Travel.

TRAVELLING IN MESOPOTAMIA.

By Major J. E. M. Boyd.

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A few days ago, after many wanderings, extending over six weeks, I reached Basra from England, and duly reported my arrival, next morning, to the Assistant Director of Medical Services, Basra area. I was told to go to the combined base depot and await instructions. On the following morning I went to see the officer commanding the base depot, with a view to getting some warm clothing for my bearer; he said there was a troop train going that evening to Baghdad, and that as a medical officer was needed I had better go by it in case of accidents. He said that he would make all arrangements as regards orders and medical equipment.

The draft consisted of 17 officers and about 250 men of the Royal Air Force, with 50 other ranks of the Norfolk Regiment. During the early part of the afternoon the drafts moved off to entrain, but as I had heard nothing from the Assistant Director of Medical Services, I was still uncertain whether I was to go or not.

About 4.30 p.m., I again saw the officer commanding the base depot and asked him if he had heard anything about my going; he said everything was all right and that the train left Mekina Station at 10.22 p.m.

I asked for transport for my heavy luggage, and an army transport cart was at once placed at my disposal. In the meantime the Royal Air Force officer in charge of the entraining turned up and said all kits had been loaded and the vans sealed and that the train was then at a siding about two and a half miles away, but was moving at 5 p.m. to the station at Mekina, to which place he advised me to send the kit. The army transport cart left with my bearer sitting in a most precarious position on top, my topee in one hand and a hurricane lantern in the other. I thought it might be advisable to go up to the station, a mile and a half away, but was told that it was no use my going up then, as the train could not possibly have arrived, so at about 6.30 p.m. Major Fraser, D.S.O., R.A.M.C., who was on his way to Egypt, walked over with me. We found the army transport cart and my bearer had safely arrived, but there was no sign of the train. We found the station-master, a Madrasi, who was most obliging and did all he could; he said I was to travel in a first-class compartment, with a wing commander, Royal Air Force, and the officer commanding train; he expected the train about 8 p.m., and advised me to be at the station again about 9 p.m., and that he would then fix up everything for me, so Fraser and I returned to the combined base depot for dinner.
About 8.30 p.m., I again left for the station and as it was a cold night with a full moon, decided to walk, not caring to entrust myself to a Ford taxicar driven by a half wild Arab. I had seen these cars by daylight and expected to see them fly into fragments at any moment.

By this time the train was at the station and had been attached to the ordinary 'up' train. The accommodation consisted of a twenty-berthed ambulance coach for the seventeen officers, quite a comfortable conveyance, divided into five compartments, each with four berths, and ten covered goods vans for the Royal Air Force personnel; as some of these vans contained twenty-six men with rations and blankets, it was considered that they were overcrowded, so three more vans were asked for "on medical grounds" and were at once provided. The Royal Air Force warrant officers had comfortable second-class sleeping carriages and the two Royal Air Force officers and myself an ordinary first-class sleeping carriage on the up train to ourselves. A large tank of chlorinated water was also attached together with a dry canteen, which later proved a godsend.

We had been warned to prepare for disaster and to take food with us; as will be seen later this warning proved only too true.

The train, when finally completed, consisted of forty-five coaches in all, but as we were told the country was quite flat, we were all quite cheerful.

There was a little grumbling on the part of some of the men of the Royal Air Force owing to the fact that the Norfolk draft had third class carriages, the former having goods vans. Personally, I considered that the Royal Air Force were better off, as they could lie down at night, whereas the Norfolk's had to sit up all the time.

The station-master had by this seen to the loading of my baggage and had found a seat for my bearer in the train; he then came to me for advice as regards his health. He complained that he had been in Mesopotamia since 1916, and was becoming very fat. I gave him what consolation I could but was interrupted by the arrival of a Royal Army Medical Corps orderly, accompanied by a ward servant, with the medical equipment. This was packed in an old Rose's lime juice cordial box, and was well thought out, only what was likely to prove of use being sent, such as quinine, aspirin and castor oil, with dressings in case of burns or injuries, all useless articles being eliminated. This box was added to the rest of my "cabin" luggage, and punctually at 10.22 p.m. the train started. Just outside the station an Arab "jumped" the train and apparently got a free ride to his destination. There being nothing else to do we went to bed. Breakfast was to be served at about 7.30 a.m. at Ur junction. I awoke several times during the night and on each occasion the train appeared to be at a standstill and I thought that there must be a great number of stations on the line. We turned out next morning at about 8, and as the train had stopped, asked if we had halted for breakfast. The station at which we were then standing certainly boasted of two lines of track, four lamps and a few huts; of platform there was no
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The guard said that we had not yet reached Ur, having only completed twenty-nine miles in about ten hours. He also said that the train had not stopped during the night, that the engine had not broken down but had only "failed," and that our breakfasting place was still about 100 miles away. At 10.30 a.m. a goods train caught us up and the engine of this was transferred to our train and we again started off. By this time we had taken just twelve hours to cover the twenty-nine miles from Mekina.

The men were perfectly happy; at every halt they swarmed out of the train and had a run round to get warm; at one station two Arab ponies and a donkey were captured, which some of the braver spirits mounted with great glee. As the day got warmer the men climbed all over the train, on to the cow-catcher of the engine and roofs of the carriages, whilst some, more enterprising than the rest, insisted on driving the engine. At times they were so active that I fully expected to be called upon to render first aid, but beyond a crushed finger, due to one of the iron doors falling on it, there were no casualties.

At 1.30 p.m. Jalibah was reached; here we found that the dining car of an ambulance train had been sent down from Ur junction to meet us and we had a very good, well-cooked meal. Up to this we had lived on biscuits, dates and chocolate. At 4.20 p.m. our suggested breakfasting place, Ur junction, was reached. We found two dining tents, and hearing we were only to stop for half an hour, hurriedly ordered tea. Three and a half hours later we left. Luckily the dining car was still attached, and before leaving Ur we got in and at about 8.30 p.m. had dinner, returning to our own carriages at the next stop.

It was very cold during the night, so we did not turn out till about 9 a.m. next morning. When we asked what news there was of breakfast, the guard said we had passed the last dining place, where we should originally have had dinner, at 4.30 a.m., and that we would get no more food until Baghdad was reached; so we again breakfasted on biscuits, dates and chocolate. Baghdad was reached about 1 p.m. I proceeded to the Maude Hotel, had lunch and reported at General Headquarters later, but as it was Saturday afternoon and the final for the Baghdad football cup was being played between the Royal Air Force and the Norfolk Regiment, I could find only an orderly.

As regards the country passed through, it has already been well described by Mr. Thomas Atkins, as consisting "of two rivers with miles and miles of damn all between"; it was mostly flat desert, with a little scrub in places; near Hilla were what appeared to be the remains of an old irrigation system. At places in the distance could be seen dense columns of black smoke, which seemed to indicate the presence of oil.

Along the line were old sand-bag block houses unroofed, but each containing one or more water tanks, and at each station an Arab sentry, who seemed very proud in the possession of an old but serviceable Lee-Enfield rifle.
Amongst the third class passengers were some Arab levies, who looked exceedingly smart in their khaki uniforms with shoulder chains.

Thus ended a journey which, had it not been for the general cheerfulness of the passengers, might have proved unpleasant, but as it was, was interesting and amusing.

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Lecture.

THE PREVENTION OF TUBERCULOSIS.¹

BY COLONEL S. L. CUMMINS, C.B., C.M.G.

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AMONGST the lay public there seems to be a generally accepted belief that the "stamping out" of tuberculosis should be a fairly simple thing if only there were a big enough organization to apply the knowledge that the doctors claim to possess, and if only people were told what to do and did it. The opinion of the "Man in the Street" was crystallized into one sharp, clear question by that very able layman, the late King Edward VII, who asked, "If preventable, why not prevented?"

Doctors are to blame in this matter. Some of them, even to-day, persist in attempting to give the impression that the problem is quite a simple one, and that all that is needed is some general ideal such as "fresh air," "clean milk," "better housing," or "scientific food." All these specifics are of great value, but not one of them can be accepted as in itself sufficient to prevent tuberculosis. Cases occur amongst people leading a life chiefly spent in the fresh air; we meet with severe tuberculosis in countries where the bovine tubercle bacillus is unknown, and where, therefore, milk cannot be to blame; there are plenty of victims every day in beautiful houses amongst people well able to afford the most expensive food. As for sunlight, we see cases arise and progress with terrible rapidity to a fatal termination in countries where there is so much sunlight that men have to wear Wolseley helmets and spine pads to protect themselves from it, and where sunstroke is one of the common causes of death. Not that I wish to suggest that fresh air, clean milk, good houses, good food and plenty of sunshine are without effect. On the contrary, they are all of high value as means towards the betterment of health; and they are of especial value in tuberculosis. It is safe to say that a clean milk and butter supply for everybody would get rid of bovine tuberculosis in man, and thus save thousands of children from years of suffering and perhaps life-long deformity, while the effect of the sun's rays, skilfully used, are most powerful in treatment. But my point is that none of these things are capable in themselves of stamping out tuberculosis. We may safely advocate them all as measures that will repay our best efforts, but there is no ground for the belief that by such means alone we can get rid of the disease.

¹A Public Lecture given at University College, Swansea.