

THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

Aleppo, Syria.

July 6, 1919.

Dear Dad,

It is 11 A.M. Sunday morning and I just got up - in fact I'm just recovering from the glorious "Fourth", which we celebrated here in regular American style. Personally, I don't expect to ever spend a more unusual "Fourth" again. It's quite a story and I may run out of stationery but here goes.

As I've told you before, John Dannaway takes care of the "repatriation" work for Armenians. Well, on July 4th he came to my house at 5 A.M., woke me and said - "We're going by auto to an Arab village for some Armenian girls! Want to go along?" Of course I got dressed in a hurry and was on the Red truck when it started off - Miss Shebe (a Red Cross nurse, born in Syria, & Dannaway, therefore our interpreter) a man named Fleming, who writes for Harper's Magazine, the Armenian guide who had told about the presence of the four Armenian girls in the village, two Arab soldiers as our guard, & I - in all and our driver - a Mennonite from Iowa - named Graber.

The Armenian guide was a carriage driver or "arabadchi". On one of his trips thru the village the Armenian girls held there had slipped word of their presence & asked for help to get away. The man told us the village was about half an hour's auto ride, over

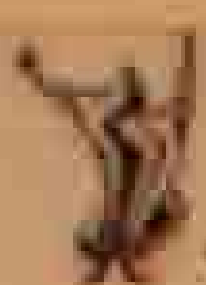


a good road. As we found out ² later, he was a natural born liar - in fact Fleming says ^{the Bedouin} ~~the Bedouin~~ should have said - All men are liars, especially the Armenians.

This was my first sight of the country around Aleppo. As soon as we got outside the city we were practically in a desert - broad stretches of level land without a tree or bush in sight, only a dry grass and sand. The only land marks were occasional Arab villages - the craziest looking affairs - big groups of cone-shaped mud & straw huts - reminding you of an enormous group of big bee-hives. The natives apparently had seen few autos so we made quite a sensation going thru. Finally we came in sight of a big lake - or rather what looked like a lake - it was dried up & the salt which had been deposited shone so in the sun it looked like water - The Arabs call it the salt lake. Our guide kept saying the village was just a little farther on. Finally the road got so bad we had to walk ahead of the machine & throw the rocks aside. After about ten miles of this we stopped for water at the tent of a Bedouin, who told us we were on the wrong road. The Bedouin was a picturesque fellow & very obliging - he insisted on feeding us buttermilk, etc. Well, we retraced our steps at least ten miles & then by inquiring every time we passed an Arab on his camel or donkey we finally got started in the right direction. This time we got down on the edge of the lake & found the salt made a fine road. We had passed camel trains & big caravans headed for Aleppo up to now, & now not a soul anywhere. After a drive of sixty



3/ miles - (instead of our "half-hour journey" we came in sight of our village "Jabal Ali" another of these collections of cone shaped mud houses, with one big black tent like those of the Bedouins. We stopped the machine in front of what was apparently the home of the Sheikh & then the fun started. The whole village was soon around us. The guide led the way to the big tent - which seemed to be a sort of harem - (as someone explained later) and pointed to two of the women & said "these were Armenians. One big Arab woman hustled him out of the tent so fast & with so much eloquence he didn't get a chance to protest. The excitement & everybody started in to curse the whole crowd of us. ~~the~~ The two Arab soldiers began to show a big "yellow streak". They took Samiray & Miss Shabazide & said we would all be massacred if we attempted to take the girls. After much powwowing with the crowd it turned out the Sheikh was in another village & no one else would even ~~listen~~ listen to an argument - all they would say was - "The street is away, you must not take the girls." The two Arab soldiers refused to do a thing. Finally we decided on a little strategy. We were to get in the machine as tho' about to go, but were going to make a dash for the tent, make the guide show us the girls, put them in the car & beat it. We had noticed that altho every man in the village had a cartridge belt, not a rifle was in sight. We were all armed - three rifles, & each one had a revolver. Well, we started the machine, swung it around quickly & made a dash for the tent. Immediately there was a commotion &



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rifles began to pour out of the huts, & the Arabs got behind huts & walls. When we got to the tent the two soldiers & the Armenian guide were almost in tears and held on to us so we couldn't get out. As the crowd ran up, the soldiers explained ~~the~~ in Arabic to the villagers that we merely wanted a drink. The guide absolutely refused to get out and point out the two girls to us - so in disgust we gave up. Miss Shabe is full of pep & she certainly did abuse those two soldiers & the guide. Finally an old Arab agreed to go with us to the next village where the sheikh was. ^{He knew the sheikh was in Aleppo.} He too was a liar. He said it was half an hour's horseback ride across the desert. There was no road, so we drove right over the plain till we came to the salt lake & then used the salt deposit for a boulevard. The Arab's "half hour by horse" proved to be thirty miles across desert. We ate lunch ~~on~~ on a little knoll - without a drop of water - & started again. When we finally arrived - the "village" proved to be a Bedouin camp - about a hundred enormous tents made of camel's hair, dyed black. The Bedouins were very friendly & brought out bowls of filthy looking water, which was good because it was wet. They were very much interested when we gave the engine a drink of water, too. We took their photos, & finally when they said the sheikh was in Aleppo we set out in some disgust with ourselves for going on this wild goose chase, & more disgusted ~~too~~ with our guide & the two Arabs for being such cowards. They insisted however that we would have been wiped off the map if we had taken the girls. Miss Shabe



6/ shot owing to the wind. As it was, the flare would not work very well, & Dunaway had forgotten the signal anyway & fired two shots instead of one. Graber jumped on the donkey & started for Aleppo in spite of the protests of the soldiers who said there were many robbers. Graber, being a Monanite, wouldn't take a revolver. It was just about dark. The Arab brought us water in a goatskin, & two enormous dishes of a sort of rice pudding which was delicious, and some native cheese & bread. The bread was a sort of thinly rolled dough which they bake on stones, ^{like a paper} the procedure is to make a funnel of the thin "bread" & use that as a spoon for the rice pudding.

Waiting for Graber to return with another car - we had our Fourth of July sports to keep warm. - broad jumps, hundred yard dashes, etc. etc. - then Miss Shabe gave us a lesson in Astronomy - which she seems to know very well & at last we put the auto seat cushions on the ground & tried to sleep while the Arab soldiers did sentry duty. About midnight I woke. Fleming was awake, too. He was to leave Aleppo on the train that pulled out at 6 A.M., so was worried. We figured that Graber was two hours overdue and had either lost his way or had been waylaid by bandits. We decided to wait in, & wrote our Armenian guide. He absolutely refused to budge. - said the road was full of robbers. & that our sidearms wouldn't help any. One of the soldiers finally went with us. After we had gone half a mile we saw the lights of an auto in the distance - and very soon were picked up by Graber returning in another car with gasoline.

It had taken him four hours to reach Aleppo. The donkey threw him over its head once, but the fall was so short it didn't hurt. He created quite a sensation riding thru the city on a donkey, as ~~the~~ his clothes were like the British officers & they usually ~~are~~ ^{quite} drive around in carriages & Fords.



5/ made a few remarks to them in Arabic that she wouldn't translate, but which they seemed to appreciate (?). Graber was now worried about our supply of gasoline. The ground was rough and we had no idea where we were. We changed tires three times, but had no trouble with the engine - a brand new Reo which had just come from Derindjeh.

We were now on the opposite side of the salt lake & so kept skirting the salty shores till we saw another cone village in the distance. Once in the village we found the road to Aleppo - 12 hrs. away by horse - the Arabs said.

It was late in the afternoon so Graber made the dust fly as we hit it up along the road. Once we saw an enormous column of dust which ended at the ground in a funnel-shaped whirl - a sort of young cyclone. At sunset the engine gave one last gasp as the gasoline gave out. In the distance we could just make out the outlines of the citadel in Aleppo - the old castle on a big mound in the center of the city - so we figured we were at least 8 miles away. Later we found it was about 15. About a mile away was another of these cone villages. Dunaway & I walked over hoping to find gasoline. A big Arab on the edge of the village invited us into his enclosure, & after much sign-language & a little of my very bad Turkish he produced a can of kerosene, which we bought - hoping that the engine might be hot enough to run on kerosene. We had to pay 2 meydiks or about \$1.25 for a gallon. Dunaway took the kerosene, & I was to wait at the village: if he fired two shots, it meant that the engine was running. One shot meant, "here a horse". The Arab climbed on top of his ^{cone} house to listen, after bringing me a rug to sit on. Half an hour passed, and not a sound. The car top could still be seen, so I tried some more Turkish & finally ~~the~~ the old man saddled up a donkey & rode over to the car. We hadn't heard the



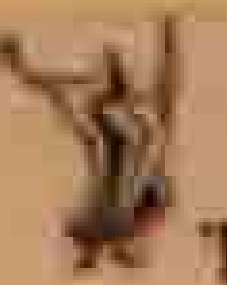
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7 We finally landed in Aleppo about 2 A.M. The Arab came with us so he could take his donkey home, & yesterday Dunaway saw him riding away with a broad grin on his face - & probably a lira in his pocket. He wouldn't take a piastre for the food.

I couldn't wake any body at my house & finally got so much attention from two night cops that I gave up, & slept in an empty tent near the Red Cross.

Today we heard this news: - A courier from the village had come immediately to Aleppo to tell his sheikh about our visit, & apparently also said that they would have killed us had we taken the girls, for the sheikh went to General McAndrews, ~~promised~~ to said he was sorry the Americans had not received better attention at his village & that we had been threatened. In fact he was so scared that he would be punished that he promised to send in not only the four women we went for, but more whom he had in the harems, & in fact two arrived at the Red Cross this morning, as I just heard.

As a result of our trip - which we thought had been very expensive & a failure, - in the future ~~we~~ we will be able to get the girls from villages by notifying the British, who will put the sheikh of the village under bond to produce them. So the trip was worth the trouble & the results better than if we had taken the girls. Some Fourth of July! I got some dandy photos, which I'll send later - showing some of these villagers, the



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8/ Bedouin tents and the mob at the village arguing with Miss
Shake. I'd give a lot for a picture of Gruber on the Donkey.

I just had dinner & found the long expected package
from America - many many thanks for the candy & films & handkerchiefs.
Everybody here is passing candy around so we're having a grand ^{time}
feed. Can you send more films later? Also if you could send
some pieces of linen & the proper thread for embroidery I could
have the Armenian girls do the work. They have very poor
materials to work with. Also magazines of any kind are in
terrible demand here. A Sunday newspaper two months old is
soon worn to a frazzle. Do you get the "Acorn" which is our
newspaper published in Constantinople? I just saw the first three
copies. It tells about what is being done at various stations here.

Wm. T. Ellis came thru here last week & I had the job of
escorting him around. I took photos for him with the Graflex & gave
him the negatives, so when you see his account of Aleppo, the illustrations
are mine. After he had been here two days he said "Is your father
Ben Kerr?" I said "yes", & he said "why didn't you tell me?" ~~When I said~~
He said that it was a slap at you not to have told him, because
he considered you very much worth mentioning. I told him I had
told him that I was at the meeting he addressed in Darby before leaving
for the near East, & he remembered it very well. His son is with him. Then
here he went yesterday to Adana, & is going to the Caucasus before going
home. & Mr. Jackson Fleming is here too. He writes for Harpers, so you
might keep your eye open for his articles.

Lambert seems to want to keep me here in Aleppo, as business is
picking up along Lat lines. Our hospital, dispensary, refuge homes, orphanages
employment bureaus, etc. etc. are all working full blast. The Armenians ought
to be able to help themselves now that we have them started. Thank you again for the
package. Love to all from Stanley.

July 6/17