anything to do ; for the rest the goods were simply made up in ordinary packing cases with false declarations of contents. Of a dozen or so of such cases, one or two perhaps would contain the drugs and bear a secret mark which the accomplices in the Customs of the country of destination would recognize, and escort the consignment safely through the formalities without inspection.

It was all very easy for the dealers, when the value of consignments ran into thousands of pounds, with a capital of hundreds of thousands behind the sellers ; a road was bought

## *Tricks of the Trade*

and the goods were safe. After those big organizations had been broken up, the consigners had to use their brains to invent good cover. The quantities still were large, and for a time the wardrobe trunk with a false bottom was the favourite method of transport. The Customs searchers, however, soon learned by experience and the careful use of the calipers and the centimetre measure, what should be the normal thickness of a trunk's sides and quickly spotted any unusual dimensions. We have a saying that everybody can run contraband once, which is very true. After all, neither Governments nor Customs want to hold up passengers and tourist traffic for long hours while they search every piece of baggage. But repeated travel by an individual on the same route, especially when he is of a certain type and has come through a particular port, are points that draw the attention of the intelligent Customs official. Even then, blind searching of baggage and goods without information to work on is a wearisome and unproductive business.

As the big dope gangs prospered, others wished to enter the business and share the profits, but it was not too easy without big capital. The smaller groups, like fish attracted by the smell, swam about near the dope factories of Europe to pick up what information they could and soon developed a good system of blackmailing the big fish. Sometimes they would demand cash for their silence or sometimes a proportion of drugs for their own trafficking, but the cost of this racket grew and was a contributory cause to the eventual break-up of the big gangs. This was where most Continental police forces were handicapped and where countries such as England, the United States, Canada and Egypt, who meant business and were prepared to pay the cost, found no difficulty in finding agents in the countries and ports of origin, who in return for reasonable payments and fair handling, were willing to supply information of drug shipments. Naturally many who offered their services were bogus and all of them without exception were rogues, but after all, we did not expect to find Sunday-school teachers behind the scenes in the drug traffic, nor could we always expect to get 100 per cent.

## Tinned Milk

return for money invested. On the whole the agents played the game pretty well, their motives as also their subsequent security being no business of ours so long as their information was valuable.

The best hunting grounds for our agents were seaports like Piræus and Istanbul. We were particularly fortunate in our choice of agents in Istanbul in 1930 when a factory on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus was the source and origin of all the contraband morphine and heroin that was pouring into Egypt. The factory had its own quay and landing-stage, besides access from the land. The Bosphorus being always full of small boat traffic, an extra boat or two caused no comment, and one day our agent from his boat was able to watch a motor-boat discharge a number of heavy bags at the factory and load up with fifteen wooden cases which it discharged eventually into an empty warehouse in Galata. Confidential inquiries established the certainty that these cases contained heroin and a constant watch was kept on the warehouse. Four days later the occupants of the warehouse were seen to take in sixty brand-new four-gallon petroleum tins and were heard starting work behind closed doors. The next day seven hundred and fifty kilos of lactose, or sugar of milk, were purchased from an Istanbul druggist and taken into the warehouse, to be followed the next day by four tinsmiths who worked until dark in soldering up the tins. Everything completed, the next morning the fifteen packing cases containing the tins had their serial numbers painted on them and were conveyed by road to another landing-stage and thence by motor-boat to a steamship of an Italian line. By now our agent had established the identity of the owner of the goods, as also of four of his associates who had continually visited the warehouse into which they were admitted on giving four distinctive knocks on the door.

Our agent then sent us a telegram to Cairo giving the dimensions of the fifteen cases, their identification marks and the fact that they were entered on the ship's manifest as '*sucre de lait avarié*' and were manifested 'Naples to order'. Upon receipt

## *Tricks of the Trade*

of that information, the Bureau got into touch with the Italian authorities, who cabled the captain of the steamer to warn him of the contents of the cases and to the Naples police to keep them under observation and arrest whoever would come to collect them. Evidently, however, someone had been warned and as no one in Naples turned up for ten days to take consignment of the goods, the cases were opened by the police and customs, seven out of the fifteen being found to contain eighty-four kilos of heroin. This would, no doubt, have later been shipped to Egypt, where it would have fetched £E120 the kilo to the importer. As it was, thanks to the smart work of our Istanbul agent, £E10,000 worth of drugs was destroyed.

All the best seizures in our ports of entry were made on information from our foreign agents. Sometimes it was hashish and at other times the much more valuable heroin. Hashish is bulky and has a strong smell which must be disguised by packing it in such stronger scented consignments as pine powder, which is used in tanning. Otherwise it has to be in hermetically sealed containers such as the imitation mill-stones from Istanbul. Heroin, on the other hand, is small in bulk, has no smell to betray it but has to be carefully excluded from air and damp. Consignments of tinned fruit, vegetables, butter, tomato sauce, glucose, oil and other commodities were often found to contain, tins of heroin. A lot of hard work and trouble was wasted by the smugglers in one case when a consignment of sacks of prunes had been landed on the quay at Alexandria. A passing porter noticed that a sack was torn and picked up a prune to eat, when to his surprise he found that the stone had been replaced by a lump of hashish. This led to the seizure of forty kilos of drug thus disguised in the fourteen sacks.

A clever ruse where the dope passed through the Customs before we got our information (though we eventually proved the case) was that employed by a man from Vienna who had been importing quantities of stearite wax as for his candle factory. Calculating from the tins of heroin and the quantity of broken blocks of wax that we seized in his store rooms, we

## *Hollow Millstones*

were able to prove that each block of stearite wax had been moulded round a tin containing one kilogramme of 74 per cent. pure heroin and that by this trick he had smuggled in a hundred and twenty-six kilos of the drug to a value of £E11,700.

Another trick from Vienna which succeeded for some time before being discovered was the importing into Egypt of several hundred water-closet seats which had had their back-boards hollowed out and filled with heroin, as also the floor-boards of wooden weighing machines.

One of the most cleverly thought-out devices was employed in the case of the six false millstones. These were made in Istanbul by a Dutch specialist. He first made a mould of a millstone, set in it a wire frame to which he attached about a hundred air-tight tins of hashish and opium and then filled the mould with cement. When ribbed and slatted these sham stones would have passed the Alexandria Customs with ease, had we not had previous knowledge of their dispatch from Istanbul. That was actually a trial run by the smugglers. Had they succeeded in passing the comparatively cheap hashish and opium, they would then have used the same cover to pass several thousand pounds worth of heroin.

Some amusement was afforded the Alexandria Bureau in unmasking a group of male and female smugglers who in connivance with certain cabin stewards visited a ship in harbour, disguised as monks and nuns, and were arrested coming ashore with packets of heroin attached to their nether limbs. The joke was that the leader of the gang had approached a man, who happened to be our agent, to find him a suitable girl to play one of the nuns' part. By finding him just the girl he wanted, we were able to keep in touch with all the gang's preparations, though things became rather complicated by the leader trying to get engaged to be married to our girl.

At one time considerable quantities of hashish and opium were brought in on the Palestine railways' goods trains. This was done by railway men removing the greasepads from the axle boxes and filling the cavities with slabs of drugs. As for



## *Tricks of the Trade*

the smaller smugglers there was nothing with a hollow in it that they did not try out. Cattle boats from Syria threw overboard carcasses of dead sheep with their bellies filled with hashish to be picked up by confederates at certain spots on the coast. Ships' stewards sent ashore dead chickens with their crops filled and dock hands concealed metal and rubber containers in the most unlikely places of their bodies.

Small employees of foreign legations sometimes abused their diplomatic privilege in order to run drugs. Such cases were most difficult to deal with as the unsuccessful search of diplomatic baggage landed a zealous Customs officer or policeman in serious trouble.

One day in 1930 we got news from abroad that a certain diplomat who was shortly returning from foreign leave had in his service a chauffeur who intended to smuggle into the country a quantity of heroin in his master's baggage which would of course pass through the Customs unsearched. We sent a polite warning to the diplomat while his ship was still in the outer harbour and later received an acknowledgement from him and an assurance that he had searched his chauffeur's baggage with negative results. We, however, were not satisfied, kept our eyes open and soon heard that the chauffeur had safely landed a quantity of heroin and was looking for buyers. Our agent got into touch with him but went too fast and handed over £E300 for 3½ kilos without giving us the chance of effecting the arrest as planned. After a decent interval the same agent approached him again to bring off the purchase of twelve kilos still unsold. We soon found that we had a very cautious customer to deal with and that the stuff was always carried to would-be purchasers in his master's diplomatic car, which from our point of view was just as extraterritorial as his legation. We realized that to make an arrest with cast-iron proof we must be able to prove that the car which carried the goods had never been out of our sight or contacted anyone from the moment it left the legation garage till the goods were handed over to our agent and the arrest made. This involved following the car,

## *Lambros*

which obviously could not be done in the ordinary way without exciting the fellow's suspicions.

We noticed that there was a postal pillar-box at a short distance from the legation garage. We therefore disguised an English constable as an Egyptian motor-cycle postman and arranged that he should be clearing the letters from the postbox at the time when the chauffeur should leave the garage in his master's car for the rendezvous. Inside the box of the tricycle we concealed an English constable in uniform with orders that they were to shadow the car to the rendezvous. Everything to begin with went as planned and the car left the garage followed at a respectful distance by the motor tricycle. 'Ali, the chauffeur, however, was taking no chances and soon spotted the poor old post-office tricycle attempting an unaccustomed speed in his rear, whereupon he trod on the gas and was soon back home in his legation garage, leaving the motor tricycle far behind. On getting the news I telephoned to my Minister to obtain permission from the diplomat to search his garage on the very offchance of finding some traces of the heroin powder in the car. After considerable delay the permission arrived and the police entered the garage to find the rascally chauffeur wearing a mocking smile and innocently playing soft music on his violin. The smile, however, was soon transferred to the face of the police who, after a fruitless search of the premises, on going through the chauffeur's pockets found on him £75's worth of marked bank notes out of the £300 that our agent had paid to him in the original deal which had gone wrong. We had been watching him betting heavily on the tote at the Heliopolis races the day before, where luckily for us he had not paid away all our £300; no traces of the heroin were found, but the marked notes and other evidence were sufficient to convict him.

'Ali got the maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine of £1,000. While in prison he got another five years for murdering a fellow prisoner and eventually died in jail.

In 1932 by far the biggest trafficker in Egypt was Lambros

## *Tricks of the Trade*

Yannicos, whose organization was highly elaborate and efficient. We had the luck to arrest one day in Alexandria a young Scandinavian sailor from Istanbul in the act of selling a kilo of heroin and in possession of a secret code for communicating with his principals. He seemed to be a decent sort of youth, so instead of prosecuting him we decided to employ him, to which he agreed. As a result we eventually effected the arrest of Lambros and the discovery of a number of his secret caches in various Cairo flats. In one of these we found the filed ledgers and account books of the firm, all kept in a code, which was unreadable until we picked up Lambros' confidential clerk, who having a grudge against his master, obligingly translated them for us. Thanks to this lucky find we eventually went to court with sixteen Egyptian and forty-five European accused.

Lambros Yannicos was sentenced to a year's imprisonment by the Greek court in Alexandria and the sentence was confirmed by the Court of Appeal in Athens, while other Greeks got minor sentences. In the course of his opening speech, which was remarkable for its comprehensive exposure of the ramifications and activities of the gang, Maître Riad Bey Rizqalla, substitute of the Parquet, traced the career of Lambros Yannicos from the time of his arrival in Egypt from Greece, some twenty years before, up to the time of his arrest and the sensational discovery of his back ledgers and account books. That treasure, as Rizqalla Bey called it, revealed the names of more than one hundred and fifty persons who, as retail traffickers, had dealt with Lambros in hashish, opium and heroin to a total of several tons. Between April, 1929, and October, 1931, the book showed that hashish and opium had been sold by Lambros Yannicos to a total value of £E100,000 and heroin to a total value of £E112,000. "This Lambros," declared Rizqalla Bey, "is the person who was so vigorously defended by his lawyer, when he appeared before the Greek Consular Court, that some of the latter's observations subsequently formed the subject of an apology both to the Egyptian Government and to the public."





**POLICE CAMEL CORPS TROOPER WITH CITADEL IN BACKGROUND**

From a painting by Mrs. Nina Colmore

**READY FOR THE EARLY MORNING RIDE**

## *Hasan Saqr*

“Remember the pure air of the Acropolis,” implored Lambros’ lawyer in an impassioned appeal to the Greek Tribunal, “and do not splash in the muddy waters of the Nile.” The Egyptian Customs Commission, however, appeared either not to have heard the speech or anyhow to have been uninfluenced by considerations of air or water, for when Lambros’ case came before them, they sentenced him to a fine of £E41,000, thus constituting a record in Customs fines for one individual. As regards Lambros’ Egyptian associates and confederates, fifteen out of sixteen accused were sentenced, eleven of them to five years’ imprisonment and £E1,000 fine each, and four to minor terms, while one was acquitted. Among those to get five-year sentences were Hasan Saqr and Husein el-Keretli, of Alexandria.

Hasan Saqr had started life in Cairo as a sweeper in a cigarette shop and within five years of starting to deal in drugs had accumulated enough money to own two flats and to construct a new building at an approximate cost of £E26,000. Though arrested and tried on various occasions, he had always escaped conviction, being able to afford first-class counsel for his defence. The other big man was Husein el-Keretli of Alexandria, who was one of the most spectacular figures in the trafficking world. He began his smuggling career in 1880 and, when I knew him in Alexandria in 1902, he was the kingpin of the hashish traffic from Greece. During the operations in Tripoli in 1912, Lord Kitchener had got the Egyptian Government to deport him to Malta as a dangerous arms trafficker, commonly reported to run his stuff in an old Greek submarine. A good story is told of him which I believe to be true. A year or so after Husein had been sent to Malta, Lord Kitchener was in England, living at Broome Park in Kent. One day there was a ring on the front door bell which was answered by the butler who found a gentleman at the door asking for Lord Kitchener. On being asked for his card, he replied with regrets that he had not one on him, but that Lord Kitchener would remember him if the butler would mention the name of Husein el-Keretli. Kitchener had him in and had a talk with him, showing surprise as he knew

## *Tricks of the Trade*

that el-Keretli's last address had been the internment camp in Malta. El-Keretli replied that he could not stand the boredom of Malta any longer, so he had escaped and come to England to offer his services to Lord Kitchener as a secret agent, in which capacity he was subsequently employed and proved to be of considerable value. In later years he had come down in the world a lot, especially after the Egyptian Government had seized his smuggling-ship the *Daldoul*, and he afterwards lived a quiet life as an hotel proprietor in Alexandria.

## CHAPTER 21

### *DESERT SMUGGLING*

LOOKING back on more than twenty years of active warfare against drug traffickers, it is interesting to follow the rise and fall of armed resistance to arrest by the various categories and nationalities of smugglers. The boldest and toughest of all were the desert Arabs. In the old days when contraband hashish came entirely from Greece and was smuggled by Arab caravans into Egypt across the Western Desert from Cyrenaican ports, the Arabs in charge were all armed, in fact better armed than the Coastguards, and did not hesitate to make use of their weapons.

In those days the Western or Saharan Desert was unmapped and unknown country except to the Arabs themselves, the Coastguard Camel Corps and a few occasional explorers. To-day many thousands of our troops have fought over it, but with this difference, that time and distance have been annihilated by the motor-car, whereas in my time the one and only means of transport was the camel.

The general public today knows from following the Western Desert fighting that the outstanding feature of that country is the sand-dune country south of Siwa, and the Qattara depression known to the Arabs as the Sabakha (salt swamp), the northern scarp of which runs north-east for a hundred and fifty miles from Siwa, to leave only a narrow strip of thirty miles of desert between it and the sea at El-'Alamein. This saline, with its treacherous salt bog lying at an average of sixty metres below sea level, is impossible for laden camels to cross except at a short period in a dry season and then only by certain paths.

Hashish smugglers had two alternative routes for bringing



## *Desert Smuggling*

their cargoes into Egypt. The first was to land them at Derna or Benghazi in Cyrenaica and strike out south into the sand-dune country, keeping to the south of Jaghbub, eventually striking water again at 'Ain Dalla and Dakhla Oasis, from where there was an easy run into the Nile Valley. The other alternative route was to run their goods ashore somewhere on the coast between Marsa Matruh and Alexandria and try to rush them through to the outskirts of Alexandria by keeping between the Sabakha and the coast. Either route had its particular difficulties. The southern route was long, with bad going and only two watering-places, while the coastal route was hemmed in between the sea and the Sabakha and was heavily patrolled daily from the Coastguard stations on the coast.

In those years the biggest and most formidable of all the desert smugglers was a Tripolitan Arab, named 'Abd el-'Ati el-Hassuna. His base was at Benghazi in Cyrenaica, where he made up his caravans at his leisure and with his well-armed Arab escorts protecting his convoys would make a dash across the Egyptian Desert and fight it out with anyone who opposed him. The year before I joined the police, they had had a fight near the water-hole of 'Ain Dalla, west of Dakhla Oasis, and one of the Coastguard troopers, who were all Sudanese, had been killed; his relative, a sergeant-major, took this up as a family feud and constituted himself the avenger of blood. On the coastal section between Marsa Matruh and Alexandria preventive patrols worked in daily from the coast stations of Dab'a and El-'Imayid to the cliffs of the Sabakha on the look-out for smugglers' tracks going east with a fair chance, if they cut tracks on the previous night, of catching up with the smugglers before they could reach Alexandria. 'Abd el-'Ati, however, disliked this piece of country between the coast and the Sabakha, partly because it narrowed to a dangerous bottle-neck only thirty miles wide opposite El-'Alamein, but chiefly because he was on bad terms with the Awlad 'Ali Arabs, who owned this desert and who would have given information against him to the Coastguards. He therefore always took the Jaghbub-Dakhla line and

## *Sudanese Courage*

trusted to his fighting strength and the number of his water-carrying camels to win through to the Nile Valley.

In order to watch and control this Libyan frontier, the Coastguards had established a strong camel post at Girba Oasis, two hours' ride north-west of Siwa, whence tracking patrols were sent out daily along a forty-mile front into the sand-dune country beyond Siwa. Girba thus formed a most important advanced post for the strong Coastguard patrols at Marsa Matruh, Sidi Barrani and Dab'a on the coast.

'Abd el-'Ati by now was the Coastguards' enemy No. 1 and Royle of that service, as O.C. Marsa Matruh, once stayed out over a year, without ever returning to Marsa Matruh, in his endeavours to catch him, patrolling even as far as Abu Minqar in the Sahara, over two hundred miles south of Siwa and fifty miles west of Farafra, always hoping to get on to his tracks and settle the long-outstanding account. Early in the summer of 1903 the Coastguard Headquarters in Alexandria got information through their agents in Greece that 'Abd el-'Ati was about to land another big consignment of hashish in Cyrenaica, on which information the coast stations, and Girba in particular, redoubled their precautions. One morning a scout patrol sent out from Girba came racing back to the station to say that they had cut the tracks of 'Abd el-'Ati's caravan one day's ride to the south-east of Jaghbub. Without a moment's delay the whole of the Girba force jumped into their saddles and raced off to follow the tracks, no matter where they might lead.

The force consisted of a young Egyptian officer, whom I had known at Mex, and who told me the story later, the Sudanese sergeant-major, the blood relative of the murdered trooper, seventeen other ranks and four Bisharin trackers, all mounted on thoroughbred Sudan camels, each carrying four days' camel forage and five gallons of water for the men. Fast pursuit of an enemy on camels is only possible by day, as with nightfall tracking becomes either impossible or, even with a moon, at best a matter of slowly puzzling out the tracks at a walking pace.

## *Desert Smuggling*

Like bloodhounds on the trail, every man raced his camel along, hoping to close in with the enemy, and at sunset on the second day the leading Sudanese on the fastest camels caught up with the smugglers and at once opened long-range fire on the rearguard who, however, made good their escape in the dark. Beaten by the night, the Coastguards had to await dawn before once more picking up the tracks and continuing the chase. At the end of a long day's pursuit the Sudanese in front again got in touch with the strong rearguard of the smugglers, who had entrenched themselves in the high sand-dunes. Without waiting for their officer and the rest of the patrol on their slower camels, these leading men attacked until darkness once again defeated them and the smugglers made off unscathed.

That third night must have been a desperate one for the Coastguards: men and camels dead beat, forage and water finished and death staring them in the face if they turned back, and as certainly their lot if they continued their pursuit and failed to overtake their quarry. Impatiently waiting for the first glimmer of light, the avengers of blood, led by the gallant old sergeant-major, stood by their camels as the false dawn of the fourth day came up and then, first at a foot's pace, and then beaten into a weary trot as the light got stronger, the tired camels padded their way through the soft sand with the Bisharin trackers ahead, their eyes glued to the footmarks that grew fresher and fresher as the day wore on. Eagerly the men noted the tell-tale marks in the sand: here the trailing toe mark of a laden camel dragging his weary feet along: here another camel had foundered and been beaten to his feet again: no droppings from those unfed camels and all the signs that men and beasts were beat to the world.

Flogging their camels through the red-hot sands as the sun reached its midday height, the patrol at last caught sight of the straggling rear-guard of the smugglers. Handing over their mounts to be brought on at a safe distance in rear, the troopers dismounted, took open order into the dunes and gradually fought their way in closer and closer. Early in the fight the

## *Blood in the Sand*

thirsty troopers saw to their joy that one of 'Abd el-'Ati's big water camels had fallen with his double load of bullock skins and that the Arabs, in the stress of battle, had failed to slit the skins as they invariably do to prevent the precious water falling into the hands of their pursuers.

Cheered by the sight, the men pressed their attack until 'Abd el-'Ati and the seven clansmen that formed his bodyguard retreated into the dunes and abandoned to their fate the rest of his men and caravan. Closing in on the beaten mob, the patrol now had them at their mercy and 'Abd el-'Ati's brother, two cousins and four of their men fell to the Coastguards' carbines and revolvers. Blood feuds are stern things and the only prisoners taken were ten live camels with twenty-eight sacks, each containing fifty kilos of hashish, seven good Mauser magazine rifles and two bags of ammunition.

This desert battle took place in the centre of the Egyptian Sahara between Bahrein and 'Ain Dalla, some three hundred miles from the Nile Valley in a country of huge dunes, each many hundreds of yards long, made of sand as fluid as water, each of which must be circumvented, as to attempt to cross them means death from exhaustion to the camels, which sink up to their knees in those liquid mountains.

One can picture the scene that night as the victorious Sudanese drank their fill of the captured water : smugglers' saddles were quickly split into firewood and meat from the dead camels was soon sizzling in the flame and rough bread quickly made from the captured flour. Good camelmens by race, they first tended their weary camels : half a gallon of water was all that could be spared for those long thirsty throats, but just enough to coax them to eat the dry forage taken from the Arabs. One can see those strange beasts stretching their long necks out on the sand, grinding their teeth for a time and then sleeping as only tired camels do. What a chatter there must have been among the men, their white teeth gleaming in the dark, each telling what he had done, the rounds he had fired, the marvellous shots he had made, all the incidents of the battle, till even the

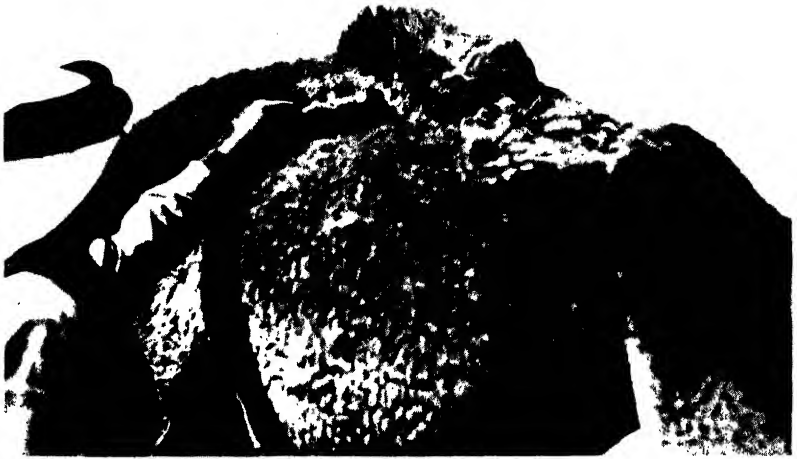
## Desert Smuggling

Sudanese could talk no more, and wrapped in their blankets with their sheepskin rugs beneath them and their saddles set on end as wind screens behind their heads, those gallant fellows slept on the soft sand that had been so nearly their tomb under the unheeding stars.

Next morning with the dawn came the reloading of the captured hashish, the gurgling and bubbling of protesting camels as the patrol got on the move again, every man on foot, their riding camels laden with the loot. Four days plodding through the sands brought them to the lonely and uninhabited depression of Bahrein, where a day was spent watering and resting tired camels and men. On again on foot till, eight days later, the patrol made its slow way into Marsa Matruh and civilization. What a scene it must have been as the faithful wives, weary of waiting for husbands they might well have thought lost for ever, suddenly heard shots fired in the distance. Running out from their huts with their piccaninnies at heel, they could see a mob of straggling and heavy laden camels crawling back home each with a man ahead tugging at the head-rope. Gradually as the convoy got nearer, each of the wives must have spotted her man and run forward to greet him with the shrill *zagharit*<sup>1</sup> of welcome. Regardless of regulations *re* ammunition on charge every man was firing off what cartridges remained to him and Marsa Matruh gave a true Sudanese welcome to its victorious patrol. One can imagine the scene and the noise, camels unloaded and fed, the men dismissed to their quarters, chattering and jibbering as they tell their tale with wives and children swarming round them, calabashes of native beer appearing like magic, drums throbbing, a pandemonium of excitement, until gradually even heroes became sleepy and twenty-three gallant riders of the desert enjoyed the sleep of exhaustion, honour avenged, and victory won.

I was in Cairo a few weeks later and heard the official story of the fight which struck me as bald and strangely colourless. Meeting André von Dumreicher, who then commanded the

<sup>1</sup> Shrill female cry of joy.



CAMEL WITH HASHISH SLABS GLUED TO BACK UNDER HAIR  
TINS OF HEROIN CONCEALED IN BLOCKS OF STEARITE WAX



THE HASHISH PLANT

ZINC CYLINDER CONTAINING HASHISH AND OPIUM, FOUND IN CAMELS' STOMACHS

## *Sinai Patrol*

Coastguards in the Western Desert, I started to pull his leg by telling him that I had heard a rumour that the Minister of Justice was doubtful as to the accuracy of the official report rendered by the Coastguards and proposed sending a Parquet official to the scene of the fight to verify what had actually happened. So far from pulling Dumreicher's leg, I learned from him that the rumour, invented as a joke by my own imagination, was an actual fact. He was taking it quite calmly, however, knowing that all the arrangements for any such visit of inspection would have to be made by himself, that without his trackers, the spot would never be found and that in any case all traces of the fight would have by now been covered by the drifting sand of the moving dunes.

The Parquet officials were advised to begin by taking riding lessons at the Camel Corps Depot at 'Ain esh-Shams and Royle, then O.C. Depot, carefully selected his fiercest and roughest camels for the purpose. Casual hints were dropped and broad jokes made in the Parquet's hearing about the doubtful pleasure of a three-hundred-mile camel trip in the height of a desert summer. Gradually an inclination began to show itself to accept the official version of the Coastguards' report and in a very short time all doubts were buried as deep as the corpses in the dunes.

Then and now my sympathies were entirely with those camel patrols, even if their methods were somewhat drastic. They had fought many a hard and often losing fight with 'Abd el-'Ati's clan, always at a disadvantage with their Martini single-loading carbines as opposed to the modern magazine rifles of the Arabs and running the risk on every desert patrol either of a lingering death by thirst or of a sudden one from the bullets and knives of a pitiless enemy to whom asking and giving of quarter were unknown.

Soon after 1932, when Greece prohibited the cultivation of hashish, the Lebanon and Syria took her place as chief cultivators and the Bedouin Arabs of the Sinai province became the carriers. These Sinai Arabs are small, wiry men of various tribes, camel



## *Desert Smuggling*

and goat graziers by profession, who live most of their lives on the verge of starvation and of all God's creatures are about the poorest. These are the men who, for a few pounds' commission, try their luck at running the hashish across the Sinai desert to the Suez Canal and are prepared to fight if necessary.

Up to 1914 the deserts of Egypt for police and administrative purposes were under the control of the Coastguards Administration, who also patrolled the actual coastline and had a marine service as well. After that date a new semi-military organization, attached to the Ministry of Defence and called the Frontiers Administration, was created. This department took over the deserts and their coasts, the oases and the Sinai province, leaving the marine service and the Suez Canal to the Coastguards.

To understand contraband-running and contraband-chasing in Sinai, it is necessary to know the geography of this desert peninsula. Sinai is like a triangle, with its base to the north and its point to the south. The base is a thick square of semi-desert, semi-mountainous country, bounded on the north by a hundred miles of coastline from Port Said eastwards to Rafa, on the west by the hundred miles of the Suez Canal from Port Said to Suez, on the east by a hundred miles of open frontier running south-east from Rafa on the north coast to the head of the Gulf of 'Aqaba, and on the south by a hundred and fifty miles imaginary line from the head of the Gulf of 'Aqaba to Suez. South of that line the true mountainous peninsula of Sinai begins and tapers away to the 6,000 foot massifs of Gabal Tarbush, Gabal Serbal and others in the southern tip. It has always been across this north Sinai desert that the Arabs have tried to run their contraband hashish and here they have had many a running fight with the Frontiers patrols.

Up till about 1930 the Government forces were composed of a police force of locally-recruited Arabs and a Camel Corps composed of Sudanese Arab troopers mounted on first-class Sudan camels. It was these tough desert fighters whose job it was to protect Egypt's eastern frontier from this contraband invasion. Their main system of control was to patrol along the

## *Car versus Camel*

Egyptian side of the Rafa-'Aqaba frontier, in search of track of men or camels crossing into Egypt from Palestine. Sometimes patrols acted on information, but generally the finding and reading of the tracks depended on the skill and experience of the trackers, who could immediately give the age and pace of the tracks and decide whether the camels were laden or not. It was here that the great difficulty of overtaking by Camel Corps came in owing to the shortness of distance from the frontier to the Suez Canal. A tracker patrol is out at dawn from a station like Kosseima on the frontier and picks up tracks of contraband camels that have crossed the frontier during the early part of the night. First the tracker has to ride back at full speed to the nearest Frontiers post to turn out a strong patrol, then to ride back with it to the tracks and follow them at top speed, the post meanwhile telephoning ahead to other stations and to the Canal to send out intercepting patrols. The total distance from the Palestine frontier to the Canal is about a hundred and twenty miles. Picked Bedouin camels lightly laden will do seven or eight miles an hour in country they know, and the patrol camels will do ten for a time. The smugglers have already got ten hours' start and by travelling all night will by daylight have got into the rough hilly country within twenty miles of the Canal; here they will lie up till the next night to do the last stretch in the dark and hand over the stuff to other Arabs who swim it across the Canal and away to the fishermen's boats of Lake Manzala or the desert-edge villages of the Sharqiya Province, who have always had a finger in the smuggler's trade. These expert desert smugglers choose the roughest ground, where tracking is difficult, and move only at night, lying up by day and leaving their camels innocently grazing. The Government camel patrols, on the other hand, even with their superior speed, must stop at sunset when the contraband tracks cease to be visible.

It was always evident that, anyhow in this particular desert, the Frontiers would never get on terms with the smugglers until they had quicker transport than even these racing Sudanese

## *Desert Smuggling*

camels. Colonel Hatton of the Frontiers and others had been working for some years to produce a motor tyre with the same weight per square inch as a camel's spongy foot and by 1933 a certain number of these balloon tyres had been issued to the Frontiers' desert car patrols, which up till then had had great difficulty in competing with the mixture of sand-dunes and rocks of the Sinai Desert. One of the first opportunities to try out this new equipment occurred in July of that year, when a report was brought in to a Frontier post that four armed Arabs with camels had been seen entering Egypt near Kosseima. Police camel patrols and car patrols were sent out in every direction to try and pick up tracks, but it was not until next day that a camel patrol found the tracks in the open desert some thirty miles in from the frontier and heading south.

Four of the newly-fitted cars raced to the tracks and for the next two days followed them through the maze of wadis until they found that the tracks had left the low ground and were climbing a 2,000-foot isolated mountain called Umm Mukhsheili. Casting the cars round the base of the mountain to find where the tracks came down, the officer in charge received a message that a sergeant-major in one car had picked up the tracks and gone straight ahead on his own. Collecting his three cars, the O.C. set off in pursuit and soon heard heavy firing in the distance. It appeared that the old Sudanese sergeant-major had spotted the four smugglers crossing the sand-dunes and had driven straight at them, in spite of a hot fire from the rifles of the well-armed Bedouin who were quickly run down and taken prisoner by the combined cars. The capture was a good one, consisting of four well-known smugglers, four modern rifles with 200 cartridges, a field telescope and 156 kilos of hashish, worth at that time about £E4,000 in the wholesale market.

This was one of the earliest triumphs of the desert car over the Sinai Desert and the smugglers soon learned that sand-dunes and rocks were nothing to a desert Ford in the hands of these Sudanese drivers, who are experts at their jobs, first-class mechanics, keen as mustard and, as once happened, even prepared to

## *The Needle's Eye*

lower a car down a precipice with ropes rather than give up the chase. Casualties which were common among the Frontiers' men in the days of camels, became less so with the advent of the desert car, but even then the hardships were considerable, the men sometimes going for two days with neither food nor water rather than give up the chase.

I shall always think of those Sudanese fighters with the greatest admiration. As Director of the Narcotics Bureau I was able to reward their services by instituting a fund, administered by the Governor of Sinai, Major Jarvis, whereby £E5 cash was paid on the spot for every smuggler shot or captured in contradistinction to the Government system of paying, months later, a miserably small reward for drugs seized, which inevitably led to the pernicious habit, not unknown among other preventive forces, of seizing only the eggs while sparing the goose, in hopes of further eggs being laid later on.

Armed resistance against city and district police by drug traffickers was not common, but it did occur and in a few cases with fatal results. Most of those happened in the Capitulation times when the European smuggler trusted to his consular protection and faced the police raiding party with his nationality papers in his left hand and a revolver in his right. Once the Capitulations were abolished the foreign trafficker learned sense and realized that, if he pulled a gun, the police were ready to do the same and get him an exemplary sentence in the Egyptian courts.

Among the poorer classes of Egypt camel meat usually takes the place of beef and large numbers of camels are imported annually from the Sudan, Libya, Palestine and Syria, to be slaughtered and sold throughout the country for food. The Frontiers, Customs and Quarantine station for camels entering Egypt from Palestine is at Qantara on the Suez Canal, and in normal years some thirty thousand camels pass through that control station.

In February, 1932, a Frontiers Administration Camel Corps patrol of the Sinai province was on routine duty along the

## *Desert Smuggling*

frontiers between Egypt and Palestine when it met some Bedouin Arabs driving a herd of twenty-five camels towards Qantara. The patrol, seeing that the camels were unloaded and not even saddled, paid them no attention and did not bother to search them. Fifty miles further into Egyptian territory the Bedouin were met by another small Frontiers patrol consisting of a Sudanese corporal and a private of the Camel Corps. Many of these Syrian camels are bred in the north of that country and grow a heavy winter coat of fine silky hair which is clipped annually and fetches a good price as wool for robes and head-cords. The corporal noticed that these particular camels had not been clipped, and it struck him that he might do a good bit of business by purchasing one cheap and giving the wool to his wife as a present. He started bargaining with one of the Arabs, but found him unwilling to sell even for a price well above the average. While the talk was going on, the corporal was running the fingers of his right hand appreciatively through the fine silky hair on the camel's hump, when he felt something hard under the hair. Like a good policeman he kept his face, gradually strolled away from the camels till he could whisper to his fellow policeman and then called the six Bedouin over to have their clothes searched in the usual way for arms or other contraband. When he had got them well away from their camels and nicely grouped, he covered them with his rifle and ordered his companion to fetch some rope from his saddle and tie up the Arabs securely. This done, he went over to the camels and found that what his fingers had touched under the hair was one of a number of slabs of hashish, made up in the usual way in flat cakes, each of a kilo weight, and sewn into linen bags. It then appeared that all the camels carried a similar burden so carefully hidden that no casual inspection would have revealed the trick. What the owners had done was to shave the hair from where it was thickest between the hump and the top of the ribs on both sides of the camel. They had then glued the hair on to the top of each slab and glued the underside of the slab back into place on to the camel's skin. Care-

## *The Belly-Cache*

fully combed over, there was nothing in the appearance of the hair of the hump to reveal the trick. Altogether the twenty-five camels were carrying a hundred and fifty slabs, weighing a hundred and forty kilogrammes, worth at that time about twelve hundred pounds. The photographs we took two days later did not do justice to the neatness of the ruse, as in reconstructing it we found it impossible to get the right slabs back on to their proper camels and thus match the hair correctly.

In October, 1939, the Frontiers officials got news of a new system of getting hashish or opium through the Customs control at Qantara, by filling a number of tin cylinders with the drugs and forcing them down the throats of cheap butchers' camels, which once through the Quarantine and the Customs and safely into Egypt would be slaughtered at some quiet spot on the road and the valuable cargo recovered. In the nature of things the information that came to the police was never too definite and usually merely indicated that certain Arabs would be passing through El-Arish on their way to Qantara with a herd of camels and that some of them would be carrying tins in their bellies. Suspicion in this case centred round two particular bunches of camels and nine were arrested on suspicion at Qantara and three at El-'Arish. All camels entering Egypt at Qantara have to be kept in quarantine for five days and at the end of this period the Frontiers officer applied to the Parquet for authority to slaughter the nine camels suspected of carrying drugs, but this the Parquet refused to grant on the grounds of lack of evidence and the camels had to be released. Meanwhile at El-'Arish additional suspicion was aroused by the owner of the three camels under arrest refusing to sell one of them to an agent who was put up for the purpose, and who offered up to ten pounds for a miserable camel not worth three. Suitable pressure was, therefore, brought to induce the owner to agree to sell, the officer calculating that, if unsuccessful in his search, he could anyhow recover some of the cost by selling the camel meat in the market. The camel was duly slaughtered and twenty-seven zinc containers were found in its stomach and a similar

## *Desert Smuggling*

number in the stomachs of the other two. A message was quickly sent to the officer at Qantara to slaughter his nine suspect camels. He had already released them on the Parquet's orders, but was fortunately able to overtake them and bring them back for slaughtering, when they were all found to be similarly loaded. The same trick was detected on several subsequent occasions when good information was received, but no doubt many camels carrying drugs in this way got through without detection.

In the earlier cases the containers, which measured  $15 \times 4$  centimetres, were made of ordinary tin from old kerosene cans, but gradually the technique was improved, and in the more recent cases the tins were made of a softer and less-corrosive zinc. The camel is a ruminant and chews the cud, the tins were therefore weighted with lead at each end to prevent them being regurgitated. They were also made just sufficiently wide to prevent them passing from the rumen, or first stomach, into the second stomach where the main digestive process takes place. Each tin was then filled with hashish or opium, the conical cap soldered on and the tin forced down the camel's throat. It would be thought that a camel so loaded would indicate his discomfort by word of mouth, but camels are always noisy, grumbling creatures when handled, and normally emit snarls and roars that should indicate agonizing pains, but in reality do not mean anything. Nothing that the camel can say, therefore, helps in the search for the tins. A slight indication in the beginning was the fact that it was the poorest and, therefore, the cheapest animals that were used, but the Arabs soon realized their error, and in subsequent cases the camels were first-class animals worth twenty pounds apiece.

At one time I had hopes of discovering these tins by X-rays ; being completely ignorant of this science, I put the problem into the hands of experts and, after a year's correspondence and experiments, had to accept their verdict that the camels' stomachs were too thick through and the animals themselves too restless to give satisfactory results to 'X' or other rays. One corre-



THE AUTHOR





## *Metal Detectors*

spondent from America gave me a lot of general information on the subject of the 'electric eye', as used for searching prison gangs on return from work outside prison, and finished by saying that he had been unable to put things to the test on actual camels, "as camels unfortunately are rare in Massachusetts".

We then called in Dr. Balls and his radio experts, who at the time had been perfecting a mine detector for military use in the Western Desert fighting. They very soon provided an experimental set in Cairo which, even without the ear phones, made it possible to hear the metal tone when a camel carrying metal in any form passed within its range. A full-sized installation was then set up in the quarantine station at Qantara and all camels entering Egypt from Palestine were made to file past it, with disastrous results to a number of owners and great satisfaction to ourselves. It was obvious, however, that our method could not be kept secret for long and that the smuggling fraternity would either abandon the method altogether or invent a container of a non-metallic substance. As always in the struggle between crime and law, every step in improved technique by one side is quickly followed by still further improvement by the other, and our victory could only be looked upon as temporary. A serious setback, however, for this type of smuggling was caused by the Syrian and Palestinian Governments forbidding the export of live camels from their countries during wartime. At the same time we were constantly on the look-out for some rough-and-ready method of detecting the presence of these tins without the laborious process of the metal detector. It was hard to believe that a camel could carry fifteen pounds of metal cylinders in his belly for several days without showing some symptoms of pain or discomfort. I therefore called in the help of the Government Veterinary Department and bought them a camel at Qantara to experiment with and loaned them thirty confiscated cylinders.

Each cylinder measured  $15 \times 4$  centimetres and with its drug contents weighed 250 grammes. The thirty cylinders were loaded in by the mouth at the rate of one per minute, with a ten-minute pause after each ten. The camel's head had to be

## *Desert Smuggling*

tied well up and his mouth kept open by pulling his tongue across the corner of the mouth. In cases where the camel had difficulty or was unwilling to swallow a cylinder, water was poured into his mouth to make him swallow, otherwise the natural salivation was sufficient without any other lubricant. For the next four days temperature, feeding, rumination and general condition were normal. The camel was then sent by train to Cairo and walked from Cairo station to the 'Abbasiya Veterinary Hospital, a distance of some five miles. The camel was kept under strict observation for thirty days, during which time no change whatever was noticed in his condition. He was then slaughtered and the cylinders recovered. It had been previously proved that on being swallowed the cylinders are caught up by, and lodge in, the water sacs which lie round the sides of the rumen or first stomach and that after a few days they work down to the bottom of the stomach and lie there. The veterinary surgeon maintained and tried to demonstrate to me that when there were a number of cylinders thus collected in the bottom of the stomach "near the ziphoid cartilage behind the pad of the camel", he could by palpating upwards with five fingers of the hand collected together into a point feel a definite crackling or tinkling resulting from the tins grating against each other. I was glad to have this expert opinion, based on actual experience, that no actual visible symptoms can be expected from this wonderful animal, the camel, that can carry  $7\frac{1}{2}$  kilos of tin cylinders in his stomach for a month without 'batting an eyelid'. I wondered, however, whether a routine application at Qantara of the method described of 'pinching the camel's stomach' carried out on 30,000 wild camels per annum, would not be counterbalanced in value by the high casualty list that would ensue among the veterinary surgeons who applied the test !

## CHAPTER 22

### FUTURE OF THE DRUG TRAFFIC

WITH the outbreak of war in 1939 and the cessation of all commercial shipping, Egypt's problem of seaborne drugs was temporarily solved. I think we are entitled to say that with the exposure and closing down of the Bulgarian factories in 1938 the League had finally got control of the European wholesale source of narcotic drugs. As I have said, there remained Japan, but with the closing of the high seas Japanese-produced heroin could not reach Egypt. The total disappearance of heroin from the Egyptian market created an increased demand for hashish, which could only be obtained from the Lebanon and Syria. The centre of the C.N.I.B.'s activity accordingly shifted from Alexandria, which had been the gate of the European white-drug traffic, to the Suez Canal and Egypt's land frontier on the east, this being the only route for the entry of Lebanese- and Syrian-produced hashish into Egypt. The history of the annual destruction campaign in those countries during the war years confirms the view that every pestilence must be tackled at source. An outbreak of typhoid fever in a city water supply cannot be dealt with by disinfecting the water taps. The duty of the authorities is to discover the source of infection, find where the contamination has entered the main, and stop it. In our case there is no need for a prolonged search for the source. It is common knowledge and admitted by the governments concerned that, in spite of legislation to the contrary, thousands of acres of *Cannabis* are grown every year in the Levant States for conversion into hashish and export in contraband into Egypt. All hashish imported into Egypt is the result of cultivation in the Lebanon and Syria, and it is there that the campaign of prevention must begin.

## *Future of the Drug Traffic*

Egypt and Palestine spend some half a million pounds a year in trying to prevent the entry of hashish and opium and succeed in seizing perhaps some 10 per cent. of what enters. During the war years the British military forces in the Levant States were able to assist those governments with transport and personnel to locate and destroy the large areas of *Cannabis* cultivation. In 1944 the joint forces destroyed seven million square metres of crop which would have produced some 35,000 kilos of crop, worth £E1,732,500 in the Lebanon and £E9,000,000 approximately in the wholesale market in Egypt. This was calculated to have been 75 per cent. of the whole crop.

During the summer of 1945 the British military forces were otherwise engaged and could not give any help. The landlords seized the opportunity to plant even larger areas than before, of which the Lebanese authorities claim to have destroyed twenty-two million square metres of crop which, left undestroyed, would have produced 110 tons of drug for smuggling into Egypt. The situation to my mind is clear. Hashish cultivation in the Levant states is illegal; it is also extremely profitable. It is principally in the hands of certain powerful notables from whom the Government are not yet able to exact obedience to the law. Egypt has been unable so far to prevent these tons of drugs entering her country. I have therefore suggested that her representative on the Arab League should bring the matter forward without delay and obtain from that body a joint agreement condemning the cultivation and manufacture of hashish by any State member of the Arab League. This, I have suggested, should be done in all urgency in the general interest. Otherwise I foresee some unpleasant exposures of facts at some future committee meeting of the United Nations Organization when some delegate will point out that certain countries, in spite of their international commitments, are not enforcing their anti-narcotic laws.

If a joint agreement is concluded, Egypt, I feel sure, should be able to prevent her country from ever again being menaced by the white drugs or injured, as it is being injured today, by

## *Dangers of Revival*

imported hashish. Through the United Nations Organization she will be able to call attention to any neglect of the Opium Convention by a neighbouring country, and she herself, being a non-opium-producing country, will be able the more freely to join in the great work that lies ahead of obtaining world agreement to the limitation of the cultivation of the opium poppy to the scientific and medical needs of the world.

\* \* \* \* \*

Since writing the above the Advisory Committee of Geneva days, now known as the Committee on Narcotic Drugs, has had its second meeting in New York. The reports of this meeting have not yet been published, but I am informed by the British representative that the Committee is in a position to state that the wholesale manufacture for the illicit market of white drugs of an opium base no longer exists either in Western or Eastern Europe or in the Far East. Seizures of small quantities of cocaine and morphia are still made from time to time, but these have been proved to originate in German or other Military Medical stocks which have been stolen and come into unauthorized hands. When one thinks of the tons of these drugs that were produced only a few years ago for the illicit market, the old Geneva organization can feel satisfaction at the result of its work.

International legislation will, however, have to be passed to cope with the new drugs that are now being manufactured synthetically from a coal-tar base and which are just as habit-forming as were the opium derivatives.

## CHAPTER 23

### *FINIS*

FORTY-FOUR years is not only a long time out of one's life, but it is a lifetime in itself. I came to the Egyptian Government service as a young man of twenty-three and leave it now after forty-four years' service, and can well say that my life has been spent in that service.

I and the other Englishmen of the Anglo-Egyptian civil service came out to Egypt in those early days to help the Egyptians on their road to self-government, and now that complete independence has been attained, one feels that one's career has been rounded off. It has been a happy life, especially in the earlier days when things were still uncomplicated and when one's responsibilities were not so great as they were later, with the public security of a great capital city on one's hands. The first eight years in the provinces gave one all that a young man could want, varied and interesting work, adventure, sport and an open-air life, and all just at the age when one could best appreciate it.

Living as I did among the fellahin, I gained an intimate knowledge not only of colloquial Arabic and the geography of the country, but also of the daily lives and mentality of the people. This was to prove invaluable in after-years when I became a city policeman. I have seen several excellent English police officers, who had only served in the cities, severely handicapped by lack of that knowledge of the provinces so necessary to the understanding of the police they commanded and of the people they controlled.

In my forty-four years' service I have been the servant of thirty-two Egyptian Governments. As Commandant of the Cairo Police I have taken my orders from twenty-nine different

Ministers of Interior in as many years. In the ebb and flow of politics there were many Ministers whom I had, at one time or another, to arrest or intern, under orders from on high, and yet I think I can say that, in spite of this severe strain on personal relationships, no one of them has borne me lasting unfriendliness for having carried out my orders. This I attribute to the fact that I have always identified myself with my Egyptian chiefs and avoided seeking power and protection from other sources.

One of the most trying features of Egyptian Government service has been this constant change of Ministers and Under-Secretaries of State, and I can count myself lucky that in my Ministry, I have had one Under-Secretary of State in the person of Hasan Rifa'at Pasha, who, if not officially permanent in the British Government sense, has at least occupied the same post for the past twelve years and, by his knowledge and wisdom, contributed much to the continuity of policy and the stability of the administration.

In a cosmopolitan city like Cairo, with its population of over a million and a half inhabitants, a police commandant's work has been most varied in its scope, with its criminal, social and political aspects. Far from being tied to routine, one has had the opportunity of constructive work much outside the ordinary work of a police chief.

It has been my privilege to represent Egypt abroad and speak in her name on a number of occasions. In 1923 I attended the International Police Conference in New York, where the police chiefs of the world met to discuss their profession and schemes for individual and international improvement. While I was occupied with the Conference my wife made a detailed study of America's system of Juvenile Courts and thereby gained interesting experience of modern methods which enabled her for seventeen years to devote herself as a member of an Egyptian Committee to the organizing and running of a model home for the Waifs and Strays of Cairo's streets. For nine successive years I attended as Egypt's representative to the Advisory Committee on Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs at Geneva, and



in 1931 I was charged with a Mission on the same subject to the Turkish Government to Istanbul and Ankara.

The fact that I was able to devote much of the last seventeen years of my service to fighting the drug traffic, which was menacing the country with ruin, added a zest to life which no routine police work could have done, and gave the satisfaction of feeling that one was doing something for the country in which one had spent so many years. This book is not merely the record of a policeman's life, for my service was concerned, even in later years while in the city police, with many problems which are not properly a policeman's. It was the early years in the provinces, days spent in the hospitable houses of local notables, going round their fruit gardens and estates, sharing their sports and pleasures, days spent riding through the countryside, learning the life of the villages and of the simple people, that enabled one later as a senior official to understand and cope with many Egyptian problems. It was this experience in the provinces, where in one's time one had met every notable in the country, the great landlords, the officials of every Ministry, which later meant that every official or Minister in Cairo was an old acquaintance. Egypt's friendliness and hospitality have never failed me and I have spent many happy years in this country of immense charm and beauty.



## APPENDIX

### *The Arabic text of the Snake-charmer's Chant*

Ana badeit 'aleyk,  
Kama el-ard inshagat,  
Wa antabagat 'aleyk.  
In kont gharib,  
Tegini.  
Wa in kont Sakin el-Mahal  
Ma tetla'sh.  
Bas ! Ow'a Tezini  
Bi'izn Allah  
Wa ayat Allah  
Wa Musa, Kalim Allah  
Ana Bi'azzim 'aleyk.  
Tukhrug min el-bab.  
Aleyk el-Aman  
Aman Sidi Suleiman  
Illi hakim 'al el-ins Wa el-jan.  
Wa hakim 'al el-hayya el-Munzir  
Wa el-Bours es Sa'ran  
Tub wa inzil  
'Aleyk el-Aman.

## GLOSSARY

*Note.* The circumflex accent used here (but not in the text of the book) shows where the stress of the voice falls. See Note on Transliteration, page x.

Abu Siyûr . . . . .	African Beauty Snake
‘Aib . . . . .	shame
‘Ain . . . . .	Spring
Arqam . . . . .	Clifford’s Snake
Azrûd . . . . .	Flowered Snake
Balsam . . . . .	Liniment
Bimbashi (Turkish) . . . . .	major
Bîr . . . . .	well
Burûgi . . . . .	bugler
Dada . . . . .	wild olive, <i>Olea europaea</i>
Damm . . . . .	blood
Darb . . . . .	path
Dassâs . . . . .	Javelin Sand Boa
‘Ezba . . . . .	small village, hamlet
Fellâh (plural, Fellahîn) . . . . .	agricultural labourer
Gabal . . . . .	hill, high ground, desert
Ghafîr (plural, Ghafar) . . . . .	night-watchman
Ghâgari (plural, Ghâgar) . . . . .	gipsy
Gharîba . . . . .	Carpet Viper
Gincina . . . . .	garden
Gôza . . . . .	Coco-nut shell pipe
Hâlabi . . . . .	gipsy
Hallâq . . . . .	village barber
Hashîsh . . . . .	<i>Cannabis indica</i> plant
“ Hat el-midra ” . . . . .	“ bring the punt pole ”
Hâya . . . . .	Horned Viper
Hessa . . . . .	administrative division of village
Intiqâm . . . . .	vengeance

## Glossary

Kaimakâm (Turkish)	. . . . .	lieutenant-colonel
Lewa (Turkish)	. . . . .	brigadier
"Mafîsh moiya"	. . . . .	"there is no water"
Maglis	. . . . .	council
Mahjân	. . . . .	camel stick
Mamûr	. . . . .	chief officer of police district
Markaz	. . . . .	country police station or district
Miralai (Turkish)	. . . . .	colonel
Mudîr	. . . . .	governor of a province
Mudirîya	. . . . .	province or provincial headquarters
Muwallad	. . . . .	half-breed
Nabq	. . . . .	tree of medlar type
Nashîr haye	. . . . .	cobra
Nâzir	. . . . .	steward of estate
'Omda	. . . . .	mayor of village
'Omdet el-Muzar'in	. . . . .	chief of cultivators
Qasaba	. . . . .	measuring-rod
Sagh (Turkish)	. . . . .	adjutant-major
Sant	. . . . .	valley acacia tree
Sarrâf	. . . . .	finance clerk of village
Seiyâl	. . . . .	desert accacia tree
Sheikh el-ghâfar	. . . . .	chief of night-watchmen
Teryaq	. . . . .	antidote
Thar	. . . . .	blood feud
Urfi	. . . . .	sanctified by custom
Wabr	. . . . .	coney or hyrax
Wâdi	. . . . .	desert valley
Warran	. . . . .	Monitor lizard
Wasm	. . . . .	tribe mark, brand on cattle
Yuzbâshi (Turkish)	. . . . .	captain
Zagharît	. . . . .	shrill female cry of joy
Zarîba	. . . . .	straw hut, cattle enclosure

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