



East-to-West – 5. The Eastern Mediterranean

GEORGE BRANDT

(This is the fifth of six travel articles Mr. Brandt is writing for SCRIBNER's as he circles the globe.—THE EDITORS.)

OF all the posts in the Empire the British soldiers most loathe Aden, on the barren corner of Arabia, guarding the Red Sea. And yet this wilderness of sand and naked rock has definite character. Like the peak of El Greco's Toledo, the black, jagged cliffs bite into the sky. As a local Arabian who spent seven years in Chicago said, "Aden may not have elevators and gangsters, but there's something about it that gets you."

In a Wolseley limousine I skirted the bleak shore, past Maala, where gaunt dhows (timeless ships of the Near East) are under construction, past the imposing station of the Royal Air Force (staggering under the weight of regal crests), to the famous salt works. Here knock-kneed camels slowly draw trains of little cars piled high with glistening salt while near by great creaking wind-mills pump water from deep wells.

A little farther on, and the vast plains of Arabia lay about me, shimmering under the midday sun. I thought of the almost-mythical T. E. Lawrence, uncrowned king of this desolate land. Here

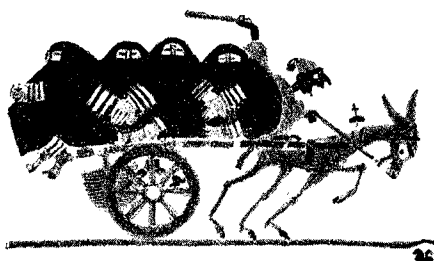
in Arabia, as elsewhere in the East, even the pattern of old age is unpredictable. With a history of thousands of years of violence, one would imagine an orderly government to be welcome. But apparently not. Even today, in a world full of superheterodynes, V-8's, air trains, and cinemas, new destinies can still be carved out in these sandy voids by adventurers who dream of empire.

I visited the gigantic reservoirs, built unknown centuries ago to store the precious water of mountain streams. Today they serve as arenas for Arab urchins who favor tourists with hand-springs and then yowl for baksheesh.

From Aden I came through the Red Sea, watching the shores of Arabia and Egypt converge into great flat desert plains, apparently empty of life, yet where, during the long centuries, great

armies met, fought, and made empires. Egypt is ruled today by the eighteen-year-old King Farouk, and after all these centuries, is once again independent—in the British meaning of the word, of course. Farouk is liked by his people, particularly some of the women, who tremble quite perceptibly when they see his handsome features. I saw him and his retinue streaking through Cairo one afternoon in a covey of flaming-red Rolls-Royces. Egypt is as full of sleek motorcars and modernistic architecture as it is full of camels and pyramids. Indeed, nowhere else in the world have I seen so many makes of cars for sale as in Cairo. You needn't think you must rough it here: the thing for you to worry about is whether or not you will be modern enough.

Port Said long had had pride in her malodorous corruption, but after India it seemed to me as clean and bright as a Borden baby—and very nearly as wicked. In Cairo I noted, besides the Bedouins and veiled women, shops carrying ambergris (to give coffee and cigarettes that certain something) and weird perfumes labeled "White Tobacco," "Always I Am," "Be Mine," "Dream of Love," and "Passion of the Desert." Here one can buy an entire



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sheik costume. I limited myself to dining à la Egyptienne and witnessing the contortions of hefty Fatimas in a local cabaret.

There's no point in adding to the tons of literature about the pyramids, or Sakkara's Doric columns, centuries older than those of Greece, or the huge statues of Rameses II at Memphis. The Nile boats, operated by Cook's and the Anglo-American Company, stop at Memphis, and for tourists with time there's no better way to see this country. Twenty days are required for the round trip between Cairo and Aswân; seven more if one wishes to go on from Aswân to Haifa. The railroads and hotels are modern and efficient, the cotton the finest in the world, the Nile colors at sunrise and sunset are infinitely soft, pastel-like.

From Cairo I drove out through modern Heliopolis to Almaza airport, climbed aboard *Al Fostat*, the twelve-place ship of the Miar Airlines—an Egyptian company sponsored by the government and equipped with ultra-modern planes flown by British pilots. We flew to Bagdad at a top speed of 180 m.p.h., making the trip in some nine hours, passing over the gleaming blue blade called the Suez, over the Sinai desert—where wandered the Children of Israel those forty years—over the Mediterranean, the Mount of Olives. We dropped to earth at Lydda airport and then started off again, over Haifa, past the white peak of Mount Hermon, over Rutbah Wells, over the treeless, shrubless plain where once the Royal Air Force plowed a furrow straight across the desert to guide army fliers.

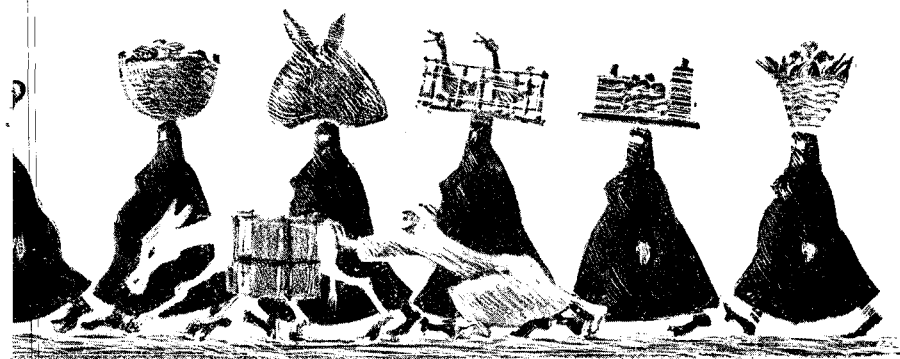
Never have I seen a river as large as the Tigris rush by at such breakneck speed. No regular bridge apparently can withstand it, for even today one crosses to Bagdad over a pontoon bridge, securely moored with heavy cables. My bus meekly followed a magnificent

Bedouin, whose steed thundered across, striking terror into the wraithlike pedestrians. On the way I saw several of the big circular *guffa* boats, indigenous to these parts. How they ever navigate is still a mystery to me. Down Bagdad's principal street race countless carriages, drawn by regal Arabian horses, tossing their heavy manes at lowly humans. Perhaps they are justified, yet inhabitants of such a town as this, with lineage running back to the first Bagdad of Caliph Mansur, cannot altogether be snubbed.

All Iraq contributed to its building: from Wasit came the demon-made gates of King Solomon; near-by Babylon gave bricks from her shattered walls. And when it was finished, the finest structure of all was the Khorassan Gates, on the "Golden Road to Samarkand." Only the glorious memories of the old city remain, all else has vanished. But on its site has arisen the new Bagdad—a wondrous jumble of twisting lanes only a few feet wide, with richly ornamented wooden balconies nearly joining overhead, and massive doors guarding the citizenry from attack by desert brigands.

Excursions from this city could continue indefinitely. Only twenty miles away stands the gigantic arch of Ctesiphon, more than a hundred feet high with a span of no less than eighty-two feet. But perhaps it is Babylon, sixty-five miles distant, that most kindles the imagination. Babylon became an important city-state under Hammurabi about 2,000 B.C., which was rather late in the history of this section. Assyria and Babylonia trace their development from nearly a thousand years earlier. It was the Sumerians in the south who invented cuneiform script, which even ancient Egypt used for official documents. Today the situation is reversed. In Bagdad I saw American film magazines on sale, along with *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, and *True Story*, and a hun-

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dred other indications that the land beyond the Atlantic is strongly influencing Iraq, where history possibly began. In the Eastern Mediterranean nearly everyone I met had a brother or cousin in America. Apparently only our immigration laws prevent a complete transplantation. Mencken and Lewis may carp at our shortcomings, but in this trip of mine I've found that a very large percentage of the world's population would make any sacrifice to be allowed to share our woes. Hollywood has presented America to the world as a modern Arcadia, and no other influence equals it in world-remaking.

But they're still influencing us. Visit a cabaret in modern Bagdad, and you'll see the inspiration for Minsky's and a hundred American burlesque theaters. That is as far as women visitors may go. With a permit from the government officials, men may visit the local sin-center, conducted in the most brazen manner imaginable. Not long ago, when a conservative Cabinet tried ruling out all these excitements, even including the movies, fate stepped in with a harsh retribution for these gentlemen. Some went mad, some were murdered, others resigned. Now all is normal again along the Tigris.

Vacation Cruises

For the last nostalgic days of summer comes news of short trips by water, rail, and air.

On August 28, the motor liner *Grips-holm* (Swedish-American Line) leaves New York for a six-day cruise that covers more than two thousand miles. At one extreme of her voyage she touches Bermuda; at the other, the quaint, cool shores of Nova Scotia. Rates begin at \$70. Over Labor Day, the *Berengaria* will be taken from her transatlantic run to make a four-day cruise to Nova Scotia. Minimum tariff is \$50.

For lovers of the sun, the islands of the West Indies with their foreign atmosphere are an all-around-the-year mecca. Fast liners sailing on commuter-like schedules make it possible to arrange a vacation that offers as complete a change in a few days as any long journey. For example, on the ships of the Furness Bermuda Line five-day cruises begin at about \$70; while for the nine-day cruises to Havana and Nassau, on the Cunarder *Carinthia*, the minimum cost is \$85.

Excellent tours by rail offer the traveler great variety in a short space of time. These trips are planned with

stops of several days in spots of interest such as Yellowstone and Estes Parks, and include interludes of motor travel along the way. For the vacationist with less than three weeks to spare, there is an Alaskan tour that embraces a nine-day cruise through the Inside Passage. A bit over \$300 covers expenses from Chicago and return. Other tours through the American Rockies, and to California, are planned for eight days to a fortnight and begin at less than \$90.

For the air-minded, the American Express Travel Service has arranged twelve tours with itineraries that cover the whole United States and Mexico. In *Tour Two*, for instance, Santa Fé is reached the second morning out of New York. Here there are two days of sight-seeing by motor through the Indian Detour, visits to the Puye Cliff Dweller Ruins and the Pueblos of the Taos Indians. The plane then wings to California, where motor and rail journeys break the trip and afford comprehensive sight-seeing. On the return passage, Salt Lake City is the main stop, and a day there is spent in exploring the city. In all, the trip takes fifteen days and costs but \$510.—K.K.

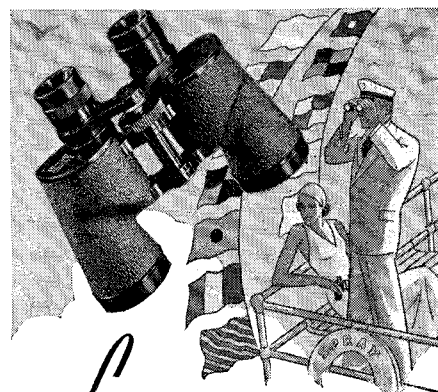
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