

## OUR EXPEDITIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The members of expeditions that are at work in Palestine and Mesopotamia have experiences that sound strange to readers of the Bible and the history of these ancient lands. A letter has just been received from Mr. C. Leonard Woolley, in charge of the Joint Expedition of the British Museum and the University Museum in Mesopotamia. It was announced in the last issue that the Expedition was starting excavations at Ur of the Chaldees. Mr. Woolley's first letter from the field was dated at Ur Junction, November 2. This is a station on the Bagdad Railroad between Basra and Bagdad. The letter reads in part as follows:

On October 23rd we landed at Basra. . . . We were met on landing by reports that the disturbed conditions near Ur would make our going there impossible, but the situation cleared up during our stay in Basra. . . . Thanks to the kindness which was uniformly shewn, it proved possible to leave for Ur on October 26th. . . . During our stay at Basra we lodged with the Civil Chaplain, Rev. C. W. Carter; Sir A. T. Wilson arranged that the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. should act as honorary agents for the Expedition; I met Lt. Col. Tainsh, Director of Railways, who gave all facilities and allowed me to purchase much of the necessary equipment from the railway stores at reduced rates and will supply Decauville material; while both the Ordnance and the R. R. Stores also furnished stuff.

Reaching Ur on October 27th, we were accommodated temporarily in the Railway Institute, comfortable quarters but too far from the site to be of permanent use. We visited the mound and selected alternative sites for the Expedition house and arranged methods for getting regular food supplies. On the following day I left for Bagdad, Messrs. Newton and Smith remaining behind at Ur to carry out the preliminaries to excavation.

I arrived at Bagdad on Sunday, October 29th, and was invited to stay with Col. Tainsh, Sir Percy Cox being away and having smallpox at his house. I saw Miss Bell, the Hon. Director of Archaeology, who informed me that the Antiquities Law was coming before the Cabinet on the morrow and would probably be passed. On Monday I had interviews with H. M. King Faisal, H. E. the High Commissioner, H. E. Sabih bey, Minister of Works, within whose province comes the Directorate of Archaeology, H. E. the Minister for the Interior, and other local authorities, English and Arab. As the law failed to be passed that afternoon, the Minister gave me a provisional permit to dig, which will be replaced by a regular Irade as soon as the details of the new law have been fixed. I should like to remark specially on the interest shewn by everyone in the work to be carried out by your Expedition and on the practical manner in which this interest was manifested by

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the willingness of all to give every kind of assistance. The King was very affable and keen on the work, and in Miss Bell we shall of course have a most sympathetic Director; the R. A. F. have agreed to make a special series of air photos of the site. Maj. J. M. Wilson, of the Department of Public Works, has volunteered to make photos and where possible measured drawings of antiquities encountered by the Survey parties. Altogether my visit to Bagdad, which was of course necessary in any case, turned out as useful as it was made pleasant by the kindness of the people whom I met.

Mr. Clarence S. Fisher, in charge of our excavations at Beisan, is accustomed to send to the Museum month by month a copy of the Diary in which he enters day by day various events at the diggings both in Egypt and in Palestine.

The following quotations are abstracted from the Diary recently received at the Museum and written at Beisan during the month of August.

August 1. Tuesday

Last day of work as the great Moslem festival begins tomorrow and the locals want the full three days. We resume on Saturday.

The men are now working up the north slope between the lower terrace and the summit. . . .

I had heard that there is a quantity of light Decauville railway, 60 cm. gauge belonging to the Government about two miles from here. It is for sale. Labib, whom I sent to look at it, reports that there are 9 wagons and over 200 metres of rails. This would enable us to handle the debris on the hill, collecting it from the whole summit and throw it over the eastern edge. We have only the 80 metres loaned to us by the Government. I am making an offer for the whole lot but it may not be accepted.

August 2. Wednesday

First day of the greater Bairam festival.

August 3. Thursday

The workmen came with their new holiday clothes and gave us the greetings of the season.

August 6. Sunday.

After lunch Major FitzGerald of the Gendarmerie brought down some officers of the Air Force. They expect to fly over tomorrow to pick up a message from the camp above us.

August 7. Monday.

Early this morning our visitors of yesterday flew over the camp in a Bristol Fighter No. H 1677 and dropped a pennant with their cards attached.

Here are two chronicles of contemporary events in close contact with antiquity. One speaks of photographing from the air the city of Abraham's birth; the other speaks of passing travellers that drop their visiting cards from the clouds upon the spot where the severed heads of Saul and his sons were fastened to the walls of Bethshan, the modern Beisan. This contact of the present and the past is extremely picturesque and romance is not lacking in circumstances that bring the airplane into relation with the attempts of archæologists to make contact with the historical level of four thousand years ago within these Bible lands. To experience at once the physical and intellectual horizon of Abraham's ancestor and the horizon envisaged by the airman has been reserved for the archæologists of today.