

Dear Folks at Home

Letters from Iraq

1922-1925

George Gosselink

Edited by

Charles G. Gosselink

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The cover picture is of the main mosque in Basrah, Iraq, located on Ashar Creek, drawn in 1932 by Dr. Wells Thoms, a member of the Arabian Mission. Wells and Beth Thoms were stationed in Basrah that year while completing their Arabic language study.

For James, Robert and Rebecca,
who have inherited their grandfather's
spirit of adventure, sense of humor,
and spontaneous generosity.

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George Gosselink and Students, 1923

Preface

It is painful to follow the news from Iraq these days. Five years of war and violence have destroyed the nation, taken tens of thousands of lives, left its cities in ruins, littered the countryside with the debris of battle, caused untold environmental damage and shredded the fabric of political and civil society. Few Americans remember, if they ever knew, that Iraq was once one of the most advanced nations of the Middle East, with a prosperous economy, high standard of education and health care, and a vibrant cultural life. Twenty-five years of dictatorship under Saddam Hussein brought an end to any political progress that Iraq had made, but this war, initiated by the United States, has completed the economic and cultural devastation of the nation and sent many of its best educated and most qualified leaders into exile. It is hard to see how the nation can ever be restored. This was not part of the dream of the founders ninety years ago.

The nation of Iraq was created by Great Britain in the aftermath of World War I out of three provinces of the defeated Ottoman Empire. In 1920 the League of Nations recognized it as a new state and awarded a Mandate to Britain to guide and prepare it for independence and self government. Though it seems clear that they expected to maintain control of the area indefinitely, the British moved quickly to establish an Iraqi government through which they could continue to exert their influence, and to give legitimacy to this effort, they sought to appoint an Arab king. And so on August 23, 1921, the Emir Faisal of the Hejaz, son of the Sherif of Mecca, was crowned King of Iraq, and the nation began its journey toward independence.

Just one year later my father arrived in the southern Iraqi city of Basrah to begin a three year assignment as a teacher with the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church in America. His appointment was to the School of High Hope, the Mission school for boys, which had been established ten years earlier. His responsibilities were to teach English, oversee the sports and extracurricular programs, and supervise the small boarding department. During vacation times he had an opportunity to visit other places in Iraq as well as neighboring countries. It was an interesting time to be in Iraq, a country in transition from imperialism to independence, a land of hope and expectation, a place so different from the Iraq we have come to know in recent years.

Every week for almost three years, Dad faithfully wrote to his parents and siblings back home in Pella, Iowa and set the pattern which his two brothers and sister also followed when they left home, and which all continued for the rest of their lives. The "Dear Ones Everywhere" letters were a weekly obligation, and they chided each other when any one of them missed a week or even sent off the letter a day or two late. When Dad died unexpectedly in 1990, my sister found the weekly letter, with its five carbon copies – for his three siblings and three children – already half written in the typewriter. Though we may have secretly admired this habit, we cousins joked about the letters. There was a stock formula: a brief weather report, comments on family news from letters received that week, then a report of the weeks activities, and perhaps a

commentary on the state of the world or some particular issue that, in Dad's words, "got my goat" that week. That, too, was the pattern of Dad's early letters from Basrah.

Our grandparents kept the Basrah letters, which were returned to Dad after they died. We discovered them again only after his death, when we were helping Mother close up their house in Tucson, Arizona, where they had lived in retirement. When I first saw the letters, I was excited because I hoped they would shed light on that period of Dad's life and also on the early history of Iraq, but when I read them I was disappointed. The letters did reveal a great deal about the young George Gosselink, but on first reading seemed to say very little about what was happening in Iraq and the Middle East.

It is not that Dad was unobservant. He also kept a travel diary, and his entries, when he was away from Basrah, often contain lengthy descriptions of the people and places he visited that do not appear in the letters. Even then, when his ship stopped at Port Said on his way out to Basrah, when for the first time he came into contact with Arabs and their culture, he wrote only that he had had his "first smell of the East, tho there wasn't very much to see." Shortly after he arrived in Basrah he reported that he had gone out to see the town and visit the school, but he offered no description of the people, the streets and the buildings, all of which would have been completely different from anything he had known in Pella. As a young man just arrived from Iowa, he may be forgiven for not knowing much about the political situation in Iraq, but when he did write about what was happening, he seemed to share his mentor John Van Ess's views rather than his own observations. He rarely said anything about what was happening in the country, the political developments in Baghdad or the continuing unrest in other areas. He wrote of spending time with his students and visiting them in their homes, but he seldom reported what they talked about, what their interests were, and what they thought, for example, of the continued British presence in their midst. And he almost never gave the names of his students, fellow teachers and other friends.

But then, he did not see himself as a reporter but only a dutiful son keeping in touch. When he first arrived he may have been so overwhelmed that he did not know what to write. And after some time, when the novelty wore off, he did not think to provide the details which would be so interesting to us now. In part he may have been sparing his parents the facts which he felt they would not understand. Sometimes he was shielding them from the news which might have caused them anxiety. His letters describe his own activities during the week, the routine of the school, the comings and goings of other missionaries and travelers, and the occasional special outings. And after he had been there a year, there was a lot of repetition, as the calendar determined the weather, the school schedule, the local holidays and festivals. I found the letters somewhat banal, and set them aside.

In the months leading up to the start of the war in 2003, I was often asked to speak on Iraq. Since I had been born in Basrah and lived there until I was eighteen and had visited several times after that, I was thought to have some knowledge of the area. In preparing those presentations, I took a renewed

interest in the history of that country and my parents' experience of living there for almost forty years. Iraq, as late as 1960, was a very different country from the one we hear about today. And when I thought of my father's letters again, I realized that the very ordinariness of his life in Basrah in the 1920s is significant and gives a picture of Iraq and the Iraqi people that is simply not seen today. The people of Basrah had electricity and potable water, their police could apprehend thieves and restore stolen goods, the courts functioned to resolve disputes, shops carried a wide inventory of goods, followers of different faiths lived together in seeming harmony. I would not put too rosy a tint to this picture – the poor did not enjoy all these benefits and religious prejudice was not far below the surface – but there was a fair degree of security in the ordinariness of life, and there was the expectation that conditions would improve. Dad's letters reflect that reality, and so I decided, on further thought, that there would be some benefit in transcribing and sharing them.

His letters are long and rambling and, as I have mentioned, often include a weather report, his response to news of family and friends, and long commentaries which are not very relevant today. Taking inspiration from Florence Bell, who edited the letters of her stepdaughter Gertrude Bell¹, written from Iraq 1917-1926, I have selected and edited Dad's letters, cutting out a great deal but including those things which shed light on the nation of Iraq and its people, the lives and work of the missionaries, and his own activities and experiences. That done, I have been surprised and pleased to discover how interesting and informative they are.

While I have edited his writing and spelling, I have tried to retain his style and idiosyncrasies. Sometimes his language and opinions seem to be politically insensitive by the standards of our time, but they represent the usage and attitudes of his time. For example, his use of the word *native* (as in "The *natives* are celebrating their new year." or "I have learned to like native food.") jars our ears, but it was the common idiom then. He uses *Mohammedan* where we might prefer *Muslim*. He was interested in Arab customs and ways of doing things but was not always sensitive to cultural differences and was quick to make judgments. He observed once that the Arabs have no family life, though he visited their homes, shared in their special feasts, and commented once on the attitude of respect that sons showed their fathers. What he meant was that they did not gather together as his family would at home. Women did not socialize with men and were not seen at these feasts, though their role in the family was very important and influential. He could not observe that side of Arab family life.

On a number of occasions Dad expressed regret that he did not speak Arabic. He knew that he would have had a much better understanding of the culture if he had been able to converse with his students, hosts and other friends in their own language. Career appointees to the Arabian Mission were required to spend at least two years in language study before they were given their first assignments. As a "short termmer" Dad plunged right into work without any preparation. He did pick up a little Arabic from his students and

¹ The Letters of Gertrude Bell, selected and edited by Lady Florence Bell, 1927.

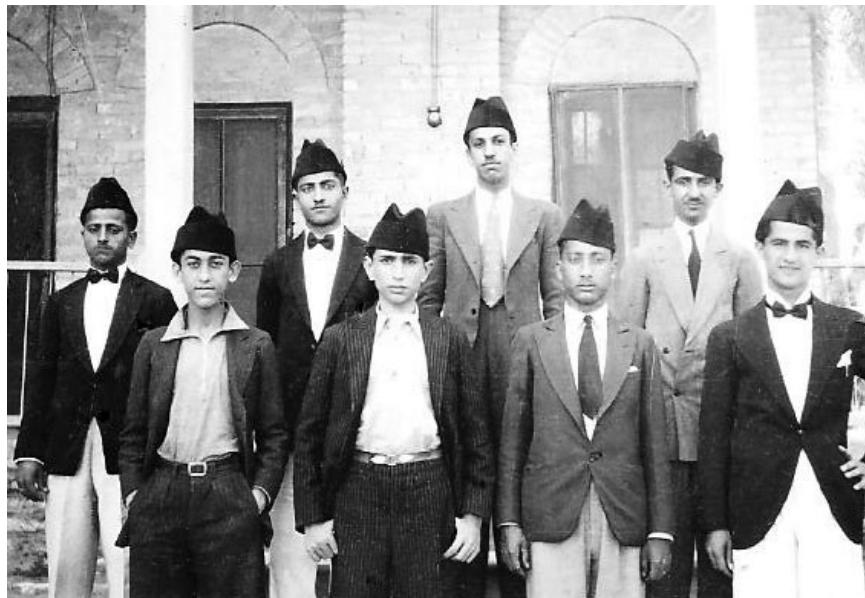
seems to have been able to communicate with even the youngest of them in some mixture of Arabic and English. He was very popular with the boys, who knew him as “Mister George” – the name he carried for the rest of his career in Basrah.

Understandably, Dad wrote about the unusual or special events in his life rather than the routine. He lived at the school and took all his meals with the boys in the boarding department, but he wrote about visits to his students’ homes and especially about the holiday feasts at the Van Ess house and moonlight picnics on the river. He liked his Mission colleagues and they seem to have been fond of him. John Van Ess and Dirk Dykstra appreciated the fact that he spoke Dutch. I have been especially taken by his references to members of the mission “family,” those same uncles and aunts that I knew as a child, and his description of holiday feasts and moonlight picnics are identical to what I remember of twenty and thirty years later.

Dad was there to witness the very first years of Iraq’s nationhood. He expressed some skepticism of “Arab government” and felt that most Basrawis would have preferred British rule. But he also saw a change taking place. Some of his students wanted to go abroad, especially to the United States, for further education but they all expected to return to serve their country. They were beginning to think of themselves as Iraqis. When Dad first arrived in Basrah in 1922, most of his students were still wearing the Turkish fez. When he returned in 1929, they were wearing the *sidara*, the unique Iraqi hat that had been introduced by King Faisal. It was a small symbol, perhaps, but a sign of the hope that characterized the new Iraq at that time in its history.

September 15, 2008

CGG



Basrah Boys School Students, 1932

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All other photographs included with the text, except as otherwise attributed, were taken by George Gosselink or with his camera.

A Note on Words and Spelling

In his letters home, Dad sprinkled his American Midwestern English with words and phrases from other linguistic traditions. Dutch was his second tongue, if not first, was often used in the family, especially with his grandparents, and was the language of his church in Pella when he was growing up. So it is not surprising that he threw in the occasional Dutch term or sentence. Some words, such as *slokje* (a shot or slug of coffee or something stronger), *pas op* (be careful), or *vet en strop* (bacon grease and syrup) were commonly used in our own family a generation later. I have provided translations of other less obvious words and sentences in the foot notes.

Dad was quick to adopt the missionary language of his colleagues. The general area of their endeavor was always referred to as *the field* and the specific locations as *stations*. Thus Dad often writes about Basrah Station or *station meetings*, where local decisions were made. The mission wide decisions concerning personnel assignments and the allotment of funds were made at *Annual Meeting*, not simply a scheduled business meeting but an occasion for the ingathering of co-workers, of fellowship and rejuvenation. General questions of policy, recruitment and the budget were the purview of *the Board*, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America and the General Secretary, whose office in New York was referred to as the *Board Rooms*. Returning to the United States was usually *going home*. Thus, missionaries on home leave might stop at the Board Rooms before heading back to the field, where they might be assigned to Muscat station. Their primary interest there might be with *inquirers*, those Muslims who had expressed an interest in Christianity and might be taking further instruction, though very few in fact took the next step to become converts.

The concept of “going home” was part of the language of British India (and all the colonies), where *home* was always England. It implied an attitude of impermanence, shared by and large by the missionaries, that however long one might live abroad, eventually one would return to the home country. The British in Iraq influenced the way their language was taught and spoken. Dad noted of the use of terms such as *motor car* and *petrol*. Surprisingly, in these letters he also used Indian words common in British speech such as *bazaar* instead of the Arabic *suq* (market), which he would typically use later on.

The transliteration of Arabic words and names poses some problems. Dad himself was not consistent in his usage, even spelling the name of *Basrah* sometimes as *Basra* or *Busrah*. In the interest of clarity I have edited his spelling of place names, adopting as far as possible the modern usage of books and newspapers, though I insist that Basrah is spelled with an h. Similarly I have tried to bring some consistency to Dad’s spelling of Arabic names. I have not changed his rendering of the names of his students, but I have given a more standard spelling to the names of public figures. I have left his use of the name *Abdul* (Abdul Amir, Abdul Ahad, etc.) though I would prefer *Abd el* ____ (Abd el Amir) as being closer to the Arabic “servant of the ____”. I prefer *shaikh* to *sheikh*

because, while either might be an acceptable transliteration, people tend to see *ei* as *ee* and mispronounce the word as *sheek*.

It is significant that though he must have known about the two major divisions of Islam, he never used the terms *Sunni* and *Shi'i* in his letters. While both Sunnis and Shi'is attended the school, along with Christians and Jews, he never felt the need to distinguish between them, at least when writing to his parents. I, however, have had to use these terms in my explanatory notes. The term *Sunni* is the generally accepted term for the majority form of Islam. Followers of this branch are called Sunnis or Sunni Muslims. The minority form of Islam has several spellings. I do not like the word Shiite, as sounding somewhat archaic. The term Shi'i corresponds to the term Sunni and describes the minority form of Islam as well as its adherents, who may also be called Shi'is or Shi'i Muslims. I prefer this spelling because the apostrophe represents the unheard (by non Arabic speakers) consonant between the two *i*'s.

Christians were known by various names, most of which are clear from the context of Dad's letters. He uses three terms to refer to the Protestant or Evangelical Christians. *Nasrani*, or Nazarene, applies to all Christians in general. *Mosulawi* means "from Mosul" and may refer to the people of that city and region or more specifically, in Basrah during Dad's time, to the Evangelical Christians who came from Turkey or Northern Iraq, in the vicinity of Mosul. They were also called *Protestani*.

And a word about our mother, Christina Scholten Gosselink: As a child, she was known to her family as Stijntje but took the American name Christina when she went to school. In college, and for most of her life, she was known as Christine or Chris. In his letters, Dad always called her Crissy. Finally in retirement she went back to the name she really preferred, Christina.



The Dear Folks at Home, 1923
Gerrit Nina Jenny Robert Nick

Prologue

The life shaping moment came sometime in the fall of 1921 when he was summoned to the office of the president. My father, George Gosselink, was a senior at Central College in Pella, Iowa, looking forward to graduation the next spring, though his plans for the future after that were not well defined. While not yet formally engaged, he had an understanding with Christine Scholten, but she was two years behind him in college, so marriage would be put off for a time. He had vague thoughts of continuing his studies at the University of Iowa. He once said that he had hoped to become a mining engineer and go to South America. But it would be surprising if he was not also open to some “higher calling,” a career in the ministry, in teaching, or some other work of the church.

Dad had been raised in a good Christian family. His mother was especially devout. As a pretty young woman, Jennie Bogaard had attracted the attention of several young men, but she was not to be hurried. One ardent suitor was very persistent, and she must have liked him some, because she kept his letters, but he did not have what she was looking for. Eventually she responded to the overtures of a young farmer and neighbor, Gerrit Gosselink. Even then she was not entirely satisfied with what she found. In several letters, she urged him to stand up for his beliefs, to make a commitment, to attend communion services more regularly. Gerrit was quiet, less outspoken, but solid in his faith, and eventually he won her over. They were married in 1899.

The Church was an important part of their lives and heritage. It was just fifty years since their grandparents had arrived in America from the Netherlands. Gerhardus Hendrikus Gosselink and his wife Elizabeth had come with their seven children, including sixteen year old Gerhard, Gerrit’s father, in 1847. They had traveled with 160 families of *afgescheiden*, religious separatists, under the leadership of Dominie Hendrik P. Scholte. In Holland Dominie Scholte had preached against the power and practices of the national Reformed Church. He had been arrested and jailed and his followers had been persecuted. In America they sought the freedom to worship in their own way and also hoped for better economic opportunities than they were experiencing in Holland. They found their “Place of Refuge” on the prairies of Iowa and named their new settlement Pella. Jennie’s grandparents, Arie and Wijntje Bogaard and their children, including her father Nicolaas, a two months old baby, arrived from Holland to join the community in 1849.

Many of the immigrants were able to continue in their former trades, but most, including Gerhardus Gosselink and Arie Bogaard, took up farming. The rich soil of Iowa rewarded their hard work and the community prospered. By 1899 Pella was a well established town, with churches and schools, banks and places of business, small industries and a newspaper. The people developed good relations with their neighbors and were quick to adopt American ways. Dominie Scholte encouraged them to become citizens and participate in local government, and he personally became involved in state and national politics. Still, Pella retained much of its Dutch character. The Holland language was

still commonly spoken at home and on the streets and it was not until the 1920s that local churches began offering English language services. Gerrit and Jennie certainly knew English, but they often spoke Dutch at home and their children grew up speaking both languages.

Gerrit and Jennie raised their family of four children on a farm located between the De Moines and Skunk Rivers, a little east of Pella. The family attended the Third Reformed Church in town. Their eldest son George, born in 1900, started his education in a one-room schoolhouse in the country and went on to attend high school in town. It was a natural step then to go to the Reformed Church related Central College, also located in Pella. Over the next four years, while majoring in mathematics and science, he was active in the Men's Glee Club and pep band, joined the local chapter of the Student Volunteer Movement, and enrolled in the Cadet Corps, what we might call ROTC, although World War I had already ended. He was an active, confident young man, just the sort of person President Milton Hoffman, or Prexy as he was affectionately known, was looking for.

"George," he said, when Dad entered the office, "I have just received a letter from the Mission Board in New York. They need a man to go out to Arabia to teach English in the school there, and I think you are the man for the job." Here was "the call" that Dad was waiting for. His parents may have been hesitant to have him go so far away but they would have been proud to have a missionary son. Christine agreed to wait for him. And shortly after graduation in June of 1922, he packed his bags and headed off to Iraq on a three year assignment with the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church of America.

The Arabian Mission had been established in the early 1890s. Those were the heady days of the missionary movement, when leaders spoke of "the evangelization of the world in this generation", and American churches were sending scores of missionaries to Africa, India, China, Japan and other places around the world. But Samuel Zwemer and James Cantine, seminary students in New Brunswick, New Jersey, noticed there was one place, the Arabian Peninsula, which had so far been neglected. They raised money for an initial survey, traveled through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and though they could not penetrate into the heart of Arabia, they eventually persuaded the church leaders at home to support their endeavors to reach the Muslim Arab people living on the periphery of the peninsula

Their first permanent mission station was in Basrah in southern Mesopotamia, at that time a province of the Turkish Empire, shortly to become part of the nation of Iraq. Beginning their work there, just fifty miles east and downstream from where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers join to form the Shatt-el-Arab river, the traditional site of the Garden of Eden, Zwemer and Cantine may have thought of Cain, who went to dwell in the Land of Nod, east of Eden and "far from the presence of the Lord", and they may be forgiven if they found it still a godless place. Summer temperatures rose to a humid 120 degrees; winters were cold and damp. The officials of the Turkish government were suspicious and uncooperative and the people seemed to lack that tradition of hospitality for which the Arabs are famous. And at first they found no easier

conditions or friendlier welcome in Amarah, north of Basrah on the Tigris River, and in Bahrain, Muscat, or Kuwait, the other stations soon established in what was then called the Persian Gulf, all familiar names now but almost unknown to most Americans then. But those pioneers persevered in their work. The number of missionaries grew, and they were confirmed in their commitment to serve the Muslim people in that part of the world.

While evangelism, the preaching of the word and the distribution of Christian literature, was their first priority, those early missionaries could not but respond to the conditions they found, the need for medical care and the hunger for modern education. Hospitals and schools became the primary means by which they reached out to the people and through which they came to earn their respect, trust, and friendship.

Dad was assigned to work at the School of High Hope in Basrah. Dr. John Van Ess had established this school for boys in 1912, the same year that Dorothy Van Ess had opened a school for girls. The first was ground breaking; the second was revolutionary! To accomplish this Dr. Van Ess had had to travel to Istanbul to persuade authorities to give him an *iradah*, or official permit. While the Turkish officials in Basrah remained suspicious, local shaikhs and leading merchants in town were happy to send their sons, and even daughters, to the mission schools. Sayyid Talib Al Naqib, the leading Sayyid (descendant of the Prophet) of Basrah, and Shaikh Khazal, the paramount ruler of Mohammerah, across the river, were among those who were ready to put their sons under the care of John Van Ess. At that time there were no other schools in the area where students could receive a modern, secular education and become acquainted with the world beyond their narrow boundaries.

Much of the success of the school was due to John Van Ess himself. Arriving in Mesopotamia in 1902, he had immediately immersed himself in the language and culture of the Arabs, traveling extensively through the marshes and desert areas north and west of Basrah, getting to know tribal leaders and common people. By the time he married Dorothy Firman in 1911 and settled down in Basrah, he was fluent in the local Mesopotamian dialect and in classical Arabic, that most valued jewel of Arab culture. That alone would have won him the respect of the Arabs. But he was also friendly and outgoing, loved to spend time in the local coffee houses discussing the news of the world, talking politics and swapping stories. Though he never hid his missionary identity or purpose, he had respect for the people he was trying to reach. He was at home with the Arabs and they were at home with him.

Dad was the first of a succession of 'short-termers' assigned to the school in Basrah. His responsibilities included teaching English, geography and mathematics, supervising the dormitory, and helping students with sports and other extracurricular activities. Although his assignment was for three years only, he seems to have known almost from the beginning that he would be returning to a life of service in the Arabian Mission. Nowhere in his letters does he make that pledge explicitly. The only question had to do with what kind of training he should seek to prepare himself for that career. He returned to the U.S. in 1925, earned a B.D. degree in seminary, married Christine Scholten,

and served one year as pastor of a church in Accord, New York. In 1929, when circumstances made it possible, George and Christine Gosselink were appointed as missionaries of the Reformed Church. They served in Basrah, Iraq until their retirement in 1966.



George, Christine and Ruth Gosselink
Sheldon, Iowa before departure for Basrah
1929

Dear Folks at Home

Letters from Iraq, 1922-1925



The Voyage

Early in August 1922, George Gosselink drove with his mother from Pella to Boyden, in the northwest corner of Iowa, to spend a few final days with his fiancée Christine Scholten and give their mothers, Jennie Gosselink and Hendrikje Scholten, an opportunity to meet and get to know each other. The time was too short. In writing to George's mother later, Christine said, "Yes it does really hurt to think of having to be separated from him so long. The saying is often that the parting is the hardest, but though it was hard to see him leave that morning, all that day I seemed to miss him more, and as I thought of the three long years before I would be able to see him again I couldn't help feeling a little blue. . . . If he were going for selfish reasons and if I had no faith in God, I'm afraid it would almost be unbearable. But now when I think that it is the Master's will and that he is everywhere and will care for us whether we are together or separated, it really places a brightness over it all and I can't help but feel happy that God has sent this calling to him and that he was willing to accept."

A few days later George said another difficult farewell to his family in Pella, his parents, brothers Nick and Bob and sister Nina, and boarded the train for New York. Dad had spent his whole life in Pella and had seldom been separated from his family. While in college he had sung with the Men's Glee Club and had taken several tours with the group, twice to sing at churches in northwest Iowa and neighboring states and once to perform at churches in the East, when he had had a chance to visit Washington, Philadelphia, New York City, Niagara Falls and Holland, Michigan. He had seen very little of the rest of the country. Now he was headed off to the other side of the world.

In New York he had several more days to prepare for his voyage. He consulted with Duke Potter, then the Associate Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church of America, and met his traveling companions. James Moerdyk was a veteran returning to "the field" after a year of furlough. He had joined the mission in 1900 and had served in Basrah, Amarah, Bahrain and Muscat, where he had toured extensively in the interior areas of Jebel Akhdar, the Green Mountain. He would be assigned again to Basrah and become a close associate and friend. Bernard and Elda Hakken, newly married and newly appointed to the mission, were headed for Bahrain for language study. Mike Schnurman, like Dad, was a short term missionary assigned to the Arcot Mission in South India. He would travel with the others as far as Bombay.

Their route would take them by ship first to London, then to Bombay via the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, and then on to Basrah via the Persian Gulf. The trip would take six weeks.

Letters August 13 – September 23, 1922



HOTEL ALBERT
ELEVENTH STREET & UNIVERSITY PLACE
ONE BLOCK WEST OF BROADWAY
NEW YORK
ERNEST D. FOWLER
MANAGING DIRECTOR

*Sunday afternoon
August 13, 1922*

Dear Folks at Home:

Well – I'm still here and feeling fine and am enjoying myself, too – altho I haven't much to do, I manage to enjoy myself anyway. Yesterday morning I plumb over slept – I never woke up once during the whole night from the time I went to sleep until about 8:30 in the morning. After I had had breakfast I got down to the office at 9:30. Just outside on the street I met Mr. Potter. He had been on his vacation and had not been back to the office since until just then. I was there just a few minutes when Mr. Moerdyk arrived and a few minutes after that a Mr. Schnurman also came. He's just a young fellow, a graduate of Hope this spring. I believe, and he is going to India on a short term, so he will sail with us as far as Bombay, so that will be pretty nice company for me. Mr. and Mrs. Hakken I haven't seen yet; they were due to arrive Saturday morning but they hadn't come yet at eleven o'clock when we left the office again. We're all staying at the same hotel here but Schnurman went over to Passaic Sunday to visit relatives and I haven't seen Moerdyk all day yet.

I went over to Flatlands church in Brooklyn this morning and heard Prof. Lee preach. He is preaching there for five or six weeks while Roonds is on his vacation. Also met Mr. Ditmas again and was over to his house for dinner – had a dandy time. Soon after dinner I came back here and wandered around for a while. Went down to the pier where our ship is harbored. I saw the tops of the smoke stacks but that is about all, as the rest of it was behind buildings and the buildings were all closed. We surely ought to have a fine trip to England – the Mauretania is one of the fastest and biggest ships. Last week coming from England it made a record trip for time. And now I am back here

at the hotel. It's about four o'clock and I will spend the time until supper time writing a few letters. I think I shall go to the Marble Collegiate Church this evening.

I surely am glad that Mr. Moerdyk is going with us because he knows the ropes and knows how to get everything done in a hurry. We went down to the passport office yesterday and got our visas and everything on our passports fixed up in about half an hour where otherwise it might have taken two or three hours if he hadn't been with us. In the afternoon we went to the station and got our trunks transferred over to the pier and the rest of the afternoon we spent in sight seeing and loafing. We were at Central Park for a while and saw lots of animals in the zoo and lots of flower gardens.

I feel fine and dandy and can't say that I'm homesick yet and I hope you are not feeling so bad anymore either. I feel a whole lot better now than when I left home. You may think that I acted a little hard boiled or as if I didn't care very much whether I left home or not, but if I did act that way I did it because I had to keep myself straight – it was awfully hard to leave home and think of leaving parents and brothers and sister and friends and everything behind.² I appreciate, Mama, what you said about Crissy. I wanted to say something then but I couldn't, but you know that I think an awful lot of her and I know that you'll always be nice to her and try to help her in any way you can. I've asked her to do the same for you and I know she will.

Tomorrow all we have to do is to tend to a few things, and tomorrow evening you know Mrs. Alcott³ is entertaining us at dinner on the roof garden of the Astor Hotel. Ahem! Such renowned people we are. Say, don't let go of my full dress suit very soon yet because I may want you to send it up yet sometime. I wish now I had taken it. I won't need it tomorrow night but maybe I will over there. Schnurman asked Potter about it and he said that it came in quite handy once in a while, especially where there were English people. They dress up in evening togs for almost anything. Schnurman bought a tuxedo to take along. Maybe it's different in India than in Arabia. I'll wait and see and let you know. And then Tuesday at noon we sail. I'll try to write once more – either tomorrow night or Tuesday morning – and then you'll have to do without news from me for at least a while.

Yours lovingly,

George

² Writing many years later, in 1957, Grampa Gerrit Gosselink recalled that day: "When you left for Basra the first time, I remember how we parted on the Toonerville platform, and in the first letter we received from you, you apologized for not giving me a goodbye kiss. I answered that I liked your attitude better – your calm devotion to your call of duty, without any outward demonstration. I am also proud of Christine when I think of her willingness of letting George go for three years and remaining true to him."

³ Mrs. Eben E. Alcott, a member of the Women's Board of the Reformed Church of America, became something of a patron of all the young missionaries headed out to the Arabian Mission. When Mother and Dad were appointed full time missionaries in 1929, Mrs. Alcott gave them beds for their house in Basrah.

August 14, 1922

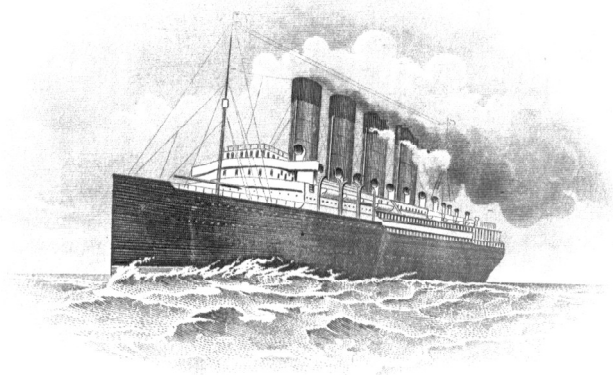
Dear Mother, Dad and the kids:

Now for my last letter before I leave the U.S.A. It's been a very interesting day today getting final things ready, etc. It surely costs a lot to send a missionary out. You know I got \$75 already to start from home with. This morning Mr. Potter gave me \$250 more. Of course I won't need all that, but very nearly all, and besides that he has already paid for my steamship ticket, which is also quite a lot. I don't know how much in all – I know it is about \$150 from here to England. I land in Southampton in England and then leave again from London. I first got that money changed for traveler's checks and also got about \$20 worth of English money – four pounds. This afternoon Moerdyk and I went down to the pier to see that our baggage was there alright and got it checked to go on board so all we have to do tomorrow is to walk right on board the steamer and make ourselves at home. I am already somewhat acquainted with our ship. We had a chance to go on board and we spent about two hours looking it over, saw my room and everything. Now I am back here and pretty soon I have to get ready for the dinner party. Then for a good sleep tonight and tomorrow morning about 10 o'clock or so we get on board and sail at 12:00

I got a big pack of letters this morning marked "not to be opened until on board the ship." They were all in one big envelope. I have a hunch Francis Van Der Linden collected and sent them, because it came from East Franklin Street. Also got Prexy's letter and yours, also – was mighty glad to get it. I am feeling just first rate and am anxious to get started.

Your loving son and brother,

George



CUNARD R.M.S. MAURETANIA.

Saturday August 19, 1922

Dear Folks at Home:

I won't be able to mail this yet for a couple of days, but there's lots to write and then I can write again before leaving England. We expect to get to Cherbourg Sunday night and to Southampton Monday morning. From there we go directly to London where we wait until the 25th when we start for Bombay on the Kaiser-i-Hind. We've had a very good trip so far, everybody feeling fine, no seasickness or anything of the kind in our party. We had the finest weather one could wish for the first two days out. Yesterday and this morning it was a little disagreeable outside, kinda chilly and raining and the water is a little rougher than usual, but that doesn't keep us from enjoying ourselves. We spend a good deal of our time reading and when the weather is good we go out on the top deck and play shuffle-board or other deck games. We are pretty well toward the back of the ship and can feel a little of the vibration of the propellers, or screws rather, and hear the hum all the time, too. Up toward the front in the first class quarters you can hardly feel any of that at all, and a couple decks below us in third class quarters it's worse than ours. I suppose you know we use second class. Third class is just about like riding in a Pullman train. This ship has four screws and it's no wonder it makes such a vibration, especially as we are going along at about 25 to 30 miles an hour average. I could write much more but I thot I'd have to write you on this kind of stationery once, so will write some more later and stop now. Hope everything is going fine at home yet. Seems a long time to wait before I can hear from you again, but I'm not homesick yet.

August 20, 1922

Nearing the end of the first part of our journey. We expect to hit Cherbourg tonight sometime soon after midnight. We will stay there until morning and then move on to Southampton. We've had fine weather again today, a little cold but nice and sunshiny most of the time. We've had a very interesting day today. We saw eight or ten ships of all sizes. We passed up the "New Amsterdam" this morning. It left New York three days before we did, so you see we're making some speed. We are making

between 550 and 600 miles a day and average about 24 knots an hour. Toward about six o'clock this evening we passed near some islands, the Scilly Islands, nothing but rocks. They had several lighthouses scattered all over them which we could just see with field glasses, that is all except one which was quite near, at least it looked near but was still over seven or eight miles off. These islands are almost 200 miles from France.

We had church this morning, or at least that is what it was supposed to be. It was an Episcopal service and didn't amount to much but some formal ceremonies, no sermon or anything of the kind. You see, everything on this ship is English and since England is Episcopalian the services on the ship are, too. There are quite a few missionaries on board, about twelve or fifteen, and this afternoon we had a short discussion together on the Sunday School lesson. There is a whole family of missionaries going to Africa – a man and his wife, two sons, one married, and a couple of small children. I don't know what denomination they are – United Brethren or something of the sort. Also two others going to Africa, one other to India – he comes from Canada – and then a couple more going I don't know where, besides our party. This Mike Schnurman in our party, from Hope, I've written about him before, is surely a fine fellow, that is, I mean as company for me. He is almost in the same boat I am. He never was a student volunteer in school and never thot about it seriously until only this spring when Mr. Potter came to Synod in Pella. He stopped at Holland and there Mike came in contact with him for the first time. So he didn't have half as long as I to make up his mind and go. He's going out on the same kind of term and same kind of work as I am.

Well, by this time in Pella you are just coming home from Sunday School. We are on London time now and that is six hours ahead of Pella time. Time for me to go to bed, so will close. I am going to get up early to see France tomorrow morning.

As ever yours,

George



CRANSTON'S KENILWORTH HOTEL,

GREAT RUSSELL STREET,

LONDON, W.C.1.

August 22, 1922

Dear Folks at Home:

In the great city of London. We got here last night, just before supper. We got settled but we were pretty tired so we went to bed pretty early. We arrived in Southampton just at noon, but it was a couple of hours before we got thru the immigration office and customs and then a couple of hours on the train and then some more time to get to the hotel. We didn't have any trouble getting thru; it's just because they are so awfully slow that it took us so long. All they did was ask us to show our passports, give it a stamp and shove us on. All they did in the customs house was ask if I had any firearms, perfume, tobacco, and a hundred other things, none of which I had, open my suitcase just for form and shove me on. They did the same with all the others.

Today we started seeing London. First we got our tickets to Bombay fixed up. That took almost up to dinner time. After dinner we went to the House of Parliament – we couldn't get in but we could see it on the outside. Then we went over to Buckingham Palace. And the rest of the afternoon we spent at Westminster Abbey. They were having a prayer service when we got there and we attended that. Then we saw where Livingston, Browning, Tennyson, Handel, Dickens, Gladstone and hundreds of others were buried right in the floor of the church, also where all the kings and queens are buried, and we also saw hundred of busts and monuments and slabs in memory of John Wesley, Lowell, Longfellow, etc. There are only three or four Americans represented there. Just in front of the Abbey they have a big statue of Lincoln.

Tomorrow we first look after our baggage, see that that gets to the docks. Then we want to go to St. Paul's, the Tower of London, London Bridge, etc. Don't worry; we have more than we can do in the few days we're here. But London isn't the town for me – it's the worst place to get lost in I ever saw, altho we haven't been lost yet. But there are no two streets in the whole place that run the same direction, and not one street that is straight for more than two blocks. And then talk of being "finished." I guess it is alright and got finished years ago. Everything is old fashioned. You very seldom see a new car, and they all have one of these rubber bulb horns and they keep honking those all the time. It sounds like a bunch of geese.

Well, so much for this time. I will write once more before we leave Friday. Am feeling fine and hope everything is all right at home.

Thursday eve. August 24

Again, our last evening in London and my last letter home for some time. I don't know when will be the next chance to mail again, I'm afraid not until we get to Port Said (near the Suez Canal). As far as I know, we only make one stop before we get there and that is at Marseilles, France, but only for a few hours, which they expect will be after midnight and ordinarily no mail is taken off the boat and we won't be able to get off either, they won't let us as we have no French visas, which cost five dollars.

We have surely been doing some sight seeing yesterday and today. Yesterday we were at St. Paul's cathedral. That surely is some church. We spent about three hours looking it over. We also stopped at every other place of interest that we passed. Mike Schnurman and I go together. It's pretty hard to keep the whole party together thru all those crowds, so we just split up. One of us has a map of London and the other a guide; we look in the guide what we want to see and then on the map where it is and then we strike out. We saw the London Stone, London Monument, London Bridge, Temple Church, Tower Bridge, and a great many of those things all of historic interest.



This morning we first went to buy our pith hats, or tropical hats, we have to wear as soon as we get to the other end of the Mediterranean, because the sun is so hot you'll get sunstroke without one in a minute. You know we have to wear them in Arabia all the time. Then Mike and I scooted for the London Tower. Saw all kinds of things for warfare there that they have used for several centuries, metal armor which the knights of the middle ages used, and all kinds of weapons from the bow and spear to modern mortars and machine guns. Saw the block and ax and also the place where they used to have the guillotine. Saw the royal jewels, thousands of diamonds set in the crowns of different kings and queens, and all kinds of rubies and emeralds and other kinds of stones. The rest of the afternoon we spent in the British Museum. We were there over three hours and I don't believe we saw half of it, all kinds of relics, sculpture, painting, and every imaginable thing, dating back to 3500 B.C. dug up in Egypt and old countries.

Well, it's time for bed and tomorrow morning we have to be ready to leave from here at about 9 o'clock. Our boat leaves at noon. Hope everything is all right at home. I'm feeling fine, as good as ever.

Your loving son and brother,

George



P & O. S. N. Co.
S.S.

Kaiser-i-Hind, August 30, 1922

Dear Folks at Home:

We expect to arrive in Marseilles tomorrow morning and there mail will be taken off the boat, so I will take another chance to write. I'm feeling fine and we're having fine weather now, too. The first morning out of London after breakfast I was actually seasick – it makes me sore to think about it now because it seemed such a foolish thing to get sick. Anyway, I was – only that morning, tho and by noon I was feeling fine again. I didn't go to dinner just for safety sake, but at supper I ate enough to make up for it again. I guess it was too much coffee that upset me. The stewards on this ship always come around with a cup of coffee and some fruit even before you are out of bed in the morning and then I took another cup at breakfast. I haven't touched coffee since and am feeling fine. This boat is only about a third as heavy as the Mauretania, so that even on the roughest day the Mauretania didn't seem as rough as a calm day on this boat. The first two days out of London were cold and damp but since that time we've had nice warm weather, fine to sit out on the top deck and read or sleep or take a sun bath for an hour or two. That's about all we have to do, but the time doesn't seem at all long or monotonous. We are going quite near the shore all the time, at least every once in a while land is in sight, although it may be twenty or thirty miles off. The Hakkens have a pair of field glasses but they don't care to use them very much, so they gave them to me to take care of and believe me I use them.



Bern and Elda Hakken

We stopped at Gibraltar for about two hours yesterday morning. We didn't have a chance to go ashore. We had a fine view of the Rock of Gibraltar from the ship while we waited there. I got a couple of good pictures, at least I hope they are good. That point belongs to the British and it surely is a good stronghold. The Strait of Gibraltar is only about 20 or 25 miles wide and the Rock itself is about eight or nine hundred feet high, sloping right from the water's edge. They have the whole thing set full of big guns. We could see a good many with the glasses, but they say they have a great many more hidden, and the whole thing is tunneled. They keep about six or eight

thousand soldiers there all the time, so that it is next to impossible for any other country to ever get possession of that point. They can shoot to pieces any ship that ever dares to enter or get out of the Mediterranean. Just opposite, on the other side of the straight, we could see the mountains of Africa.

Tomorrow morning we reach Marseilles and will stay there until Saturday morning. I don't know if we will be allowed to go ashore there. I don't know what will be our next stop, perhaps not until Port Said. I don't know how long we will stop there, but at least long enough to coal the ship again, which will be at least half a day, and there we can surely go ashore because our British passport will take care of that.

It surely is a funny crowd on this ship – most of them are English. No prohibition on this ship, and all these English must have their "slokje," women and men alike, and then too, most of the women smoke. Some of them are worse cigarette fiends than the men. There is no place where there are "no smoking" signs up, which would be of no use because almost everybody smokes. A couple of evenings ago, our party happened to be sitting together in a corner of the lounge, or parlor as you would call it, and a couple of women who were sitting nearby were smoking, and Mrs. Hakken said, "I believe I'll ask those ladies to stop smoking because there are gentlemen around." But in spite of all that we are enjoying ourselves.

Marseilles, September 1, 1922

One more from Marseilles and next time I write I suppose will be from Port Said. We leave here at midnight tonight. It will take about two weeks for us to get to Bombay and then two weeks more before we get to Basrah. I'll be glad when we start moving again from here. We haven't had a half bad time here, but I'd rather be on the move toward our destination.

I never saw such a dirty place as this city is – dust and dirt everywhere and then quite a little wind, and you can imagine what it is like. They don't try to keep the streets clean, and the stores and houses, too, are dirty inside and out. But it is kinda interesting to walk along the street and look in at the store windows or sit down in a park once in a while. Mike and I have surely done a lot of walking in these two days here. There isn't much of interest in this place, a couple of nice Roman Catholic churches, a Notre Dame is here also and a very nice cathedral up on a high rocky hill. And you can get a fine view of the surrounding country from the top of the hill. I'm feeling fine as ever. All this walking has given us enough exercise again for a couple of weeks. We didn't have any trouble getting ashore; they never even asked to see our passports once and we could go back and forth as we wanted. Well, no more news, so will close.

Kaiser-i-Hind, September 5, 1922

This letter will be at least a week longer in coming, I guess, than the last one I sent. This will be posted with all the ship's mail tomorrow morning in Port Said, but very likely it will have to wait a couple days before a west-bound mail steamer comes along to take it to England. Pretty nice, tho – all letters mailed on the ship only need the postage the same as if it was mailed in England, and England and the U.S. have a special mail contract so that it doesn't take any more postage to send a letter to the States than to any place in England. It is only a penny and a half English money, which equals about two and a half cents U.S. money. If we waited and mailed a letter on shore in Port Said we would have to have Egyptian postage and that would probably be equal to 5 or 6 cents U.S. money. In Marseilles it was 50 cents French postage or about 4 cents U.S.

We've been having a fine trip on this side of Marseilles – fine weather part of the time and getting warmer all of the time, but they say this is cold compared to what we are going to get in the Red Sea. Toward evening of the first day out of Marseilles we passed between the islands of Sardinia and Corsica, where Napoleon was born. The islands are so close that you can see both at the same time, passing between them. The next afternoon we passed near a small island; the whole island was nothing but a volcanic mountain and it was in action – not very bad, just a lot of smoke coming from the crater. Toward evening of the same day we passed between Sicily and the lower tip of Italy. The passage between the island and the mainland is very narrow, only about five miles across. Our boat is about the biggest that can pass thru because it is not deep enough for bigger ships. The land was very pretty on both the island and the mainland. It looked rough and mountainous, but even the mountain sides were cultivated, all covered with grapevines. That was the first nice green that we had seen even tho we have skidded along the coast almost all the way from England. Before that all the land was too rocky and too steep to cultivate. Yesterday we passed near the island of Crete. Tomorrow morning early we hit Port Said, stay there about four or five hours to take on water and coal, then on thru the canal, and then we don't stop again until we hit Aden, just outside the Red Sea.

By the time you get this letter I suppose school will have started again. Everybody back and working the old grind again. I'd like to drop down in Pella for a couple of hours in about two weeks from now to have a look at things around school and home again. Oh, no, I'm not homesick – but a person can't help wishing sometimes.

Kaiser-i-Hind, September 9, 1922

Well, we've had our first real "smell" of the East and our first taste of tropical weather. We're almost as far south now as we're going, that is about 12 degrees north of the equator. We're almost at the end of the Red Sea now. I suppose we'll pass around the bend and turn east sometime this evening and reach Aden tomorrow morning early. I don't know how long we'll be there, perhaps a couple of hours, long enough to take on some more coal, and mail will also go off.

We surely have been having a fair sampling of hot weather since leaving Port Said. I guess it's the Red Sea alright. There is hardly a minute either day or night that I'm not wringing with sweat. If there is anything of a breeze at all it is only a hot dry wind, but we haven't been having very much wind at all. But the heat isn't bothering me very much – I'm feeling first rate and still enjoying myself, sleeping good too in spite of the heat. It is usually after eleven before we go to bed, because it is absolutely too hot down in our cabins before that time, but then I drop to sleep right away and don't wake up again until morning, unless I wake up to find myself swimming in sweat, and then I am awake only long enough to scoop the water out of my bed and drop off to sleep again. We have the fan in our room running all night, but even that doesn't keep us cool. Lots of people go out and sleep on the deck, but if you do that you can't go to sleep until very late unless you want to sleep while there are still a lot of people on deck, and then you get booted out early again because they come around early to scrub the deck.

Port Said gave us our firsts smell of the East, tho there wasn't very much to see. We went ashore anyway for a couple hours. We stopped there for about four hours. It is only a small town and has quite a little of the atmosphere of a desert town, the streets all sandy and dusty, but I liked it a good deal better than Marseilles. The



streets are lined with palm trees and other desert trees. Going thru the canal was interesting, too. The land on both sides is nothing but desert, nothing but sand dunes as far as you can see, with some brush growing here and there. We saw a couple of herds of camels. It took us almost eleven hours to go thru the canal. The canal is about 90 miles long, and we had to go slow all the way. Since that time we have been going in the Red Sea all the time. We expect to reach Bombay about Friday the 15th if we

don't have any trouble. Some of the ships coming from Bombay which we have met in the last couple of days have told us that we are liable to run into quite a storm on the Indian Ocean. But they say more than likely the storm will be over before we get there because they never last long, so we'll miss it yet.

Well, this is about all the news. There isn't much new news, just the same thing everyday, chugging along at the rate of about 400 miles a day. I suppose by the time you get this letter I'll be at my destination.

Kaiser-i-Hind, September 14, 1922

Not very much new news this time but will write a few lines anyway as I have the chance of mailing a letter again when we arrive in Bombay tomorrow morning. I don't know how long we will be in Bombay, probably until the first part of next week. It

all depends on when we can get a boat going up the Persian Gulf, and then we will have another ten day trip on the water. We have been having very nice weather since leaving Aden, very much cooler than it was in the Red Sea, and we missed the storm completely. There is still quite a swell on the water, but the storm itself is gone. A day after we left Port Said they had quite a storm on the Mediterranean and yesterday we heard that there had been a wreck off the coast of Spain, 600 on board and all but 30 rescued. You see, we get news messages from England everyday by telegraph.

We had a nice time at Aden. We stopped there about six hours. There wasn't very much of particular interest to see, but we went ashore anyway and took a ride in a taxi. We rode for almost three hours and it only cost us about a dollar apiece. It's an awfully hot place. The city is in a bay with high rocky mountains on three sides, and the sun just burns down. But riding like we did was very nice and refreshing after that hot trip thru the Red Sea. Almost all the cars there are American made – Fords, Maxwells, Dodges and also a couple of Essexes. The city is almost entirely dependent for its water supply on tanks and wells in the mountains where the water drains when it rains. Then it is pedaled out thru the town in tanks drawn by camels. We went up to see some of these tanks, up a winding road and thru several long tunnels hewn out of solid rock. The car had about all it could do to get up there, but it was very interesting to see.

I'll try to write once more from Bombay if we stay there any time at all, but if you don't hear from me in a couple of days, you will know that we are on up the Persian Gulf.

*Carlton Hotel, Bombay
September 21, 1922*

Dear Folks at Home:

Still in Bombay but everything is turning out fine. We are all set to leave tomorrow, Friday, on the fast steamer and will be in Basrah about the 30th. Hakkens got their passports in shape and we all succeeded in getting passage on the fast steamer, so we will have a merry crowd on the way up, as the Van Esses and Pennings will also be on that boat. They arrived in Bombay yesterday and we all had dinner together at the



Mission House last night. The Mission House is a place where missionaries can stay when coming thru Bombay, but as it was full when we came we had to go to a hotel. But the person in charge of the Mission House invited us over there for dinner last night, all together and we had a very nice time. The Hakkens have been doing quite a little shopping here, buying a lot of furniture and dishes, etc. You can get that stuff much cheaper here than any place else if you go to the native bazaars. You can get almost anything imaginable in these bazaars and if you

bargain with them long enough you can get some things for almost nothing. They ask you a high price first – you offer them about half or sometimes even a fourth of what they ask and just so you hold your own they will come down alright. Mike bought a pair of carpet slippers there. At first they asked him seven rupees (a rupee is about 29 cents U.S. money) and he bargained them down to two and a half. Some of them are strictly one price places though and won't bargain with you, but even so they have good stuff very cheap.

I also did some shopping. I had two white drill suits made to order for 12 rupees a piece. Hakken got six of them. That is about all most missionaries wear, especially in the hot season. That's the way you get all your clothes here. You go off to one of these tailor shops, pick the goods you want, they take your measurements and if you are very much in a hurry they will have the suit ready in four hours. That's service, isn't it? And it's good stuff, too, and good workmanship, as good as any tailor at home does it. And think of getting a suit for 12 rupees or less than four dollars. I wish I had waited and gotten more of my clothes here. I got a better bargain than Hakken. He ordered them at the first shop he came to and got them for 15 rupees. I also bought a dozen socks for five rupees, part of them for six annas and the rest at eight (16 annas = one rupee – or one anna is equal to a little less than two cents) and a couple of shirts for four and a half rupees.

We got all our money changed into India money – that is used in Arabia, too, and we all ran around as if we were bankers. I had about \$230 changed and got nearly 800 rupees for it, and the others had still more. It surely costs the Board a lot to send missionaries out like this - \$145 to cross the Atlantic, 72 pounds or about \$325 from England to Bombay, and now about \$90 from here to Basrah, besides hotel bills, etc. It runs right up to seven hundred dollars, besides the outfit allowance. It is no wonder they can't give the missionaries very big salaries.

I am having some of my pictures developed here and can get them this afternoon and will send some of them to Crissy and I will ask her to let you see them, and then you can fight it out yourselves how you want to divide them. If there are some that you both want or if you both want all of them, let me know and I'll have some more printed. Maybe I'll get a developing outfit of my own in Basrah if it doesn't cost a lot and get it done.

I am feeling fine and growing fat. It's a fact. I haven't had a chance to get next to a scale but I can notice it on my belt. I wear it about one inch and a half looser than usual. I suppose this will be the last letter before I get to Basrah so you mustn't expect any more letter for at least a couple of weeks, because it will be at least a week going up and a week longer for the letter to come back, see?

Your loving son and brother,

George

British India Steam Navigation Co., Ltd.

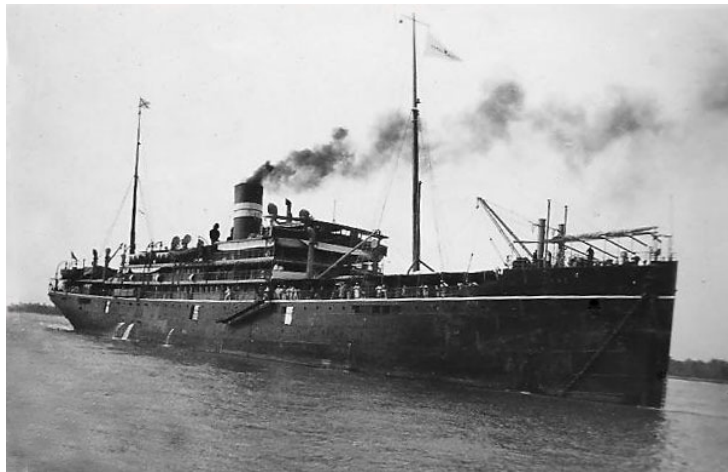
S. S. Varsova
September 23, 1922

Dear Folks at Home:

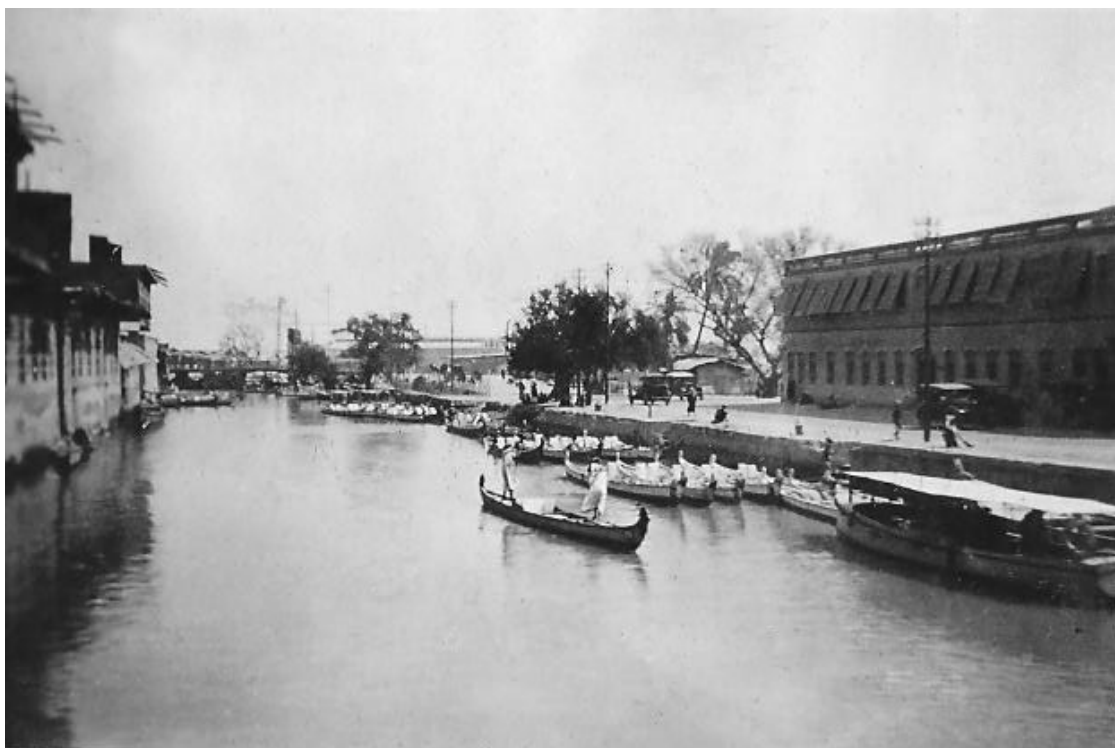
Even tho I just mailed a letter to you day before yesterday, I don't suppose you'll get this until at least a week later, because it has to wait for the next mail steamer from Bombay. We are making a couple of stops on the way, something we didn't know about until today, and tomorrow mail will be taken off the boat again.

We are stopping for just a little while at Karachi tomorrow morning – that is right in the upper corner of India on the coast, so that will be the last we see of India. We have a pretty nice boat, small – only a little over a thousand tons, only a tenth as large as the Kaiser-i-Hind – but very good accommodations. It rolls around quite a bit even tho the sea is quite calm. I don't believe I'd care to be on it in rough seas. I felt a little sea sick last night, but forgot about it and feel fine today

Yours lovingly, George



The S. S. Varsova



George Gosselink

Ashar Creek, Basrah

Basrah

Dad's destination, and his home for the next three years, was Basrah, a small city in southern Iraq, located on the Shatt-el-Arab, the river formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. At that time Basrah had a population of about 100,000, but it was the third largest city in Iraq. The Arabian Mission had had a presence there since 1891, when it was still a part of the Ottoman Empire, the capital of the Vilayet or Province of Basrah. It was an old city, founded in the 7th century as a military garrison by the early conquering Army of Islam. Over the centuries it had been governed by a series of Arab, Mongol and Persian rulers, but in spite of this political instability it had maintained some prominence as a flourishing commercial and cultural center, known for its scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and several competing schools of theology. After the Ottomans took control in 1668, its importance declined so that by the early years of the 20th century it had become a drowsy city in the backwaters of the Empire.

World War I transformed Basrah from a sleepy provincial capital of the Ottoman Empire to the busy, commercial center of the newly established nation of Iraq. Although the War had begun in Europe in August 1914, the British waited until November before making a formal declaration of war on Germany's ally Turkey. The next day they landed a British-Indian military task force at Fao, near the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab, and very quickly occupied Basrah and the surrounding area. Their objective, ostensibly, was to secure the oil fields of nearby Persia (Iran), an essential source of fuel for the British navy, but having driven the Turkish forces out of Basrah so easily, they quickly set their sights on the rest of what they referred to as Mesopotamia, the Turkish provinces of Baghdad and Mosul.

The campaign proved much more difficult than they had anticipated. The British did not commit a sufficient force to accomplish their objective and were surprised when the Turks put up such a strong defense. The war along the Tigris River took many thousands of lives, mostly Indian soldiers, and it was almost four years before the British were finally able to drive the Turkish army out of Mesopotamia. Basrah, in the mean while, became the political and military headquarters for the campaign and the port through which they brought in all their equipment and supplies from India, and as a consequence it became a busy, vibrant city.

Basrah had been an important, if quieter, town even before the coming of the British. Located fifty miles up the wide Shatt-el-Arab from the Persian Gulf, its deep water port served all of Mesopotamia. It was a major producer of dates, which were shipped all over the world, and it handled the significant export of grain, which was grown further to the north. Even when the first pioneer missionaries, James Cantine and Samuel Zwemer, arrived in 1891, they came on one of the weekly ships of the British India Steam Navigation Company that carried mail, passengers and freight up the Persian Gulf from Bombay. Shallow draft, side-wheeler steam boats connected Basrah with Baghdad and other towns along the Tigris River. In those days the British Consulate provided the

international mail service to and from Europe via Bombay, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean.

The population was mainly Muslim Arabs with some Persians and a minority of Arabic speaking Christians and Jews. There was a small foreign community consisting of British, German and Russian consuls and their staffs, and the mostly British representatives of shipping firms, including the local agent of the Hills Brothers Company, which handled date exports to the United States before some enterprising American took plant stock from Basrah and introduced dates to California.

The governing class, including customs officials, the police, teachers, and military officers, were of course Turkish. Most seemed to consider their assignment to Basrah a sort of exile. They seldom learned Arabic, kept themselves aloof from the local population, and took every opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the people they were supposed to be serving. Of course, in this they took their direction from the pashas, the governors of the province, who were chiefly concerned with getting back, with interest, the money they had paid to secure their position. Under these circumstances, very little was done to improve the economy, the infrastructure or the living conditions of the people. There were some necessary public works projects, such as the flood and irrigation control measures on the rivers to the north and the dredging of creeks and canals within the city itself.

Basrah was known, at least at high tide, as “The Venice of the East.” The countryside, for about two miles on either side of the river, was intersected by creeks and smaller canals leading off of them, through which the six-foot tide flowed in and out twice a day. The canals watered the date gardens and provided the primary avenues of transportation. There were few good roads and most local travel was by *bellum*, the gondola-like passenger craft, poled or rowed by two boatmen. Larger sailing craft, known as *mahalas*, carried heavier freight and smaller high-prowed canoes, called *meshhufs*, were paddled by Marsh Arab women selling eggs and dairy products.

The few existing schools were poorly run and offered instruction only in Turkish. There were no hospitals in the city and few doctors, until the Mission opened its facility in 1911. Every several years a cholera or plague epidemic would take thousands of lives. There was no safe public water supply. The missionaries hired boatmen to go out to the middle of the river to collect fresh water every day. Still, Basrah had a certain charm, captured by Dorothy Van Ess, writing about her first impressions:

“I first saw Basrah under a full moon on the last night of 1911. We went up the Shatt-el-Arab river by launch from Mohammerah (now Khoramshar) on the Persian side, a trip of about eighteen miles. Majestic date palms lined both sides of the river, a glorious sight in the moonlight, and there was an occasional Arab village to be seen as we swept along and, now and then, a large country house of some wealthy landowner.

“Presently we came to Ashar Creek, at right angles to the river, with the Turkish Customs House on the corner. This was the principle waterway of the city and connected the port section of the town, Ashar, with old Basrah City, a mile or more west of the river. As we turned into the creek I could see the dome and minaret of a large mosque, pale and beautiful against the moon-lit sky. The roofs of the bazaars were visible behind the mosque, and as we went on up the creek we passed the closely built Arab city along the water front. The houses looked like fairy palaces in the moonlight, the bridges under which we went on our way to the mission house were bathed in enchantment, the date palms were stately and tranquil. Though I knew it afterward in prosaic daylight and devoid of all glamour, I have never forgotten the loveliness of my first impression of the city which was to be my home for half a century.

“The political setting for our lives those last years of the great Ottoman Empire, was a dramatic one, a period of transition between an old world about to pass away and a new and totally different one about to be born.”⁴

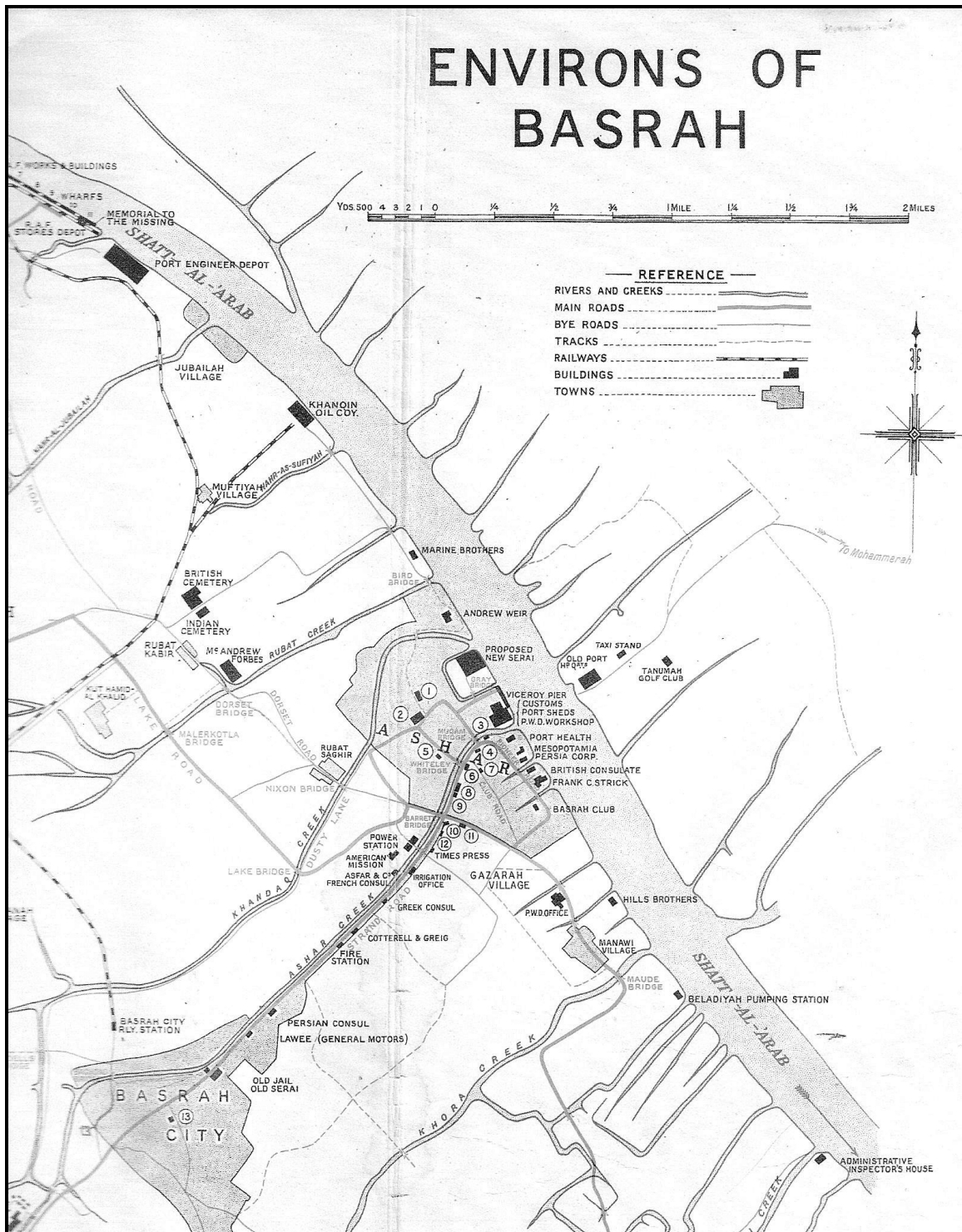
Indeed, the city had already changed dramatically by the time Dad arrived in 1922.⁵ Most of the British civil and military officers who had come in 1914 to take over the governance of Basrah had had their training and experience in India, and from the beginning they seemed to have assumed that Basrah would be incorporated into the larger sphere of British India, an anchor, perhaps, to their extensive economic and political interests in the Persian Gulf. The British were efficient colonial administrators. After restoring order, which had broken down with the hasty departure of the Turkish officials, they quickly set about building up the installations and facilities they required for carrying on the war, and at the same time began providing needed services to their new subjects. They built a new port facility a few miles north of Basrah, with wharfs where ships could dock and unload their cargo;⁶ a terminus for the railway, which when completed in 1918 would link Basrah and Baghdad; and an airport, designed for the British Air Force but which would grow to become an important commercial facility. They paved streets and built new roads in and around the city. They established an efficient police force, provided hospitals and health services, and even began, with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Van Ess, a system of government run schools. And, for the first time in Basrah’s history, they began to supply the public with electricity and piped, potable water, incidentally from facilities right next door to the Mission compound.

All of this activity, and the presence of a large expatriate British community and the coming and going British and Indian troops, brought an

⁴ Dorothy Van Ess, Pioneers in the Arab World, 1974, p. 51.

⁵ The map of the Environs of Basrah was first issued in 1927 as part of a report of the Iraqi Public Works Department and was included in a small atlas, Maps of ‘Iraq with Notes for Visitors, published in 1929. It is clearly drawn from a British perspective; the circled numbers represent British trading firms, banks and gas stations. St. Peter’s, the Anglican church that Dad attended, is located at No. 3, a short walk from the American Mission compound on Ashar Creek, shown in the middle left. The small square in the lower left corner, perhaps penciled in by Dad himself, may indicate the location of the original school building in Basrah City.

⁶ Previously ships had anchored in the river and used lighters to load or offload their cargo.



Basrah, 1927

economic boom to Basrah. Businessmen and tradesmen made lucrative contracts with the British army. Farmers found a new market for their produce. Young men who had been educated in the Mission school and knew English found ready employment as translators and clerks in British offices. Armenian and Christian refugees from Turkey, many of whom had also been educated in mission schools, flocked to Basrah to find work. Shopkeepers began importing all manner of products from India to meet the demands of newly wealthy Arabs as well as the foreign community. The British India Rupee became the standard unit of currency.

When Dad arrived, the war was long over, of course, but Basrah was still a prosperous city. It was the sole port of the newly established nation of Iraq and served as the gateway to all of Mesopotamia, direct travel across the desert to the Mediterranean being still in the future. There was a large British presence in the city. Although Iraqis were taking over many of the official positions in the local government, every department had its British advisor. The Port Director and many members of his staff were still British. The Air Force kept a squadron in Basrah, and a large number of British and Indian soldiers were billeted there.

In many ways, Basrah must have felt like an outpost of British Colonial India. The British men, civilian or military, were usually in contact with Arabs in the course of their work, but they rarely met socially. Their wives and families seldom learned the language and had little interaction with the local community.⁷ Part of this was a matter of culture, of course. Arab men and women did not mingle socially even among themselves. But part was due to the practice of separation ingrained in the customs of the British Raj and symbolized by the presence of an exclusive British Club. The American missionaries managed to bridge the gap between the two cultures. They met British people socially, at church, and in public gatherings, and developed close friendships, especially among the old hands who had been in Basrah before the War. And of course they maintained close ties with their Arab friends. The men were often invited to Arab homes to dine on special occasions or met in the coffee houses of the city, while the women visited with Muslim women in each others' homes. Christian men and women mixed more easily and were more likely to see the missionaries socially.

Until 1910, when they obtained permission to buy their own property, the American missionaries lived in Basrah City, the older part of town, where the two mission schools were also located. That is where Dad lived when he first arrived in 1922. In 1910 the mission purchased six acres of land in Ashar, the newer section of the city, where it built a hospital, a chapel, and two houses for the missionaries. In 1923, the Boys School was moved to the vacant hospital building. A few years later, land was purchased on the outskirts of Basrah City for a new Girls School, with a house for the missionaries assigned to work there.

⁷ The wife of the British Port Director of Basrah, Lady Ward, insisted on speaking to her Arab gardeners in Hindustani, the language she had learned in India and must have assumed all "natives" would, or should, speak.

The American missionaries were a close knit community in themselves. They lived in close proximity, saw each other on almost a daily basis, and made a point of celebrating all important holidays together, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas, which were feasts worthy of the best of American traditions. This was the city, community and home-away-from-home that Dad found when he arrived in Basrah in September 1922.



Oliver Butler

Khora Creek, Basrah

Letters September 29, 1922 – March 8, 1923

*American Mission, Basrah
September 29, 1922*

Dear Folks at Home:

At last, I'm here, arrived yesterday forenoon and by now we are all settled, at least temporarily for the conference which will be held next week. It took us quite a while to get thru customs, etc. and our luggage packed in a boat which was to take it up to the house, so that took us most of the day and we didn't get our bags until late last night. The docks where we landed are still quite a ways from the city and from the place where Mr. Van Ess lives and where the rest of the mission buildings are. It is quite expensive to get a truck to take our baggage, so we hired a "bellum" (boat) to take it down the river a ways and then up a creek that runs right in front of Mr. Van Ess's house.

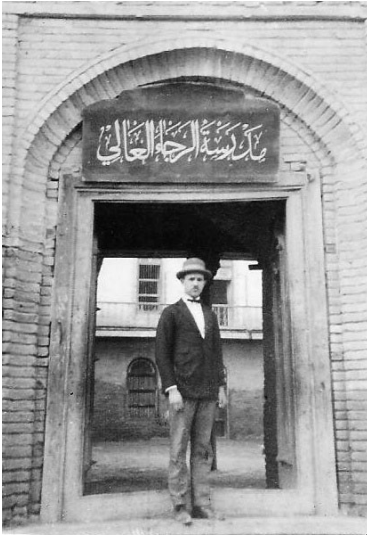
They have these creeks or canals dug all over for irrigation. It surely is a fine system of irrigation, automatic, it works with the tide. Even tho Basrah is about 50 miles up the river from the Gulf, the tide still has its effect up here, the country is that level. The creeks are dug so that they are empty when the tide is out. When the tide comes in, the water runs into these creeks and the whole country is automatically irrigated, and at the same time boats can come in from the river and go up the creeks. This time of year the tide comes in the forenoon and goes out again just before noon and then begins to come in again in the evening. We were too late for the morning tide so the boat with our baggage had to wait until night.



This is a great date country – both sides of the river as far as we came up is nothing but date plantations, all you can see is just date palms, with here and there a small town and packing house on the river side. The packed dates are loaded on steamers right from the packing house and sent to all parts of the world. Dates are just in season now and they are busy packing them everywhere. A few days ago we met a cargo boat that was loaded with nothing but dates, bound for New York.

I have been running around quite a little already. Yesterday Moerdyk had to go over to the school to get some stuff he had left there and I went along with him, so I had a chance to look at my place of business for the future. I met several of my boys, saw where I am to live, etc. I am to stay right in the dormitory and I am to be a kind of matron for it at the same time, keep order, etc. The dormitory is just part of the one school building – dormitory, dining hall, classrooms, etc. all in one building. It's an old

building, a rented building, but Mr. Van Ess says that this will probably be the last year we will have to use that building. Next year he wants to use the mission hospital building



for a school. That's a very nice building and is right near Mr. Van Ess's house. This building is quite a ways away, too far to walk – he always has to use a jitney to go back and forth. The mission has not very much use for a hospital here and has been renting it to the government during the war and since. Next year Van Ess is going to ask the mission board to let him use it for a school, and that will be ever so much nicer.

I have also been down to the business district, the bazaars, and was very much surprised. Whoever said that you couldn't get anything in Basrah was all wrong, because they have almost everything here that anybody could want. Of course, some of it may not be as good and it is mostly a little higher than at other places because they have to pay so much duty on everything that comes in from outside, but you can get it anyway.

I am feeling fine and getting anxious to get to work. I have talked to Mr. Van Ess a little and am very pleased with what he has lined up for me. I won't have as much English as I was told at first. He asked me what I had in school and said, "Good" he would give me physics and algebra and things like that and only two or three classes of English. He would rather take the English himself. You can imagine that suits me fine.

There was a big long letter here from Bog⁸ for me. It was mighty good to hear of things going on at home, even tho he wrote that letter only a little while after I left. That was all the mail I have had so far, but I suppose there will be more when the next steamer comes in. Mail comes in and goes out regularly once every week, so I think we can write regularly once a week, even tho letters will be on the road five or six weeks. You notice once how long it will take this letter. It will go off on the mail steamer on Sunday, October 1st.

October 5, 1922

I guess Thursday or Friday will be about my regular time to write home every week, so I'll start right away. The weekly outbound mail steamers usually go on Sunday but letters must be mailed before Saturday afternoon in order to go out on that boat, so Thursday or Friday makes a pretty safe time to write.

⁸ Dad's Uncle David Bogaard was his mother's youngest brother. They were close in age and good friends.

I received the first letter from you last Tuesday. It came on the same boat we came on, at least it was stamped by the Basrah post office September 29, but I didn't get it until Tuesday. I was mighty glad to get it and hear from home again. I don't expect I shall get any more this week because they say that the incoming mail steamer this week failed to connect with the mail steamer at Bombay. You may not understand all this business about mail connections, but it may be interesting and may help to get our mail started running smoothly back and forth, and you'll know what's what if you should have to wait a few days or even a week or more for a letter – it's because some mail steamer failed to connect with another somewhere.

I can't get used to the idea yet of thinking of news in your letters as being about six weeks old by the time I get it, and that if I should answer any question in your letter you could not get it until about three months after you wrote the letter.

This week has been very interesting to me and I am having lots of fun, too. I am glad we got here in time for Annual Meeting. I've learned more about missions, especially the Arabian Mission, than all I knew before. I'm learning a lot of geography, too. There are about 25 missionaries here and they come from all parts of the Arabian Mission. All are here now for the conference. I never knew the mission covered as much as it does. The southernmost station is Muscat, at the head of the Gulf, way at the tip of the peninsula, then Bahrain, and Kuwait, near the northern end of the Gulf, then Basrah up the river a ways, then Amarah, still further up the river, and up as far as Baghdad.

Rev. and Mrs. Dykstra are stationed in Amarah and the Board has given them a motor launch and they do a lot of touring evangelistic work up and down the river. They came down to Basrah with the launch and I had a nice long ride in it the other day. They surely have it fixed up in great shape. It's quite a big boat and can hold up to 35 people. The back part of it they have fixed up into a little room, all closed up with windows and doors. They have a wide bench on each side which can be used for beds. They have a tank for drinking water, a charcoal stove, drawers and boxes fitted under the beds, along the sides and against the ceiling, for clothes and food, so they can live on the boat for several weeks at a time. When they go touring out among the Arab tribes where there are no big cities or any civilized accommodations at all, they have to go back to the launch every night to sleep. I'm learning a lot about the different kinds of missionary work in this way.



And we have a lot of fun, too. They are a jolly bunch and laugh and joke as much as anybody could, sometimes going even so far as that some people would call it sacrilege. And then some of those people would surely fall back flat if they would see Mr. Van Ess haul out his cigarettes and smoke to beat the band. Another one of the

missionaries in Basrah also smokes cigarettes, but they are the only ones in the Mission that smoke. I went along with Van Ess a couple times to the coffee shops. That is his way of getting in with a lot of people one could not reach in any other way. Towards evening he goes out into the coffee shops, which are just a bunch of benches pulled together on some street corner where natives get together and talk and smoke and drink this awfully strong Turkish coffee. Well, he goes there and talks and smokes and drinks coffee, and watches his chance to slip in a little missionary talk once in a while. He seems to be able to stand almost anything – he likes the heaviest of native food, smokes native tobacco, and has drunk as many as 35 cups of this strong Turkish coffee a day, about two cups of which is enough to knock down the ordinary person. I had one cup of it once – it's good if you take just a little bit of it. It seems to be made of coffee ground to a powder and then put into water until it is almost as thick as pudding, with lots of sugar in it.

Mr. and Mrs. Barney are going home on furlough next spring. So are Mr. and Mrs. Bilkert. Mr. and Mrs. Van Peurseem are going home right away, as soon as they can get packed. They were to have gone in the spring but she has not been well for quite a while. They went to India this summer, hoping that she would pick up there, but she didn't, so they have asked to go home right away. Mr. and Mrs. Cantine, Dr. and Mrs. Mylrea, and Dr. and Mrs. Harrison are home now and will be coming back between now and next spring. And then Mr. Moerdyke's brother and his wife will be coming out some time this winter as new missionaries.

October 13, 1922

We surely have been having a real initiation to missionary life, or rather to Basrah life, this week, although this is the first time anything like this has happened around here for a long time, and not any of it has struck me so don't get worried. Monday evening we were subject to a robbery. About eight or nine of us have been staying, or at least sleeping, in a house just across the creek from Mr. Van Ess's house. While we were all at the meeting Monday night, thieves broke into our house across the street and started mixing things up. They started in Dr. and Mrs. Dame's room and turned everything upside down and out of trunks and suitcases. They took a couple of Mrs. Dame's dresses, about 40 rupees, which the Dames had forgotten to take with them, and then went on to the Hakkens' room. It seems they got half thru rummaging thru their stuff and they were frightened away. They got a little money from the Hakkens but worst of all they took Mrs. Hakken's glasses, and she's only got one pair with her. She doesn't wear them regularly but still can't do without them altogether. But there is a good chance of getting everything back because the detective department here is pretty good. A couple years ago the Van Esses were robbed, too, and they got everything back, even to a thimble which had been taken from her sewing bag and sold separately from the other stuff.

Wednesday night there was more excitement. Miss Kellien, one of the missionaries living alone in a little bit of a bungalow belonging to the Mission, was sleeping on her roof (A great many sleep on the roofs here in the summer. The roofs are

all flat.), and a little after midnight she woke and found a man standing next to her bed, a Tommy, a British soldier working in the city power plant right next to the mission compound. She started to bawl him out and he walked away, climbed down and went off. After that she went to sleep inside, but a couple of hours later she woke again and heard a noise on the roof. She quietly slipped out and went over to the Van Ess house and asked him to come over. He and Bilkert went over and found that same fellow under the bed. Bilkert fell on him as he started to come out and try to get away and Van Ess whacked him over the head with a stick. They managed to hold him until the power house guards came and arrested him. He is still under arrest and stands a good chance of getting a court martial.

But in spite of all that, we have been having a good time. Tuesday we all piled into Dykstra's launch and went down the river 5 or 6 miles and had tea and came back after dark. It was nice on the river at that time of day. It gets dark early – by six it is quite dark already. We also had several birthday parties for three or four people who had birthdays during the time they were here.

The people of the “down the Gulf” stations all left today, and those going to Baghdad went this evening, so only the Basrah folks are left, except two from Bahrain who are staying with the Van Esses for a couple weeks more. I haven't moved to the



school yet and very likely won't until the first part of next week or not until I can get my rooms fixed up at school. At present, since the others have left, I am sleeping in the church right near the Van Esses' house and eating with them. It's a fine place to sleep, with fans and everything. Basrah really isn't so awfully slow when it comes to these things. It's got electric lights and everybody has electric fans. They have a

city water supply which is perfectly safe for drinking. It doesn't taste so very good, at least not as good as Pella water, but that's because it is chlorinated. It helps for thirst anyway. They haven't got street cars, but they've got taxis, or motor cars as they call them, which take you anyplace you want to go for only a few cents. It's funny that they all use the biggest and best cars. Buicks are used more than anything else, especially these big seven passenger ones. I rode in a right hand drive Essex today. Most of the cars here are right hand drive and signs say, “Keep to the left.”

Mr. Van Ess has been very good to me. He is always asking me if I am comfortable or if there is anything I need. He is going to entirely furnish my room at school. While Moerdyk was there, he had his own furniture, but now Mr. Van Ess says he wants to furnish it for me, out of school funds. He even wants to put rugs on the floor and curtains on the windows, besides a table, chairs, bed, dresser, bookcase, etc.

The Van Esses have a nice new bungalow just built last spring on the Mission compound. Of course it is a little crude compared to what we have at home or even what the missionaries have in India.

In India labor and material are cheap and they can afford to build better homes. Here they have no skilled labor. It's hard to get lumber and what they can get is awfully high priced. The house is made of brick, which is not of high quality, and the floors are all of the same brick. They don't fit very well, so they are uneven. They always cover the floors with heavy matting and put their rugs over the matting.



Baghdad has city water and electricity, too, but the other stations down the Gulf do not. However, they make up for it because they do not have to live in such a thickly populated city as Basrah, and it is much cleaner in those places because they have sand. Basrah is all dirt and dust or else mud in the rainy season. The missionaries do live almost like kings. They have servants – a cook, butler and children's maid and down the Gulf they also have a "punka" boy. A punka is a hand driven fan and the boy has to run the fan whenever they want it.

I got your second letter today and was glad to get it. It was good to have you think of Crissy the way you wrote, Mother, and I am glad you want her to become acquainted with the rest of the family. I've been sorry that I didn't have more chance to "show her off" to the rest of the family, but now I know you will do it. I also got a letter from her today from Lake Geneva.

I've intended to write about my full dress suit but always forget about it until after I've mailed the letter. If you can you might as well sell it, suit, shoes, and all. I wouldn't have much use for it here. I could find more use for a tuxedo if I had one. Missionaries are often invited out to dinner by the English, or like the Van Esses, do a lot of entertaining of people coming to Basrah, especially government people. Mr. Van Ess is personally acquainted with a great many of the British government officials and especially with army officers who are still here in Mespot (that's what they call Mesopotamia here). And at times like that it would be handy to have a tuxedo. Maybe I can get one made up if I find that I need one.

October 20, 1922

I have finally started work and a great time I am having of it, learning the names of about a hundred boys, such as Abdul Kerim, Mohammed, Showket, Shahhab, etc. and trying to get a line on what I am supposed to teach them. The main thing I have to do is teach them English, not only in English classes, where I have to begin from the

bottom up – nouns, verbs and all the rest of it up thru construction of sentences and writing compositions – but also in the other classes I have – geography, arithmetic, and physics - where I have to lay particular stress on using correct English. We haven't got the full program fixed up yet. I have been teaching the things that Van Ess taught last year and he has been busy arranging a new schedule and trying to find place for some new subjects such as bookkeeping and English classics. Mr. Van Ess is going to take all the Bible classes, which have always been in Arabic. He is going to change some of them to English now and he will also take some of the lower classes in English. I will have two or three classes in English, two classes in geography, and bookkeeping, physics, and arithmetic. He has three teachers to take care of the Arabic part of the school.

There are a few over a hundred registered students now, which is considerably better than last year at the end of the first week. You see, quite a few are still out busy packing dates and these will be coming in anytime over the next two or three weeks. Mr. Van Ess expects at least 30 or 35 more. The school is run almost like a country school or perhaps a college. Each pupil has his own schedule – there are not two schedules exactly alike – and therefore it is hard to grade or classify them. One student may be in 3rd grade English while he is high school physics, or he may be in high school English and in 4th grade arithmetic and at the same time in different grades in his Arabic studies. So it is quite a mix up, but that is the only way it can be done with a mixed group like this and it gives the student the advantage because he can go as fast as he can.



About two thirds of the school are Mohammedan boys and the others are Jews and native Christians. There are many more Jews and Christians who want to come to this school, but Mr. Van Ess says the school is primarily for Mohammedan boys and they are given first chance. At the end of the month, if there is still room then, he will take them. We can accommodate only about 140 or so in this place as it is now. Mr. Van Ess says he is not working to get a big school, because it is the personal contact in a small school that he wants.

Of course you know who the Jews are but I suppose you have never heard of the native Christians, at least I hadn't until I came here. They are people who have lived here for a long time. They were here before the missionaries came to this country. They originally came from Turkey or Armenia and have slowly migrated in small groups all over this country.⁹ The Armenians were already persecuted by the Turks. There are both Catholics and Protestants. Around Basrah there are quite a number of these native Christians. Every Sunday quite a few come to the mission church and at any time they expect the Mission to help them, even tho most of them are well to do and don't need

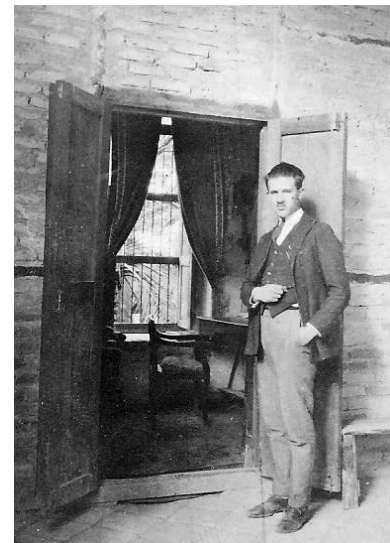
⁹ He does not mention here the indigenous Christian communities of Iraq, some of whom could trace their origins back to apostolic times.

help. They expect the missionaries to help them, preach for them and do everything else, and still they don't want to support the church or mission and more than once they have dragged the mission into some of their troubles with the government. They altogether forget or don't want to understand that the mission is primarily for Mohammedans. There is also a colony of Armenian refugees in Basrah but they hardly ever bother the mission. More than once Van Ess and Moerdyk have tried to organize these native Christians into a church of their own, but it doesn't work at all. They don't get along with each other and fight among themselves.

I've still been staying at the Van Esses for board and in the church for sleeping this week, but tomorrow I expect to move over to school. I shall be glad to get settled. I surely will have an easy life then. The school servant keeps my room clean and provides for my bath right in my own bedroom. There is no such thing as a real bathtub here, not even in the best houses. They have a small galvanized bathtub and the servants carry the water back and forth. My classroom is just three or four steps from my room and all I have to do is go down the stairs to the dining hall for my meals. I am going to start out eating Arab food, but if it doesn't agree with me, there is one European cook there and I can have him make something special for me. But I have had quite a little Arab food already and I am sure I can handle it. The only trouble is that I eat too much.

October 26, 1922

I am finally writing you in my own "place of abode" and am beginning to feel quite at home already. I have been busy all my spare time, which isn't very much, fixing up the place and it is beginning to look like a pretty decent place, although I am hardly half done in getting everything the way I want it. When I finish it will be a regular palace – two small rooms, just enough to make it cozy and comfortable. Think of trying to make anything cozy in this climate. During the day it is still pretty warm, but the nights are very cool, fine for sleeping. You remember that I felt foolish wanting to take two or three blankets with me, but I am glad I took those two army blankets and that Indian blanket. They say I'll easily be able to use that many in the winter. Although it hardly ever freezes, still the temperature feels as cold as zero does at home. Even now I sleep under a sheet and blanket. Some of the boys even use two or three blankets and they crawl under as if they are afraid they will freeze. I wonder what they will do when it really does get cold.



I've just put my boys to bed and as it isn't late yet I can write in peace and quiet. I'm busy pretty well all day long altho there is no hard labor about it. In the morning I have to see that the boys get up in time for breakfast, altho they usually are up before I am. Breakfast is at about 7:15. I sit at the head of the table and keep order.

They are mischievous little rascals but it doesn't take much to keep them orderly. After breakfast I make an inspection of their beds and the floor space around the beds. They all sleep in one big room, almost like a hospital ward. These boys are very slouchy. They go thru the motion of making up their beds and cleaning the floor and getting things neat and clean, but that is about all. Every once in a while I have to call one back to do the job over again. And then during the day they sit on their beds eating dates or oranges and without thinking they throw the seeds and peels on the floor and make a perfect mess, which they don't even notice. They don't see dirt and disorder.

There are 15 boys eating and sleeping in school now that I have to take care of. I am getting along famously with the food. The cook makes a little extra for me, even without my asking him, because he has always done it for Moerdyk, and the boys don't think anything of it. I eat the same food they eat, too, only they eat more of it. One



little fellow about the size of Robert eats three big plates of rice almost every meal. They have rice almost every meal. Above all they surely have good soup. They cook their meat until there is hardly any nourishment left in it, but it's all in the soup, so it's thick on the plate while you are eating it. They also boil potatoes and vegetables in the soup. It is all served in a rather informal fashion, at least to the boys. The servant always makes such ado

about serving me, almost as if I were a king. But this is all much better than what most of the boys are used to in their own homes. You can see that some of them hardly know what a plate is for or much less how to use a fork or spoon.

After inspection in the morning, classes begin at 8:30 and I teach nine classes out of thirteen according to the new schedule. School is over at four o'clock and from then until about 6:30 supper time there is nothing particular to do. In a couple of weeks we will start scouting and then that time will be taken up. After supper we have about an hour and a quarter of study, which I have to supervise, and then pretty soon to bed. So you see it is quite a full day.

Mr. Van Ess especially wants me to work with five or six of the older boys – about Nick's age. They are Mohammedan boys but very nice, full of pep, and Mr. Van Ess wants me to just be a regular friend and brother to them, work up stunts with them, take them to different places, take them to a show – cinema, as it is called here – or just go and visit some nearby town or place of interest and all such things. Mr. Van Ess says I can do anything I want along that line and he will foot the bill. I have these same boys in several of my classes. I hope they will invite me to their homes and they will be coming to visit me in my room. So we will get to know each other and get to talking, and perhaps they will be ask about my life and experience and faith and other important things and that will be better than if I try to talk religion to them directly. The whole thing is going to be very interesting, I believe.

November 3, 1922

Another week passed and still more new experiences. I had my first taste of Basrah fever this week. It started Tuesday and lasted until last night, not steady but fever off and on. Last night I had a long solid sleep and today I am alright again. It's kind of a miserable business alright. You feel about half sick enough to stay in bed and too sick to be up and around. You feel sore in your bones and muscles. You can't even move your eyes without having them feel sore and stiff. I slept thru it all every night tho so that helped. I swallowed enough quinine and aspirin to kill a cow, but this was not regular malaria fever and quinine does very little good for it. There is very much of this fever around now and this is the worst season of the year, but I have had it now and they say if you've had it you don't get it again. The other, regular malaria is easier to check – a good dose of aspirin followed by quinine will fix it. Most missionaries make a habit of taking about ten grains of quinine a week and seldom get fever.

I was glad to get your letters of two weeks at the end of last week. I don't want you to worry about me in regard to the Turks, because they are harmless as far as the missionaries are concerned. If you noticed in the treaty that has been drawn up, there are two articles which protect all missionaries and religious activities. Even if no treaty had been drawn up and the Turks had kept on fighting, they would never have gotten near Basrah, because even if the British had had to give up all the rest of Mesopotamia, they would concentrate all their troops at Basrah and protect it, because England has very rich oil interests in Basrah¹⁰ and also the British want to hold the port of Mesopotamia. Furthermore, before the war, Mesopotamia was in the hands of the Turks and the missionaries were all right then. So I don't want you to worry about me as to the Turks, or fever or anything. I am taken care of first rate here by the school servant, and one of the Arab teachers who also stays in the school is always wanting to do something for me, too. He speaks English and we get along very well.

I am growing fat on fresh fruit here lately – dates, pomegranates, watermelons, cucumbers, etc., and pretty soon oranges will also be ripe. There are lots of all these things and they are very cheap.

November 9, 1922

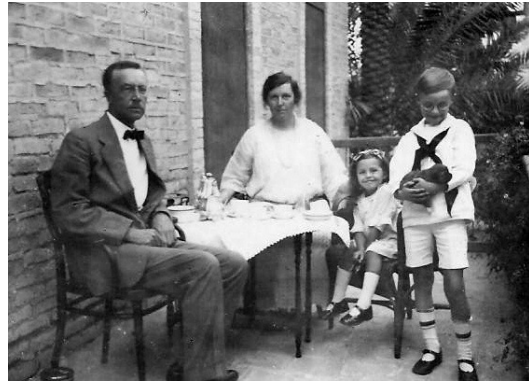
This is study hour and I usually have some papers to look over and correct while I have one eye on the boys, but this evening I haven't much school work to do so I'll spend the time writing to you.

¹⁰ The oil interests were in southern Persia. The Basrah oil fields were not developed until the 1950s.

This week has been just like the others, nothing in particular new happening. I am all over my fever of last week and am eating like an elephant. There is still quite a bit of fever around, but this is the fever season. Mr. Van Ess has supplied me with a sort of first aid kit for the boys of the dormitory so that at the first sign of anything wrong I can give them a dose of what they need and so nip it in the bud. I haven't had occasion to use it yet.

Today is three months since I left home and I've already been here six weeks. Time surely does fly for me. This week I finished a month of school and it hardly seems a week since we started. I suppose it is because I am kept pretty busy. Mr. Van Ess says that time always goes fast here. He has been here twenty years now and he says it seems almost too short to have started anything yet.

I have been spending Sundays at the Van Ess house. Most of the boys go home over the weekends and so I can leave, too, without leaving things "in de steek." I can leave any time I want to as far as that goes, but then I always have to see that somebody is left in charge. On Sundays I go in time to attend the Arabic service at 8:30. Of course that service still sounds foreign to me, but I go anyway. Mr. Barney always preaches – in Arabic in the morning and in English at night at 6:00 o'clock. Mr. Van Ess always makes me stay during the whole day, for dinner and the afternoon at their house, or sometimes for a walk in the afternoon, then the English service and after that supper, and then at about 9:30 I mozy on home again. Mr. Van Ess says I have to come to their house on Sunday to get at least two square meals each week, as if I don't get enough to eat here.



Van Ess family: John, Dorothy, Alice, John Jr.

Last week I didn't get any mail. It seems that about half the time our old steamer misses the home mail in Bombay and so we have to do without for an extra week. I suppose just about this time you are receiving my first letters from here. Christmas will be pretty near by the time you get this letter, so a very happy Christmas to you all!

November 20, 1922

I've been pretty busy this week, tho nothing unusual has happened. Mr. Van Ess is setting me to work at all kinds of odd jobs for my spare time and I rather like it, especially the kind of work he gives me to do. He has a magic lantern for the school and some very good slides, several boxes full. I have been fixing up a dark room in which we can see the lantern and also fixing the lantern itself so that it will be ready for use when we want it.

Also he wants me to study up in plane table surveying so that I can teach it, and that will be interesting work. He wants to put in a course like that maybe sometime this year or next.

Then he wants me to begin making some relief maps – something like we used to make way down in the grades with a mixture of salt, flour and water, only he wants me to make big ones in different colors, with rivers, mountains and everything so that they can be used for school purposes.

Then also every once in a while I make up experiments for the Arabic physics class as well as my own class and for the nature study and physical geography classes. Pretty soon I will be giving shows for the boys every once in a while with the magic lantern. At present I am helping some of the older boys a little in making up a Christmas program. So you see I am not exactly idle here. I haven't yet had time to start any work in scouting. If you read the letter I wrote to Grandpa and Grandma you will learn some of the interesting things I am seeing here – something I haven't written very much about to you yet.

I have a good one for you, Nick. This week I had some of the boys in my room and they were looking over my pictures and when they saw yours, they looked at it and said, "What! No mustache?" Over here a mustache is a sign of manhood and everyone must have one – even young boys without any hair on their faces do everything in their power to display one, no matter how invisible or fuzzy it may be. I don't remember if I ever wrote that I am raising a fairly decent mustache. It's quite full grown by this time, a beaut. I'll send a picture of it sometime. It's a bothersome thing just the same, especially if you have a cold. I don't know why anyone would want to have one. All the missionaries have mustaches, to keep up their position and reputation.



I am sending you a picture of the Arabian missionaries – they are all there except for those that are home on furlough.¹¹ It was taken during Annual Meeting. Also some small silver trinkets made of Amarah silver by Sabeen silver smiths. They belong to the same tribe as the people who robbed Job (see Job, 1st chapter). It is all hand made and the black figures on it are black inlaid metal. You can distribute them around as you please.

¹¹ See page 158.

November 16, 1922

I am going to try a new stunt this week and send this letter by air mail and in this way send you a special Christmas greeting. Airmail goes from Baghdad to Cairo once every two weeks and in that way saves about two weeks if it makes connections. Mail has gone thru from here to the States in that way in nineteen days, so at that rate you ought to get this before Christmas. You can use air mail from your side, but it sometimes makes very little difference, because it is just chance that you get the right connections, although letters have come from the States in a little less than a month. If you ever want to try it, in addition to the regular address write "Air Mail – Cairo to Baghdad" in a conspicuous place on the envelope and put on 20 cents postage.

Nothing much has happened since I last wrote. I am feeling fine, and every once in a while Mr. or Mrs. Van Ess, or Miss Kellien, or Mr. and Mrs. Barney also remark that I am getting fat. It would be funny if at the end of these three years I would come home as fat as Mr. Moerdyk, for instance.

I was glad to get your letter on Saturday, the one of October 9. It came in about five and a half weeks. I was glad to hear that you are all well, busy in various activities, serving college suppers, etc. So far I haven't felt that I had to miss very much by coming out here because I can get almost anything I want here, but when you wrote about all the grapes you had, about serving sweet potatoes, celery, sweet corn, and radishes, all stuff from our own home garden, and then also about Grandpa going out to make strop¹² – it kinda makes my mouth water. I wouldn't mind if you would send out a gallon of strop by wireless or cable. We can get radishes, tomatoes, egg plant and such stuff here, but still the home grown stuff seems a little better. We also have strop here, or something like strop, made of dates, and it is called dibbis in Arabic. We use it just like we use strop, and it tastes quite a little like it, too, although it has a date flavor.

I got a letter from Mike Schnurman last week, you remember the fellow from Hope who came out with us. He is teaching in quite a big concern in Vellore, near Madras, India. It is a kind of combination high school and college and is much more advanced than our school. His is more of a regular prof's job than mine and he does very little outside of regular class work. I don't believe I'd trade with him. I am enjoying my work immensely. They haven't got the nice climate there either that we have. Basrah may be hot during the summer, but it is very nice the rest of the year. We've been having the nicest weather imaginable for quite a while now. Mosquitoes aren't very bad either, although I still sleep under the net every night.

November 23, 1922

There isn't very much news this week, especially since I wrote an airmail letter last Monday, but perhaps I can manage to scrape some news together. I am still fine and

¹² molasses

as busy as ever. The weather is still very nice, a little warmer this week, but no rain yet even tho the rainy season is long overdue. I started modeling a couple of maps this week



and worked pretty late a couple nights. It takes three or four hours to do a big map of about two feet square. I've made Asia and Europe now and also a small one of America. I've also been putting up and getting some gymnastic apparatus arranged – swing ropes, parallel bars, etc. Mr. Van Ess has also sent for some more stuff from India, horizontal bar, vaulting horse, and such stuff, so you see we will have quite a fully equipped gymnasium, along with the things we already have – dumbbells, weights, etc. We have all of this right out in the courtyard. Our school building is square, with all the rooms around the courtyard in the middle.

I'm learning quite a bit of Arabic lately from the boys, although I don't know what the words look like in writing or how to spell them. Arabic writing and printing is a mystery to me. Figures aren't so bad even tho they are different from ours. I've advanced far enough with them to be able to help the boys once in a while in their Arabic arithmetic.

A week from today is Thanksgiving. I wonder what you will be doing that day. Mr. Van Ess is going to excuse the school for the afternoon and Mrs. Van Ess is going to serve a big Thanksgiving dinner.

December 1, 1922

Today is Friday, a day later than I usually write, but I was too busy celebrating Thanksgiving to write. We surely had a nice Thanksgiving. School was dismissed for the afternoon and Mrs. Van Ess put up a big dinner – we had roast goose, mashed potatoes, green peas, pumpkin pie and mince pie, nuts and all kinds of fruit, and oh, yes – oyster soup. We can't get fresh oysters here but we can get oyster powder, and soup made from that is a pretty good substitute. We surely did eat – spent most of the afternoon eating, in fact afternoon and evening. The guests were all American. Of course there were Mr. and Mrs. Van Ess and the children, Mr. and Mrs. Barney, and Miss Kellien, a member of the Mission in charge of the Girls School in Basrah; Miss Strang, a member of the Mission from Kuwait, who is here for a couple weeks for some dental work; Mr. Redfiel, a member of Hills Brothers date company of New York, who is here on a tour of inspection. Hills Brothers are the producers of Dromedary Dates, which you can get at almost any grocery store over there. They have a large number of date plantations scattered around this part of the country and get all their dates here. And then we also had a strange woman who just dropped in yesterday without warning. She claimed to be an American, from Philadelphia, and is on a pleasure trip around the world, all by herself. She had heard of Mr. Van Ess in Bombay, so when she arrived

here yesterday on the boat, she just made up her mind to spend Thanksgiving with the Van Esses and since she seemed such a poor old soul Mrs. Van Ess didn't have the heart to send her away. She is moving on to Baghdad today. She had been all over China, Japan, and India and was going on to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. She had been away from home for two years already.

This morning an old man who also claimed to be an American citizen dropped in at school. He said he had been born in Baghdad and had lived here and in Egypt. When his parents died he took to the sea as a stoker, and in that way bummed all over the world. When he got to New York, he bummed all over the States, working all sorts of jobs, became an American citizen and finally settled down in Seattle. Now he was just back on a pleasure jaunt. Mr. Van Ess says that last spring a man came to him who was roller skating around the world and a year ago there was a man walking around the world. All these crazy folks, and they all claim to be American and expect Mr. Van Ess to help them. He said that last year three beggarly looking men came to him for help, claiming to be Americans. When Mr. Van Ess began asking them questions about where they came from, they said they had only been visiting America a short time but were really from Holland. So Mr. Van Ess started speaking to them in Dutch, which they didn't expect. When they explained that they meant German, he offered to take them to the German consul. They backed out again and said that they were Romanian. By that time Mr. Van Ess had learned enough and turned them over to the police and that's the last he heard of them.

December 7, 1922

Another week has passed, and in two and a half weeks it will be Christmas. I wonder how it will be to spend Christmas away from home. I suppose I will miss you, especially the big family reunions we usually had during the Christmas season, but we are going to have big doings here also. The Van Esses always have a Christmas tree, especially for the children, and we'll have another one this year. We can't get a regular evergreen here but we will rig up some other tree and make do.

I was glad to receive your letter last week, especially as the whole family added to it. That's the way I like to have you write – the whole family adding in. You wrote about sending some nuts and candy, etc., but didn't do it because the postage was so high. If you want to send things like that because you think I cannot get them here, you need not send them because I can get all kinds of candies and chocolate bars here and all kinds of nuts, English walnuts, peanuts, hazelnuts, etc. But that doesn't mean that if you get the notion to send me something I won't appreciate it, because something from home is always better than anything else we can get.

I am trying to save some money to get my debt at the bank cleared off, but it is hard to save much out of \$66 a month. Of course I don't spend all of that, but after my board of \$20 a month, laundry, and little oddities now and then, there can't be much left. But I didn't come out here to make money, so I am not kicking. The laundry

business is the funniest here. The laundryman, or “dobee”, comes around after your dirty clothes and in four or five days brings them back clean, of course, and charges you a straight rate of two annas (about 4 cents) per piece, but he doesn’t charge anymore for washing and pressing a coat or pants than to wash a handkerchief. That’s pretty high for a handkerchief but very little for a suit or bed sheet.

We’ve had a couple of pretty cold days this week, temperature down to 40 degrees, and believe me that feels pretty cold in this climate. But I close up my room pretty well and have a little oil heater and make it pretty nice and cozy. I am glad I brought those bed blankets, so I am pretty well fixed against the cold.

December 14, 1922

I have just put my boys off to bed and can write you in peace. My bunch of boys is still growing. There are eighteen in the dormitory now. It’s funny the way they keep registering even long after school has started. But in the same way they keep dropping out also, so that our numbers do not increase very much.

I have added still another thing to my list of things to do. Mrs. Van Ess asked me to make a little bed for Alice, their little girl. She is to get a big doll for Christmas, and I am to make a bed for it so that they can put the doll in it under the tree. So you see I have also entered the furniture business.

I don’t believe I have written that I have also taken on another class last week - studying the Life of Christ, with some of the older boys. I am curious to find out how I will get on with that class. These boys haven’t very much of any religion but still they are Moslems and like to stick to their Prophet. I’ve been reading quite a little lately on Mohammedanism – one book by Zwemer – “Islam” – and one by MacDonald – “Aspects of Islam” – two books treating the same subject but from different points of view – also a book on “Mohammedan Objections to Christianity” and all of them are very interesting. It is interesting to find out how much Christianity and Mohammedanism are alike and on what things they agree. Mohammed, in the Koran, the Moslem Bible, repeatedly refers to the Bible for proofs. They admit Christ’s virgin birth, they admit him to be sinless, they admit his death and resurrection and even that he still lives, but still they say he was only a prophet and no savior of men. They contend that the Koran was inspired by God and since it was written later, they should accept it, just as since Mohammed was a later prophet, he should be accepted as Mediator.

A couple weeks ago I asked you to send me the Chronicle, but unless you have already begun, you need not send it because I have started receiving the Ray¹³, and if you keep sending me clippings I will have all that I need. I appreciate your sending me the clippings – they give me a touch of home.

¹³ The Pella Chronicle was the hometown paper. The Central Ray was the college paper. Crissy was on the staff then and became the editor the following year.

I think I may have been mixing you up a little with the different addresses I have been sending you. All of them would reach me sometime, but I think it's safest to use this address: c/o John Van Ess, American Mission, Basrah, Mesopotamia.¹⁴

December 20, 1922

There was no home mail last week so I don't get any letters, and there is a big chance that I won't get all of it this week either – that is, before Christmas – because they will have two weeks' mail to take care of besides all the Christmas mail.

We surely are going to have some Christmas celebration here next Monday. We are going to have four days vacation from school, and Mrs. Van Ess always has big plans. Somebody gave us a big turkey, and someone else gave us a big ham, so we will have a regular feast. Beef and pork are very scarce here, so that if we get hold of a piece once in a while, we think it a great luxury. To eat pork is against the religion of the people¹⁵ and for some reason they don't like beef. All they eat is mutton, chicken, ducks, etc. So if you ever want to send us something we will appreciate, send out a piece of rook-fleis.¹⁶

Mr. Van Ess has several good friends among the English people here, especially among the few British Army officers still here in this country, and they are often able to get hold of such things and often just give them to Mr. Van Ess for nothing. The man who gave them the ham is an especially good friend and often comes to visit. He is really an American but was in the British army, and since the war he was made commissioner of railroads in Mesopotamia under the British Occupation in Baghdad. He is coming down to spend Christmas with us.

Last weekend I lived almost entirely at the Van Ess house. Every so often the treasurer's books have to be audited and each station gets its turn. This time it was Basrah station's turn, so Mr. Van Ess invited me over for supper Saturday night and after supper we spent the evening doing nothing but adding columns of figures and seeing that all the entries were made correctly. Monday night I went over again and finished up the auditing. We had a bustard supper that night. A bustard is a kind of bird very much like a goose or duck, and they catch them in the marshes near here with falcons, a kind of hawk which they train to catch other birds. Two of these were brought to Mr. Van Ess by an Arab friend, and they tasted fine, the meat is dark and rich.

¹⁴ The nation of Iraq had been established in 1920 and its first king, Faisal I, was appointed in 1921. It is interesting that Dad, and perhaps the British run postal system, still preferred the earlier British term of Mesopotamia.

¹⁵ It is surprising, considering his sensitivity to the manners and culture of the Arabs, and the abhorrence that Muslims feel toward the eating of pork, that Van Ess allowed ham to be served in his own home.

¹⁶ Dried beef. Dad especially liked the dried beef his grandfather Nicholas Bogaard made.

December 28, 1922

Well, Christmas is over and more than once the thought came to me that I'd like to be at home. However, I've had as pleasant a time as anybody ever could have, and I started enjoying it already last Friday afternoon when letters began to come and kept coming on until Sunday evening. I had twelve in all besides two Rays – one from Gerrit V.R., one from Cousin Nellie Van Zante, from Uncle John Gosselink, from Grandpa and Grandma, from Connie and Bog with letters enclosed from Enos Heeren and Lapeltak, from Ben De Vries also with three letters from Y.M. fellows, and also our class round robin with eight letters enclosed, and then letters of two weeks from you and Crissy. So you see that was a pleasant starter.

Alma Chamberlain is here for the holidays. She is on a short term in India, teaching at the Madras College. Saturday afternoon Mrs. Van Ess took us to



Zubair, a pure native town about twelve miles straight out into the desert. They always like to take visitors there to give them a real feel of Arab life. Zubair is a typical Arab town. It is way out in the desert and has a wall around it with regular city gates, just as cities had in Biblical times. Streets are bounded on either side with solid walls with no windows but here and there a small and heavy door. We visited the camel market and the native bazaar and had lots of fun with a crowd of people, old and young, following us as if we were a circus. The man who brought us in his car, a good friend of Mr. Van Ess, arranged that we could have a camel ride, so I have done that now. I will send you a picture if it comes out.

Basrah and Baghdad are not real Arab cities, at least not any more. There are too many of every kind of people here and, especially since the English came here, too much outside civilization has come in. And then, too, Basrah being on the river with a strip of good fertile land along it is altogether different from a desert town.

Sunday afternoon Mr. Van Ess took us on a long walk thru the city, thru places I had never been before and to the oldest mosque in the city, and he got permission to take us to the top of the minaret, the tower from which the mulla, the keeper of the mosque, gives the prayer call five times a day. We were lucky that while we were up there it was just the time for the afternoon call, and he gave it while we were there. That was a rare privilege, because very few people other than Moslems are allowed inside the mosques, especially at the time of prayers. The prayer call which the mullah sings, or rather chants, is something like this, "God is great – God is great. There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is the prophet. Come to prayers. Come to good works. Come to prayers." And every good Moslem, no matter what he may be doing, drops his work and goes to pray, five times a day. We got a fine view of the city from the

top of that tower, even if it is not more than four or five stories high, but the land is so level and there are no high buildings or trees, so you can see way out into the desert on all sides.

Sunday evening we put the finishing touches on the Christmas tree and Monday morning early we all had to see what Santa had brought, and he didn't miss me either. I went to two Christmas services on Monday morning, one in our own church in Arabic and one in the Church of England chapel. Mr. Van Ess sat all day long to receive callers. He had open house and hundreds of all kinds of people came for just a short call and to bring holiday greetings – Mohammedans as well as others.

Tuesday evening some of the older boys of the school gave a program of short plays, speeches, etc., almost entirely made up by themselves. I have helped them a little now and then, but otherwise they did it all, and it was really good, part Arabic and part English. And then last night Mr. Van Ess and I took some of the boys to a boxing match put on by the military here. It was a pretty good show. Perhaps you may think that is a rather queer thing for missionaries to do, and perhaps it is better that anything like this not be spread around the people at home. As Mr. Van Ess said, these are the kinds of things that happen on the mission field that usually are not published in The Leader. But there is no harm in our doing anything like that. It is an excellent way to get under the boys' skin – fellowship and close contact with the boys is what we want. We have boxing in school too, because Van Ess believes it is a good thing, like any other kind of sport. It not only gives good physical exercise and trains the boys to be quick and alert, but it also has its moral value because it teaches the boys to stand for a lot of knocking and cuffing without getting sore and angry about it.

This morning school started again and we are back at the old grind. We've had wonderful Christmas weather, nice bright sunshiny days with a keen edge to the air, pretty cold, especially the last couple days. The only thing lacking was snow.

January 4, 1923

Well, it's 1923 and I'm wondering what this new year may bring forth. So many things have happened in the past year which will always have a well marked place in my life that I am anxious to know what may be next. I am very happy just where I am now and in what I am able to do, but sometimes I feel that it will be possible someday for me to do much more in service for Him. I don't know if it is that I am not adequately prepared or if it is that I have not yet learned how to take advantage of opportunities. So often questions are asked and altho I usually manage some kind of answer, I know that I might have answered better or made better use of the opportunity. Of course, here the people are different, their minds work differently, and they see and understand things differently, their religion is different, everything is different from what I am used to, and it takes time to understand them and learn their point of view. I am studying hard and reading more lately than I have ever done before in my life. I begin to think that after

these three years I could use a seminary or university course before going back to the mission field, but I doubt I would have the patience to do that, and besides, I don't want to ask Crissy to wait that long.¹⁷ Time will tell. God will show us his way, whether he wants me first to prepare myself more fully or whether he wants to use me just as I am.

This week has again added some new experiences to my list. Last Sunday evening I was invited to a party at the house of one of our teachers. Quite a bunch of people were there but I was the only one who was not a native to this part of the world. A big supper was served. They had a whole sheep roasted in the middle of the table and rice and an endless number of other things and we had to eat until we almost burst; eat with a fork, spoon or hands, whichever was handiest. Most of the people, especially the older ones, eat with their hands, and they just load it in by the handful, tear off a piece of meat, grab a handful of rice, that's the way they do it. The rest of the evening the whole gang just sat around and talked and played games, with always a supply of candy, nuts and fruit within reach. The next evening I was invited to supper at the house of another teacher – this time to a meal that was even more native than the other. We had no table, or rather the table was spread on the floor and we just sat around on pillows and rugs. If there is anything you want, don't ask for it but reach across the table and get it. I had a splendid time both evenings.



I was glad to get your letter last week, but I see that you have not yet stopped worrying about me. I can assure you that no coffee or smoking is keeping me looking like a sickly sprig. I've written before that I am getting fat. There is no call for me to smoke at all and I don't. Some people here smoke and some don't, so there is no need for me to smoke in order to keep on the right side of people, as it is necessary for me to have a mustache. It's funny the great importance a mustache has for people here. It's impossible for them to conceive of any man in the world without a mustache. I have not as yet contracted a habit of drinking coffee or tea either. We always have tea for breakfast, but otherwise I never take either one, except at the Van Esses or visiting someplace else.

January 11, 1923

Dear brother Robert,

I am addressing this letter to Robert because it will be his birthday by the time this letter gets to you. You will be 14 and you are already in high school – in your letters you are beginning to sound like a professor. By the time I come back you will be thru your junior year and Nina will be a wise and old sophomore in college.

¹⁷ This is the first indication that Dad was already thinking of returning as a full time missionary. We can assume that he had already made this suggestion to Crissy, and it would seem that her response was positive.

I have been spending my spare time in the furniture business again. For Christmas, Alice received a small toy piano by mail from someone in the States, and the thing was all smashed to pieces. I got it put back together again and it plays like a Steinway Grand. Also we have received a bunch of new school seats from India. They were shipped all knocked down and I am putting them together. These seats were made in the India mission in Mr. Rotschafer's Industrial School and they are almost as good as factory made stuff.

Today one of the teachers picked up an old newspaper and showed it to me. Just before school started last fall, Mr. Van Ess put a notice of school opening in all the local papers. In one Arabic paper they added that a new American teacher was coming to teach in the school and he was a graduate of Chicago University and an authority on education. So you see what a reputation I am having to live up to.

January 19, 1923

I was glad to get your letters of two weeks last week, and just now Mr. Van Ess has sent over my letter of this week also. I don't know if I have explained that our school is in Basrah City proper, but Mr. Van Ess lives about 1½ miles from here in a kind of suburb, almost another town, known as Ashar. The post office is in Ashar, so that if the mail comes in on Thursday or Friday he picks it up and if he gets the chance sends my letters over. Otherwise I go after it on Saturday, after I have sent my own letters off. I was glad to get the pictures of Nick's band and also of Grandpa and Grandma. I showed that picture of the grandfolks to Mr. Van Ess and he said, "Echte gooje oude Hollanders." And Grandpa's beard surely struck the fancy of the teachers here. Most people are quite surprised to find that both my grandparents are still living.



Family life is a funny thing in this country. Some families all live in one house, parents, brothers, sisters, even those that are married, uncles, aunts, but very few remember much of their grandparents, whether it is because they don't live to be very old or what, I don't know, especially since they marry very young. At least the girls are married very young, and that way you would think a child might remember even his great grandparents. A girl of 18 is considered to be long past marriageable age. Even among Christians, altho they do not allow polygamy, the girls are married very young. One of our teachers is married to a girl of 14 and another to a girl of 12 (both were married just last year), while both men are 26 or 27. The girls are doomed from birth to stay indoors, or if they come out they must wear a heavy black shawl or dress called an aba. Of course men are not allowed in the harems, the place where the women of the family live, but Mrs. Van Ess says that the women wear the most beautiful clothes in the

latest Paris fashions, that is in the well to do families, but as soon as they go outside or when a man appears, on goes the black aba. They almost look like ghosts.

Some time ago there was a death in the family of two brothers who stay in the dormitory. Yesterday was the fourteenth day after the death and that day is supposed to be a day of fasting and the night following for watching. So the boys had to go home for the night. But instead of fasting during the night, they make it a night of feasting and celebrating. Drinking liquor is forbidden by true Moslems, but sometimes that has its share in the celebrations, too. They even sent some things to school last night for us at supper, so we had a part in the feast, too.

Mohammedans are supposed to have one month of fasting during the year, but they take it literally just as their law says – 30 days. They fast during the day in that month but they spend their nights in feasts and dissipation.

Another custom I can't understand is that in the case of death they try to keep the death secret from those of the family who may not be living at home. Sometime ago one of the boys in the dormitory found out that his father had died early last summer. His father lived in Bahrain with his family and the boy, who was in school last year, stayed in Basrah during the summer vacation to work and is in school again this year. It is one of the consolations we, who are far away from home, have that we know our folks back home will let us know the moment something is wrong, and you over there expect us to do the same thing.

Last Saturday John Van Ess Jr. and Alice had a birthday party and invited about a dozen little kids from some of the English families living around here, and I was invited and helped to entertain. I rigged up a harness for John's pet goat and hitched him up to a two wheeled cart and they had lots of fun with it. Poor goat! They had a donkey a swing and see-saw, and I had to manipulate the riding on all three, besides transforming myself into a camel part of the time and giving camel rides. Between Mr. Van Ess and myself, we kept those kids busy.



January 25, 1923

Dear Daddy,

I'm addressing this to you because it will be your birthday about the time it reaches you. What is it – fifty years old? I often think of you, Daddy. I've never been able to forgive myself for not giving you a goodbye kiss the evening I left home. I surely didn't mean not to give you a kiss, it just slipped by. Perhaps I've not always shown it

but I think an awful lot of you and even tho you don't write very often, I know you are interested as much as anyone else. Anyway, a very happy birthday to you.

School is going fine. Mr. Van Ess says it has been one of the most satisfactory weeks he has ever had in school. Interest is good and so is attendance. Our average attendance is better than I have heard of even in U.S. schools, above 95% and sometimes only one or two absent out of the 145 enrolled now. The government school has an average attendance of hardly 80%. We don't keep any strict rules of attendance either. Once in a while Mr. Van Ess keeps a couple boys after school for a while or gives them a talking to just to remind them, because it is mostly just slouchiness that they don't come or come late, and the next day attendance is way up again.

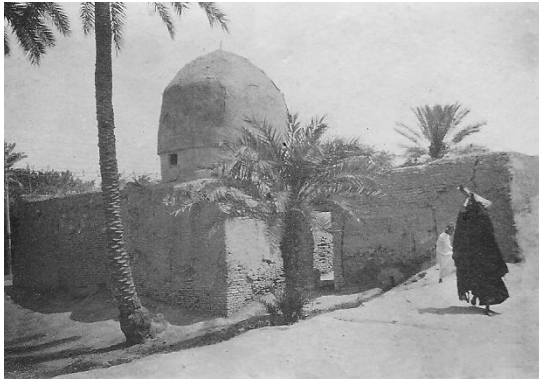
I had a nice time last Saturday afternoon. The Van Esses were invited out to tea and I was invited along with them to an English friend living across the river. The man is the Basrah Port Director and he is also the Basrah agent for the U.S. Consul in Baghdad. He came after us in a big speed launch and first took us for a little ride on the river. It was very windy and the water was quite rough and if we hadn't all had raincoats we would have been soaked. It was great sport. On our way back we saw the ship of the Shaikh of Mohammerah, one of the richest and most powerful shaikhs in this part of the country. He rules like a king over a piece of territory about half as big as the state of Iowa. Mr. Van Ess knows this shaikh very well, and as we passed his ship, the shaikh happened to be standing at the rail and recognized Van Ess and motioned for us to come aboard. We did for just a few minutes to meet him and pay our respects, and so I have had that experience too to add to my list.

February 1, 1923

Another month gone again. I can hardly keep track of the time it goes so fast. I suppose time goes fast because I enjoy my work so much and because I am pretty busy. I've got piles of work to do that I haven't found time for yet, not only for school but for myself, too. I am still doing a lot of reading but there is no end to the things I want to read to help me get better acquainted with this neck of the woods, the people and their religion. Then also there's the language, which I want to study but can't find much time for. Also mechanical drawing and plain table surveying, which Mr. Van Ess wants me to study up on so that I can teach it next year. And I haven't touched scouting, but I think we will put that off until the days get longer again.

I am in the best of health. The food has a great deal to do with that I guess. Mr. Van Ess says that before he got married he used to go off touring to inland towns sometimes for months at a time and never got anything but pure native food to eat, but never during all those times did he have a single day that his stomach was off or that his digestion wasn't good.

I've gotten in the habit of taking long walks, especially on Saturdays, thru all the highways and byways of Basrah. I try never to go the same way more than once



and I run into some pretty interesting things, pretty spots, gardens etc., and sometimes a village. There are villages inside Basrah proper, mostly of poorer people. Their houses are made out of mats woven out of palm leaves and bamboo poles or cane to support them. They have their cow or buffalo and sheep and goats and chickens all in a small court built right next to their house. They do all their cooking in that court or inside their one roomed hut on an open fire.

That one room is at the same time their living room and bedroom, so you can imagine what that is like. Sometimes I get a bicycle from one of the boys and take that for a couple hours instead of walking. And then on Sunday afternoons I usually go with the whole Van Ess family for a walk of an hour or more.

My air-mail letter to you must have come thru in pretty good time and I hadn't expected that you would get it until Christmas or later. No, I don't think I'll come flying home unless things change very much. As it stands now, it costs almost \$600 to fly from Baghdad to Cairo, to say nothing of the rest of the way, and besides I have something altogether different on my mind. And that is to go overland from here to Syria. A railroad has been opened now most of the way and the rest can be done in motor cars which make a business of making that trip, if the Turks behave. Lately there have been rumors that the Turks are mustering their forces and are going to take Mosul by force if they can't get it in peaceful ways, but authorities say there is nothing to these rumors, even if part of a regiment of the Air Force which is stationed near Basrah has been sent to the Mosul frontier. Well, to go on with my trip, from Syria I would go to Palestine and there hire a horse and guide and go all thru Palestine. Then on to Egypt, to Cairo, the pyramids and up the Nile. Then back to Constantinople, thru Greece, thru Italy, across the Alps into France, Germany, Switzerland and Holland, then to England and back to New York. All this has to take very little longer than if I went back the way I came, that is via Bombay and the Red Sea, by sea all the way. And it doesn't cost very much more either. A fellow traveling alone, after he has gotten used to native ways and is willing to put up with a few inconveniences, can travel third class, which is almost nothing, and can get along on a box of dates and an orange a day. However, that is all a long ways off yet, so I am not worrying much about it.

I don't know what I am going to do next summer during vacation. I'll be here practically alone for at least part of the time, at least no other missionaries here. Mr. Van Ess wants to arrange for me to go to this Shaikh who I spoke of last week and live with him for a month or so and be a private tutor to one of his sons. Also I would have lots of chance to learn Arabic. That would be hot stuff – free of charge, a palace to live in, horses, cars and launches at my command. Och! Och! Or if that falls thru, I may

go to Baghdad and visit Babylon, or I may go way up beyond Baghdad to Mosul with one of the teachers. Well, that's for next summer and it may happen or it may not happen.

You once wrote that I should send you the names of the boys. Here are some Bible names: Yussuf or Joseph, Ishak or Isaac, Sulieman or Solomon, Haroon or Aaron, Daoood or David, Yehya or John, Jamil or James, Ibrahim or Abraham, Essa or Jesus, and many more. Give them a Dutch pronunciation and you'll be on the right track. It is coincidental that our school should be on Essa Street.

February 8, 1923

Some of the boys are loosening up pretty nicely and coming to visit me quite often. Of course I always make them welcome. They come during the day or stay after school, but recently they have begun to come at night. But I can never make them stay long. They think they are intruding but I always take time to talk with them. They are full of America and that's the biggest thing they want to talk about. They all want to go to America for college after they finish here. And they ask if there are Mohammedans in America and they suppose they will have to give up their religion when they go there, but that doesn't seem to bother them much. Their religion is a very adjustable thing to them. But they are all young boys and their religion isn't very deep-seated yet. I've had a few discussions on Christianity and Mohammedanism, but it is hard to make much headway because they are not enough advanced to bring up their arguments in English, even if they could do it in Arabic, and it is hard for me to present Christianity so that they can understand it because I would have to do it in English and they can not follow English that well.

Tomorrow is just half a year since I left home – where has the time gone? By the time you get this letter it will be well on toward commencement over there. Tomorrow is a holiday for the Catholic Christians here, at least they call it a holiday. They go to their cemeteries to pray over the graves of their dead relatives, and the rest of the day they spend in feasting. Catholics are pretty strong here – they have several churches, but it isn't any merit of their own that they have these churches – they get help from Rome to build and support them.

February 22, 1923

I had a rather pleasant surprise this week. I got a notice from the post office that there was a package for me. I couldn't imagine what it would be, but I went there and after paying 13 annas customs, I got it and found that it was from Uncle John and Aunt Katie – a nice little narcissus set, four bulbs and a nice little dish to put them in. I planted them right away, so now I'll have flowers pretty soon – I mean growing flowers. I am hardly ever without flowers of some sort in my room – the boys always bring them in. We have flowers almost the whole year round, even roses during this winter season.

I don't know if I have written that next year we are going to move the school to the mission hospital building right on the mission property. The mission owns a piece of land about the size of two square city blocks. That's where the hospital and church are and the two large homes where the Van Esses and the Barneys live, and also a small bungalow for some single missionary who happens to be stationed here. Mr. Moerdyk will likely be stationed here next year when the Barneys go on furlough.

It will be ever so much nicer for the school to be over there. Here as soon as you step out of the door you are out in the street. There we will have a nice big playground and better school accommodations, too. The mission has been renting the building to the military for the last couple years, but now their lease expires so we are going to make use of it, as well as put up a new building so that we can keep the elementary department and the high school apart. It will be nicer for me because I will be right on the mission compound and only a few steps from where the other missionaries live. Mr. Van Ess is going to give me three small rooms there so that I can make them up into a very nice suite.

Mr. Van Ess was not in school the first two days this week. There is an American dentist in Abadan, Persia (about thirty miles down the river) for a month or so, and Mr. Dykstra was down here with the mission launch for about a week, so Mr. Van Ess took advantage of it and went to Abadan to get some dental work done. We have a few pretty good native dentists here but their work is never as satisfactory as of an American dentist. In fact not even the English dentists are as good as American dentists. It's strange, too, because the English as a rule have very poor teeth. And the Arabs, even tho they are full of infectious diseases, have as a rule very strong teeth. Very few you find that do not have a full set of solid white teeth. Perhaps that is something we can attribute to their religion. Before they may go to any of their five daily prayers, they must wash their hands, feet and teeth, or the inside of their mouths.

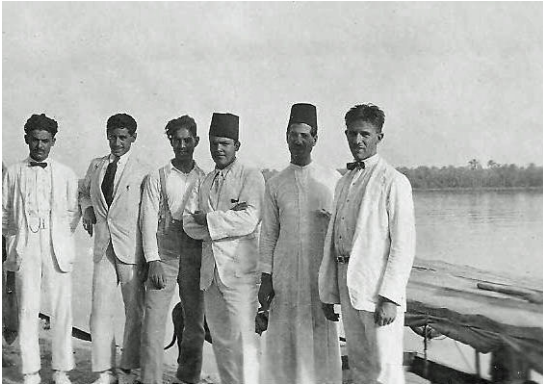
The Dykstras surely have a large field to cover in their work. They have the whole river valley of both the Tigris and the Euphrates, from Basrah way up the river. They can hardly do the whole round more than once a year. Their main station and where they live is Amarah. They happen to be working down near Basrah now, so they just dropped in on us for a few days, because they also wanted to get some dental work done.

March 1, 1923

Spring surely has come, manifestly so. The first unmistakable signs of it are appearing – spring fever. The boys are forgetting their overcoats, which they don't do very quickly. Even on warm days in the winter they bundle themselves in big overcoats and mufflers and head shawls as if it's thirty below. I have discarded all but one blanket and the sheets on my bed and have also doffed my vest. Before very many weeks we will be more than ready to get into our palm beach, white duck or khaki suits. It is the custom here, which the English have and have taken with them into every

country under English rule, so that even the natives adhere to it as to their mustaches, that a man may never be seen without a coat on – on the street, in the office or anywhere, no matter how hot it is, not even in his own home if there is anyone else around. In a round about way I heard one day that it had been remarked about in the bazaar that I had been seen with my sweater on and no coat.

I had a big time last Saturday. I was invited to the house of one of the boys¹⁸ in school along with four other boys, about three or four miles down the river. We started off a little after nine in the morning in a motor car which they had sent (I've gotten so used to saying motor car now that it almost sounds strange to say automobile – the same with petrol instead of gasoline). On the way we stopped at the house of one of



the other boys and visited for a while, then we got on the river and took a motor boat the rest of the way. By that time it was dinner time and they fed us no end of things and wouldn't think of letting us stop. We nearly burst, so we couldn't do anything for an hour afterward but just sit and talk. It was a Mohammedan family, of course, so we had only the men folk of the family to talk with. The women are all locked away, of course, and may only appear when there are lady visitors and no men around. Then we spent a

couple hours walking thru the gardens, the fields you would call them. We saw some men doing their spring plowing. At about four o'clock we started home, first by launch to Basrah, then by bellum up the creek that leads to Basrah City right in front of the school. A bellum is a long narrow boat which they use here especially in the creeks. They do not use oars but two men push the boat along by means of long bamboo poles reaching to the bottom of the stream. We took our time, stopping on the way at the Van Ess house so that I could get my mail, and got home at about six o'clock.

One cannot help but notice as he visits some of these Mohammedan homes the position of the children. The position of the women is bad, but even the boys are treated very little better than servants, and the younger boys are the underdogs of the whole family. They must do everything the older boys tell them to do. At the table the older boys take first as much as they want and then if there is anything left, the younger boys may have it. All the boys, both young and old, are very meek and quiet in the presence of their fathers and of their relatives. The boy whose house I visited is almost as old as I am and much bigger and stronger, but after dinner when we went out to sit in the living room, he came in last and sat down very meekly and quietly, because his father was there, even tho he was supposed to be the host. Sometimes even a boy does not sit down in the presence of his father but stands like a servant waiting for his master until his father gives him permission to sit down.

¹⁸ This was Abd el Aziz el Amir, the son of a prominent citizen of Basrah. Abd el Aziz remained a friend for all the years Dad lived in Basrah.

March 8, 1923

Last Saturday I went all thru the courts. I went with one of our high school boys, one of the nicest boys we have, and full of life, so full that he can't be still a moment. He is a natural leader among the boys. His father is a lawyer and the boy wants to study law, too, so naturally he spends a good deal of his spare time in the courts, following cases, etc., and it surely was interesting to go thru with him. Several boys that have been in our school hold prominent positions there.

Another one of the boys is quite a genius in photography and electrical stuff. He is also very nice, not much of a leader but a better student than the other. I was in his room for a while in the afternoon and he has it all fixed up with electric engines, dynamos, motors, photographic apparatus, even a small moving picture machine and projecting lamp which he made himself. He develops and prints his own pictures and even enlarges them by means of his projection lamp. He wants to develop and print all my pictures and never take a cent for it. One evening this week this boy took me to see the city x-ray department – a pretty good outfit for this part of the world. They have only had it for about a year. Before that, if anybody broke an arm or leg and it was splintered badly, they often had to take the limb off because they could not set it properly. Since they got the x-ray they have not had to amputate a single arm or leg.

Another of the boys wants to become a doctor and he is always studying and reading about medicine and asking me questions about physiology and medicine which I can't answer. We really have a nice set of high school boys, with high ambitions, too, as you see. The second boy wants to go to America next year. The third, who wants to be a doctor, also wants to go, but he is very poor, in fact the mission is supporting his family now to a large extent.

A man who has been doing surveying all over this part of the world dropped in at school one day this week. He wants all the boys he can get who have had a little elementary work in surveying, trigonometry, drawing, etc. If we train them from now until the close of the school year, he will take them in his office during the summer and train them and send them out next fall as helpers to experienced surveyors. Some of the boys are interested so now we are starting a class in that also – more work for me. Our Persian boys seem especially interested.

Last night I went to a lecture at the English Club given by a Mr. Woolley¹⁹ of the British Museum of London, who is doing excavation work at Ur and Babylon. It surely was interesting. They are finding some great things there and discovering things about the history of the ancient world going back to 3500 B.C. He used the Old Testament a great deal for reference and proof of the dates of his finds as well as using their finds to explain some things in the Old Testament.

¹⁹ Sir Leonard Woolley was in charge of excavations at Ur for over twelve years and wrote extensively on the archaeology of ancient Mesopotamia.

I received my Dutch letter last week – you know, the one Grandpa had translated for the Weekblad. I almost laughed myself sick – the way some of these things were translated – some I couldn't even read or understand. Some time ago there was an article in the Leader, a report on the progress of some church in Grand Rapids, I believe, but even tho it was in English, it was just as Dutchy as it could be. You could feel that it was literally translated from Dutch, sentence structure, arrangement of words, Dutch idioms translated literally. Mr. Van Ess and I had lots of fun about that. Mrs. Van Ess was out of it because she doesn't know Dutch.

Well, so long, your loving

George



Oliver Butler

Baghdad on the Tigris River

Iraq

The end of the World War I left the British in occupation of the three former Ottoman vilayets of Basrah, Baghdad and Mosul. They had already decided to hold on to Basrah and Baghdad, perhaps as an extension of their colonial rule in India, the whole of the Persian Gulf area being seen as part of Britain's sphere of influence. But the vilayet of Mosul posed some difficulties. The Turkish government of Mustafa Kemal was demanding its return, and the French, who had already occupied adjacent Syria, had designs on Mosul as well. The multi-ethnic people of the area, especially the Kurds,²⁰ were not eager to throw in their lot with the Arabs to the south. But, in the end, especially when they realized the area might have large deposits of oil,²¹ the British decided to keep it and incorporate Mosul, Baghdad and Basrah into the nation of Iraq.²²

The British civil administrators in Iraq felt they could govern the diverse population in much the same way as their colleagues were governing India, not surprising since most of them had had their training and experience there. They felt the Iraqis would welcome their just and efficient administration. The High Commissioner, Sir Arnold Wilson, wrote in 1918, "The average [Iraqi] Arab, as opposed to the handful of amateur politicians in Baghdad, sees the future as of one of fair dealing and material and moral progress under the aegis of Britain . . . The Arabs are content with our occupation."²³

They were not. Most Iraqis were not ready simply to exchange their Turkish masters for English, particularly as the latter were not even Muslim. Many of the educated classes had accepted the Wilsonian promise of self determination and independence. They rejected what they saw as colonial rule. Others, particularly among the tribes, were disaffected when the British, in the name of reform and a more rational taxation system, violated tribal law and long held customs and traditions. Anger at the British united Sunni and Shi'i Muslims, and even the Kurds for a time, in their opposition to British rule. In 1920, violence erupted throughout Iraq. Small groups of tribesmen attacked British troops and installations with hit and run tactics all over the country, particularly in the lower Euphrates area, and it was more than six months before the British were able to put down the rebellion, at the cost of many lives and much treasure. One of the more effective ways of countering this insurrection, they had discovered, was the use of aerial attacks, the bombing of villages and desert encampments.

²⁰ Besides the Kurds, there were Sunni and some Shi'i Muslims, Yazidis, Turkomans, Assyrian and Chaldian Christians and several other small groups.

²¹ The odd shaped national boundaries of Jordan, with an eastern salient reaching out to touch Iraq, were drawn by the British to secure access to oil from Iraq through the territories of Jordan and Palestine, which they also controlled.

²² The origin of this name is disputed, but the best explanation perhaps is that the Sassanid Persians referred to the Mesopotamian region of their empire as "Eraq Arabi" - Arab lowlands - and the Arabs themselves have traditionally called that area "El Iraq."

²³ William R. Polk, Understanding Iraq, 2005, p. 74.

Even before the outbreak of the revolt, in an effort to mollify the Iraqis and gain their support, the British had tried to assure them that Iraq would not become a colony but rather a Mandate of Great Britain, by the authority of the League of Nations, under which Britain would prepare the Iraqi people for eventual self-rule. The Iraqis were suspicious, particularly since no specific time was given for the termination of the Mandate, but with special inducements and arm twisting, many of the leaders were persuaded to accept the inevitable decision of the Britain and League of Nations. Following the rebellion, the British began to implement the plan and establish the framework for Arab government. A Council of State was named, made up of British selected “notables.” The “notables” came from all the major confessional groups. Sunni Muslims predominated, but Shi’i Muslims, Christians and Jews were also represented. Arab ministers were appointed to the various ministries, and at the local level Arab officials began to replace British political officers. Of course, at all levels British advisors had the final authority.

To head this government, Britain needed a leader. Several prominent Iraqis were considered. The Naqib Al Ashraf, leader of the descendents of the Prophet in Baghdad and head of the interim Council of State, was considered too old. The Naqib of Basrah, Sayyid Talib Pasha, whose sons attended the Mission school, had helped the British during the war and had been appointed to head the Ministry of the Interior. He was perhaps the most popular Iraqi candidate and was gaining support throughout the country. However, he lost the confidence of the British when he coined the slogan, “Iraq for the Iraqis” and spoke too openly of the right of Iraqis to choose their own leader.²⁴ Fearing that he would always be a thorn in their side, the British arrested and deported him to Ceylon.

The favorite candidate of the British administrators in Baghdad was not an Iraqi but the son of the Sherif of Mecca and leader, with T. E. Lawrence, of the “Arab Revolt” against Ottoman rule in Arabia and Palestine. The British thought of the Amir Faisal as a proven leader with good credentials²⁵ who could draw the Iraqi people together and would not be beholden to any of the various factions and interest groups. By the same token, however, he had no following among the Iraqis, who were not impressed by his pedigree or experience. But again, with inducements and arm twisting, the British persuaded the “notables” and other leaders in Iraq to accept him, and in August 1921, Faisal was crowned King of Iraq. While popular support was lukewarm at best, Iraq entered a new era.²⁶

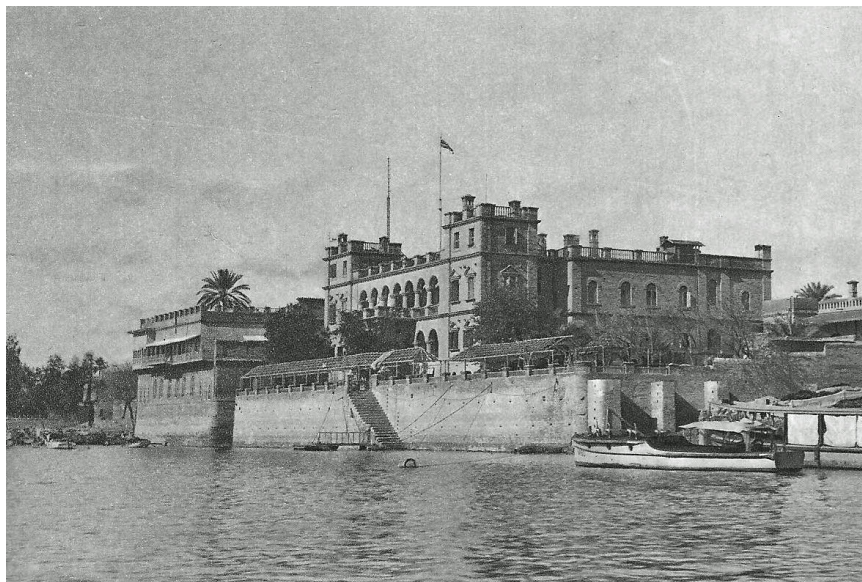
John Van Ess’ position in all of these matters was somewhat ambivalent. In spite of his friendship with Iraqis of all classes, he at first favored the

²⁴ Polk, p. 80.

²⁵ Faisal was, of course, a descendant of the Prophet and might appeal to both Sunnis and Shi’is.

²⁶ If any of the foregoing history of Iraq sounds similar to what has been happening there since 2003, it is further testimony to the fact that the American leaders did not learn the lessons that Britain’s experience might have taught them.

continuation of British rule. He felt that he knew “the Arab.”²⁷ Dad’s statement in one letter must have been almost a direct quote from Van Ess, “The Arabs may be good for some things, but they are no good for self-government.” Van Ess argued with Gertrude Bell, the Oriental Secretary and political advisor to the British High Commissioner and a major architect of the policy of Iraqi self rule. The Van Esses had gotten to know Bell when she was posted to Basrah shortly after the start of the War and, in spite of their differences, they were close friends. “But Gertrude,” he said on one occasion, “You are flying in the face of four millenniums of history if you try to draw a line around Iraq and call it a political entity.”²⁸ He felt that no Arab leader would be able to overcome the traditional animosity between Sunnis and Shi’is, tribe and tribe, Kurd and Arab. When they discussed possible leaders who might be able to win the support of the tribal shaikhs and urban leaders, Van Ess favored Sayyid Talib Pasha. Bell adamantly rejected his suggestion. She offered the Amir Faisal. He warned that the Iraqis would never accept an outsider. Van Ess must have been angered when Talib was arrested and deported, with the complicity of Bell, but they remained friends.²⁹ Later, when Van Ess had the opportunity to meet and get to know King Faisal, he changed his mind. He found Faisal to be a man of integrity, honor and charm and he was heartened when Iraqis seemed to accept his leadership, too. He was still skeptical of “Arab government.”



Oliver Butler

The British Residency in Baghdad

²⁷ Van Ess felt he knew enough to generalize about “the Arab.” He titled his 1943 book Meet the Arab, and dedicated it to King Faisal the First “who made me promise that I would always tell the Arabs the truth about themselves.”

²⁸ Janet Wallach, Desert Queen, 1966, p. 256.

²⁹ Dad never met Gertrude Bell. She seems not to have visited Basrah while he was there, and on the one occasion when he spent time in Baghdad with Van Ess and might have met her, she was in England on leave.

Letters March 15 – October 21, 1923

March 15, 1923

I don't know what happened to the mail last week but I haven't received any yet. Some say it all had to be censored and some say it just missed a connection somewhere. They have been censoring some letters lately, none of my letters yet but some of the Van Esses' and others that I know. I don't know what the idea is. Maybe it is just a streak of Arab government. Mr. Van Ess jokes about problems that come up and often says, "That's Arab government for you." The Arabs may be good for some things but they are no good for self-government. They are trying now, at least to a large extent – the British are still in occupation – but they are making a mess of many things already. For example, in many of the city offices and law courts there have been Persians and other non-Arabs holding positions. Persians have more experience and are more capable than Arabs in general in these kinds of jobs. But now the government is throwing out all these non-Arabs and putting in Arabs in their place, and they don't know a third as much and often ask for bribes before they will do anything.

I was at the Van Esses' house for tea last Saturday. There were also some Mohammedan women present, and they took off their veils and black abas even while I was there. When they saw me they started putting on their veils again, but when they found out who I was they didn't hesitate anymore to unveil and were very friendly. They belong to a good family and are good friends of the mission. The younger one of the two had been in Miss Kellien's school and spoke good English and was just as refined a young lady as she could be. She even got up and passed tea and cake around, even to me – a man – which was an honor Mrs. Van Ess said I could remember to my dying day. This family also had a son in our school and he now has a good position in the courts.

March 24, 1923

Vacation has just started and I have again moved over to the Van Esses for the time. We are having eleven or twelve days vacation before the final stretch to the middle of July. Thursday was the Persian New Year, so it was quite a holiday, a good start for our vacation. Everybody went picnicking in the gardens and along the creeks. For one day in the year man, woman and child was let loose, even the women of the harems, tho veiled on the street, as soon as they got out in the gardens they abandoned the veil. As you saw them whiz by in cars you could catch a glimpse of them all dolled up in their Sunday best. One of the boys who has a car took me on a long ride in the gardens and we saw picnic parties every couple yards and crowds of people on the roads.

March 29, 1923

Today was Good Friday and I suppose everybody has been planting potatoes over there. Our vacation is almost over again and I hardly know where this week has gone. I did a lot of reading and helped do some painting in the Van Ess house and other things like that, which doesn't seem to be very much in proportion to what I was planning to do. One day the Van Esses and I and the other teachers were invited up to the same place where I went with some of the boys some weeks ago, and had another very nice time.

It's a great country we are living in over here. All sorts of wild tales are flying around and every one that comes around has some new story to tell about Arab government – rebellion among the tribes, British evacuation, downfall of King Faisal's regime, Turkish reoccupation and all such stuff, and one says the opposite of what others say. But don't worry – it's Arab government and we take it for what it is worth, and no matter what happens, it can't affect us in the least. About the only thing that is stable around here at all is one clause in the treaty which provides that missionary work can not be interfered with in Iraq as long as it does not endanger peace and public morals.³⁰

April 5, 1923

Basrah, and especially the Van Esses, seems to be a regular sort of clearing house for the Persian missionaries. Late last fall about a dozen missionaries came up by ship and Mrs. Van Ess put them up for two days while they took care of their luggage and waited for the train to Baghdad. From Baghdad they go by car up to Tehran. They telegraph ahead from Bombay when they are coming or from Baghdad when they are going home and Mr. Van Ess always meets them at the ship or train. Early this week a man and his wife arrived from Baghdad and yesterday another couple arrived and they are waiting for next week's boat. The boat from Bombay is bringing three who are on their way to Persia. It makes it pretty crowded for the Mrs. Van Ess, but she always makes them welcome. If they don't all fit in her house, she puts them in the little bungalow that Miss Kellien used to have. And she may send a couple men over to stay with me. I can do that fine, at least if they want to eat Arab food. They always carry their own bedding. In this country you have to do that because they never provide bedding for you on trains or even in hotels.

Anyway this is a fine chance to get acquainted with them and will insure a good welcome for any Arabian missionaries who go to Persia. Many of our missionaries will be going to Persia for vacation instead of to India. The climate is better than India

³⁰ Article XII of the treaty governing relations between Britain and the new nation of Iraq stated: "No measure shall be taken in Iraq to obstruct or interfere with missionary enterprise or discriminate against any missionary on the ground of his religious belief or nationality, provided that such enterprise is not prejudicial to public order and good government." It seems probable that this clause was included at Britain's insistence rather than at Iraq's initiative.

and it's not as expensive. Mrs. Van Ess would go there this year if it weren't that she wants to put John in school in India. There is a good school for missionary children in South India where both Arabian and India missionaries can send their children. Mrs. Van Ess has been tutoring John and he is quite a scholar. He is only six years old but reads in the fourth reader as slick as you please. Alice, of course, is too young for any schooling – she is only three – but she is master of two languages already. She talks English better than any child I have ever seen of that age and she rattles away in Arabic as if she were really an Arab herself. Some of Mrs. Van Ess's Bible women say she never makes a mistake in gender or tense or any catchy things of the language.

April 12, 1923

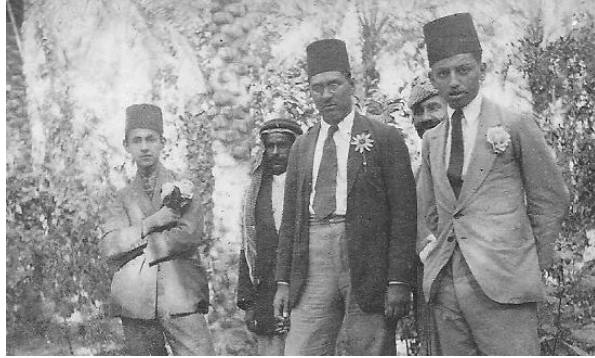
We surely have been having our fill again of feasts and fasts. The Jews have just had their Passover feast and for eight days we didn't have any Jews in school. We have about twenty-five enrolled. These Jews are pretty old and conservative in their religion. Their synagogue services are still in Hebrew. During this Passover feast, these Jews didn't touch anything but unleavened bread and a few vegetables, no sweets or anything of the kind. Funny habits some of them have. During this feast or on any Sabbath they may not do any work, but it is all right to loaf their time away aimlessly wandering the bazaars and streets. Last Saturday a couple men strolled into the school. They started doing some tricks, sleight of hand, etc. I thought I would get one on them, too, so I began this one of writing "the same word," you know well. Well, I asked one of them to write something on a piece of paper, but he said, "No, I may not write anything. This is the Sabbath." A little later this one got up to leave and I asked him where he was going. "To the cinema (movies)," he said. I would think that going to the cinema would be impossible on the Sabbath, but even if that did not prevent him from going, it is decidedly forbidden for him to handle money on the Sabbath, which he would have to do to pay his admission.

Next week the great Mohammedan fast of Ramadhan begins. They fast between sunrise and sunset but at night they indulge in feasting. You can imagine what havoc that plays with school. Very few of the boys are such staunch Mohammedans that they observe the fast during the day strictly, but they are up with their parents all night and have breakfast again just before sunrise. Naturally they don't feel like coming to school at 8:30. But we are going to run the school as usual and tell them to come anyway, even at ten or eleven o'clock.

Last Sunday the native Christian congregation gave Mr. Barney a farewell reception because he is leaving on furlough this coming Sunday. They gave him two nice Persian rugs for a present. Mr. and Mrs. Bilkert left a couple weeks ago. They went across the desert from Baghdad so they ought to be well on their way to London by this time.

April 19, 1923

Last Saturday, the boy at whose house I have visited a couple time, as I have told you, asked me to go with him and a couple of other boys to another place belonging to the family about twenty miles down the river. We went in a car all the way instead of on the river, and it certainly was fine riding thru the date gardens. The gardens are just about at their nicest now. The date trees are in blossom, orange and pomegranate trees are also blossoming. Grapes, figs and a few peaches have already dropped their flowers and the green fruit is beginning to come. All the grain – oats, barley, and wheat – is already in the head. Cucumbers and melon vines are beginning to creep around, too. The big lettuce season is just over and beans, endive, etc. are coming on now. And then all over the gardens there are oleander bushes and rose bushes, all in bloom, roses of every kind – real American beauty roses as nice or nicer than any greenhouse roses. It is funny the way they have all these things together in one field. The main thing of course, is the date trees, but in between the date trees are these other bushes, trees and vines, and under all these are the grains and melons, etc. The grape vines are not on racks as they are at home but are stretched from their roots to the date trees with rope, and all these vines and trees are kept perfectly pruned. Altogether a beautiful sight. And you can see that a man gets quite a variety of crops off one small piece of ground, and the soil seems to be able to stand it, too – it is very rich and truly the garden spot of the world. Even parts of the desert would be very fertile if it could be properly irrigated, and in fact there are signs that in ancient times great parts of it were irrigated, especially up toward Baghdad, between the rivers.



Every spring both these rivers are flooded, often beyond control. Large areas of the desert up above Baghdad are low and could easily be used as reservoirs to hold the high water floods in the spring time when the snow begins to melt in the mountains, and then lead the water away in canals when it is needed. Even tho there is very little rain fall in this country, there is more than enough water here if it can be made use of in the right way. Well, to come back to our visit down the river. It took quite a while for us to get there since we drove slowly. We didn't do much in particular there but sit around, walk in the garden and eat a big dinner, Arab style. We visited the government school in that village and learned how much better their school was than ours! In fact it wasn't such a badly run school, but like other government schools, they are behind times in their methods. The education department is always sending us questionnaires and asking for statistics. If we had to answer them all we would have to have two or three secretaries to do the work. Mr. Van Ess ignores most of them. Last week a letter came from the city director of education asking if we had permission to run our school. They seem to forget that a few years ago they had no government schools at

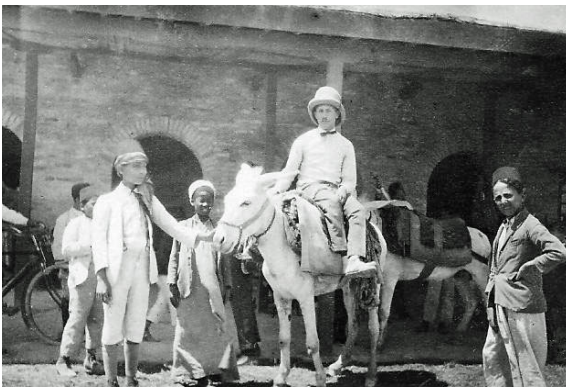
all and that Mr. Van Ess himself started them at their request and was in charge of them for two or three years and that we had permission from the government before they even had government schools.

Well – to come back to last Saturday. On the way back, we walked thru the gardens and literally loaded ourselves with roses and then started for home again. It wasn't an exciting day but very pleasant and it gave me a nice chance to be with the boys.

Sunday morning I was delegated to see the Barneys off at the boat, as Mr. Van Ess had to take Barney's place and preach and Mrs. Van Ess had to play the organ. I took John and Alice and their Indian nurse or ayah. Mrs. Van Ess has a very nice Indian girl to look after the children when she is off at her work every day, visiting women of the poorer classes in their huts or and wealthier women in their harems or doing relief or charity work. The children thoroughly enjoyed the motor car trip down to the wharfs, about five miles, and visiting on board the ship. We stayed on the wharf until the ship was well on its way down the river.

I am getting to be known as "Uncle George" by all the English families around here. John and Alice call me Uncle George and so any of the English children that come to play always call me that, too. The moment I make my appearance there I become a camel or horse or pusher for the swing or reader of stories. A few days ago I met the mother of one of John's friends on the street, and she said, "Hello Uncle George."

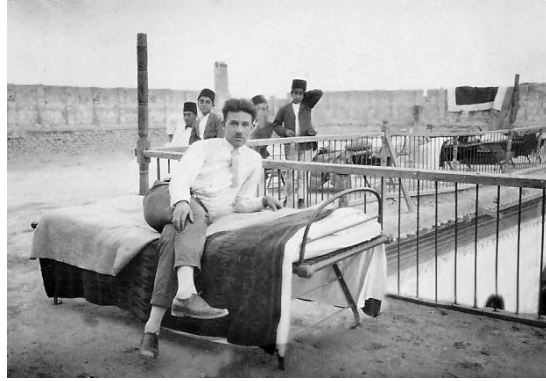
Monday we had a big field day for the whole school. We went out on the desert just outside of town to the race course, a fine place for all kinds of sports, and we had foot races, jumping, tug-of-wars, cock-fighting³¹ and a hundred other kinds of games. We had hired five donkeys for the day and everyone had to participate in a donkey race. At noon the school cook came with bread and boiled eggs and other things and we had a great feed. It was a great outing for all the kids and a good "finale" for the Mohammedans as their fast started the next day. We start school now at 6:30 in the morning and run until 12:30 at noon. We started this one session schedule because it fits better with the Ramadhan fast. The boys would rather come to school in the morning, because whether they sleep in the early morning or not, or fast or not, they get sleepy in the afternoon anyway, so we take the best part of each day and make the most of it.



³¹ Pillow fights between two boys straddling a horizontal pole.

April 26, 1923

It is slowly beginning to get warmer and warmer now, although the heat is nothing to complain of yet. It's been ideal weather so far this spring and it is keeping quite cool much longer than usual they say. We have already begun sleeping on the roof at night with the sky and stars for a ceiling. It surely is nice. We have started doing this already not because it is too hot inside but because of the fleas downstairs. There are no fleas on the roof. That sounds as if we are living like a bunch of tramps here, doesn't it, but every year for about three or four weeks we have an awful siege of fleas, and they get into every place and no matter what you do you can not get rid of them. They just eat you up at night if you don't go on the roof, and it is nothing to be particularly ashamed of to be scratching fleas, even in good society, as it would be at home, because everyone has them. However, pretty soon, when the heat begins to come, the fleas will disappear again. The only thing is, then the mosquitoes will begin to come. But I've still got my army mosquito net, so I am not worrying about them.



We are right in the swing of the big Ramadhan fast. It is strange how it has a grip on everybody, even on some of the boys who never showed a sign of religion before. Of course the younger boys in the dormitory are still too young to go thru the regular daily Mohammedan prayers, but even among the older boys it is seldom that I have seen any of them pray. But now, on the first day of the fast, several of them have started faithfully with regular prayers. Several of them made a brave attempt at fasting, but most of them before the first day was out couldn't resist the call of their stomachs. Several of the boys have left the boarding school and are living at home. Usually it is the parents who want to have them home so they can better observe the fast.

It is strange the effect it has on the spirit of the boys, and everybody, even Jews and Nasranies (native Christians). Everybody is quarrelsome, short of temper. Och! Och! These feasts and fasts are a pest on the land. Jews, Christians and Mohammedans all have a limitless number of them and they complain when we don't observe them and refuse to excuse them from school. Yesterday afternoon a boy, not in school, a Catholic Christian, asked me if I wasn't feasting or having a holiday that day. I asked him what for, and he said, "Don't you even know your own Protestant holidays? It's St. so and so's Day." I told him that in America we don't observe all these saints' days. He said, "What kind of a Christian are you?!" They seem to think that a man's religion is measured by the number of feast and fast days he observes.

May 9, 1922

Last week I had one night of “Ramadhaning.” The boy whose place is getting to be almost a second home to me asked me to spend the night. The family is Mohammedan, so that gave me a good chance to see how they carried on during Ramadhan. We got there just before the sunset gun went off. They have a big gun in the middle of town which is shot off in the morning and at sunset and can be heard for miles around. The moment the gun went off they rushed off to the table, which was already set, even tho we were in the middle of an interesting conversation, and started to eat a couple handfuls of food to satisfy the first pangs of hunger. Then they went to their evening prayers. After that we all sat down at the table together. The table was set out on the end of a small pier which he has built out on the river above the water. It surely was nice to be out there on the water, and the food was good, too. We sat around and talked until about nine, when the boy’s father suddenly decided he wanted to visit some friends about fifteen or twenty miles down the river. We all got into the motor boat, but the boy and I got off at Basrah and wandered around thru the bazaars and coffee shops, which were all full of people. We sat down here or there as we ran across some of the other boys and sipped tea or coffee or lemonade. At about midnight we started back to his home by car, and I went directly to bed, but he had to wait until his father came home, when they would have another meal. I might as well have stayed up for all the sleep I got, because I was literally eaten up by fleas and mosquitoes. At school, up on the roof, there are no fleas and my faithful old army net keeps the mosquitoes off. When I got up, so did the boy, but alas there was nothing to eat. The servants had gone home after the last meal and taken the keys to the kitchen with them, because they don’t eat or drink or even smoke during the day. It must be awful to have to do without drinking, especially in the hot weather. I almost dried up during the few hours I stayed there that morning. I can understand why people get out of sorts during Ramadhan. I was down and out with just one night of it. Anyway, I am glad that I have seen that side of it for myself.

By the time you get this I suppose school will be closed and everybody gone home again. I was surprised to get a letter from Crissy from Boyden last week which she wrote during Easter vacation. She was surprised to be home at that time, too. It’s mighty nice the way you have treated her and the way you have made her feel at home at our house during the whole year while she was in Pella.

May 24, 1923

Just now it is weather here as we might have over there after a hot summer day. It has been a hot and sultry day with the temperature hovering around a hundred degrees. It doesn’t bother me very much tho, I hardly notice it, perhaps because instead of going out to work on the pavement³² or going out into the field to pitch bundles or work in the hay, I don’t go out in the sun at all. I guess its a lucky thing that I am not

³² Dad had spent one summer during his college years working on a crew paving the streets of Pella with cobblestones.

bothered by this weather or else I don't know what I will do pretty soon when it gets to be about twenty-five degrees hotter. But it almost always cools down at night, and since we are sleeping up on the roof now, we can always get a good rest even if the days are hot and humid.

Last Saturday night I went to a concert given by some members of the Church of England church. I was just longing to hear the Glee Club. I haven't heard any real music as long as I have been out here, at least very little besides a phonograph. Native music is rather fascinating with its weird minor tunes, but still I was hungry for familiar music. It was amateur music but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I have been going to the Church of England lately on Sunday nights since Mr. Van Ess stopped the evening English services in the mission church. Miss Kellien and I were the only ones left after Mrs. Van Ess and the children went away.

May 31, 1923

The so-called King Faisal is said to be planning a visit to Basrah in a couple of weeks and it will be "much-ado-about-nothing" for the people of Basrah. The people here don't want King Faisal, they don't even want Arab government, but they will have to put up with a lot of stuff and make a big show while "King Faisal of Iraq" is here. The rest of the year Basrah and Basrah district just follow their own sweet ways and pay very little attention to the whims of Baghdad. Basrah is thoroughly pro-British and they see that the only thing that will save Iraq is continued occupation by the British.

You may have read about the new Anglo-Iraqi Protocol – that is, the new treaty between England and Iraq, changing the twenty year mandate to a four year mandate – that is, four years from the time Iraq enters the League of Nations or the signing of the peace with Turkey. What it means I don't know – nobody knows but everybody is speculating. The general opinion of the local British and British sympathizers is that England put one over the Iraqi nationalists, that this four year agreement merely opens the way for some direct action by the British and also that Iraq is going to get into the League of Nations only and strictly on British terms. When the non-political natives here first heard of this new Protocol they said, "What are King George and King Faisal exchanging 'portical' for anyway?" Portical is Arabic for orange. King Faisal and the Faisal government is a joke in the opinion of most people around here.³³

Last week, the day after I wrote you, I had a birthday. I didn't do anything radical, simply edged off into my twenty-fourth year. I got the piece of "rook

³³ While this opinion sounds somewhat presumptuous on the part of young George Gosselink, he may have been largely correct. He was greatly influenced by John Van Ess, who was very politically minded and had his own strong biases. Basrawis had a reputation for being apolitical, more concerned with commerce than government, as long as public order was maintained, but they – and John Van Ess – had also favored Sayyid Talib Pasha for King before the British put forward the Emir Faisal of the Hejaz in Arabia as their candidate.

fleis” you sent a couple weeks ago and also the greeting cards and birthday wishes you sent. Thanks so much for your greetings. That hair pomade you said you sent hasn’t yet appeared. I suppose it all melted in the Red Sea or some other oven so they just threw it away.

You ask what kind of bread we have here. Yes, they raise wheat in this country, not here but a little up toward Baghdad. We can get ordinary white bread here but only a few Europeans use it. The native bread is made of whole wheat ground course like graham. It is baked in flat cakes, not doughy like graham bread but crisp. I like it very much and hardly ever touch the white bread. It is very healthy, too.

You will be interested to know how we keep our water cool in the hot weather. Of course we have no deep wells and the city water is always hot because the tanks are right out in the burning sun. First the water is put in a large earthenware vessel holding about 25 or 30 gallons. This tank is very porous so that the water filters thru quite quickly. As it filters it leaves behind even the smallest particle of dirt and also



gets rid of the taste of chlorine. All city water is chlorinated. As it filters from the big tank, it is collected in smaller earthenware jugs, also porous but only slightly – just enough so that the outside of the jug is always damp. Now according to the laws of physics, evaporation takes heat, as you notice when you put a drop of gasoline or alcohol on the back of your hand and it feels cold. So as the moisture evaporates from the outside of the jug, it takes heat from the jug and from the water inside, and it really is quite cool. And the strangest thing is that the hotter the weather and the more you set these jugs in the sun, the colder the water gets because the evaporation is faster. These are the same old kind of earthenware jugs they had in Bible times. We have ice plants here and ice can be gotten quite cheaply, but it is usually a lot of bother and besides it may not be as sanitary and I suppose it isn’t good to put ice in drinking water. But it gets very little colder with ice than it does in these jugs.

June 8, 1923

Well, I’ve changed my place of abode – we have closed down the boarding school and dormitory. Most of the boys have begun to stay at home since the hot weather began, even tho they have to come some distance. Especially as we have school in the morning and they have the whole afternoon with nothing to do. With only two or three boys left it did not pay to keep the cook and servant, so we made other arrangements for them and I have moved down and am living with Mr. Van Ess. The Dykstras have been here for almost a week from Amarah, so we have had quite a mission family again. The Dykstras invited me to visit Amarah this summer and take a tour with them of a couple weeks in the launch. I surely would like to do that.

You talk of having lettuce – we've had our lettuce season already and we surely had loads of it. I don't want to make your mouth water but just the same I want to tell you what we have been having lately. We've had cucumbers and tomatoes and a kind of small apple and apricots for several weeks. This week we had sweet corn, not canned but real roasting ears. We have had grapes and musk melons and we have fresh buttermilk everyday. We'll have melons now until the end of October. It's a good thing we have so much fruit during the summer because you can't eat much of anything else when it is so hot.

All summer long, no matter how hot it gets during the day, the nights, at least after midnight, are always quite fresh, at least they feel fresh, even at 75-80 degrees, compared to the 110-112 degrees we have had for several days recently.

June 16, 1923

Major Yates, a good friend of the Van Esses from Baghdad, was down here for one day this week. He was here too last Christmas – I believe I wrote you then about him – and we had a good time with him again. For one thing, he took us to a swimming pool, one where all the railway people (Major Yates belongs to the railways) and a great many British civilians go.

Your school has been over for a week, but I still have four weeks to go. After that we will stick around here a couple weeks to move all the school stuff over to the hospital building here on the mission compound. And then I am going along up to Baghdad with Mr. Van Ess and will nose around there for two or three weeks. I've got an invitation to stay with Major Yates as long as I am there. Then I'll come down the river and stay in Amarah with the Dykstras. And so a great part of the summer will be gone again. Then it will be time for Annual Meeting, this time in Bahrain, but I hardly think that I will go. I have no business there as my work comes under Mr. Van Ess's report and I don't have a vote. Anyway I may have to stay here to open school as school must start here before Annual Meeting is over.

June 23, 1923

I saw the king yesterday – "His Majesty King Faisal the First of Iraq" – and I can never again say I have not seen a king. He arrived in Basrah yesterday afternoon, and of course they had a big parade from the pier (He came by river boat.) to the place where he was to stay. They were to have the King in a car at the head of the parade with his personal body guard and an honor guard of forty mounted policemen. There was also to be a formation of aeroplanes overhead as a guard of honor in the air. Behind the King's car were to follow all the notables of the city and surrounding country,

British advisors, etc. etc. Well, it started all right but they were so slow in starting that the air guard got impatient and went off and didn't return. Then all kinds of cars and garies³⁴ and even wagons which had no place in the parade at all simply fell in with the parade anyplace where they could squeeze in. Then all the spectators who were supposed



to stay on the sidelines started to crowd out into the street and chant and do tribal dances, etc. and even the King's car had to stop once in a while before the road could be cleared, and after the King passed this whole hoard of people just swarmed in back of his car regardless of the rest of the parade that was following. Then the horses of the mounted guard started to get wild because of the confusion of people and they all

scattered. It was confusion everywhere. However, before they got to the end of the parade I believe they got the thing straightened out again. Today everything is going very nicely, at least as far as appearances go. The Basrah people are great actors – they don't really want King Faisal, but they are putting up a big show for him. You ask anyone from a taxi driver to a member of the city council if they have been up to pay their respects to the King and they don't say very much, but you can see the twinkle in their eyes as if to say, "Great joke, isn't it?" I guess that the King's visit down here will help to straighten out the rub between the Basrah people and the King's crowd and things may go more smoothly after this.

I had a game of tennis one afternoon this week, the first since I've been here. I played as if I didn't know what a racket was for. There are some pretty good players here, people who have a court of their own, and they play almost every day. There used to be a court on the compound here but a few years ago there was a very high flood and the whole thing got washed out, along with a lot of fruit trees, rose bushes and other flowers, and it's never been fixed up again. Next fall, after we are thru building the new school building, we are going to get the whole compound fixed up again.

I had a swim again this week – this time at another place. The Port Director has staked a large barge down in the big river, just so deep that there is always about seven or eight feet of water in it. It has holes in the sides so that the river current flows thru but no sharks or anything of the kind can get in. Fine place.

Say, I have something funny I want you to do if you can – send me a "komijne" cheese – you know the kind that has little seeds in it. Vander Ploeg's Bakery usually has it. Send a whole one if you can and pack it in some kind of tin box and seal it. Mr. Van Ess and I were talking the other night and we got started on cheese. When I mentioned this cheese, he almost went wild. He said if I could get you to send some to me, he would go half the expense even if I wouldn't let him more than look at it.

³⁴ Horse drawn carriages

Got your letter this week and one from Prof. Sadler and two from Crissy. One of hers came in 32 days!

June 29, 1923

You may remember a few weeks ago I was writing to you as how I hadn't had a touch of any fever at all yet as long as I have been in this fever stricken town. Well, I guess I forgot to knock on wood at the time because I did have fever this week – two days of it, Wednesday and Thursday. I felt crazy as a bat, just fever, but that was enough – going on about 100 to 102.5. You feel it coming on. You begin to feel hot inside and you stop perspiring, so you take a dose of aspirin and quinine and go to bed and keep yourself quiet – that is as quiet as you can with that fever in your head. Pretty soon you begin to get the chills and cold shivers begin to go up and down your back and you turn off the fan and pull the blankets over you – mind you, with a temperature outside of 119 degrees. Well, you are in the siege of ice bergs for a while, and then you all of a sudden begin to perspire, and you absolutely get drenched in your own perspiration. You almost have to swim, but you dasn't turn on the fan for fear of catching cold. Well, this stretch of intense humidity brings down your fever and you begin to feel like yourself again, only pretty much like a washout, and you sit down to read or do something but before long you begin to feel your insides begin to burn again. You dose yourself with aspirin and quinine again and try to ward it off, but you are in for another attack. That's all there is to it. That's all I did for two days. I guess I have made it sound perfectly terrible, but it really isn't so bad.³⁵ It's a little fever, that's all – there's nothing really serious about it. You feel like a rag and you dope yourself with quinine and aspirin to get rid of it. The quinine makes your head buzz like a hornet's nest. I guess I am still a little silly as a result of the fever, at least so it looks from the way I write, but I am really first rate again today. I went to school again today. I could have gone yesterday, although I was still feeling a bit fagged, but Mr. Van Ess told me to stay home and Ali, the servant, looked after me as if I was a baby.

Well, King Faisal and his crowd left Basrah again and Basrah is settling back into its own quiet ways. The King left without doing much harm. He visited several of the government schools and they gave him rather a poor impression. Then at a dinner, at which Mr. Van Ess was present, the man sitting with the King told him about our school and the King seemed pleased and said he was sorry he hadn't visited it also, as he was disappointed with the government schools. We didn't suffer any by not having a visit from the King, but the government schools did. The King's secretary told Mr. Van Ess that if the mission would open a school in Baghdad, we would have it full immediately.

³⁵ Malaria was not something to take lightly and could have serious consequences. But having described his symptoms so graphically, he now seems to have had second thoughts and had to assure his mother that it was not really so bad after all.

Well, I guess we wouldn't hesitate long to open a school there if we had the men and money for it.³⁶

July 6, 1923

This has been a very quiet week again, nothing happened out of the ordinary. Wednesday was the Fourth of July and I spent a very safe and sane "Fourth." It's the first time in my life that I have gone to school on that day. The most excitement I had was in the afternoon when I was just dropping off for a snooze and the ceiling fan above me started to act funny and all of a sudden decided to come apart altogether and the pieces came down just missing my head. I got up there, screwed the pieces together, turned on the juice and went back to sleep as if nothing had happened. Exciting, hey what! In the evening Mr. Van Ess and I went out for an ice cream sundae and with that we called it a day

Our new school building is coming right along. We are surely going to have some plant here next year. This will be the first building here that is actually built to be a school. Others are all big old native houses used for schools, like our present school.

July 14, 1923

Well, school is over. Yesterday morning we had our last exercises. We had invited about two hundred notables of the city and each of the graduating boys gave a speech or what you might call an oration – or rather three of the boys gave orations in Arabic and one of them gave a short reading in English. The fifth would also have given an English speech but he came down with a heavy case of malaria fever the day before and couldn't be there. The boys did very well. Mr. Van Ess says the Arabic orations were every bit as good as any commencement oration that is ever given at home. Then Mr. Van Ess gave a short address in Arabic and presented diplomas to the boys. A couple of the prominent men of the audience also got up and gave short talks, and we also had a couple of songs by the school boys and that, together with sherbets, soda water and coffee, finished the program. It was a nice little show.



³⁶ The United Mission of Mesopotamia, with which the Arabian Mission cooperated, did open a Girls school in Baghdad, which quickly gained a reputation as one of the best schools in the city. The Mission did not compete with the Jesuits who established Baghdad College, an excellent preparatory school for boys, which many of the present leaders of Iraq attended.

We have been having a terrible siege of malaria fever lately and it is still raging. It's a kind of malignant malaria and knocks one completely out. I guess I had a touch of it a couple weeks ago but nipped it in the bud, at least I only had a light attack compared with what most people have now. Mr. Van Ess went down with it the first part of the week, too, altho he too got rid of the fever pretty quickly. But he had more of the malignant fever than I had. He was down for twelve hours with a high fever, and do what he could he could not bring the fever down. When the fever left him it left him weak as a rag and he did not go to school for the rest of the week and I had to do the finishing up. He had all he could do to attend the exercises yesterday morning, and even then he got off easy compared with some others. Some people go down with high fever and are delirious and unconscious for four or five days. I am still keeping absolutely fit, but I am taking ten grains of quinine a day as a safe-guard. It makes you head buzz, but I take it at night so I don't notice it at all.

July 20, 1923

Dear Mother,

Now it is your turn. Perhaps I am a bit late and you won't get this letter in time for your birthday, but I want you to have my sincerest birthday greetings and wish you many more. I only wish I could have some of the candy and fudge or cake or whatever you are going to have at Grandma's and Grampa's. Well, you take my share, too. I'll soon have done the rounds with birthday letters. Nick, the slow poke, is way behind. Say, Nick, how's the brush salesman anyway? Maybe you could do a pretty good business out here.

You wrote that you had a big argument about lodges one Sunday. Well, I'll say first that I don't ever intend to join a lodge, not because anything is wrong with them, but simply because I don't see any particular use in them. Of course there are a few things about the lodge that I don't agree with, but that is no reason to condemn the whole works. I can't see anything wrong with the general principle. Dancing – altho it has been carried to extremes from which it gets its shady reputation – if it were not for the extremes, would have a physical as well as social and moral uplifting influence. Same way with cards or even checkers or dominoes. Sometimes people divert the use of these things to wrong channels, gambling, etc., but as long as you stick to what cards and checkers and the rest are meant for, it is not only good exercise for the mind but entertaining as well. Mr. Van Ess and I sometimes sit up on the roof at night until long after midnight talking about things like that. Mr. Van Ess does not belong to any lodge – I don't believe anyone in the mission does – but he says if he saw that his joining a lodge would in any way help him in his work for the mission, he would not hesitate about joining. He does not dance, but has nothing against dancing itself – he even took a few lessons from Mrs. Van Ess's sister one time. These are just a few more things in a missionary's life which are best not published far and wide among people at home, so use discretion. A missionary with his eyes open to world problems cannot help but become a

little more liberal minded than the conservative country minister who has a multitude of thirty families in his flock and thinks of very few things that happen out in the world.

Mr. Van Ess is going to Baghdad next week and I may go with him – I am not sure yet. It depends on the progress they make with the new school building. If they keep on working, I am staying here to oversee the work until about the middle of next month and then go to Baghdad. Otherwise, if they call a halt to the work to let the walls get settled and dry before they start on the roof, I may go with Mr. Van Ess next week, spend a couple weeks there, then come down to Amarah and spend a couple weeks with the Dykstras, and be back in Basrah by the first of September to oversee work on the building and get the whole compound fixed up before the opening of school.

July 27, 1923

We are still here in Basrah. Mr. Van Ess has not been feeling well for a couple days this week and didn't get his work done before he could leave and I, too, had a lot of work that I could do. We are planning to leave next Wednesday. We've had pretty good weather this week except for a severe dust storm a couple days. The whole sky was filled with dust, so much that you couldn't see the sun, and it was rather dark all day long. Otherwise it was very nice, a good fresh wind blowing all the time and the temperature wasn't above 106 degrees.

This week is another four day Mohammedan feast in honor of the hajj (pilgrimage rites) at Mecca. In reality it is a feast in commemoration of the time when God told Abraham to make a sacrifice of his son Isaac, only they believe that it was Ishmael. They say that Abraham was a pioneer Moslem.

Well, Robert, if you are going to keep on sending me directions on where to milk a cow, etc., I've got a few questions I would like to have you answer which I have been racking my brain about. First, why is a mouse when it spins, and if so, why not? Second, what is the correct way to spell the following sentence: "There are three ways to spell the word "to."? That way is wrong. Now you find the right way.

Yesterday I had a nice little trip up river about ten miles in the morning with an Englishman to pay a visit to an Arab friend of his. The Euphrates has taken a new course a few years ago. It used to join the Tigris about fifty miles up, but now it comes in just a few miles above Basrah and we had to cross it there in a car ferry. Then late in the afternoon we made another trip down the river about ten miles to another prominent Arab. Both were nice trips. That's what they do in this country. On any big holiday all these big notables, shaikhs, etc. do nothing but sit all day long and receive callers. You go there, pay your respects, talk a while, drink a cup of coffee and then go off again. Mr. Van Ess had to do it all day long last Christmas.

Baghdad, August 8, 1923

We've been in Baghdad a week now. We had quite a nice trip up, although there wasn't much to see along the way – nothing but desert on both sides most of the way, occasionally a small Beduin camp or shepherd with a few sheep. At Ur Junction we got a nice view of the original Ur of the Chaldees about a mile across the desert from the station. All we could see was just a big mound with a particularly high mound at one corner where the Temple of the Moon is supposed to have been. We arrived in Baghdad on Thursday morning and were met by Major Yates, and we are staying at his house now. He has a nice bungalow with a beautiful garden and lawn away from the heat and noise of the city.

Mr. Van Ess has a room in one of the hotels in the city where he does all his work and where he meets people that come to see him. I go in with him every morning and he goes to work and I start off by myself thru the bazaars, seeing interesting things, visiting a few of our school boys who live here, taking a few pictures. I visited the American Consul one morning – and, by the way, we heard of President Harding's death. It was in the papers here thirty-six hours after he died. The Consulate is closed for three days and the American flag is flown at half-mast for a week.



Oliver Butler

Toward evening we usually go out together for a ride in Major Yates' car. He is surely giving us a fine time. One evening we went out to the site of an old city about ten miles out in the desert. Digging just a few inches below the surface we found bricks with the real Nebuchadnezzar stamp on them. They were big heavy things so I couldn't slip one into my vest pocket. Besides the Iraqi government has recently passed a law which makes it a crime for any private person to possess any antiquities of this country. Foolish law, but it's so. On the way back we had some hard luck – first we had two punctures, then going over a little bump a radiator hose connection broke and we lost all our water – and there was no water within five or six miles, so while Major Yates tried to fix the connection, Mr. Van Ess and I started out in search of water. It was already quite dark. But we didn't have far to go as we soon met some shepherds who let us have some of their water and soon we had everything fixed and were off again.

It was after ten when we got home. The worst of it was that we had a dinner engagement that evening with the High Commissioner. But when we went to apologize to him, he thot it was a good joke on us and invited us for the next night.³⁷ "Dining with Royalty!" Mr. Van Ess is good friends with many of these people in high

³⁷ Sir Henry Dobbs had just recently been appointed British High Commissioner for Iraq, the senior British official in the country. Van Ess had known him in Basrah during the War when he had been second in command to the chief Political Officer Sir Percy Cox.

office because of things he was able to do for them during the war, and now I'm getting in on all these things, too.

Another night we went to Kadhimain,³⁸ a famous mosque about five or six miles up the river – a famous place for pilgrimage, two famous saints are buried there. The mosque has four minarets and two golden domes. Of course we were not allowed to go inside, but we got a nice view from the roof of a neighboring house. It was beautiful in the twilight. But a sight like that only impresses one with the discouragingly big job that we have. Thousands come there every day to pray, utterly ignorant of the Light and saving Grace which our Savior gives us and is meant for them as well. Then Baghdad with its two hundred thousand and hundreds of thousands in other cities – and we can only touch a speck of them.



Oliver Butler

Baghdad, August 15, 1923

I am still in Baghdad and enjoying myself very much. I hardly know what to write about, there are so many things that I have seen and done, few of them of much importance – tramping around thru the bazaars, endless rows of shops in narrow crooked streets, stopping to wrangle a while with shop keepers in broken Arabic and English. Once in a while I meet someone I know, someone from Basrah or one of our students who lives here. Then some evenings we take a ride out to a neighboring village or straight out into the desert until we get to some beduwin camp and we stop to talk. They like it, too, especially as Mr. Van Ess talks Arabic with them and has been among the tribes a good deal before he was married. They come out with coffee and will hardly let us go again. I've been out to dinner several times with Mr. Van Ess. I hardly know where the two weeks here have gone.

I been trying to get a visit in to Babylon, but I don't think I can make it. It's about fifty miles from here and the train gets in just at noon and the train back leaves four hours later, not enough time to walk a couple miles from the station to the ruins in the hottest part of the day, and besides there is nobody working there now and nobody to show me around. So I am going to let it go now and will probably get a chance next winter. Professor Clay of Yale is going to start a school of archaeology in Baghdad next winter and they will do much of their work at Babylon. He is very likely coming to Basrah to spend Christmas with the Van Esses, and Mr. Van Ess says that if I want to go back with him and look at Babylon, he will let me off five or six days. At that time the British Museum will be working again at Ur, so I could also stop there on the same trip.

³⁸ The Kadhimain mosque was bombed and its golden domes destroyed in a terrorist attack of March 2004.

Tomorrow morning I am starting for Amarah by river steamer. That ought to be interesting. A good deal of the land along the river here is in grain, instead of date palms as in Basrah. Of course the grain will be cut by this time but they will still be threshing. They still do that in the old fashioned way on a threshing floor, throwing it up in the wind to separate the grain from the straw and chaff. And there are also quite a number of fields of cotton. That is a new thing here and it's only experimental, but it looks as if it is going to be an important crop in a couple years.

Baghdad, August 24, 1923

Well I am in Baghdad yet or again, I don't know which. I left last Thursday morning on the river steamer and we had hardly been going an hour and we got stuck on a sand bar only about six or seven miles out of Baghdad. The river is very low at this time of year and it is very uncertain when ships will get there if at all. There were only three Europeans on board and the rest were all Arabs who had been on a pilgrimage to different shrines up here. Tuesday morning it didn't look any more hopeful of getting thru so most of the passengers went back to Baghdad, and I did, too. All that the ship could do was see-saw back and forth trying to drag itself off the sand bar, and all we could do was watch. There was a good bunch of sailors on board and they worked hard and long. During the five days that I was there they worked almost twenty-four hours a day, and they were just as optimistic and full of fun as ever. You could hardly help laughing, and yet at the same time the shivers would go up and down your back to hear them swearing in such a whole hearted way while they were hauling or some rope or cable, yelling "Allah! Allah!" with every jerk at the rope. Profanity doesn't faze them. It's that way with all the Arabs – they can hardly make a sentence without putting in the word "Allah."

We didn't have such a bad time. One of the cabin passengers was an agent of the Standard Oil Company and we two managed to find some entertainment. Every evening, when the sun got low enough, we jumped overboard and had a swim. We could walk straight across the river, there was so little water. Of course it was boring to be stuck there so long, but it was funny to think of being there on the Tigris, in the oldest country of the world, in the land of the Chaldees, of Abraham, and a large part of the history of the Old Testament.

I guess I'll give up my visit to Amarah but I am not going to Basrah just yet. Mr. Van Ess advises against it because there is a bad epidemic of cholera in Basrah just now. There is very little danger of getting it if you are careful about what you eat and drink, but all the same, I'm taking the inoculations for cholera this week. But I am not going to risk it by going back there yet. I may go to Mosul with Mr. Van Ess and stay there for about a week and then see how the epidemic is getting along. Epidemics of cholera usually don't last very long. At least don't worry about me. I'll take care of myself.

Mosul, August 31, 1923

We left Baghdad Monday night. Mr. Van Ess and I were intending to travel second class as we did when we came up from Basrah, only the line we were going on this time to come to Mosul is only a mixed freight and passenger jerkwater train and there are two trains a week. However, only a couple hours before it was time to leave, the director of the railways dropped by. He asked how we were traveling and we told him. He looked at Major Yates and said, "Is that the best you can do for your guests?" They mumbled around a little bit and then one of them went off to the telephone and when we got to the station we found that a special private coach had been hitched to the train especially for us – a regular parlor car with a kitchenette and cook aboard, too – a car that is only used by officers of the railway and "royalty." Well, that took us to Shergat, a small station about seventy miles from Mosul – the railway does not go all the way to Mosul yet, they are still extending it – and the rest of the way we had to go by taxi.

Soon after you leave Baghdad you begin to see the foothills of Kurdistan in the distance, and after you leave the train and take the car, the road goes partly thru desert and partly thru some of the foothills – very rough land. Mosul itself is a queer city, absolutely different from anything else in Iraq. I haven't seen very much of it yet but what I have seen gives a pretty good impression, at least a whole lot better than Baghdad. There is a lot of marble here and most of the houses are built of marble or limestone instead of mud brick as in most of the rest of Iraq.

We are staying here with two young fellows who belong to the Persia Mission – Presbyterian. They only have Mosul as their headquarters. They do most of their work in the mountain villages of Kurdistan.

Basrah, September 8, 1923

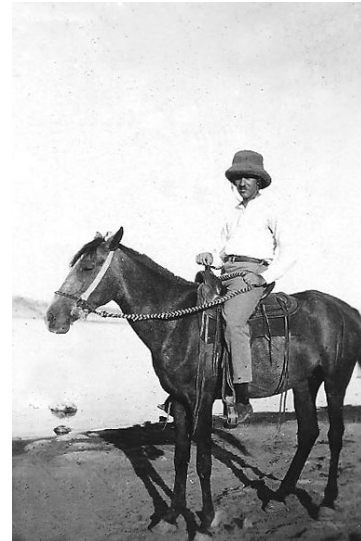
Well, I'm back in Basrah, arrived just this morning. About all I've done since I arrived is read letters. It surely was good to hear from you all again – about Uncle John and Aunt Katie's visit, Nick's brush business, Nina's C.E. convention, Robert and Dad's harvesting, etc. and last but not least, Mother's visit to Holland, Michigan. I was glad to hear that you did go even tho you weren't very keen on going. You may think you were pretty well satisfied at home without a vacation, maybe so, but goodness me! Life is too short to slave away in one place day in and day out, year in and year out, with always the responsibility of the farm and house hanging over you. You, all of you, Dad as well, let the old farm go hang for a couple days or a week once in a while – it won't go kerplunk the moment you leave it for a little while. Get into the car with the whole family and take a little trip at your leisure, forget about your work and see what other people are doing. If you don't like summer resorts or fishing or camping at a lake someplace, drive up to some old farm place in whatyoum'callit county, hitch the car to his gate post and tell the farmer you want to harvest corn or stack grain for him – anything – just so you get away from your own farm and responsibilities – and you'll come back in a couple days with six times as much pep for your own work, a wider horizon on life, a greater

appreciation for your own position and ever so much more. And don't go thinking you have no right to these things because I can't enjoy them also. I'm getting more than my share, in fact I have had so much that it has left me flat broke. However, I have seen so much on this trip that it is worth it to go a little financially tight for a short time now. Don't think I am getting a big head or trying to order you around, but both of you, Mother and Dad, have raised a good family of kids and you have a right now to begin to think of a little enjoyment for yourselves once in a while.

Well, now to tell you something of my Mosul visit. As I said, we stayed with two young fellows from the Persian Mission.³⁹ As we were coming near Mosul in the taxi, we met two men on horseback, both wearing a fez and both with full beards. At first we didn't take any notice, but they shouted at us and then we recognized them as our hosts. They had just gotten back a few days before from a three month trip up thru their mountain villages, and as most of their trip has to be done on foot, they travel light, which means leaving their shaving gear behind and also wearing mostly native clothes. They have their own horses and we went horseback riding almost every day. Every afternoon toward evening we went swimming in the Tigris about a mile from their house. The water is beautifully clear and cold.



One afternoon we went to Nineveh, just opposite Mosul across the river. There is not much to see there except some mounds. One high mound is said to be Shenecherib's palace. Many years ago, before the war, some German archaeologist did some excavating there and made some pretty good finds, but now it is all closed and sealed until the authorities can begin work again. No private person is allowed to do any digging and the archaeologists are still too busy with Babylon, Ur, Kish, etc. to touch Nineveh. As you go along in the train, almost everywhere, along rivers and waterways, even out in the middle of the desert, you see mounds, places that used to be flourishing villages and cities in ancient days. How much history there may still be buried in these places. In one part of the ruins of Nineveh there is the mosque and tomb of Nebi Yunis where Jonah is supposed to be buried. Visitors are allowed to go into this mosque and we went in. One room contains the supposed coffin of Jonah and on the walls of the room are displayed the bones of the fish that is supposed to have swallowed Jonah. There is a tall minaret in Mosul which leans so far over that you would expect it to fall over any minute. It is said to be nearly eight hundred years old. There is a tradition that says that when Mohammed visited Mosul, all



³⁹ These were Roger Cumberland and Edwin Wright.

the minarets bowed to him except this one, and Mohammed with his little finger pushed this one over into a bowing position and it has remained that way ever since. Too bad it does not bow toward Mecca.

Mosul surely has a conglomeration of different kinds of people and sects. A great many are Christian refugees from Turkey and Kurdistan. There are Syrians, Kurds, Turkomans, Persians, Arabs, as well as some Russians. There are Syrian Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, Jacobites, Nestorians, Syrian Orthodox, Protestants and I don't know what else. The place swarms with Catholic, Orthodox and Jacobite priests and bishops. Catholics will have nothing to do with the Mission and to some extent oppose it. Jacobites are quite friendly toward the missionaries but don't do much to help. The Protestants are just the same helpless bunch of Nasranies that they are in Basrah – will do absolutely nothing, not even to support their own church. Even tho they are quite a crowd and well to do, they can't even raise fifty dollars a month to support a minister. They depend entirely on the mission to support them. The Persian Mission has resolved not to continue to support a missionary for direct work with these Protestants. The Catholics have several large nice churches there, but they get help from Rome and France.

Wednesday we started back for Baghdad. We met the Amir Zaid, King Faisal's brother, who was on the same train.⁴⁰ We arrived in Baghdad Thursday morning and I started for Basrah on Friday. Mr. Van Ess is stopping to visit Hilla and Kerbala.

September 14, 1923

I am glad to hear that Mother was still in Holland. Nick was up in 'Soo County.' Dad was still plugging away at home – couldn't be dynamited away. Of course Nina and Bob were at home, too, but they are only high school sprigs! I guess I'd better pas op talking about a high school senior and high school sophomore that way. I can't imagine what Nick is doing up in that part of the state, just across the border into the next state. I don't think he has gone there to sell brushes! Crissy said she had talked to you over the phone from Sioux Center and expected to see you at the Mission Fest in Hull. I've asked her to keep an eye on you and also on that Roelofs girl. You may want to keep it a secret but people won't think it's a secret very long if you go gallivanting about the country that way. I don't think they would think you had gone up there to sell brushes. However, go to it. Here's wishing you loads of satisfaction and happiness.

⁴⁰ It would be nice to know more about this encounter. Dad makes no mention of the political instability in Mosul that summer. The diverse population there, which Dad wrote about, was not yet committed to the idea of an Iraqi nation under King Faisal. Turkey was still claiming territory in northern Iraq and the Kurds were demanding independence. Faisal favored an autonomous Kurdish government within the boundaries of Iraq as long as the Kurds accepted Iraqi sovereignty. Zaid had been sent by his brother to win the Kurds and other dissidents over to the Iraqi side.

I haven't been doing as much as I expected to get done this week. Our school building is just about finished. I was going to clean up the compound, make some new paths, and do some repair work, but I cannot get any workmen. The contractor of the new building who was to get men for me can't even get enough for himself to work on the building. Everybody has gone to the cherdachs – the date packing places. This is the height of the season and everybody moves out to the date packing places. They take their families and simply live there until the work is done. I am eating my share of ripe dates and they surely are good. They aren't at all like the packed dates you get at the grocer. They are very soft and when you put them in your mouth, they simply melt away like honey. But of course they can't be packed that way – they have to be dried first.

September 21, 1923

Last Monday the brother of one of our teachers came and asked me to go to a date packing place for a couple of days. Mr. Van Ess said he could manage alone and encouraged me to get that experience.



Our teacher is chief manager of the place. It was about fifteen miles down the river, right on the river front, and it was almost like camping. He has his whole family out there, as well as his brother's family, his mother-in-law and I don't know who else, living just the way they do at home, about two dozen family members living with them. It surely is a social place, especially with about a hundred and fifty workmen and women living all around, like a big

family. They have a house built of cane and reeds and mats inside the enclosure in which all of the dates are packed, and the workmen have their huts just outside the enclosure. At night we spread a couple of blankets and went to sleep in the moonlight on the river bank. A couple of times I went fishing on the river, but didn't catch much, only a few shad, the fish of the season now.

Of course I watched the date packing process, but it is hard to describe. I will send you pictures when I get them printed. It was interesting to watch the whole process, from when they are taken down from the trees, brought to the cherdach, and then packed by hand by women packers in seventy pound boxes. When you see how they are packed you almost say that you'll never eat another date. These packers are not very clean and the place all around is sticky with mud and discarded dates, and the dates are pressed down in the



boxes with bare feet on a piece of board. It's lucky that germs can't live very long in dates. A certain acid or something in the sugar kills them very quickly. The women packers get about an anna a box and good packers can pack fifteen to twenty boxes a day (30 to 40 cents a day), which isn't so bad a day's wage for ordinary laborers. The boxes are weighed, stamped and sealed and are ready to be loaded on lighters to take them out to the middle of the river where the date ship is anchored and is loading. One of the biggest companies has already sent a ship directly for New York and Hills Brothers is sending their first boat in a day or two. There is always a big competition between Hills Brothers and the native companies to see which can get to New York first. Hills Brothers has bigger, faster ships and usually wins.

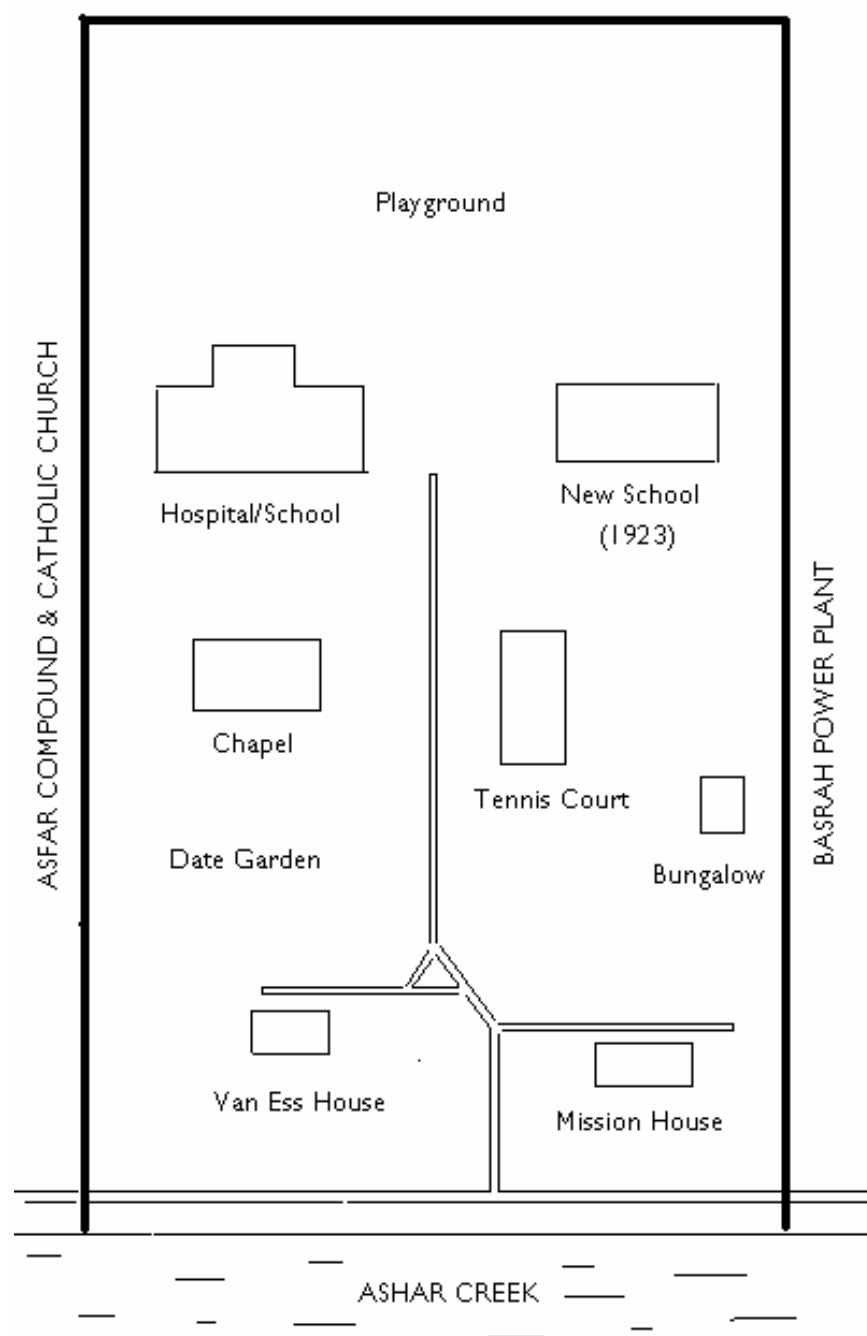
Gosh, Nick! A thousand pardons. I almost forgot that this was supposed to be your birthday letter. Happy birthday to you on your twenty-first birthday.

September 28, 1923

I am all alone in Basrah again, in fact I am the only missionary in the whole of Mesopotamia at present. The others have all gone to Annual Meeting at Bahrain and won't be back until the twelfth of October.

I am just puttering around here doing a little of everything and not much of anything, getting the new school building finished and equipment in shape for school to start on the fifteenth of October, getting some painting and other odd jobs done on the mission property. The seasons for gardening are altogether different here and very few people seem to know much about flower gardening, except for rose bushes and oleanders. So I am beginning to experiment a little on my own. Mrs. Van Ess has sent for a big batch of flower seeds and garden seeds from England and she has given me the run of the compound to plant the seeds, how and where I want. The mission has property equal in size to about one half a square city block. On it are two mission houses, the church, the hospital, a small bungalow (formerly for nurses' quarters) and now also the new building. There are date trees all over, also some young pomegranate trees, grape vines and a couple of other kinds of fruit trees. There used to be more fruit trees than there are now, and also a good tennis court, but there was a high flood in 1916 and most of the young trees and tennis court were washed out and have never been replaced.





American Mission Compound

Since school is going to be right here on the compound this year and I will be able to be here all the time, I'm going to put in my exercise getting these things in shape once again. We have two gardeners on the compound whom we allow to cultivate part of the ground for themselves and in return they have to do all the irrigating that is necessary for whole compound and take care of the date trees, which is no small job. In the spring each of the fruit bearing trees has to be pollinated. The blossom has to be taken from the male tree and hung up in the branches of the bearing tree. Then at this time of year the dates have to be harvested, sorted and packed. And all thru the year, as the lower branches die, they have to be cut off and disposed of as fuel for poor people. These men also do any gardening we want them to do but they don't know a thing about flower gardening, so I am going to make it my job this year. Mr. Van Ess doesn't like gardening at all.



I was glad to get your letter again this morning. I guess that story about my fever must have created quite a sensation, according to how you all mentioned it in your letters. I guess I made it sound worse than it really was. I feel fine now. I got Doc Kramer's prescription which you sent and if I ever have occasion to use it, maybe I will. Aspirin and quinine serve the purpose very well, and I don't think they are as harmful as some of the doctors over there claim. Quinine does make your ears ring, but I've never heard of any deafness caused by it. There is a very good European doctor here – the head of the Basrah Civil Hospital and Chief Health Officer. He is always very prompt in attending to any calls from the mission and he will not take a cent for his services from any missionary. Also within a block of the mission compound is the Civil Nursing Home for Europeans, with four trained nurses, and it is always open to us. So we are not at all badly fixed for medical services.

There soon will be another way to get my weekly letter to you. Besides the air mail service to Baghdad there is also the Overland Motor Transport service between Baghdad and Haifa across the desert. It carries passengers and mail. The company which runs the service has bought a fleet of specially equipped Cadillac cars, with a special radiator, large gasoline, oil and water tanks, an ice chest, camp equipment, and rigging on top to carry baggage and mail. They go two cars at a time and each two cars has three drivers. You would appreciate that if you knew native drivers. They make the trip of five hundred miles in two days, camping out in the desert one night. By the time I'm ready to go home, I will certainly go that way. This way you can be at the Mediterranean in two days instead of sixteen or seventeen if you go around by ship. And you can save a lot of money.

October 7, 1923

Our Bible shop man holds Arabic services in the mission chapel when Mr. Van Ess is away, and I went there this morning, even tho the service was in Arabic. Many of their hymns are set to English hymn tunes and I sing along with the English words. Also the Lord's Prayer, creed, etc. They have one hymn which they sing quite often set to the tune of "Old Black Joe" and another to the tune of "John Brown's Body."

I keep plugging away at all kinds of jobs that have yet to be done before school starts. Last week I got all our old school seats washed with lye. We have about eighty American school seats and there was about an inch of dirt and grime and varnish on them. I tried almost everything to get that dirt off, even burning, with no success. Then I found some caustic soda (lye) in the bazaar and tried some of that, made up pretty strong, and the dirt, varnish and everything came off in a flash. I got a couple of men to work at that and they finished the whole job in a jiffy. Then I found some good varnish in the storeroom, and one of the teachers, who has been helping all along, got to work on those seats. I got some black enamel for the iron parts and finished them up in good shape. Some people have asked in earnest if they were new. I've also been putting up blackboards. We are using wall board. You remember we used that once in the old country school. We got blackboard paint from India. We are also getting still more seats from India, so we ought to have a rip-snorter of a school next year. New building, new and cleaned furniture, blackboards, two new teachers – everything.

Last Saturday I attended the funeral of a fellow American, in fact I was one of the pall bearers. It was a simple service with just five Britishers and myself for bearers and the Church of England chaplain. The padre read a few short scripture passages, said a prayer and it was over. A couple Arabs came along and started filling the grave again before we left. The cemetery is quite a nice place, well kept but it is only a large open space surrounded by palm trees. Several thousand British soldiers are buried there and off to one corner is the civilian part where several British civilians are buried and also two of our missionaries, Harry Wiersum, one of the first missionaries here, and Mrs. Bennett, who contracted typhus and died of it while tending Turkish soldiers during the war. This man was a driller for the Anglo Persian Oil Company and had been in the nursing home for over a month with malaria fever and dysentery. He seemed to get better again and left, but had a relapse and had to go back and he utterly gave up hope. He was down and out and said he never expected to get out alive again. He never adjusted to the food here and was pining away for some American food. I almost believe a good piece of American coconut pie made by an American cook in an American restaurant would have saved him, but there is no such thing in this land. I wouldn't mind having a piece of coconut pie myself, but I'm not going to let myself die because I can't get it.

October 14, 1923

Well, things are settling down again to normal. Mr. Van Ess and Miss Kellien came back from Annual Meeting in Bahrain. Mrs. Van Ess and the children will

be back in two or three weeks. School starts tomorrow, or at least we will have registration. We won't start classes until the end of next week because there is still a lot of work that has to be done on the building. Our contractor has done pretty well on the new building but it is next to impossible to get him to finish the last things. I have been getting after him to put the door knobs on and clean the building and other little things, and he says, "Tomorrow workmen are coming." But tomorrow never comes. Mr. Van Ess says he did the same thing last year when he built the house the Van Esses live in.

Mr. Van Ess and I have been talking a blue streak today about Annual Meeting, but not any of that would be of much interest to you. The first part of the week I got a letter from Bahrain to which about half of the people at the meeting had added something. That surely was nice. Mr. and Mrs. Hakken have passed their first year's language study examination.

October 21, 1923

We are surely going to have some party here this winter. We expect Mrs. Van Ess and the children back from India at the end of this week, and Mrs. Firman, Mrs. Van Ess's mother is coming with them. Mr. and Mrs. Firman used to run a city settlement house in Chicago, but since Mr. Firman died several years ago and her children married and scattered all over the world, she has been traveling around visiting them. She has just come from China where her daughter and her husband are in Y.M.C.A. work. Mr. Van Ess tells me that she was President of the Congregational Women's Mission Board at one time. Then the Jackson sisters, who will finish language study the first of December, have been appointed to Basrah, one to help Mrs. Van Ess and one to help Miss Kellien in the Girls School. They will be here before Christmas. Then Mrs. Conklin and her daughter, of our mission in India, are coming to spend the Christmas holidays in Basrah, so we'll have a merry crowd. Major Yates also always comes down for Christmas.

We've registered students this week and Mr. Van Ess has been reorganizing the whole works, so we'll run on a different schedule this year. I've still been doing about the same as the weeks before, cleaning and leveling off the compound and getting everything in general fixed up. I also set up forty-eight new school seats that just arrived from India this week. They were all knocked down so that they could be shipped better. I am pretty proud of myself. I actually managed to work up a pretty good tan and some calluses on my hands. The sun is getting so that you can be out in it all day without getting "overhet" or being uncomfortable. Of course, when you work your sweat runs like a river. So I've flung local tradition to the winds the last couple weeks and donned a khaki shirt and shorts and showed the workmen how to get things done. I can't simply stand by and oversee while these workmen are making a show of work but not getting things done. I feel fit now because of all the exercise I've been having.

Your loving son and brother, George



George Gosselink

Basrah Boys School - 1923

The School of High Hope

The school in Basrah was officially named The School of High Hope, or in Arabic, *Medressa el Raja' el 'Ali*, though in the Arabian Mission it was usually referred to as the Basrah Boys School, and in Basrah itself as the American School. In 1973, responding to an inquiry from Selim Hakim, a former Inspector with the Ministry of Education in Iraq and now a doctoral candidate studying in London, Dad wrote a brief history of the school. Following are excerpts from that history, covering the founding and early years of the school, in his own words.

Dr. John Van Ess went out to Basrah in 1902. He was not a trained educator, but he soon became convinced that education was one of the great needs of the country. One or two of his predecessors had attempted some education, in a primitive way, with small groups, but this had no official standing. Dr. Van Ess was convinced that education should have official recognition, and opened negotiations with local officials and the Turkish Government in Istanbul. This involved several trips to Istanbul and finally he was successful in obtaining the Imperial "Irade" signed in gold ink by the Sultan Abdul Hamid himself, giving the Mission the right to conduct schools for boys and girls. This document was kept in the Mission safe in Basrah for many years, but I don't know what has become of it now.⁴¹ It took another two years of work with local officials to get approval for the premises to be occupied, the course of study to be undertaken, the textbooks to be used, teachers to be found, etc. But in 1912 the School of High Hope was opened with about eighty students from all ranks and walks of life, from the poorest to the wealthy, and over 50% were Muslims. Six months later a school for girls was opened by Mrs. Van Ess and was conducted along much of the same lines as the Boys school. This was the first school for girls in this whole area. The name of the school, the School of High Hope (and the School of Hope for Girls), came from Hope College in Holland Michigan, of which Dr. Van Ess was a graduate, and reflected the high hope the sponsors had for the school in its ministry to the youth of southern Mesopotamia, as the area was called at that time.

Dr. Van Ess believed firmly that his responsibility was not to make young Americans of his students but to train them for a better life in their own environment and culture. Accordingly, Arabic was made the official language of the school and all its subjects were taught in that language. As you know, Dr. Van Ess was a great student of the Arabic language. He studied Arabic while still a student in Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, and he continued his study and love of Arabic as long as he lived. He used to read the Arabic dictionary just for pleasure. He believed that no member of the mission had any business being there unless he could communicate with the Arab decently and in a qualified manner in the Arab's own language.

Instruction in other languages was offered, but only as languages: Turkish, because the government at the time was Turkish; Persian, because a large part of the Basrah community was of Persian background (the Shaikh of

⁴¹ When the Iraqi Government seized the school in 1969, they took all the school's documents and records.

Mohammerah at one time had eight sons enrolled in the school); French was still the international language of diplomacy at the time; and English was of growing importance in international trade and commerce. Some other subjects were given in English, such as mathematics, geography, etc., but mainly to help give students fluency in the English language, although also to prepare them for a place in the world of trade and commerce. Not all students studied these languages; this was largely a matter of personal choice. Most of these languages were dropped from the course of instruction after World War I.

As I have already said, Dr. Van Ess was not a trained educator. But as I often heard him say, he considered this not to be a handicap, but in many ways an advantage. He was not bound by traditional methods of education. You cannot just transplant, for instance, an American system into another environment and expect it to work. And so he developed his own system to a large extent as he saw the need and opportunity arise in the local situation. Very early he adopted an adaptation of what was known as the "group system" of instruction, which was being tried at the time on an experimental basis in certain schools in America. This allowed for instruction in groups and not according to grades or classes. Each student was classified in each subject according to his attainment in that subject. This may sound as if it would lead to considerable confusion. But actually, although it involved some scheduling problems, it worked out very well, and seemed to meet local conditions of variations in the attainment and natural abilities of the students, especially in those early days. It also made for a more individual and personal teacher-student relationship, which was thought to be important. Of course there was an effort of leveling off, so that by the time students were ready to graduate, they were pretty much on par in all subjects. However, this was not a condition for graduation. It was recognized that not all students have the same interests, and there was little point to making a student spend a lot of time on a subject he was not interested in and might never use in his lifetime. You will surmise that the main object was to allow the student to gain a thorough workable knowledge of things useful to him, rather than just to make him memorize a few facts that would help him pass the examination at the end of the course.

This system was followed more or less until the late twenties or early thirties when the Iraqi system of education had pretty well taken form and we were required to conform to this. We were required to follow the Government prescribed curriculum; our teachers had to be approved by the Government Department of Education and our text books were those prescribed by the government. While we sympathized with the Government in its desire to unify the educational program of the country, we were not anxious merely to duplicate what the Government was doing. We were sorry that we were not allowed to continue in Experimental Education, something which we felt we as a private organization could do, and which the Government by the very nature of things could not do as well.

In those days one of our problems was to find qualified teachers. There were very few to be found locally. As you suggest, some were brought in from neighboring countries, especially from eastern Turkey, from the Christian communities around Mardin and Dierbeker. Some of these were Aziz Mukhtar,

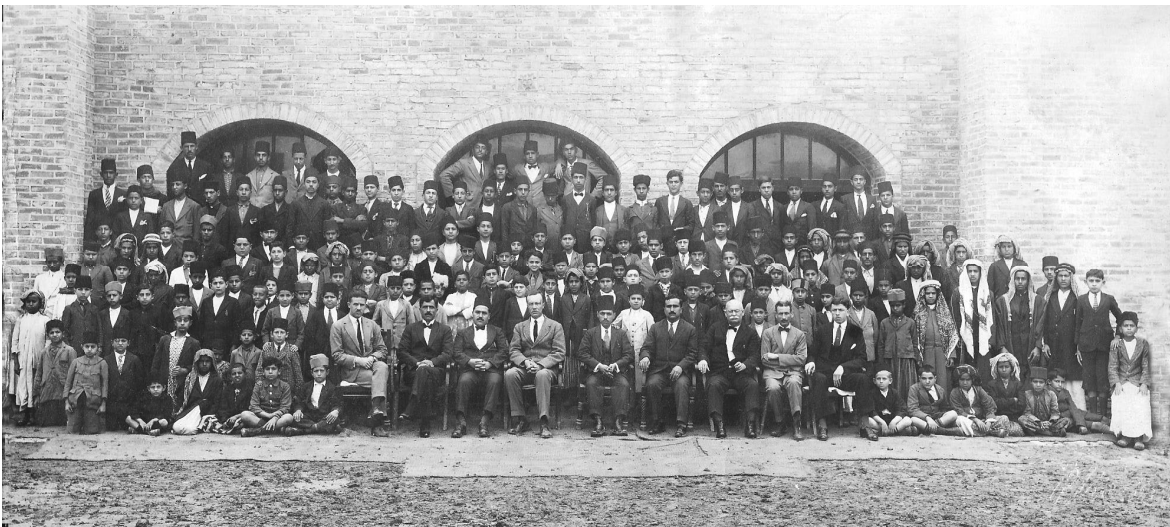
Elias Mukhtar, Jalil Amso, and Garabed Abdul Ahad, who later became pastor of the Protestant Evangelical Church of Basrah, and others. As soon as practical, Van Ess took some of his own students who showed promise and gave them on-the-job training as teachers under close supervision. Some of these stayed on as members of our staff for many years. Then, too, Dr. Van Ess had a wide range of good friends and acquaintances in both Baghdad and Basrah, and sometimes he might discover that one of them had an unusual and extensive knowledge of some particular subject, perhaps a hobby, a special interest in history or the sciences, and he would offer the man a position as teacher. He may not have been a trained teacher, but because he had a lively interest in his subject, he could impart to the students an interest in the subject in a meaningful way.

Text books were another problem, especially in Arabic. But by searching the bookshops and presses in Beirut, Jerusalem and Cairo we were able to get a fairly adequate supply. As soon as Iraq began producing textbooks we began using these. But, in any case, students were encouraged not to be satisfied with mere theoretical book knowledge but to go beyond that to a thorough practical knowledge of the subject. For English we depended on books mainly from India. I was interested in your statement that you were co-author of the Oxford English Course series, and I recall now very clearly your name on the title page of those books. As soon as those books were prescribed for the schools in Iraq, we of course made use of them in our schools.

As for myself, after receiving a B.A. degree from Central College in Pella, Iowa, I went out to Basrah in 1922 as a “short term,” that is, on a three year contract to teach English in the School of High Hope, to take charge of the sports program, and to oversee the small boarding department which we had at that time. You asked about the language used in the boarding department. I had little knowledge of Arabic at the time, although I soon picked up quite a bit, living with the boys in boarding, as I did. But there was no language stipulation in boarding – the boys used whatever language they desired. I had the able assistance of an unmarried Arabic speaking teacher also living in the boarding department, so it was not quite as haphazard an arrangement as you might think. I remember one night I heard one of the boys muttering something in his sleep in English. The next morning I told him he had completed his language requirement in English for the year; anyone who could dream in English was doing all right.

After my three year term I returned to the United States and continued my post graduate studies at Princeton and Western Seminaries and completed these with a Professional Certificate in 1928. In the meantime I had married, and in 1929 my wife and I went out together to Basrah for career service with the mission. We were associated with Dr. and Mrs. Van Ess for many years, a privilege we greatly appreciated. I had acquired a smattering of Arabic while a short-term, but now a more thorough and formal course of study was called for, and the first two years we spent in language study as our first responsibility. I must confess that I never did acquire the fluency and proficiency in Arabic that Dr. Van Ess had.

In 1939 Dr. and Mrs. Van Ess went to America on furlough, and I was placed in charge of the school. Because of World War II the Van Esses were unable to return to Basrah for several years. When they did return, shortly before the end of the war, Dr. Van Ess again resumed the position of principal, but not for long, as he was not in good health, and he resigned from that position in a year or two. I was again appointed principal in his place and held that position until I retired in 1966. Dr. Van Ess died in Basrah in 1949. He was due for retirement, but he did not want to go to America. He prayed the Good Lord to let him die in the land and among the people of his adoption. His prayer was granted, and his body lies in Makina Cemetery in Basrah.



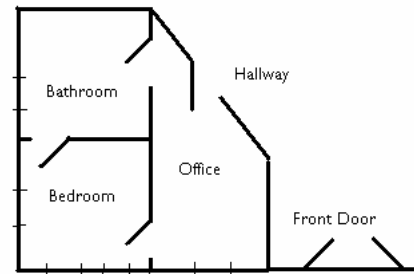
Medressa el Reja' el 'Ali
The School of High Hope
1925

Letters October 28, 1923 – April 14, 1924

October 28, 1923

We have had our first week of school and it is going strong. We already have more boys than we had at the most last year. We have 145 enrolled, which is fully 35 more than last year, and there are still lots coming. Soon we will be crowded to the limit again. With our new schedule we are running ten half hour periods a day and I am teaching every period. Mr. Van Ess said he was not going to spare me, and he just kept on piling on more classes, as I told him to, until my day was filled, because what am I out here for but to work. I feel pretty tired at night, especially this first week, after such a long grind with no breathing space except recess and noon, but my boarding duties aren't as heavy as last year. I am still the "shaikh" of the boarding department but I will have others do most of the work. One of the teachers is living in the building and soon another one will come, and I will have them do a great part of the work

I have also moved over into my new quarters – a pretty nice suite of rooms, very nicely arranged, in the corner of the hospital building like this, with marble floors, windows that fit, running water in the bathroom and everything. It's quite a contrast with what I had last year. That rickety old building with windows holding out about as much of the winter cold as a sieve holds water, and the floor of mud brick and the only water tap in the whole building down in the kitchen. I am not sorry for my experience of the last year in that big old native house. That was a taste of past missionary pioneering. But I wouldn't like to live in a place like that all my life. Then, too, it's so much nicer because this is right on the mission compound where the other missionaries live. My rooms are away from the dormitory part of the building so it will be nice and quiet. The kitchen and dining room are altogether separate from the rest of the building so we won't have the smell and smoke of the kitchen.



I'm glad you got to meet Mr. Barney. I'm not surprised at what you thought of him. He does have an air of reserve and formality about him, and as you say, it is awfully hard to be intimate with him. I guess he is just naturally that way. But I surely like the Van Esses much better. I have a lot of fun with Mr. Van Ess as well that I learn an awful lot from him. Mrs. Van Ess and the children came back this week. Mrs. Firman, Mrs. Van Ess's mother came back with them. She is a nice old lady.

I got the package of books this week. Thanks so much for sending them and also for the hickory nuts and the "stuck rook fleis." The package came thru in good shape. You said Mr. Barney said we never have any butter, but we do have it. Of course

it is tinned, but it passes pretty good for butter. We even succeeded in getting some fresh butter this summer. On one corner of the compound we have a lot of native huts for mission servants and their families, and the gardeners, and other people who work for the mission. Some of them have cows and they brought us fresh butter and buttermilk quite often this summer. Mr. Van Ess once asked Ali, their faithful old servant, if he didn't want a little time off on one of their feasts, and he said, "What do I want time off for? I have my cow and my wife right here and I'm happy." He put that in the right order!

*November 4, 1923
(Penciled note: received Dec. 3)*

Things are beginning to feel a little normal again – I am settled in my rooms, deep in the regular grind of work, and this week I also got the first number of the Ray. I haven't time to read it all yet, but what I've read of it, it surely is a peach; no wonder – look who edits it.⁴² I have been so busy around school that I hadn't even seen Mrs. Van Ess since last Sunday. John, Jr. and Alice come around once in a while and you can guess they are quite sociable. They have grown quite mature while they were away this summer. John is always wanting me to make bows and arrows and hatchets for him. He has got the Red Indian fever and I have to play Red Indian with him. The teachers at this Kodaikanal school for American missionary children in India try to get the children interested in all sorts of things, especially scouting and hiking, and you can guess he isn't slow in taking to it.

We surely are having nice weather now, regular Indian summer. We had a couple of cold days, too cold for summer clothes, and one night of quite windy rain and a lightening storm. But now it is nice again. A sheet and one blanket feel pretty good at night. During the day we wear whites or summer clothes, but you have to put on more in the evening or you will feel the chill.

Last night Mrs. Van Ess and I went to a program given by an Indian association here. It was mostly Indian music and it was some affair! Mr. Van Ess was elected an honorary member some time ago, so he was invited, but he was down with a bit of fever, so he asked me to go in his place with Mrs. Van Ess.

November 11, 1923

Armistice Day today. We've had quite an extraordinary day. First in Arabic church service this morning, Mr. Van Ess baptized two Turks. It is wonderful how the Lord gathers in His sheep to the fold in His own time and in His own way. These two converts were not the result of any direct mission work at all. For some time one old man, a native Christian, a Plymouth Brother, who has been coming to our church, has

⁴² The Central College newspaper, edited that year by Crissy.

been holding services among the Armenian refugees, who have quite a settlement here in Basrah. They hold their service in Turkish, as all of them know Turkish and don't know much Arabic. Some time ago these two Turks, who are working for the railways, also began coming to those service and about three weeks ago the old man came to Mr. Van Ess with these two and they asked for baptism. Mr. Van Ess has been examining them very closely since then and found that they were sincere and knew what they were asking for and were not merely trying to get something out of the mission, as they have good jobs and will not be dependent on the mission later on. So Mr. Van Ess baptized them this morning. When he asked one of them what had first called his attention to Christianity, he said that a copy of the Gospel in Turkish had fallen into his hands – he is quite an educated man – and he began thinking that surely if Christians thot so much of Christ and His message that they took the trouble to translate it into Turkish so that he and others could also learn about Him, that Christ must have been a man worth learning more about. Quite a few from that Armenian congregation were in church this morning and after the baptismal service, they sang “Oh Happy Day” in Turkish.

During Annual Meeting in Bahrain a Moslem woman was baptized there whose husband had been baptized some time before. For the last couple of weeks, four inquirers have been coming to Mr. Van Ess regularly four or five times a week and it seems they are sincere in wanting to know more about Christianity. One of them wants



to be baptized, but Mr. Van Ess is giving them some good solid teaching first to prepare them. It is the policy of the mission not just to baptize anybody that comes along and asks for it but to give them solid teaching and a severe test of their faith for a couple months to a year before they are baptized. For a long time four men have been coming almost daily to our Bible Shop in Basrah City and our Bible Shop man has been teaching them, and now he says he thinks they are ready for baptism. Two of the men have said that they want to be baptized but were afraid to because of probable persecution. There are a few in our native Christian congregation who have the missionary spirit, but most are just the opposite. There seems to have been a change lately in Mohammedan feelings toward Christianity. In Bahrain, there are few native Christians but the church is packed full every Sunday and at weekly

prayer meetings with Moslems all too eager to hear. There are more and more Moslems coming to our church here in Basrah every Sunday. In Amarah the Bible Shop is doing more business than ever, and Mr. Van Ess had some wonderful experiences this summer along the line of inquiries in Baghdad and Hilla. Really some very heartening things are taking place lately in the Mission. It surely was an Armistice Day this morning when these Armenians, whose relatives and friends had been massacred and property destroyed by the Turks, to have them stand up now in church and sing for those Turkish converts.

After the Arabic service, the English church had a small Armistice Day service up at the cemetery. Mr. Van Ess had been asked to speak and we all went along. This afternoon, Mr. Van Ess married a young Armenian couple and toward evening a brand new inquirer came in. He said that during the war he had always worked for British officers – he is a skilled mechanic and fitter – and some of those officers had encouraged him to become a Christian, but his father had always prevented him from going to the mission to learn more about Christianity. But now his father had died and he had no other relatives and was free to do what he wanted. So Mr. Van Ess gave him some reading material, told him a few things and invited him to come back again.

I don't know if I have written about Prof. Clay of Yale University. He is probably the best Assyriologist in the world. He is starting a school of archaeology in Baghdad and will do field work in Babylon, Kish and Nippur. He and a party of five came down to Basrah for a day and were guests of the Van Esses. Prof. Clay gave a lecture at the British Club. It was very interesting. He can read cuneiform like English.

November 25, 1923

I sent you a small carton of dates this week just for the oddity of it. They are supposed to be a special kind of date, better than any kind they ever export. People keep them for themselves as there are not many of them. They are also stuffed, but you needn't be afraid that they are dirty or full of germs.⁴³ They were stuffed by reliable hands – one of our teachers gave them to me. I also sent a carton to Grandpa and Grandma and also to Grandpa Gosselink and Mrs. Scholten in Boyden.

We got unexpected news from the Board in New York this week. Friday night I had dinner with the Van Esses, and the first thing I heard when I got there was, "The Board won't let us go home on furlough next spring." The Board seems to be so short of money that they can't even afford to pay the passages of the Barneys, Van Peursems and Bilkerts back to the field next summer, so they have to extend their furlough indefinitely, and for the same reason they asked the Van Esses to postpone their furlough for a year. While they don't mind personally for themselves, and have answered the Board that they accept the decision, it does cause some difficulties. At Annual Meeting this year, Mr. Moerdyk was appointed to take Mr. Van Ess' place and Ruth Jackson to take over Mrs. Van Ess' work, and that will have to change. Mrs. Firman was planning to travel home with the Van Esses. Now she can't go to America next spring as she cannot travel alone, so she is bound to stay here. But the doctor says she can't stay in Basrah next summer and she can't go to India to Kodaikanal because the altitude is too high and she has heart trouble. They are thinking of going to Persia with the whole family. But even with all the inconveniences, Mr. Van Ess is tickled pink and Mrs. Van Ess is not sorry either. Their hearts are in their work here and this has come to be their home. Mr. Van Ess doesn't want to go on furlough at all, except for a month or two to visit relatives. He gets out of patience with the people over there and begins quarreling

⁴³ After description of date packing in the cherdachs a few weeks before, he must have felt the need to reassure his parents about these dates. There are as many kinds of dates as there are apples.

with them, and the worst is that the Board always sends him to just that kind of people he has no patience for, and he has to speak to them and try to collect money from them.

I am tickled too that they are staying another year. They surely are wonderful people and are awfully good to me. That means also that we will be in America at the same time. We were talking about that yesterday, and Mr. Van Ess said, "Then perhaps we will be able to attend your wedding." Possibly. Who knows?

December 2, 1923

It's December again and soon it will be Christmas. We had Thanksgiving Day this week. A holiday like that seems to put a special cheer into the whole week. Coming to the mission field doesn't seem to detract any from the joy of celebrating these different Christian holidays, if anything it adds to them. We had school in the morning but Mr. Van Ess dismissed the boys for the afternoon. Mrs. Van Ess served a wonderful dinner. Besides the Van Ess family and Mrs. Firman, Miss Kellien and I were the only guests there. We had roast goose, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and gravy, green peas, vegetable salad, mince pie and pumpkin pie, and loads of fresh fruit, nuts and other good things. We were at the table most of the afternoon. You can imagine we didn't care for much supper, but just the same we had more leftovers brought into the drawing room and nibbled away in front of the fireplace with a big fire going. And all the while we talked and talked, played games and tricks, and had a special program for the children.

The next morning I also got your package of bacon. That surely was a surprise. I don't know how you meant I should use it, whether I should keep it for myself or not, but anyway I did not keep it. It would hardly do for me to eat bacon for breakfast with the boys of the boarding school. I would be considered unclean for the rest of my life if they saw me eating bacon. Mr. and Mrs. Van Ess always do so much for me, so I turned it over to them. This morning Mrs. Van Ess asked me over for breakfast and we had some honest to goodness bacon and eggs. It was surely good. Mr. and Mrs. Van Ess simply raved about it and told me to tell you so. Tonight we will have some more of the bacon in club sandwiches for our supper in front of the fire.

I wonder what you folks did on Thanksgiving. I wonder if you had another one of those big family reunions, and I wish I could have been there if you did. But I doubt if I will ever spend many more Thanksgivings or any other holiday at home. That's the only thing that keeps Thanksgiving from being as nice out here – not being able to have your mother and father and all the rest of the family around. Maybe someday you will do just like Mrs. Firman, come around and visit your children a while wherever they may be.

December 9, 1923

Christmas season is in the air. It's wonderful that we, even in this land, can enjoy this glorious Christmas season to the fullest. The boys are busy again rigging up some kind of special program. The Jackson sisters have just passed their language examination in Bahrain and are moving up to be stationed here for their work. We expect them at the end of the week. With them the Conklins from India are also arriving. I've written about them before. So we will have quite a merry crowd here.

Sometime when you have a chance, will you send my army pants if you still have them. There is no hurry, sometime when you are sending some other things. I would have a lot of use for them around here and especially next summer if that wild scheme I have in my head now works out. You see, next summer if I want, I can go to India at mission expense for my vacation. But I am not so keen on that. I would have to go alone and I am not eager to go to the place where missionaries usually go in South India. So I would probably go Kashmir in the north. But the places I want to visit are places where a lady could go, too, so I would much rather wait until Crissy can go with me. I have an idea of what I might do which I would enjoy just as much as India and wouldn't be able to do if I had to take a wife along! That is, go up to Mosul again and go with Roger Cumberland up into the Kurdish mountains among the Kurdish villages for a couple months tramp. That's where Cumberland does his regular work, and he would be glad to have my company. It would be mostly walking as any other means of locomotion is impossible, and that's where the army pants come would come in handy. It's cold enough there for woolen army pants and a woolen shirt even in summer.

December 24, 1923

Yesterday I didn't have a speck of time as we were all busy showing all the guests around. The people from Bahrain and India arrived Tuesday morning. The Conklins also brought a girl along, not a regular missionary but I think she teaches in the same school Miss Chamberlain, who was here last year, taught in. When the Jackson sisters rolled in with all their luggage and boxes, I thot they had brought the whole of Bahrain with them. They had twenty boxes in all and they have been busy all week unpacking and getting settled.

I got a letter from Grandpa and Grandma this week, part of it was in Dutch. The Dutch in the Dutch script was quite a puzzle to me but I got thru alright. In it they sent Christmas greetings to Mr. Van Ess and family. It was in Dutch, so I let Mr. Van Ess read that for himself and he fairly gloated over it. He likes to look at their picture, too. "Lieve oude menshen," he always says.

We are going to have Christmas tomorrow. We are surely going to have a good time with this big family. I am expecting Major Yates any time now. He is going to stay with me. We will eat over at the Van Ess' house. I must get busy and get hold of a Christmas tree.

December 30, 1923

Well, Christmas is past and we surely had a nice Christmas. We got the tree set up and decorated on Monday and in the evening everybody played Santa Claus and put their presents on or around the tree. There was a pile of things, but there were fifteen of us. The Dykstras came down from Amarah to spend Christmas here, too. Christmas morning we had to get up early to get breakfast and the presents over with by the time callers began coming. Mr. Van Ess had to sit again all day long and receive callers. In the morning all the rest of us went to the Church of England Service. There wasn't much of a service, but they sang a good many Christmas carols and that was nice.

The day after Christmas the whole bunch of us went up the river for a nice long trip in Dykstra's launch. It was an ideal day, just snappy enough that you needed an overcoat, and the weather was clear and sunshiny. We went about twenty or twenty-five miles. We took all the leftovers along for lunch, which we ate right on the boat. We stopped for a couple hours at the camp of a very rich Beduin shaikh. I guess he owns



about as much land as half the size of Iowa. They do not have houses but only tents, like the black tents of Kedar in which the sons of Ishmael lived. Last year the shaikh had two of his sons in our school. We started back and reached Basrah about an hour after sundown. It was wonderful to see the sunset from the river, everything tinged with color. And when it began to grow dark, we got the beautiful silhouette of boats and bellums

and trees against the water and the sky. As soon as we got back home, the boys had their program in school which they had made up entirely by themselves and that was pretty good, too.

January 6, 1924

Well the holidays are over and we are down to solid work again. We had a pleasant New Year's Day. We were going to have school in the morning and dismiss the students for the afternoon, since it wasn't really a holiday for the boys and wasn't the first of the year in the Arabic calendar. But everybody was feeling down for having to go to school on New Year's Day, the faculty as well as the boys, so Mr. Van Ess dismissed school for the whole day. We had a big turkey dinner. An Arab friend had brought the turkey on Christmas, too late to enjoy him then, so he was saved for New Year's dinner. He surely was some bird. In the afternoon we went for another ride in Dykstra's launch.

This afternoon I went to a betrothal ceremony. It's a funny business in this land. Mohammedans have a strange custom concerning betrothal, but the ceremony of the native Christians is almost as strange. Mr. Van Ess presided. I went with him first

to the house of the bridegroom-to-be where a whole lot of people were gathered, and we sat a while and had refreshments. Then Mr. Van Ess was given a box all decorated up which contained the engagement ring, and this he had to take over to the house of the bride-to-be and put the ring on the finger of the girl. In this house another large crowd was gathered, making merry. We sat around for a while and that was the end of the ceremony. It seems strange that even among the Christians, when a man marries he has to pay the bride's parents a certain sum which they have agreed to, just as if he were buying his wife.

January 27, 1924

It's been just an ordinary quiet week again, rather wet and unpleasant weather a good part of the time, too. We had rain three days this week and it is raining again today – and we have mud galore. Iowa mud is nothing compared to Basrah mud. Even when we go from one building to another, we almost sink away in the mud.

We're having lots of rain this year and that means it will be a quiet and peaceable year among the tribes. In this country the weather has everything to do with the political situation. If there has been lots of rain during the winter, the grain crops will be good and so the tribes people will be too busy with farming and won't have time for fighting or raiding other tribes, and they are perfectly content because they have food for themselves and pasture for their herds and flocks. In a dry year there is no grain and so partly because they have no work to do and partly because they need food and pasture, they begin to raid other tribes and so everything is in unrest.

Mr. Moerdyk arrived this week and has been getting himself settled in his suite just opposite mine. He has already started his work as "padre" by taking charge of the church service today. Mr. Van Ess threw up his hat and had a regular celebration when Mr. Moerdyk arrived because that meant that he didn't have to preach anymore.

You asked a lot of questions about our work here. We have six teachers besides Mr. Van Ess and myself. Five are native Christians and have developed into the spirit of the mission pretty well so they don't break down anything the mission is trying to do. The sixth is one of the boys who graduated last year, a Moslem. I think he is really a Christian at heart and would declare himself a Christian if he could do so without being ousted from his family and being practically exiled by everybody else. He has aspirations to become a doctor, so pretty soon we are going to send him to Bahrain, where Dr. Dame will train him for a while before he goes to some medical school.



Yes we know where every one of last year's graduates is and we are getting encouraging reports about them. They all have positions in either government or private companies. We are going to take one of them ourselves soon to take the place of

the teacher who is going to Bahrain. Remember that all but one of last year's graduates were Moslems, but now everybody who has anything to do with them praises their high character.

I don't know what I wrote to give the impression that we never mention Christianity to any of the boys, but we certainly do. Mr. Van Ess teaches nothing but Bible to different groups of students all day long – the Gospels, not the Old Testament. And when the boys talk to me, I don't have to argue for Christianity – they know enough to argue among themselves. I think some of these boys could be as sincere Christians as any boy or girl of the same age in a Christian family. But if they would make a definite confession of Christianity here, it would almost be like committing suicide.

You asked about how our flower garden is getting along. Well, things have a strange way of growing here. All those seeds that we planted last fall will not bloom until summer or even next fall. Most of them have to be planted almost a year before they bloom. Grain is sown as early as August or September, but it does not grow until the winter rains are over, and it is ready for harvest in April. You asked about sending some flower bulbs and seeds, but it happens that we have every kind that you mentioned. The chrysanthemum season is just over and we surely had loads of them and several other kinds, too. They were all planted just after the rains about a year ago.

This week I sent Crissy two copies of the picture we had taken of the whole



bunch on Christmas day and she'll give one to you.⁴⁴ But do be careful when you show that picture to others because Mrs. Van Ess' three servants are there, too, and some people are apt to take that wrong. They immediately think that missionaries live in high style and luxury, with servants and everything and that people at home have to pay for all that. But where the woman has a full time mission appointment, she doesn't have time to cook and do all the housework. So she has a cook to do the cooking as well as shopping in the bazaar, and she must have a man to do the housework, too, and that is a lot of work with visitors coming and staying with them all the time. That kind of work is done by men here, because women work in their own houses and can not work in other houses where there are men around. And then of course she – that is, Mrs. Van Ess – must have a nurse to take care of the children

⁴⁴ Top: Yusuf, Ali, Mary Ayah. Second: Rachel Jackson, Dirk Dykstra, John V.E., Jr. John Van Ess, Minnie Dykstra, Ruth Jackson. Third: Dorothy Van Ess, mother Mrs. Firman, Alice V.E., Mrs. Conklin, Miss Conklin. Bottom row: George Gosselink, Miss Luce, Charlotte Kellien, Major Yates.

because she can not take them everywhere she goes. She goes out every morning and very often does not come home for lunch at noon but gets back late in the afternoon – visiting the women in their homes, reading to them, teaching them, looking after the poor people and doing all sorts of things. And it's the same way with all the missionary families. But there are many people who are altogether too anxious to get some excuse for not supporting missions, and they are just as likely to take this servant thing as a reason simply because they do not understand. Missions have suffered a good many times because of this kind of misunderstanding.

February 3, 1924

We are still having lots of rain. People say they haven't seen so much rain in one year for a good many years. There has been too much rain for several of the houses – you see, all the houses are built of mud brick which won't burn very hard and can't stand so much rain. Four or five old houses in Basrah City have collapsed. One house went down in the middle of the night and seven people were buried under it and killed. The roofs of the houses are flat and made of mud, too, and I don't believe there is a house in Basrah that doesn't leak at least a little. Our roofs have stood up pretty well, at least I'm still perfectly dry in my rooms.



By the way, I've never heard very much about your selling that farm. You wrote that you had sold it for so much an acre to someone – I don't remember the name – but that is all you wrote. You didn't explain what the terms were or whether they are so that they ease up the payments on the farm you live on now. Maybe it's not my business, but I am interested in your financial affairs because I want to know whether you will be in a position to help me go to school some more when I get back without breaking the bank. I don't have much chance to save money here. If I went to either one of our church seminaries, the Board would probably help me, unless they are still as tight financially as they are now, but as it looks now I won't be going to seminary. I don't want to take all that time in a regular seminary course when I can get all I want in half the time by taking special courses in education, religion, pedagogy, etc. in some other school. Well, we'll see how it goes.

February 10, 1924

I guess some of the cold that you spoke of in your last letter has drifted over here, at least it's been pretty chilly the last few days. I seem to feel the cold more here than at home. Forty degrees feels like zero does over there. I suppose that's because the heat of the summer burns your bones hollow and that allows the draft to howl thru them in winter.

I was very interested in what you wrote about adopting that Indian boy. I suppose he will go to school while he lives with you. Does that mean you will have to support him? If you did that it would be part of your share of missionary work. I wish more people would feel the responsibility of doing something like that. We could send a shipload of boys from here to be put in Christian homes over there. But there seems to be lots of money for other things but not for missions. With the appropriations we have this year we won't be able to run the school for a whole year. We've either got to dismiss a couple of our teachers and run the school on one leg or run until the money runs out and then just close the school, unless we can scratch together some money ourselves from somewhere. The Board has given Mr. Van Ess – our field treasurer – the maximum we can expect for the mission this year. Ever since he came back to Basrah from Annual Meeting he has been working on that budget, cutting and slicing the estimates for different departments in every possible way, and still there isn't enough. For evangelistic work it is not so bad, because they can slow down a bit, but if the school appropriations get cut, we have to go along half-shod. Mr. Dykstra has already had to give up river touring because there isn't money to support running that launch, so the launch is simply tied up, doing nothing, and rotting. And Dykstra now has to confine his work to Amarah itself.

February 16, 1924

It's been an awfully quiet week again – nothing doing and nothing to write about. That doesn't mean that it's monotonous, quite the opposite. There are always



things that are happening that keep things alive, visits from the boys, meeting new people, walking around thru the bazaars. In school the classes are always interesting. I've just started a class in geography of the Near East – a new book published last year. I am learning a lot myself – two or three evenings this week I just spent reading it. But the boys don't catch on to it at all. You would think they would be interested in the geography of their own part of the world – maybe they are interested but just don't get the hang of it yet. That just means that I have to buckle down and find some way in which they will soak it up. So it goes all the time, and lots of little things make the time fly.

I begin to feel the handicap of not knowing the language more and more. The first year there was enough to do in getting adjusted to the new environment. But now that that is past, I would like to be able to do much more and that requires a thorough knowledge of the language. In school the boys don't know enough English to fully understand what I say and they can't explain what they want to say. At first, when I didn't know a word of Arabic, I simply didn't pay attention to anybody talking Arabic,

but now when I can understand a few words, almost to get the drift of what they are talking about, if they are talking about everyday things, but can't understand it all, I get "nervis" as John Jr. would say. I envy Mr. Van Ess and Mr. Moerdyk when they are talking with Arabs and are perfectly at ease in their language. But if I could really get down and study the language, even if I could give all my time to it, it would be close to the end of my term here before I could really understand and make myself understood in Arabic.

February 24, 1924

One of the moving picture houses has been showing the Old Testament, beginning with the creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the whole works. The whole thing is in four or five parts and they showed two parts last week. They gave it two afternoons after school especially for school children. Monday afternoon there were only children from the mission schools there. Rachel Jackson brought some of her Christian students and younger Mohammedan students from the Girls School. Of course the older Mohammedan girls can't go to a public place like that. The picture was pretty good – it surprised me – and the children enjoyed it. You should have heard them shout, "No! No!" when Eve was going to take the forbidden fruit and again when she offered it to Adam. They especially liked the part about Abraham. The story of Abraham is always a favorite with them. Mohammedans hold that Islam existed before Mohammed lived and that Abraham was really a pioneer Moslem. They also hold that God commanded Abraham to offer his son Ishmael as a sacrifice instead of Isaac.

March 1, 1924

Not much has happened this week. We had some more movies of the Bible, a continuation of what we had last week – Joseph, Moses, Ruth and Solomon – but they weren't as good as last week. They brought in a couple things which are not true to the Bible at all. For instance, when Moses went up the mountain to die, they had a whole crowd of people following him and they buried him. Another thing was a strictly Mohammedan tradition and not in the Bible. To show the wisdom of Solomon, they told the story of two brothers who had a dispute about their inheritance from their father who had just died. To settle the dispute, Solomon ordered the body of the dead father to be brought in and gave each brother a bow and arrow, and said that he would make his judgment according to which one would shoot closest to his father's heart. The one brother shot but the other refused to shoot at his father, and accordingly Solomon gave the inheritance to that brother. They left out the story of the two mothers and the baby.

March 8, 1924

I guess I'll begin by answering some of your questions, tho I think I have answered a good many of them in the last couple of months but maybe not all. Last year everything was new and there was always something to write about. Now things are getting more or less ordinary and I forget to write about them. Maybe the second year is the worst in the missionary's life on the field. The first year has been a whirl of new things all the time and the second time they are no longer new and you don't feel that excitement. I still may be missing a lot, and that is why I feel the lack of knowing the language. But there is still plenty to do – reading, studying, figuring out a better method of teaching – at least more than enough to keep me busy.

I am teaching every hour of the day in school – that is ten half hour periods. I have three classes of reading – second third and fourth grade – three classes of grammar and composition, arithmetic, geography, book keeping and physics – not a hard schedule but a steady grind the whole day. Makes one glad just to sit down for a while after school and do nothing. I don't teach Bible. Mr. Van Ess is taking all the Bible teaching himself – he has every boy in school for a period a day in Bible.

I don't go around with the boys as much as last year, that is to their homes. But more of that will happen later in the spring. But even if I don't go out with the boys as much, the reason is that the boys are around school more. Last year we had



no playground so there was little for them to do outside of school hours, but this year we have a good playground and almost everyday there is a big gang of boys playing there until dark – even on Saturdays and Sundays. I asked Mr. Van Ess whether I should allow them to play football (soccer) and such things on Sunday, and he said he would leave it to me – to give them permission as I thot best. So I figured that we could not expect the boys to sit around all day long doing nothing, and that if I didn't give them permission they would only go somewhere else, most likely a worse place. So I gave them permission to play on condition that they would not play during church time, because they would be right next to the church and would disturb the service. The result is that a good many of these boys have been coming to the service, wiling away their time until church is out and they can begin to play. And that is where we want them to be – in the atmosphere of the church and mission influence rather than scattered around town. So we are happy to have them here, even if we have to let them play football on Sunday. I sometimes play with them, and afterwards before they go home they sit down to rest and talk with me for a while.

Nick asked whether there was any need on the mission field for someone trained in music. I don't see much chance for one to be of use here with music only, but this isn't the only mission. There might be opportunities in India and Japan, where they

are much more advanced than here. As for other work, I don't see that a full seminary course would be of much use unless you were going into evangelistic work, but a year or two of general training above college would almost be a necessity for any department of mission work. That's why I want to get more training in education. Without it I could never be more than just an assistant to Mr. Van Ess. I would never be able to take full charge of the work, at least for a good many years, simply because I don't know enough. But with a few more years of schooling, I would be able to take Mr. Van Ess' place someday or be able to start a school some place where there is nothing yet, and I would be able to point to that as something I had started and built up myself.

March 15, 1924

I believe Mother is getting to be a pretty good Arab. In this week's letter she used the phrase "if God wills" just like a real Arab. I remember when we first came out, Moerdyk told the Hakkens and me that we should never say "Yes" but always "Insha'llah" and that is just about the way it is with Arabs. They use it in so many ways, too. You ask, "How are you?" they say "Insha'llah." You say, "It's a nice day." They say "Insha'llah." Or they use another phrase. You ask, "How are you?" they say "Elhamdulillah" – Praise God. "How is your brother?" "Elhamdulillah" "It's a nice day." "Elhamdulillah" - and so on.

So far we haven't been bothered much this year with all the assortment of holidays that we have here. There have not been many Mohammedan holidays yet – they will be coming soon. There have been Jewish and Christian holidays, but it has gotten so that they don't dare ask to be excused because they are afraid they will be kicked out of school. We have two hundred boys in school now, which is more than we have room for, and Mr. Van Ess has warned the Christians and Jews that they have to come up to the mark or they will be dismissed. So they come meekly, holidays or no holidays. At the end of next week and the following week tho, there will be a whole flock of holidays all at the same time – Christian, Jewish and Mohammedan – so we are going to give them ten days of spring vacation. About the second week of April Ramadhan, the month of fasting, begins again, which will also affect our school, but we can't have vacations all the time.

I don't know yet what I will do during vacation. I had a mind to go up to Ur and see the work of excavation there, but they have again stopped work until next fall. They have gone to Baghdad. They use the summer to decipher and catalog the things that they have found over the winter. So, since they have stopped work, I don't know that it is worth the trip just to see the ruins, which are really just a hill of dirt. They have been finding some valuable stuff again this winter in regard to things proving ancient history and Old Testament history, too. Mr. Wooley was down here one day last week before going back to England and he showed us a cup which was five thousand years old.

Mr. Dykstra dropped in on us unexpectedly yesterday. He was on his way to Nasariyah, up the Euphrates not far from Ur. Nasariyah is part of the Amarah station territory and Mr. Dykstra has a Bible shop there with a native Christian in charge, and

he has to go there every once in a while to look things over. Now since the launch is tied up and not used at all because of the lack of money, he had to come down to Basrah (he bummed his way as a deck passenger on a steamer) and will take the train from here. While he is here he is staying with Mr. Moerdyk and me and eating with us in the dormitory.

March 22, 1924

We are having vacation this week. I might wish you a Happy New Year as it was the Persian New Year yesterday.



Although it is a Persian holiday, Arabs observe it as well, and everybody was out celebrating yesterday on the river and in the gardens, although it looks more like a county fair than anything else, the way people crowd together in one place instead of in small groups picnicking by themselves. Their idea of a nice quiet boat ride on the river is to go to a place where there are already a couple

hundred boats all bumping and pulling and pushing each other.

March 29, 1924

Here it is the end of vacation again and I've done hardly any of the things I was planning to do. I haven't been idle. A new American Consul for Bushire, one of the Persian ports up the Gulf, has been staying with me all week and left by ship this morning. He has been Consul in Jerusalem for the last eight months. He drove his own car from Jerusalem to Baghdad along with one of the convoys of the trans-desert transport companies, and also most of the way from Baghdad to Basrah, except for about seventy-five miles where the road was impossible and he had to load his car on a river barge. I went around with him to show him around, meet people and get his business done. Yesterday was a fine morning for driving so we drove out to Zubair, which is always interesting because it is still an Arab town, the gateway to the interior. Camel caravans start off from there. You also see a lot of real Beduin tribal people, small and thin but tough as leather. Another afternoon I took John and Alice to see the circus in town. There isn't much to the circus itself, but they also have three or four elephants, five tigers, a couple of lions, monkeys, deer, trained horses and dogs, and these animals were nice for the children to see.

By the way – although April first will be long past by the time you get this – do you know the origin of April fool in the Bible? Look up Hezekiah 2:10.

April 5, 1924

*I got your letter again last Monday. It was in answer to my letter which I wrote less than two months ago. How small the world is growing.*⁴⁵

*We are living in great days now for Iraq. The first national parliament of the Iraqi state is at present in session and being organized. Last week an order came that all schools should be closed on Constitution Day, a new Iraqi holiday in honor of the opening day of the first Iraqi Parliament. We had vacation anyway so it didn't affect us. Everybody here is eager to find out what they are making of it. Most Basrah people regard it more as a joke than anything else, although they do have their representatives there, too. Our teachers were joking about it the other day and one of them said that the first thing the Parliament would have to do is pass a law saying that all the furniture in their assembly hall should be screwed down to the floor, so that if the members got into an argument, they wouldn't be able to take up the chairs and tables and throw them at each other. Most Basrah people are too well satisfied with British administration to want any independent government.*⁴⁶

The big news here is that Mustapha Kemal, the leader of the Turkish forces and top man in the Turkish government, has thrown out all religion from the government of Turkey – the religion of course being Islam. Under Mustapha Kemal government and religion will be absolutely separate, as they are in the U.S. You see, Islam is a religion of the sword, and the sword of Islam has always been represented by Turkey. Now that Mustapha Kemal has thrown religion out of government, Islam is without a religious and military head. The Caliph, who was the religious and temporal head of Islam, in whose name Moslem prayers are made, has been exiled from Turkey and has had to flee to Switzerland. It is interesting that he had to go to a Christian country for protection. King Hussein of the Hejaz, who is also the Sherif of Mecca, has set himself up a Caliph of all Islam, and Iraq and Transjordan and a few other Arab countries have already recognized him as such. But that is because King Faisal of Iraq and the Emir Abdullah of Transjordan are sons of King Hussein. Persia will never recognize him, nor will Egypt or the Moslems of India, Turkey and Russia, and it is doubtful that Morocco and other north African countries will. It is likely that there will be a split in Islam, with separate caliphs over each part. Anyway, no matter what happens, all these doings won't hurt the work of missions – it will rather help it along. All those people who are the least bit weak in their Mohammedan faith may be more willing to accept Christianity, especially because of the instability of Islam.

⁴⁵ As he mentioned in an earlier letter, mail was now going overland to the Mediterranean rather than via Bombay by sea.

⁴⁶ It is difficult to evaluate the truth of this statement. This was certainly the opinion of John Van Ess, who felt that even the recent tribal revolt was more a matter of expressing grievances than a call for independence. And it should be mentioned that the people of Basrah had prospered under British government during the war and immediately afterwards. They were unsure about what rule from Baghdad would mean.

April 12, 1924

Ramadhan is upon us again. It started just a week ago. It has been very nice and cool so that helps make their fasting not quite so hard. It must be awfully hard when Ramadhan is in mid-summer and they can't even take a drop of water from sun-up to sun-down. You see the Arabic year is eleven days shorter than ours, and so according to the calendar, Ramadhan comes that much earlier every year, so it makes a complete cycle in thirty-three years.

We have also begun running school one session a day, beginning at 6:30 in the morning and finishing at 12:15. I like this schedule fine. It is easier to get the boys to school early in the morning than to keep them from falling asleep in the afternoon. I am surprised at the way they come so early in the morning – only a few are late and very few are absent – no more than usual.

I think a few more boys are fasting this year than last. But they aren't very sincere about it. None of them do their prayers, most don't even know their prayers. At the beginning of the week none of the boys fasted, but then one evening some boys came to me and said they were going to begin fasting the next day. I couldn't forbid it in the dormitory – that would only make them antagonistic, for they feel they are being very sincere – so I kidded them a little and let them go their way. I thot one of them would give up his fast before three days were out but the others would have more perseverance. They all started out strong – got up early before sunrise, ate some bread with cold water because the cook wasn't around yet, and then went back to bed while the rest of us had breakfast. They stayed bravely away from the table at noon. About the middle of the afternoon, the first boy came to me and said he was dying from hunger and was going to stop fasting even if the other boys killed him for it, and he asked me to tell the cook to give him something to eat. I said I couldn't help him, because when he said he was going to fast, I had told the cook not to prepare anything for him. But he begged and pleaded, so finally I sent him to the kitchen. The other boys are still going strong, more to let me see that they can do it than because it is a religious duty. I think they would feel ashamed of giving it up now that they have started. The other boys in school kid them along – whenever they haven't got their lessons or have failed to do something, they say, "Oh, that's right. You are fasting." They joke about it among themselves, too.

It is awful that I forgot your silver wedding anniversary until you mentioned it in your letter. It is too bad you didn't have more of a celebration. If you are never going to have any celebration if all your children aren't at home, I am afraid you won't have many more celebrations.

Lovingly,

George



Oliver Butler

Ezra's Tomb on the Tigris River
Jewish Pilgrimage Site

Christians and Jews

The daily reports of violence in Iraq these days, including stories of the destruction of Christian owned shops in Basrah, the bombing of churches in Baghdad and the kidnapping and murder of a Chaldean archbishop in Mosul, bring to mind happier times in Iraq when Christians – and Jews – lived in peace and played a significant role in the life of the nation. Over the centuries of Persian and Islamic rule in Mesopotamia, these minority groups had suffered some periods of persecution but more generally had lived in harmony with their neighbors and contributed significantly to the civic, intellectual, and artistic life of the country.

The Jews of Iraq could trace their history back 2600 years to the period of the Babylonian captivity, and in the years after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Mesopotamia - Babylon and Baghdad - thrived as a center of Jewish life and learning. Jews had an important place in the early years of Iraq's independence. The first Minister of Finance, Sasoon Eskel, was Jewish. Jews were represented in the Iraqi parliament, held significant positions in the bureaucracy and were very active in business and commerce. It has been suggested that Jews at that time considered themselves to be Arabs of Jewish faith rather than a separate people or race. But they also made a unique contribution to the culture of Iraq. Among other things, they provided most of the musicians who performed in the clubs, at Muslim and Christian weddings, and on broadcast programs for the newly established radio stations in the 1930s.

Gertrude Bell has a beautiful description of a reception which the Jewish leaders of Baghdad held for the soon to be appointed King Faisal in 1921. The guests, including Christian and Muslim notables, met in the courtyard of the Grand Rabbi's official home, with women and children crowding the overlooking balconies. The Torah in its gold case was removed from the ark and taken to the Rabbi, who kissed it, and then to Faisal, who repeated the gesture. After a round of speeches, Faisal was given an opportunity to reply. "There is no meaning in the words Jews, Muslims and Christians in the terminology of patriotism," he said. "There is simply a country called Iraq, and all are Iraqis. I ask my countrymen the Iraqis to be only Iraqis because we all belong to one stock, the stock of our ancestor Shem; we all belong to that noble race, and there is no distinction between Muslim, Christian and Jew."⁴⁷

These were eloquent words, and probably sincere, but political events outside of Iraq began to undermine this harmony. Some Iraqi nationalists in the 1930s, impatient with the continued presence of the British, were influenced by Nazi propaganda and adopted a spirit of anti-Semitism not previously known in Iraq. And although as late as 1947, ten out of nineteen members of the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce were Jewish, the creation of Israel and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 led directly to the persecution of Iraqi Jews and the unfortunate departure of practically the whole community, numbered at

⁴⁷ Gertrude Bell, Letters, p. 494-495, and Janet Wallach, Desert Queen, pp. 413-414.

120,000, by 1951. It was a sad loss for Iraq. It was, quite literally, “the day the music died.”

The Christian communities of Iraq also have ancient roots, some dating back to apostolic times. In the year 2000, Christians made up about 5% of the population of Iraq. The Assyrian Church, sometimes referred to as the Nestorian Church, is perhaps the oldest community, tracing its origins back to the witness of St. Thomas. The Chaldean Catholic Church, a later break-off from the Assyrians, is the largest of Iraq’s Christian communities, found mostly in Baghdad and Mosul. Some smaller groups, such as the Syrian Orthodox or Armenian Apostolic churches, follow the theology and rites of the Greek Orthodox Church. Others, such as the Chaldeans, Melkites and Armenian Catholics are associated with the Church of Rome. Like the Jews, Christians over the centuries have suffered periods of persecution but on the whole have been free to practice their faith and traditions without molestation. In modern times, most Iraqi Christians have sought education and found work in the professions, in commerce and in government service. Like the Jews, Christians were given reserved seats in the Iraqi parliament. They were especially well represented in the legal profession, as lawyers and judges, and in education. The Assyrians were an exception to this rule. They were rural folk in the area of Mosul and the borderlands of Turkey. They, like the Armenians, suffered persecution by the Turks in the early part of the 20th century, and fled to Iraq, where, in the 1930s, when they tried, like the Kurds, to establish their own independence, they were crushed or deported again. The head of the church now resides in the United States.

All of these Christian groups were represented in Basrah in 1922 when Dad arrived. The group that the Mission had most contact with, however, were the Protestants, or Evangelicals as they came to be known. The members of this group were not converts from Islam, but rather Christians from the Eastern churches – the Assyrian, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, etc. – who had come under the influence of Congregational and Presbyterian missionaries in Turkey, Persia and northern Mesopotamia in the latter half of the 19th century. The missionaries had not originally planned to establish separate churches but sought to enliven what they thought was the moribund state of these ancient churches. They opened schools and hospitals, and in their own worship services they emphasized biblical teaching and personal devotion in contrast to the liturgical rites of the historic churches. Those Christians who were drawn to this new kind of witness became known as *injiliyyeh*, the Arabic word for gospel or evangel, hence the term Evangelical. Understandably, the local clergy felt threatened by the appeal of the well funded missionaries, conflicts developed, fissures grew and eventually new Protestant churches were established.

The end of the 19th and early 20th century witnessed that tragedy of history we have come to know as the Armenian Genocide. The violence inflicted on the Armenians and other Christians by the Turks and their Kurdish allies in the area of southeastern Turkey around Mardin and Diyarbakir was witnessed and reported by the American missionaries. Many of the members of the new Protestant churches were caught up in the violence, were massacred with the

Armenians, or were fortunate to be able to flee south to Syria and northern Mesopotamia. During and immediately after World War I, when the British had driven the Turkish army out of those areas, many of those refugees made their way to Basrah. In 1922 there were still large refugee camps in and around the city, though many of the educated refugees, especially those who spoke English, had been able to find employment with the British, and others who had managed to bring some wealth with them were able to establish businesses. Though they came from southeastern Turkey, most spoke Arabic as their first language and were able to blend into the population of Iraq fairly easily. The Mission in Basrah was fortunate to be able to hire most of its colporteurs⁴⁸ and teachers, for both schools, from this group of Evangelical Christians.

If Dad sounds somewhat uncharitable in his description of this community, he was only reflecting the attitude of his senior colleagues, John Van Ess and James Moerdyk. From the vantage of time, it may seem to us that the missionaries were insensitive to the particular circumstances of these people. The problem, from their point of view, was first that these Christians were overly dependent on the missionaries and would not take responsibility for themselves, and second that they did not behave as Christians should and were no help, perhaps even a hindrance, in the missionaries' efforts to reach out to Muslims. But the Christians were only recent refugees from the violence of Turkey and were probably hungry for the security that the American missionaries could provide. Furthermore, their culture of dependence was born of their experience in Turkey, where the missionaries had provided them with schools, hospitals and churches, and where they, not the Muslims, were the primary recipients of the missionaries' attention.

These Christians were probably no better or worse than Christians anywhere, but the missionaries held them to a higher standard. Dad reports on their constant quarreling, but he should have remembered that the good Christians of Pella had been fighting among themselves and separating into factions ever since their arrival from Holland with Domine Scholte. The missionaries were not happy when several members of the congregation were found to be dealing in alcohol, but there were not many business opportunities for the refugees and these men had found a lucrative niche in a land where many Muslims were happy to consume alcohol even if they could not sell it themselves. The missionaries felt their behavior undermined the moral reputation of the faith they were trying to promote.

The missionaries' strongest disappointment with the Christians was that, with a few exceptions, they had no interest in the conversion of Muslims and did not welcome converts into their midst. But Christians in general had survived in the Muslim world precisely because they had kept a low profile and had not posed a threat to Islam. And these particular Christians had just

⁴⁸ From the beginning the missionaries had depended on native Arabic speaking colporteurs to assist them in selling Bibles and other Christian literature. These unsung heroes of the missionary movement were true partners in the endeavor, often touring or living alone in areas where there were no other Christians and where their lives were sometimes at risk. It is remarkable that they usually found a market for their books, even in this environment.

suffered persecution in Turkey because they had not seemed to be sufficiently Turkish. They were not prepared to risk their new security by appearing to be insufficiently Arab, by promoting their Christian faith as somehow superior to Islam. The British had had written into their treaty with Iraqi a provision protecting missionaries and their activities. The refugee Christians had no such protection.

But these Evangelical Christians did seek out and attend services in the small chapel on the mission compound, participated in special meetings, and sent their children to the mission schools. How surprised they must have been when Jim Moerdyk asked to meet and examine them individually and then denied the sacrament of communion to some who did not pass his test. Imagine their anger. If they were not Christian, what were they? And if Christian, how could they be denied the rites of their faith? And so a tension existed between the American missionaries and the local Protestant Christians.

In the long run, things worked out well for both groups, at least until recently. Encouraged by the missionaries, members of the Protestant community took on more responsibilities and organized themselves into an independent church. The missionaries attended that church and participated in its activities, but never voted or held office. Under the leadership of a wise and fatherly pastor, the Usqf Gharabet Abd el Ahad, a former teacher in the Basrah school, educated in Lebanon but of the same background as the members, they eventually constructed a church building of their own, and over the years developed into a strong, self-reliant community. The fact that it had no formal ties to the American mission meant that it survived when the Government of Iraq seized mission property and expelled the missionaries in 1969. Ironically, Christians, including members of the Evangelical Church in Basrah, were protected under the rule of Saddam Hussein and have only been persecuted in the period of chaos following his overthrow. The church survives today, but many of its members have had to leave the country.



Mission Chapel, Basrah

Letters April 21 – July 21, 1924

April 21, 1924

We had a very nice Easter this weekend. In the first place, Dr. and Mrs. Zwemer arrived here on Friday morning and were here until late last night. He has been holding a series of missionary conferences the last month in Egypt, Smyrna, Athens, Beirut and Jerusalem, and now he is on his way to India where he will hold conferences for three months all over India. He stopped at Baghdad for a small conference with some of the Persia, Baghdad and Mosul missionaries and now he was here waiting for a boat to India. Although we didn't have any formal conference here, still we conferred a good deal – especially with the teachers from the Boys and Girls Schools and a couple other times with the whole native congregation. He is a great one for conferences. He is a good one for that kind of thing; he gets things all stirred up and leaves a red hot trail behind him, usually too hot for the comfort of the missionaries who are regularly in the place. Some years ago he was in Basrah a couple days and he thot that the missionaries were not doing enough advertising – so he went out and buried the whole town with red hot controversial literature, and of course that set everybody on edge, but as he couldn't stay any longer, he left again and left it to the missionaries to soothe people down. It was some time before they dared to do even their regular work.

But he didn't do anything like that this time but confined himself to the native Christians, and then in the evenings all the members of the mission got together and talked and asked questions, because if there is anyone who knows about work with Moslems, it is Zwemer. But we put a couple questions before him that he couldn't answer. For one we asked him what we could do for our converts and sincere inquirers to give them the sort of Christian home or place where they could feel welcome. We are not given any appropriations for that kind of work. We spend a lot of money trying to make them Christians and then if they are converted we let them go and have no means for following up. Zwemer said we should let them join the native church. Moerdyk and Van Ess told him a few things about this native congregation – how they were a hindrance rather than a help to mission work, that there was no feeling of unity among them, and that they did not give a welcome to the converts but always looked at them with suspicion. Zwemer felt we didn't have the right attitude toward these Christians. He seemed to think highly of these Eastern Christians and said that mission work should be centered in these churches and go out from there. They didn't say much more but resolved to let Zwemer see a few things for himself the next day.

Zwemer asked to have a meeting with the church mejlis, a sort of consistory or committee of three appointed by the other members of the congregation. Moerdyk has been trying to help them lately to get organized into a regular church of their own, where they will have to go thru a regular training and pass the committee's examination before they will be confirmed and presented for church membership. They are not really members now – they come to church and call themselves members but they really aren't. Well, a mejlis meeting was held but only two showed up. In the afternoon

we were invited to tea at the home of one of the congregation. While we were there, one of them made a beautiful flowery speech to Zwemer and he made a nice speech in return. The man who made the speech is the head of a regular gang of gamblers here, and Moerdyk saw to it that Zwemer found out about that. As we left the house, right next to the house was a pool room and salon with the name above the door of the very man with whom we had been to tea. By the end of the day Zwemer began to understand the problem we were facing, but he didn't offer any suggestions on how to solve it.

Yesterday was Easter and we had some very nice services in spite of the fact that the congregation was made up of saloon keepers and gamblers, etc. Mr. Moerdyk had announced a couple weeks ago that all who wanted to partake of communion on Easter Sunday had to hand in their names to him. That made most of them stop to think and very few of them dared to hand in their names. Mr. Moerdyk had a good strong talk with a few of those who had handed in their names, and so those who did partake were made to appreciate it more and really got the real meaning of communion. We had a very nice impressive communion service by ourselves in the afternoon. I don't think I ever had an Easter mean more to me.

This morning we saw Mrs. Firman off. She was able to go on a boat which goes direct from here to Philadelphia loaded with licorice. In Philadelphia the licorice is extracted and used for chewing tobacco, medicine, etc. Mrs. Firman is the only passenger and the trip will take six weeks, but she is a good sailor, likes nothing better but to be on a ship in the middle of the ocean. It was hard on Mrs. Van Ess to see her go.

April 27, 1924

Well, slowly things are beginning to get back to normal again. There is only one more week of Ramadhan. The Jews have just had their Passover feast – nine days of it and one day to rest up. The native Catholics and “Protestanti,” as they call themselves, have also had their various Easter feasts, which many celebrate in different ways and at different times. The Armenians, Syrians and Mosulawis, as our crowd is known, all have different dates for Easter. Next week is the end of Ramadhan and there will be three days of “Id” (feast) for Moslems. We are going to close school because nobody comes to school anyway, even the Christians and Jews. From then on we hope to have steady school until the end of the year, around July 10th or 12th.

I've got good news for you – at least you didn't seem to like the idea of my going with Cumberland into Kurdistan. Well, I'm not going. I got a letter from him this week saying that he was being transferred to Meshed, a station in east Persia right on the Afghan border. They have just organized this new United Mission of Mesopotamia.⁴⁹ In the last month, three couples have come thru here for this new mission to be stationed in Baghdad and Mosul. Mr. and Mrs. Cantine, who have just recently returned from

⁴⁹ The United Mission of Mesopotamia was a cooperative venture of the Presbyterian, the German Reformed and the Dutch Reformed Churches. In 1960, Basrah station was also transferred to the renamed United Mission of Iraq, and Dad and Mother were then assigned to the UMI.

furlough, will also work in the new mission in Baghdad. Too bad we have to lose Cumberland from Iraq, because he seemed to be such a good person for work among the mountain Kurds.

I haven't decided yet what I will do this summer. Most likely I will go with the Van Esses to Hamadan in Persia or go with Mr. Moerdyk to a resort in Lebanon, which would be handy for a trip thru Palestine. I will let you know.

It will be commencement time by the time you get this letter. You will be doing quite a lot of "commencing" over there, with Nina from high school and Nick from college, and Crissy, too. I want to give Nina and Nick my heartiest congratulations, and to Robert, too, for finishing his sophomore year.

May 4, 1924

'Tis the merry month of May. However, instead of it being the most beautiful month of the year, as you can expect, over here we have to expect broiling hot weather any time now. But in spite of the heat it is nice here, too, with all the flowers, green grass and leaves and all. The flowers that we planted last fall are in bloom now. We have piles of sweet peas, corn flowers, roses, sunflowers and a dozen other kinds of flowers. We've been having nice weather so far, too, getting warmer but not too hot yet. We have packed away our woolies and have donned "whites." Last year at this time street vendors were selling "donderma" – ice cream – for a couple of weeks, but yesterday was the first time I have seen one this year.

Yesterday afternoon we all went over and had a swim. The director of the port had a grand idea and sunk an old barge in the river in a place where the water is five or six feet deep – made some holes in the sides so the river water can flow right thru but no sharks or anything of that kind can get in. He has a roof over it and all kinds of gymnastics apparatus right over the water. He has invited us to make all the use of it we want. We tried it yesterday and it surely was fun. Of course it was too deep for John and Alice, but they jumped right in anyway and kept the rest of us busy "saving" them.

I had one of my characteristic little goes of fever one afternoon this week. I had been feeling as usual during the morning, but at noon I felt a little chill coming on. I immediately doped myself with aspirin and asanofele – that's something new we use now instead of quinine – it does all that quinine does but with none of the bad effects such as dizziness or buzzing. But the chill kept coming on, so I crept into bed and piled on all the blankets and quilts I could find, and still I felt like an iceberg and had a high fever. I fell asleep and woke up at about four o'clock in a sea of perspiration but feeling fine. I had a cold shower and felt so good that I went and had a game of badminton with Mr. Van Ess and the Jacksons. Generally we have not had any fever to speak of this spring – everybody is healthy.

I've been devouring lettuce, radishes, green onions, etc. Cucumbers are in season now. People here eat cucumbers just like apples or some such fruit. Vendors go along the street with baskets full of cucumbers and the people in the streets and shops buy one or two and eat them "out of hand" right there, without salt or vinegar or anything. People have a funny way of eating a good many things like that – like radishes – they eat the leaves of the radish and seem to care more for the leaves than the radish itself. Or lettuce – they have no idea of eating it at the table as we do. It's mostly a kind of head lettuce with long leaves and they buy it from the vendors on the street and walk along eating it leaf by leaf without any trimmings. I have some fixed up with vinegar at the table sometimes, but oh how I would like to have it once more in the good old way, with sour cream and new potatoes and "speck en vet."

May 24, 1924

Last Monday night we had a picnic supper, or rather a bellum moonlight supper. I left a teacher in charge of the boarding school and Mr. Moerdyk and Mr. Van Ess skipped away from their callers and inquirers for an evening, and Mrs. Van Ess and the girls had put up a wonderful picnic supper of fried chicken, potato salad and other goodies including chocolate ice cream. It was supposed to be in honor of my birthday, which is tomorrow, but there would be no moonlight then. We left in two bellums at about half past six and went a couple miles up the river. Then we tied the two bellums together and anchored them and had our supper right there on the water. It was beautiful bright moonlight and the river was calm and everything was quiet. It surely was nice. We took up the anchor after we had finished and simply let the bellums float slowly down the river, and we got back home at nine-thirty.



It was nice of Crissy to give you that Easter lily. She always mentions to me the times she is able to drop in on you and also the few visits you have made to her in the dorm, and I want you to know, too, that I appreciate it more than I can tell that you have been so good to her.

I put up a volley ball court for the boys this week. But it is awfully hard to get them to play any game like that properly. They have no idea of playing according to rule or order or system. They haven't the slightest idea of team work. Soccer is about their limit, which amounts to very little more than kicking the ball around, if you don't want a more organized game. They are great individualists and think they can do the whole thing themselves. In volley ball they have no idea of staying in their places but run all over the court, naturally getting in everybody else's way, leaving their own place vacant, and of course the whole play is bungled up. Then they start cussing each other

for being such boneheads, and meanwhile the other side keeps on playing and sends the



ball across the net and it hits somebody in the face and they start cussing each other again. And that's the way it goes. You can imagine what a picnic I have trying to referee such a game, keeping track of two dozen boys – twelve on a side. Rules are nothing to them – all they want is action as long as it is going their way. We've tried basketball with the same result. I wish I had more time. I'd start some more work along that line with smaller groups,

because that is one thing they need to learn – teamwork and playing strictly according to the rules.⁵⁰

June 8, 1924

I had a nice time at Zubair this weekend. We have three boys in the boarding school, sons of the shaikh who was governor of Zubair for a long time. They belong to one of the best families around here. These boys invited Mr. Moerdyk, Mu'allam Jabbar – one of our teachers – and me to come and spend the night with them some weekend, so we went on Friday. I always like Zubair – it's hot during the day but dry, so the heat isn't uncomfortable. There is no fever or anything of the sort because there are no mosquitoes. Then it is a pure Arab town, mostly Beduin – desert people – not mixed with European civilization like Basrah or Baghdad, which are neither Arab nor European. You can't help but admire these desert people. They are rather small but as keen eyed as can be and tough as leather and can stand any of the hardships desert life.

The desert has fascination for me. It makes me think of God in a different way. It almost seems to me that God must have His earthly abode in the desert, it is so large and boundless and there is nothing in it to distract our thoughts from God. Only the people who live continuously in the desert know where to find the water holes, get food, etc., and so only those that live continually with God realize His infinite love and His blessings and the promises that He gives us. Many of the Old Testament people lived in the desert and lived near to God and learned to know Him and His will – Abraham, Moses, and John the Baptist, and even Jesus lived in the desert for forty days – to be tempted, yes – but at the same time He was taught by God and received strength from Him to overcome temptation.

Well, in Zubair we walked about the streets and bazaars a while and then pretty soon it was supper time and we were served with a great big Arab meal – it was very good. After supper, Mr. Moerdyk thot that he had to go home – he said that he had

⁵⁰ The picture above shows not only a volleyball game in progress but the new school building completed in 1923.

work to do and callers were coming, so at last they let him go. But on the way back he had car trouble so that when he got home it was after ten – too late for callers. Mu'allam Jabbar and I stayed the night and we did it according to true Arab fashion – went to bed with the chickens. By nine o'clock we had all turned in to bed under the open sky. The others were soon asleep, but I lay awake a long time before I slept. Everything was so calm – just a light breeze off the desert. The desert is always cool at night no matter how hot it is during the day. It was quiet – hardly a sound – a great contrast to Basrah with its taxis and cars making a racket all night long and the glare of the lights and noise of native theaters and clubs all over the city and the electric light plant right next door to the mission compound.



Next morning we also got up with the chickens – part of the family was already stirring at three-thirty and we were all up and had breakfast by a little after five. We looked around a little while longer and then started back to Basrah, and we got home before Mr. Moerdyk had had his breakfast.

Last night Mr. Dykstra dropped in on us unexpectedly at about nine o'clock. I was reading in my room when he started hollering at me thru the window. I rigged a bed for him on the roof, and nobody but Moerdyk and I knew he was here until he walked into church this morning. It was nice to have him drop in like that. He came down in the launch. Mrs. Dykstra stayed behind to look after the home base. Kuwait has no electricity, so Kuwait station has just received a Cole lighting system – something like the Delco – for the hospital and mission houses. It was a gift from someone at home, I believe. Dykstra was going down at the end of this week to install it. He came down a little bit early so he could run up to Nasariyah, on the Euphrates near Ur, which is also part of his territory and he has a Bible shop there with a native colporteur in charge.

It is pretty sure now that Mr. Moerdyk and I will go to Syria this summer. We will go to a mission school up in the Lebanon mountains which is used as a sort of hotel or resort. The Cantines and probably the Mylreas will also be there. I'm not going to sit there all summer. I want to get out and see something. If I can I want to hook up with someone and go on a walking or bicycle or horseback trip thru Palestine. They have automobile trips thru Palestine, too, but they only take two or three days and at that pace you don't see anything. I want to take my time – about two or three weeks. We'll leave here in the middle of July and be back here the first of October. You can send my mail to this address for five or six weeks – figure about three weeks for transit: Lebanon Boys School, Suq-el-Gharb, Lebanon, Syria.

June 14, 1924

Gosh! I can't keep up with the times anymore, at least not with the times over there. I have been richer by one aunt for a couple weeks and didn't know it. You never wrote me the actual date when Bog and Connie would be married. Then too, both Crissy's and Nick's recitals were past a couple weeks before I even knew the date they would be given. Then Nick has been flying around the country delivering Fords, and Grandpa and Grandma skipped off to Michigan, and Nina is chasing around to typing contests. I suppose, Nina, that you had your hair bobbed before you went off to the typing contest in Des Moines so you would look more like a stenog. I'll put the same condition on you having bobbed hair that I put on Crissy – first that you send me a picture and second that you don't let it grow out again before I get home next year. I suppose commencement exercises are over by now. Congratulations to everybody over there.

Last night we had another moonlight bellum picnic. Mr. Dykstra was back from Nasariyah so he also went with us, and it surely was nice again. The river was beautiful with the moonlight and cool breeze. It was so bright that we didn't even need a lantern or any light to eat by. I guess this will be the last time we will have anything like this for some time as next week our "family" will begin to break up for the summer. This was the last week of school for the Girls School and Miss Kellien has gone to Amarah to keep Mrs. Dykstra company while he is Kuwait. Then the Van Esses are going to Hamadan, in Persia, for the summer. He has not been well lately and is pretty run down, and it is high time for the children to be getting away. They have been wonderfully well all the time so far, but you can see that the heat has worn them out a good deal. They haven't had malaria yet, a little fever but no real malaria. This is the latest that Mrs. Van Ess has ever stayed in Basrah with the children. Mr. Moerdyk is taking over Mr. Van Ess's responsibilities in the school until the end of the year on July 4th.

June 22, 1924

It's been pretty hot this week – it's the period between the winds they call the little Barach and the big Barach. First there is the little Barach, which blows for about ten days, and then there is about a week or so of lull – very little wind at all and it can be pretty hot and uncomfortable. Then comes the big Barach with winds that last about a month. Then, too, without the wind now it can be awfully buggy in the evenings. The insects, attracted by the light, get right thru the screen, so it isn't pleasant to do any writing or reading at night. I've been doing a lot of stargazing – going up to the roof early and sitting there for an hour or so before going to sleep. It is always nice up on the roof.

I am sending some interesting pictures which Dykstra gave me. Some are of them touring in the marshes north and west of Basrah. Of course they have to leave their

launch behind when they get to these narrow irrigation and drainage ditches, and then they go in these long narrow native boats. The marshes are actually higher and these channels serve as drainage ditches. Then the ditches leave the marshes and go thru a sort



Dirk Dykstra

of desert area and serve to irrigate that area. They have small dams every now and then to raise the water level so that it runs off by itself onto the land. They have to lift the boats over the dams whenever they come to them. The windmill in a couple of the picture is Mr. Dykstra's. It was an old one which Bahrain station had discarded – they had used it to pump water for the hospital. Last fall at Annual Meeting at Bahrain, Mr. Dykstra gathered up all the parts of

that windmill and brought them along on the ship as personal luggage. You see, personal luggage goes free with the passenger. We've always kidded him about carrying a windmill as personal luggage. When he got to Basrah, the customs authorities thought they were going to stick him proper for that windmill. They asked what it was worth – they didn't know whether it was new or old. Mr. Dykstra said they had tried to sell it in Bahrain for fifteen rupees and nobody would buy it, so they would have to figure the customs charges on something less than fifteen rupees. So they told him to get his windmill out of the way and they didn't charge him anything. He took it up to Amarah and fixed the thing up again and is using it now to irrigate his and his neighbor's gardens.⁵¹

I have been busy this past week helping the Van Esses to get away. They left Friday and are in Baghdad today. They will reach Hamadan on Wednesday.

June 29, 1924

Tomorrow is the last of June again. Another couple weeks and school will be out and then another year and I will be on my way home. I was glad to get your letter, which was written the last Sunday in May. You had a busy week ahead with commencement exercises beginning and high school graduation to attend. Nick and Crissy will be graduating from college. I hope you got Crissy some flowers as I asked you to do. I got Nina's graduation announcement and now I am waiting for her picture, with her new bobbed hair, and also the college annual which Crissy said she would send.

I've had more guests this weekend. Yesterday morning three young men dropped in – two had been teaching in Robert College, Constantinople, and the other in Beirut. They are on their way home via the Far East. One of them I had met on the

⁵¹ The mission property in Amarah was just across the road from the Tigris River. The old windmill was still operating twenty-five years later. Picture on page 183.

Mauritania on the way out. He wrote some time ago to say that he was coming. Nice fellows. They left early this morning by boat for India.⁵²

Mr. Moerdyk has stopped the English service at our church for the summer, since most of those who attend have left, so I have started going to the Church of England service. The Jacksons usually go, too. There isn't really very much to the C of E service, especially when the padre isn't more of a preacher than the one they have here, but it is a place of worship and after all worship is not so much what a person does or says but rather what is going on in his heart. This padre is very high church and the way he carries on it becomes almost Catholic with all his candles and crosses and priestly robes. He thinks more of form than of the spirit of worship. When you have a good padre tho, who forgets about high churchism, the English Episcopal service can be very impressive. When Bishop Linten of the Mission in Persia was here, he led the service and certainly made it wonderful.⁵³

July 5, 1924

Yesterday was the Fourth of July and I suppose you all had a picnic. Well, we celebrated by having school in the morning as usual and then in the afternoon the Jacksons invited us for Fourth of July tea – you see it is still Leap Year – only it wasn't an English tea but a real American one – a barrel of lemonade, mango ice cream and cake. It surely was good on a hot day, for it really was a broiling hot day. Then after that we went for a swim, that is the girls and I went. Mr. Moerdyk never goes swimming. He is funny that way. He knows that he doesn't cut the most graceful figure in a bathing suit and he is terribly self conscious. Then, too, he is almost feels miserable in the presence of ladies in a small group at any time, as if he lives in constant fear of being trapped. Perhaps it is because people are always kidding him about his bachelorhood. He is good natured about it, tho, and doesn't get sore. Since the Van Esses and Miss Kellien went away he said to me he thot we had better not continue our Sunday night mission suppers together, because as we were just two men and two ladies left it might cause a lot of gossip. Who would do the gossiping I don't know, but anyway the ladies wouldn't hear of our not coming, so he said perhaps it wouldn't hurt as we would be here only a few Sundays more anyway. He is funny! But he is a peach of a fellow. He is a born pessimist and is always grumbling, but that is only his way and you soon learn not to take him seriously, and as long as he is grumbles things are still going

⁵² Dad had had several other visitors that spring, young men making their way around the world. It was common for the Mission to take in travelers, given the quality of the local hotels, and Dad usually took care of the single men who came through. He seems to have appreciated these particular visitors. He found that the others either expressed no interest in the places they were visiting, including Basrah, or seemed already to "know it all" and had no appreciation of the work and experience of the missionaries, even though at least one of them was planning to write a book about his travels. Dad held forth at great length on the shortcomings of these visitors and why it was still necessary for the Mission to offer them hospitality. I have not included those letters in this collection.

⁵³ It should be noted that in later years Dad began to appreciate the Anglican liturgy more and often led the service at St. Peter's Church when there was no regular padre.

pretty good. He's got a heart of gold and when you get to know him well, you couldn't wish for a better friend. I am glad I am going to Syria with him this summer.

July 12, 1924

Dear "zusje" Nina,

Congratulations on your ____teenth birthday. You see I don't dare to put down any definite ages anymore since I made that mistake with Bob's age last spring. I can't keep up with the times. Besides, it is not polite to remember a lady's age and remind her of it. Well, vot you gonna do now? Pas op that you don't get into any entangling alliances. Maybe there is not so much danger of entanglements now that you've had your hair bobbed – still, on the other hand, maybe there is more. I still haven't gotten pictures of you and Crissy with your abbreviated locks.

Well, school is out here. We didn't have any contests or recitals or baccalaureate service. Three boys will get diplomas, but as they are all staying around here, we are going to wait until the fall when it is cooler and make a bigger and better program of it.

I have been giving private lessons all winter and spring to a boy who was at school some years ago – a sort of preparation for college. He is starting for America next week where he will enter the University of Pennsylvania. They pay special attention to foreign students there and the Y.M.C.A. has a program for looking after foreign students, so he will get along fine. He is one of the nicest young fellows around here. He is going to study economics and business and expects to come back here. What this country needs is more men who are trained like that, but the trouble with many young men who go to other countries to get their training is that they don't come back. Well, as I was saying, I have been teaching him and of course I did not charge him, but this morning he sent me a peach of a Persian rug. It's only a small one – about four by five feet, but its colors are as rich and deep as I have ever seen. It's the kind that never wears out. Some of these rugs are said to be a hundred years old and are still as good as new. I'll try to take a couple small ones home with me next year.⁵⁴

July 20, 1924

The Van Esses wrote that they were having a wonderful time up in Hamadan. The night they arrived there they were served strawberries and cream and cherries were just in season. You also wrote about picking strawberries. It makes my mouth water. We do not have strawberries or cherries or any kind of berries here in Mesopot.

⁵⁴ Ali Fuad did return to Basrah after completing his education in the U.S. and found employment in the Basrah Port administration. Dad gave the rug to his mother. It came back to him after she died. It now resides with Jim and Jean Gosselink. Indeed it may indeed never wear out.

We are at the height of watermelon and musk melon season now – and grapes. We have fresh fruit almost the whole year round, and believe me, in this hot weather I eat my share of fruit and not much heavy food – at least as long as there is no cholera or plague around. Then fresh fruit is not safe. But Basrah is a pretty healthy place lately.



The first part of the week was another Moslem feast – the most important feast of the year. It is on the occasion when the sacrifice is made at Mecca during the time of the big hajj or pilgrimage. It lasts three days and people close their shops and leave their work and have a grand spree. Even poor people go into debt in order to be able to celebrate the feast properly.

On Tuesday I went on an all day trip down the river in a launch with a couple of the school boys. We went down the river for a couple hours and stopped with relatives of one of the boys. We sat around generally making ourselves uncomfortable. It was hot but people didn't keep themselves quiet but kept moving around all the time. After a couple hours we were served a huge dinner – native fashion. A mat on the floor was the table and we sat around the edge of it – there were no forks or spoons or plates. In the center was big dish with a whole roast sheep on it and around that were half a dozen big platters or bowls of rice, five or six roasted chickens, all kinds of vegetables, fresh bread, fresh butter floating around in big bowls of buttermilk on ice and watermelon and grapes, also on ice. Some feed! And that was all for only seven or eight of us. After we had finished, the servants, gardeners, and some others sat down and ate



of it, but even when they had finished you could hardly see that we had made any impression on the bowls of rice and meat. But that is their idea of a feast – they have to have mountains of food even if there are only a few to eat it. After such a feast there wasn't anything we could do but loaf around for a couple more hours. Then we got in the launch again and went to a place further down the river to where a few more of our school boys live, visited with them a little while and then started for home. It wasn't a

bad day. We didn't do much but eat and talk, but it was pleasant, and the launch ride on the river was nice.

You are certainly dealing with high finances over there, Dad trying to get his income tax back, Nick earning money to pay back his loan for school expenses, Nina

trying to earn money for her music lessons, and Robert and Nath⁵⁵ working on the farm. I wonder what you are going to do with me when I get home next year. In a way I would like to take a full seminary course, but still there is so much in seminary that I will never have much use for and also some things I want that I can't get at seminary. I hate to think of having to spend three years at it. I would like to go to Hartford Seminary for a year and take special courses. Hartford is a very good school for missions and has one of the best libraries on Mohammedanism. Hartford is like a Mecca for missionaries to Moslems. Many try to go there on furlough. The Bilkerts have been there this last year. The only trouble is that Hartford is so far from home.

Well, het beste, love to all,

George

⁵⁵ In his letter of February 10, 1924, Dad made reference to his parents' plan to adopt an Indian boy, but no details were offered. Then some time later the name Nathaniel began to show up in the letters, with no further explanation, as though he were a member of the family. One on occasion Dad commented on the watch fob that Nathaniel had sent. I suspect Nathaniel, sometimes called Tebo, was the Indian boy, probably from the Reformed Church mission in New Mexico.



George Gosselink

The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

Vacation Interlude

In keeping with the Arabian Mission's policy of giving missionaries an extended vacation every other year, Dad had two months leave in the summer of 1924. Most of the other missionaries went to India to the southern hill station of Kodaikanal, where many of them had children in school. Dad did not want to travel that far and then, as he said, "just loaf around" for a month, especially when he thought he would have plenty of time to visit Kodaikanal later after he returned to the field with Crissy. His plans to spend the time with Roger Cumberland touring in the Kurdish mountains fell through when Cumberland was transferred from Mosul to Meshed. He contemplated going with the Van Ess family to Hamadan in Persia, but eventually decided to go with James Moerdyk to Lebanon, to a summer resort run by the Presbyterian missionaries there. They traveled overland by train to Baghdad and then across the desert by car to Syria and Lebanon. There, too, he worried that he would just be loafing around, but he hoped that he could get away for an extended visit to Palestine.

Though he liked and respected Moerdyk, he found him to be a disappointing travel companion. Moerdyk was content to stay at the resort at Suq-el-Gharb, reading, resting and enjoying the cool climate. Dad gave up his plans for an extended trek in Palestine when he couldn't find anyone to go with him. Eventually he did go to Palestine, but for a shorter visit.

Dad was given a travel diary shortly before he left home, in which recorded the highlights of his journey out to Basrah, some shorter trips within Iraq, and his visit to Syria, Lebanon and Palestine on this summer vacation. Much of what he wrote in the diary he also included in his letters home, but the tone of his writing was entirely different – much more direct, factual and descriptive, much less didactic and opinionated. Some of the entries provide additional names and interesting details, which I have included within the text of the letters which follow.

Lebanon at that time was considered to be part of larger Syria and was governed by the French under a mandate from the League of Nations. Under the previous Ottoman government, Lebanon had been a separate province, and even the French recognized its unique situation. A majority of the population then was still Christian, though divided into a number of different confessions. Sunni and Shi'i Muslims were only slightly less in numbers, and there were other smaller, but important, religious groups, such as the Druze and the Alalwites. Arabic Speaking but Mediterranean in culture, the Lebanese tended to be more Westernized and "sophisticated" than the people of Iraq. Dad enjoyed his contact with Lebanese farmers, who were more open and friendly, like the Arabs he had come to know in Basrah.

Letters July 27 – October 26, 1924

Baghdad, July 27, 1924

Dear Folks at home,

Mr. Moerdyk and I arrived here last Thursday morning. We had a pretty good trip on the train coming up. It was a very "Limited" train indeed – the trip of 350 miles from Basrah to Baghdad took up 34 hours, ten miles an hour! Whew!! It was two nights and one day and that day wasn't so terribly hot. There was no dust storm, as there often is, and so we could keep the window open and there was a pretty good breeze.

We are staying with Major Yates. The weather is surely nice here, the mornings are actually cold and not any part of the day is as hot as in Basrah. Last year I didn't like Baghdad much, but I have had a change of mind. Almost the whole of one side of the river belongs to the Railways; the city proper is on the other side. On this side, the Railway people – that is, the British employees – have made parks and gardens. These Britishers all live in neat little bungalows, also built for them by the Railways, and each bungalow has a small lawn and flower garden.⁵⁶ Major Yates has a very nice garden, and it is wonderful to sit out there in the evenings after the sun goes down. We have dinner out there, too. It surely is great when you have just come from Basrah. Basrah has been almost like a furnace the last couple weeks.

We have been chasing around here in Baghdad, getting our passports fixed up, visas, police permits, etc. Major Yates has been driving us around and showing us interesting things. Last night we had dinner with the Staudts, new missionaries of the German Reformed Church for this new United Mesopotamian Mission. They are American citizens, but he still has a strong German accent.

We start from here Monday noon and the first night we stop at Hit, where there is a ferry across the Euphrates River. The next day will be a long stretch across the desert to Palmyra or Tadmor as it is called now – about a hundred miles from Damascus. It is said to be the capital city of the powerful Queen Zenobia. It is nothing but a city of ruins now. When the Romans ruled Palestine and this part of the world, they built great temples everywhere for Jupiter, Venus and the other gods. We will see some of those ruins.

Suq-el-Gharb, Lebanon, Syria, August 3, 1924

Well, a whole lot has happened since I wrote you a week ago. We left Baghdad on Monday. There were only two other passengers in the car besides Mr.

⁵⁶ One of the major complaints Iraqis made about the British Mandate was that British officers and advisors were compensated – in salary and housing – at a rate many times higher than what Iraqis earned in similar positions, all at the expense of what was supposed to be an independent Iraqi government.

Moerdyk and myself, but a convoy of less than three is not allowed, so we had another passenger car and a light truck for the luggage. First we drove west forty miles to Falluja, where we crossed the Euphrates on a bridge of boats. At Ramadi we stopped for passport inspection. At sundown we reached Hit on the Euphrates, about 120 miles from Baghdad. Hit is supposed to be Noah's city. It might well be, because they have bitumen and tar pits nearby, so old Noah would have had lots of pitch to seal his ark with. The next day, after spending the night in a native khan, we started out at four-thirty and drove



all day until seven o'clock at night, when we reached Palmyra. That distance is about 320 miles. There is no road but only a track in the desert. Some stretches are covered for mile after mile with hard packed gravel, like a gravel road, and is as flat as the top of a table. The driver just opened the car up and drove as fast as it would go. A couple times we went for nearly an hour with the speedometer never falling below forty miles an hour.

Most of the way was not as nice as that and parts were very rocky. The three drivers were all British and tended strictly to business and were very careful. Once we met a couple Arabs on camels and a couple times we saw gazelles in the distance. We had lunch by the side of a water hole, the only water we saw all day. They carried a big tank of drinking water and they also provided food for us. They had long flat tanks on the running boards of the cars for gasoline connected right to the carburetor, so that when one tank was empty, they could simply switch to the other.

In the evening about sundown we reached Palmyra. As there is hardly any twilight, I didn't have much chance to take pictures. The site is an old caravan station, known to Solomon (I Kings 9:18). The ruins are interesting, some built by Queen Zenobia in the 3rd century A.D. and some by the Romans. The biggest thing is the temple of Jupiter, which must cover almost a square block, parts of it sixty to a hundred feet high, with monstrous stone pillars six feet in diameter and walls built of stone some of which are eight and ten feet square. The inside of the temple is all full of native houses and streets so a large part of the temple cannot be seen. Then there is a long street lined with beautifully carved stone columns and pillars and some smaller temples. But everything is in ruins.

We stayed the night with the village shaikh. The next morning we started for Damascus. Soon we were passing thru extensive gardens and vineyards. We got to Damascus a little after noon. We stopped long enough to get some lunch. From Damascus to Beirut the road is beautiful, winding in and out and over the mountains, most of it hard surfaced, and there are little streams of clear spring water running along the side of the road. Quite soon after leaving Damascus, the road starts climbing, going round and round and zigzagging up quite steep so that the cars had to go in second most of the time. We crossed over the Anti-Lebanon Mountains and then drove across the great plain of the Bekaa valley, watered by the Orontes River. Mount Hermon is visible

at the far end of the valley. Then we began the long climb over the Lebanon Mountains. The road, with many twists and turns, goes up to about 6000 feet and then we had to come down again, coasting for miles and miles. Beautiful trees, pines and poplars, line the road, not the everlasting palms of Basrah. Another thing that made it seem like home is that they drive on the right. Syria is under the French. In Basrah we drive on the left, as they do in England.

We didn't go all the way to Beirut, as the convoy passed thru the village of Aleih, only two miles from here, so we got off and came here to Suq-el-Gharb by taxi. It surely is great here. It is about halfway up the first range of mountains, about 2500 feet above sea level, about twenty miles from Beirut, but we can look down on Beirut and the Mediterranean as if it were only a few miles away. You can see separate houses and buildings and the ships in the harbor. The climate is nice. It is actually cold after one's blood gets thinned by the Basrah heat. They have tennis here. Yesterday I hiked to the top of the ridge, about 6000 feet and got a wonderful view. You can see half a dozen villages nestling on the mountain slopes and the hill sides are all terraced and gardened. There are about thirty people here, both American and English, of the American missions of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, and also Scottish and Church of England missions.

Suq-el-Gharb, August 10, 1924

I can't complain about the mail this week. I got three letters from you this week, one from Nick and three from Crissy, some forwarded from Basrah. You surely must have had some storm over there. I should think you must have been scared to wake up in the middle of the night to find buildings and trees and everything flying around. It's terrible the way the work of many months can be destroyed in a few minutes. You will be pretty busy there for a while, to get all the wreckage cleaned up and continue with field work at the same time.

We are enjoying ourselves here at Suq. I guess I am taking a rest cure. I usually sleep from ten at night to seven in the morning and usually an hour in the afternoon. Then they've got good American food here, so if I don't look out I will break the scales before the summer is over. When I am not sleeping, I do a lot of reading, play tennis, walk and visit neighboring villages. I also attended a few classes this week at the language school. They have a language school here all year round for missionaries in this part of the world. During the summer they give special courses, lectures in Islam, history, etc.

Tomorrow we expect to go to Beirut and look around there a bit, and soon we want to see some sights a little farther afield. Mr. Moerdyk doesn't care to do much roaming around, and that handicaps me, because I can't simply desert him and go off by myself.

It is interesting to study the different kinds of people here. They are altogether different from the people in Mesopotamia, although they share some characteristics. A much larger percent of the people are Christian, and the place is full of priests. It is said that in Syria and Palestine there are two big curses and they both come in black, one is the goats, that eat everything green that they can reach, and the other is the priests in their black robes. The people here are generally much fairer skinned than those in Mesopotamia. The women are much freer here – even the Moslem women here are freer than Jewish and Christian women in Mesopotamia, and some of these Syrian women go to extremes in dress and in painting their faces.

Suq-el-Gharb, August 17, 1924

Tuesday we went to Beirut. We went by motor bus in the morning and came back in the evening. We spent most of the time at the American press, where Mr. Moerdyk had some business – that is where we get all our school books – and at the American University. It is a fine school. They have the best location, right on the sea front, and fine buildings, as good as anything at home. We met the president, and his secretary showed us around. The university does not belong to the mission anymore but is independent, with an independent endowment and board in America. The professors and teachers are not really missionaries although most of them have the real mission spirit. The university is a Christian institution but makes no attempt to convert any of the students to Christianity, although it operates on Christian principles and teaches Christian values. The rest of the day we walked around the city a little, but it was hot and unpleasant, so we didn't go very far.

Thursday I went to Baalbek. Mr. Moerdyk doesn't care a snap about history or old ruins, so he didn't care to go. I went with a group of six people staying here, and we hired a seven passenger Buick to take us there and back, about forty miles one way. The drive over the mountains and then across the wide fertile plain of the Orontes River was wonderful. Then we were in and about the ruins from ten to four o'clock. A person could easily spend a couple days there. We had a guide book and as we went from one part to another we read the book and tried to figure it out ourselves. The whole place must cover five or six square blocks. The temple of Bacchus is the best preserved – it has most of the pillars and a greater part of the wall still standing. We had lunch under the pillars in the shade of the temple of Bacchus. There is nothing left of the temple of Jupiter except the outline of the foundations and six of the huge pillars which used to surround the temple. They are sixty feet high and about seven and a half feet in diameter. These temples were started by the Greeks before the time of Christ and later added to by the Romans and Arabs. Originally it was probably the place where Baal was worshipped – therefore called Baalbek, the



house of Baal. Later the Greeks changed the temple for their worship of Jupiter and other gods.

Suq-el-Gharb, August 24, 1924

I was glad to get your letter again and the pictures of the wrecked barns. You surely made quick work of it if, as Bob said, the horse barn was all rebuilt again.

Today Mr. Moerdyk and I were invited to lunch with Mrs. Hoskins, who is a good friend of the Staudts in Baghdad. She is in charge of a sanitarium not far from here. We met some Near East Relief people there. The Near East Relief has orphanages all over this country for Armenians. Refugees are still coming down from Turkey all the time. I don't see why the Near East Relief doesn't do something for the refugees in Mesopotamia. Here in Syria they have many small camps but none of them are over two or three hundred. Not far from Basrah there is a refugee camp of over twenty thousand and they have no way of supporting themselves. In the orphanages here the women and children are taught to do very nice work, embroidery, etc.

After lunch, Mrs. Hoskins invited me to go along with her to the sanatorium about fifteen miles away. I found one of the boys there that was in school in Basrah part of the first year that I was there. He left there to go to Beirut but in about a year came down with T.B. He has been up at this sanatorium for some months now and is recovering quite nicely.

Suq-el-Gharb, September 7, 1924

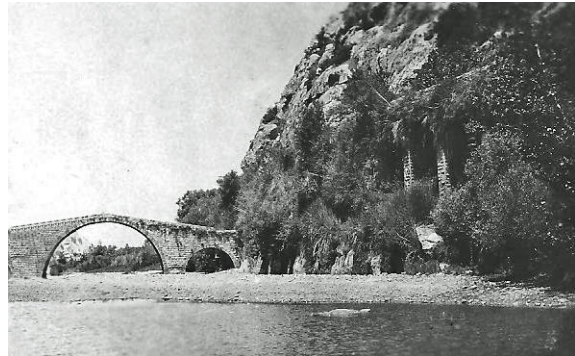
They are holding a conference here this week for all missionary workers in the Near East. I am afraid I won't get much out of it because most of it will be in Arabic, but I will attend some sessions. There are already 135 delegates enrolled, the larger part of them being native helpers and teachers. I can't make out what the policy of this mission really is. Their work seems to be mostly educational and they have good schools, too – right up to standard. Still, they don't have the education to fit the country. They teach U.S. history and geography and such things – the students learn more about America than they do about their own country, and I don't know what good that is ever going to do. What a school should do is prepare students to be better citizens of their own country.

They seem to have very little evangelistic work. They do have organized churches but they have native pastors in charge of them and one missionary seems to have supervision over a number of these at the same time. They do very little work with Moslems. I haven't met many natives here except the Syrian Christians. They are more capable and more advanced than the people in Iraq, but still they seem to have some of the same characteristics. As soon as they know a little about something, they think they know it all, and know it better than anyone else, even their teachers. They seem to hold

the missionaries in contempt and don't treat them with respect. Even some of the school boys who act as waiters here are actually impudent with the principal of the school as well as with some of the teachers. Our boys in Basrah are much better mannered.

On the other hand, there are some very nice people here, too. One day this week a group of us went on a picnic to a place we didn't know exactly where to find. But there were farmers and boys and even women along the way, who were eager to show us the way and help us. One even offered us his donkey because he wouldn't need it until evening. And all day long, whenever we'd meet anybody with a basket of fruit, he'd stop and say "tfadhal" – take some please. We were loaded down with grapes and pomegranates and figs, and when we offered to pay, they wouldn't take a thing. Many of these people were Moslems or Druze – they seem to be more hospitable than the Christians. It is interesting the way people of different religions and sects live in different villages here. One village may be nearly all Moslem, and other Druze – a strange sect nobody knows very much about – and another may be Greek Orthodox or Maronite or Protestant.

We were hiking to a place someone has imaginatively named Tom Sawyer's Pools, about two hours' walk from here. There are a good many rivers in this country, but most of them are dry in the summer. Even this one we hiked to had just a trickle of water, but there are several pools along its course, some of them ten to fifteen feet deep. The bed of the stream is all rock and the water is sparkling clear blue. These pools are between two high ridges of mountains, and the mountain sides are covered with trees, and where it isn't too steep they have vineyards, olive groves and all kinds of fruit trees. We had to hike almost two thousand feet straight down, which took us about an hour. The first thing we did was take a swim, then had our lunch and then loafed around a bit and explored other pools. We took another swim and then had to start for home, straight back up the mountain.



Suq-el-Gharb, September 14, 1924

I have been attending the missionary conference this week. It is a good program and the whole day is full with addresses and lectures, Bible study and small group discussion. School conditions and every other kind of community service are so far advanced here over anything we have in Mesopotamia that very few of the things they have been studying and discussing can be applied there, but they are at least things we can try for in the future – such as Sunday Schools, Christian Endeavor, Y.M. and Y.W.C.A. They have all these things organized here, while we are not in a position to start any of them.

It surprises me that the missionaries here don't know Arabic better. Some who have been here for years don't know as much Arabic as one of our new missionaries who has had just one year of language study. They have a regular language school right here in Suq-el-Gharb, but they seem to be slack in their requirements. A missionary here is not required to get language training as soon as he comes out, and it seems that if he doesn't get the language right away, he never learns the Arabic as well as he should. On the whole I am pretty satisfied with our Arabian Mission. We may not be as advanced, but I believe we do things much more thoroughly.

Tomorrow I expect to go down to Beirut again to get some business taken care of – for our trip back to Baghdad and also for going down to Jerusalem. We are starting for Jerusalem next Wednesday.

Jerusalem, September 23, 1924

I've been leading such a fast life this week that I hardly know where to begin. We are in Jerusalem now, staying at St. George's Hospice, an English school. We have had good traveling companions – Mr. and Mrs. Witherspoon of the Presbyterian Mission in Aleppo, who have also been spending the summer in Lebanon – and we came all the way together from Suq-el-Gharb in one car. We left early on Wednesday morning. We passed Sidon and Tyre and reached Haifa a little after noon. The road all the way is right along the sea coast and the last part of it was on the sand, actually on the water's edge. Haifa is right at the foot of Mt. Carmel, and we stopped there for lunch. Then we went on to Nazareth, where Dr. Bathgate of the Scottish Mission, who was also at Suq, had invited us to stay. Nazareth surely looks nice as you look down on it from the road when you first come in. Mount Tabor, the Mount of Transfiguration, is also seen in the distance. The next morning we saw what was supposed to be Joseph's workshop and Mary's fountain, where Mary is supposed to have drawn water and where the whole town still does. In the afternoon we went to see the Sea of Galilee, passed thru Cana, where Jesus turned the water into wine, and just beyond that saw the field where Jesus and the disciples passed thru and plucked grain as they went along. The sea is six hundred feet below the Mediterranean and it is beautiful when you first catch sight of it when you are still a couple thousand feet above it – a wonderful deep blue. We visited Tiberias, the site of old Capernaum, and saw the ruins of an old Jewish temple. Here we had a short swim in the sea and then started back to Nazareth.

In the afternoon we started for Jerusalem, passed thru Nablus, ancient Shechem, by Sychar, Jacob's Well, Bethel, etc. The next morning we went to Bethlehem, visited the Church of the Nativity, which contains the place where Jesus was born, and then we walked out to the edge of the city which overlooks the field of the Shepherds. In the afternoon we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is supposed to be built on Golgotha and the tomb where Christ is buried. Then we have also visited the Pool of Bethesda and the Pool of Siloam, Tomb of the Kings, Quarries of Solomon and dozens of other places since we have been here. Of course very few of these things are really authentic. But it isn't so much the actual spot as the reminder of these things that counts.

Saturday morning we visited the Harm esh Sherif or the Dome of the Rock, which is held by Moslems now and is built on the site of Solomon's temple. They have a very large Mosque built over the rock, which is supposed to be the site of the altar of Solomon's temple. It is now a holy place for Moslems, but all visitors are allowed to go in. Jews are allowed in as well, but they never go in because they are afraid they might walk over the place where the Holy of Holies used to be. So a part of the outside of the wall of the Temple has been given to the Jews as a sacred place. There Jews come, especially on Friday night, to read their Torah and pray and weep over the ancient glories of the old temple which they have lost.

On Saturday afternoon we went to the Dead Sea, the Jordan and Jericho. We had a swim in the Dead Sea and it surely was funny – you float around like a cork and can not sink even if you wanted to. Well, this is all very short and sketchy, but it will have to do for now.

Damascus, September 29, 1924

Happy birthday to you, brother Nick, on your twenty-first birthday. You get to vote for president before I do! Now do your duty by your country and stuff an extra vote in the ballot box for me if you can get by with it.

I forgot to tell you in my last letter that on Sunday afternoon we went to the Mount of Olives. We took everything more quietly on Sunday and didn't rush around as we had the days before. We took a carriage up to the top of the Mount of Olives, and then walked around and sat down a while in a spot among the olive trees overlooking the city below. Then we walked down to the Garden of Gethsemane, down to the Valley of



Kidron, and then up to the city again. The next day the Witherspoons had to leave, so Mr. Moerdyk and I just took our time, revisited some of the places we had seen before and saw a few places we hadn't seen. It surely has been great, this visit to the Holy Land. It has given me a whole new outlook on the Bible, a much clearer conception of how things told in the Bible may have taken place. One thing that is disappointing is that nearly

all these places have been claimed by the Catholic and Orthodox churches and they have built shrines and chapels and cathedrals and filled them with pictures of Jesus and Mary and burning candles. For me, at least, all these things spoil it. I would rather try to preserve these places and things the way they were at the time, which would make them of more historical interest.

Friday morning we left Jerusalem by car. We took the same road we had come on as far as Tiberias, and then struck north toward Lake Huleh. There wasn't much to see except a few Jewish colonies until we reached the Jordan River at Jisr Yacoub, Jacob's Bridge. From there we struck straight for Damascus. The road is pretty barren and desolate. Large parts are paved with cobblestone, partly the remains of an old Roman road. Mount Hermon, on the left, is visible almost the whole way. We arrived in Damascus at about six o'clock and put up at the Palace Hotel.

Damascus is the largest city in Syria and is one of the oldest living cities in the world. It is the connecting link between the great Arabian desert and Syria and the western world. The Barada River runs thru the heart of the city and there are nice parks and restaurants along its banks. There are few places to see in Damascus, but the interesting part of the city is its people. Its extensive bazaars are interesting not only for the large variety of things for sale brought from every corner of the globe, but for the variety of life and vocations. Besides the shop keepers there are hundreds of different vendors on the street with as many kinds of wares for sale, from rubber bands cut from auto tires to bouquets of flowers to drinks of raisins and licorice water and donkey loads of cucumbers, all calling out at the top of their voices. And above the din come the prayer calls from the minarets of the over two hundred mosques of the city. The prayer call is done in a nicer, more musical way in Damascus than I have heard in any other place. A muezzin from a minaret just opposite my hotel window wakes me every morning at about four. The bazaars are all divided according to trades – for example a saddle market for all leather goods, a fruit market, cloth market, coppersmiths, gold smiths, etc. In one market enough wooden clogs are made to put the whole world on clogs.



One long straight street – the “street called straight” – runs across town and ends at the East Gate. Just inside the gate on a little off street is the traditional house of Ananias, now converted to a small church, and a short distance along the wall outside the city gate is a window which is said to be the place where Paul was let down in a basket.

The most important sight in the city is the Omayyid Mosque. It is on the site of a Roman temple, parts of which are still standing. Later it was converted into a Christian church. It was known as the Church of St. John because it contained a casket said to hold the remains of the head of John the Baptist. Even now in the mosque there is a small dome covering that casket. The mosque is a beautiful building, with a huge dome, with beautiful inscriptions and stained glass windows, and the floor is covered with rich Persian carpets. It has three tall slender minarets, one of them named for Jesus, because tradition says that Jesus will take his place at its summit at the beginning of the last judgment.

One afternoon we went to visit Mr. Nelson, a Danish missionary doing work among the Moslems, at his home in Salihiyeh, a suburb north of the city. It is a good deal higher than Damascus and from there we could see the city with the gardens all around it – truly a “pearl of the desert.” Wednesday morning we start for Baghdad, and I shall be glad to get back again. I don’t like this unsettled roaming around for very long.

Basrah, October 7, 1924

I must make this a very short letter if I am to get it down to the P.O. before the mail closes. We arrived in Basrah just this forenoon and I have been busy since then unpacking and getting things in shape. The Van Esses arrived here Saturday, so the whole family is present again. The Jackson girls⁵⁷ say they have had a pretty good summer here in Basrah, no extreme heat at all.

We had a pretty rotten trip across the desert this time. There must have been a Jonah in the party. Last Wednesday we joined the Eastern Transport convoy and started back for Iraq. There were six cars in the convoy, all heavily loaded, and trouble began almost immediately, mostly tire trouble. The last car did not get to Palmyra until



nine o'clock that night. The next morning we started again at five. Our car was the leader and we drove a hundred miles without stopping. Then we waited over two hours before the last car came up. When we started up again, our car began to give trouble and from then until we reached Hit, we had eleven punctures, two broken springs, a broken wheel, and then we got lost. We got to Wadi Huran

at about six, when we should have been there at one. Two other cars had their share of trouble, too. You see, in this dry climate the wooden wheel spokes get loose and the whole wheel simply collapses. From Wadi Huran, the three good cars, with all the ladies in the party, went on ahead and got to Hit at about eleven o'clock. The rest of us got to Kubeisi, twenty miles from Hit, at one in the morning. We stopped and had some tea. By this time we had run out of all spare tires and tubes and had nothing to patch with, so we drove on on a flat. Shortly after leaving Kubeisi we lost the trail and couldn't find our way back to it until nearly dawn. We got to Hit at six in the morning, just twelve hours late. By that time our car was such a wreck that Moerdyk and I wangled seats in two of the other cars and went on with them to Baghdad, getting there at about two. We stayed with the Staudts until Sunday night when we took the train to Basrah, arriving this morning. We have been away two and a half months.

⁵⁷ Ruth and Rachel Jackson and Charlotte Kellien were invariably referred to as “the girls” even in later years, when they were certainly no longer girls. Ruth and Rachel were known individually by their own names, but Miss Kellien was always Miss Kellien.

October 12, 1924

I have been busy as can be this week getting things around school in shape again, especially in the boarding department. I'm going to run the boarding school right this year, even if I have to revolutionize the whole kitchen force. I have been giving the kitchen and dining room such a cleaning as it has never had before, painting tables and woodwork, screening windows and doors, etc. Everything is going to be kept spick and span so that the boys will think they've got regular New York Central dining car service. School registration starts tomorrow and class work begins about Wednesday.

Besides that I have been helping Mr. Van Ess do the walls of his house with distemper – that's something like alabastine but it goes on like paint and doesn't rub off. I am going to do the walls of my room with it, too, this week. Mrs. Van Ess said that after I got the walls done, she would get some new curtains for me.

We've been having a host of parties, teas, etc. this week. The Jackson girls have two friends visiting with them who are making a round the world tour and stopping off here for a couple weeks. We've had one moonlight bellum picnic, one dinner for the whole station, and teas and luncheons. The Van Esses received a large order from Montgomery Ward – groceries, etc., and I had to help sample things, especially when I was working over there and stayed for lunch – sweet potatoes, dill pickles, plum butter and everything!



As ever, your loving son and brother,

George



Basrah Photographer

The Arabian Mission
Annual Meeting, Basrah 1922

Back Row: Gerrit Van Peursesem, Rachel Jackson, Bern Hakken, Minnie Dykstra, Dirk Dykstra, Walter Leak, Jim Moerdyk, Cornelia Dalenberg, May DePree Thoms, Louis Dame, Josephine Van Peursesem

Second Row: Monty Bilkert, Sarah Hosmon, Elizabeth Dame, Dorothy Van Ess, Margaret Barney, Fred Barney, Gertrude Pennings, Elda Hakken, Gerrit Pennings, Anthony Pennings

Front row: Henry Bilkert, Margaret Bilkert, Alice Van Ess, Ruth Jackson, Fanny Lutton, Charlotte Kellien, George Gosselink, John Van Ess, jr., John Van Ess

The Arabian Mission Basrah Station

Although located in five stations, spread over a thousand miles from Amarah in Iraq to Muscat on the Gulf of Oman, the members of the Arabian Mission were an amazingly close and collegial group. They were held together by their common purpose and the weekly fast mail ship which ran from Bombay to Basrah with stops at Muscat, Bahrain and Kuwait.

Dad was fortunate to get to know most of the missionaries when they gathered for their Annual Meeting in Basrah in 1922 shortly after his arrival. It must have been an eye-opener for him. Members of the mission gathered once a year to thrash out the business of the mission, draw up the budget, allocate the scarce resources and assign people to their stations. There would be heated arguments. The placement of medical personnel was especially difficult, since the hospitals had to be staffed even when some doctors and nurses were scheduled for furlough. But they gathered again in harmony for study, worship and prayer and always seemed to get along well and enjoy each other's company. Dad was surprised by their animated conversation and sometimes irreverent humor.

Samuel Zwemer and James Cantine had surveyed the Red Sea coast and Yemen and visited ports along the Persian Gulf before starting work in Basrah in 1891. Leaving Cantine in Basrah, Zwemer moved on in 1892 to establish a presence in Bahrain. And in 1893, his brother Peter Zwemer began work in Oman. It was not until 1909 that the Mission received permission from the ruling shaikh to open medical work in Kuwait. Amarah had been an outstation of Basrah almost from the beginning but became a staffed mission station only in 1920. Baghdad, an early station of the Mission, was transferred to the United Mission of Mesopotamia in 1924. It was an audacious vision that from this limited presence, the Arabian Mission could reach out and bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of "neglected Arabia."⁵⁸

The early pioneers were concerned first of all with evangelism, but they were often called upon to "practice" medicine, and soon they sent out a call for trained doctors who could more appropriately address the medical needs of the people they were trying to reach. Eventually hospitals were established in all five stations, though the one in Basrah was closed in 1917. For almost fifty years, until the discovery of oil transformed the whole region, these hospitals were virtually the only modern medical facilities available to Arabs of that area. Basrah was unique among the stations for its concentration on education, though smaller schools were started in Bahrain and Muscat. Touring was a regular part of the Mission's outreach. Doctors and evangelists in Muscat explored the mountains of Jabal Akhdar and the coastal regions of Dhofar, those in Bahrain visited Qatar and the area that was to become the United Arab

⁵⁸ The bibliography at the end of the book lists a number of memoirs by members of the mission. For a comprehensive history see Lewis R. Scudder III, The Arabian Mission Story, 1998.

Emirates, and missionaries in Basrah and Amarah toured the marsh area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The hope was that someday they might reach the interior of Arabia, and indeed King Abd el Aziz el Saud did invite missionaries to visit Riyadh and other towns of what became Saudi Arabia, but he never allowed them to stay.

Over the years, the missionaries might be assigned to different stations for a shorter or longer term until they finally found their “permanent” place, and so they learned to know the particular challenges of each station and got to know each other well. And they often met and spent time together when they took their vacations at Kodaikanal, a hill station in South India.

Having started medical work in Basrah in the early 1890s with a clinic and dispensary, staffed by trained doctors, the Mission in 1908 finally obtained permission from the Turkish government to purchase land and build a hospital. The Lansing Memorial Hospital opened in 1911. As the only medical facility in the area, it was welcomed by the local population and its services were in high demand, but its success was to be short lived. When the War began in 1914, the Mission offered its assistance first to the Turkish and then the British authorities for the care of their wounded soldiers. In 1916 a group of Turkish prisoners were admitted with “fever” which turned out to be typhus. An epidemic swept the hospital, taking with it the medical staff, including Dr. Arthur Bennett, his wife Dr. Christine Bennett and the nursing supervisor Mini Holzhauser. Christine Bennett died within a few days. Her husband and Miss Holzhauser survived but were sent to the U.S. for convalescence. The hospital was closed. Several attempts to staff and open it again failed and eventually the Mission decided to close the hospital permanently, a decision made somewhat easier by the fact that the British had opened other hospitals in Basrah. The hospital building remained unused for several years before becoming home to the Boys School. Thereafter, the two schools, the School of High Hope and the School of Hope for Girls, became the primary focus of the Mission’s work in Basrah.

Basrah was unusual for the stability of its permanent personnel. John and Dorothy Van Ess were the anchors, of course, he having arrived in 1902 and she in 1911. Their primary responsibility was for the Boys and Girls Schools. Fred and Margaret Barney, who had joined the mission in 1897 and had worked in Basrah, Bahrain and Muscat, served another term in Basrah from 1920 to 1923. Jim Moerdyk, who had also been in several other stations on the Gulf, was assigned to Basrah in 1924 to take on responsibility for evangelism. Charlotte Kellien arrived from Muscat in 1922 to become principal of the Girls School. Rachael and Ruth Jackson came 1923, after language study in Bahrain, to work at the school and join Mrs. Van Ess in other contacts with women. This was the mission “family” that Dad got to know so well. Jim Moerdyk moved on to Amarah a few years later, and Ruth Jackson was assigned to the Girls School in Bahrain in 1936. The others, joined by George and Christine Gosselink in 1929, continued to serve in Basrah until their respective retirements from the Mission.

Henry and Monty Bilkert were assigned to Basrah in 1924. Dad looked forward to their coming and felt they were a fine addition to the Basrah family. Tragically, Bilkert was killed in a Beduin attack on his car while he was accompanying the American businessman and diplomat Charles Crane from Basrah to Kuwait in 1929. It was Bilkert's death that made it possible for the financially strapped Mission Board to appoint the Gosselinks to the Mission.



Lansing Memorial Hospital, 1911-1917
School of High Hope 1923-1964



The Basrah Family, Christmas 1924
Henry Bilkert, Ruth Jackson, Dorothy Van Ess, John Van Ess, visitor
Rachel Jackson, Charlotte Kellien, Monty Bilkert
John Van Ess Jr., Montieth Bilkert, Alice Van Ess, Margaret Bilkert

Letters October 19, 1924 – February 8, 1925

October 19, 1924

At last I got a letter from you, last Monday, by overland mail. You sent it on September 22, so it got here in three weeks. It seemed a little disconnected, because I am still missing four or five letters from you. I expect they will be arriving soon – either forwarded from Suq-el-Gharb or coming around by sea.

We started school again this week. We already have 150 boys enrolled, a good many more than we had at the beginning of last year. The boarding department will begin functioning tomorrow. We are almost overrun with Chaldean Catholics. These “Chaldani” closed their own school this year because of trouble they had among themselves, so they want to send all their kids over into our school. But Mr. Van Ess isn’t having any of it. He doesn’t want to crowd the school full of Chaldani just because they can’t run a school of their own without fighting. By now Mr. Van Ess has a pretty black name among the Chaldeans because he won’t accept their children. They try all sorts of things. Some have been attending our church services regularly for some weeks hoping that we will accept them as Protestants, because we do take a certain number of Protestant children, because there aren’t very many of them in Basrah and they have no school of their own. But the Catholics could very easily have a big school if they knew how to get along with each other. One Chaldani woman came into the school office one day this week with a baby on her arm and a couple of kids following her and also an older boy she wanted to put into school. She came up to Mr. Van Ess and was going to kiss his hand, but he jerked his hand away, which made her lose her balance and she fell all over him. After he had struggled free again he looked at me and said, “Daar hou ik niet van.”⁵⁹ I could hardly keep from laughing. Of course he did not accept her son. Some of them even try bribery to get their children into school, but of course that finishes them right away.

October 26, 1924

We had good soaking showers here one day this week. It just poured for about an hour. It started out with pretty good sized hail stones, which are very rare here. Rain so early in the season is rare, too. It’s cloudy and brewing again and we are likely to have more rain soon. Let it come. The rain surely made things bright and clean again and washed away the terrible dust of summer.

Mr. Moerdyk has gone down to Bahrain for the Annual Mission Meeting. It is a delegate meeting this year, one delegate from each station. Each station has its own meeting and instructs its delegate on what to do at the big meeting. We had our meeting last Monday night. We are expecting the Bilkerts to arrive here in Basrah, back

⁵⁹ Roughly, “I hate when that happens!”

from furlough, sometime this week. We are hoping and expecting that they will be assigned here to Basrah for the coming year, so they will be here when the Van Esses go on furlough next spring. They are fine people and will fit in perfectly with the rest of the force here now.

There isn't much more news around here except for news of the big things that are happening in this neck of the world. Ibn Saud, the Emir of Nejd, the interior of Arabia, and at the same time the leader of the very strict Wahabi sect of Islam – they believe they are the only true Moslems – has been attacking Mecca with a large army of his tribesmen. King Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, who proclaimed himself caliph last year when the Turks abolished the caliphate in Turkey, has for many years prevented these Wahabi tribesmen of the interior from coming to Mecca for the pilgrimage. Now Mecca has fallen, King Hussein has abdicated, his son Ali has been chosen as king and has moved his government to Jiddah, and Mecca is left in the hands of Ibn Saud. Islam is once again in chaos, without a caliph – even though not many Arabs accepted Hussein. The rumor here is that King Hussein is coming to Basrah to live under the protection of his son, King Faisal, because no other Moslem country will take him because of the terrible bribery and persecution he practiced on pilgrims to Mecca during the last years. The British may allow him to settle down in Basrah if he keeps himself absolutely quiet – but he may not know how to be quiet. He is always involved in some intrigue. It is all very interesting.

In our discussion at the station meeting this week, we were talking about whether we should ask Dr. Dame, whose furlough is due next year, to postpone his furlough another year as we might otherwise have trouble finding a doctor to put in his place and might have to close the hospital at Bahrain. Mr. Van Ess in a joking way said that since Dr. Dame was on pretty good terms with Ibn Saud and had made a long trek with him last winter thru Nejd, it might be possible that Ibn Saud would ask him to make another tour with him next winter and might even take him as far as Mecca. Now that would make it worthwhile to stay another year!

November 2, 1924

You remember a couple of weeks ago I said I was going to fix up my rooms. If you saw them now you would think I had defixed them. I didn't get a chance to do anything with them until this week and then only an hour or two after school each day, so I've been upset the whole week, but I finally finished the walls yesterday. Now all that remains is to get my "marble" floors scrubbed and the windows and woodwork washed and then hang my new curtains and put up my pictures and pennants. It hardly seems worthwhile to do it for only the eight or nine months that I'll be here, but then it will be in good shape for whoever takes my place next year.

We had an accident here in school yesterday morning. One of our boarding school boys broke his arm while playing around in the corridor. He stumbled

and fell and his arm just snapped like a piece of crockery just below the elbow. I improvised a sling for his arm and sent him off to the hospital with one of the other boys. Two hours later he came back and hadn't seen the doctor yet, hadn't even been to the hospital. Instead he had gone to an uncle – he has no father here – and his uncle wanted to take him to some quack. They had hunted around for him all that time and couldn't find him and now they were back to me and wanted a letter to another doctor who might get the job done for a few rupees less. The idea of going around bargaining with a doctor while the boy hadn't yet had his arm set just made me angry. Just then Mr. Van Ess came along. He gave the uncle a bawling out and sent them back to the hospital.

Day after tomorrow is election day. I suppose we'll get the first returns of the elections here on Thursday. We've made arrangement with the editor of the Basrah paper to send word as soon as he gets the first cablegrams from New York. We are just as excited about it here as you are over there.

November 9, 1924

We got a wire from Moerdyk this week saying that the Bilkerts had been appointed to Basrah, so that's good – only the Bilkerts haven't come yet and nobody knows where they are. They were supposed to have reached Baghdad two weeks ago. Mr. Moerdyk also said he was bringing with him four boys, sons of one of the Bahraini shaikhs.

Hurrah for Coolidge! We got the first reports of Coolidge's re-election Thursday evening, and Friday the Basrah paper had big headlines clear across the page – "America Stands Against Socialism".

Everything is going fine around here. School is packed to the limit and the boys are doing good work. Yes, there is one of our boys at Pennsylvania U. this year. We have already heard from him, and he said they accepted him right into the freshman class without examinations because he had a diploma and a letter from Mr. Van Ess, which is a pretty good compliment to our school. He is the boy I gave private lessons to last winter.

November 16, 1924

Tuesday was Armistice Day and we dismissed school for the morning. They had some exercises at the military cemetery, unveiling and dedicating a new monument in honor of those who died here in the Mesopotamian campaign of the War. It is just a plain cross of white concrete about fifteen feet high, but the whole cemetery had been leveled off and cleaned up and looked very nice. All the air force and other British military detachments which are stationed at Basrah and also a large troop of Indian soldiers which the British keep in this country and a group of sailors from a British warship which happens to be in port for a few days were all lined up and in full uniform.

We sang a few memorial hymns, the Air Commander of all Iraq made a short address and unveiled the monument and then the Basrah military padre dedicated it. One corner of this cemetery is for European civilians and there is where Mrs. Bennett, Harry Wiersum and the Worrall's child are buried.

Friday evening Mr. Moerdyk and Mr. Dykstra arrived back from Bahrain, and of course they had lots to tell about Annual Meeting. Yesterday the Bilkerts arrived and we were glad to see them. So we are a pretty big family now. Mr. Bilkert said that when he met you, Mother, you had pumped him with questions about how I was doing and whether I was really well and happy. Now, you know what I've always written, and you know that I wouldn't tell you everything was all right if it wasn't, don't you?

November 23, 1924

Let me tell you about these two young shaikhs which Mr. Moerdyk brought along from Bahrain to put into school here. They are about twelve or thirteen years old and I am to be sort of their guardian. They surely were a mess. I don't believe they have



had a bath in their lives or even their hair washed. Their heads were so full of lice, I don't see why they weren't eaten up by them. One of the boys' head was actually half raw. I sent them off to the barber and had their hair clipped off short and then to the hot bath. They have several of these baths around the bazaars – first they put you in a room which is kept very hot so that you begin perspiring. Then a servant comes in and begins rubbing and scrubbing you with hot water and soap until you are almost raw, then a dash of cold water and a rub down with a course towel. When the servant began scrubbing these boys the dirt began to come off in rolls and they got scared. They thot their skin had been scalded off. Then I also got them some bedding – they had nothing of their own with them except a blanket like they roll up in in their desert tents. I got one of the teachers to help me, because he knows the ins and outs of the bazaars. They have a servant with them, but he is a negro slave – they still have a good number of them in the Gulf cities – but he needs as much tending to as the boys do. He also went along with the boys to the bath, but when they put him in the sweating room, they couldn't make him perspire at all, even when they raised the temperature. The boys like the idea of getting cleaned up – they have already been asking for European clothes. As soon as their hair grows out so that it can be cut and combed nicely, I will get them each a fez instead of the head shawl they wear now, and also a good suit of clothes each. The British consul in Bahrain has guaranteed to pay for everything we want to spend on the boys, and we don't have to be afraid of spending too much because their father is one of the richest shaikhs in Bahrain. The boys are learning pretty well, too. They seem pretty smart even tho they didn't know the alphabet when they came.

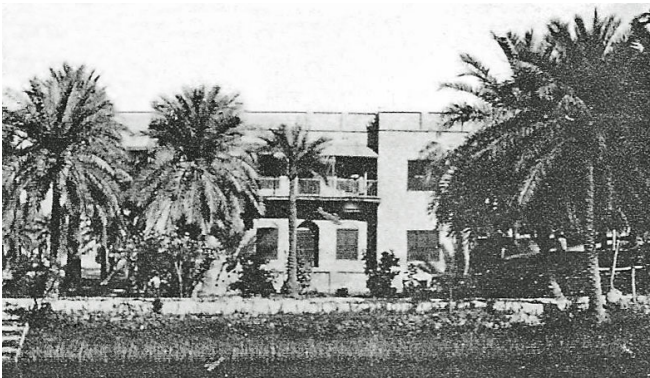
And there have been other things to keep me busy. The Bilkerts had some more boxes of stuff arriving, so I helped them with that, opening them and setting up the furniture, etc. Miss Kellien asked me if I could draw a large map of Europe with all the divisions of the countries up to date. I said I could, but it turned out to be quite a job. Then Saturday morning Mrs. Dykstra arrived with Dr. and Mrs. Moerdyk and their little boys. He is Mr. Moerdyk's brother and they have had one year of language study in Bahrain. Now they are going to move to Amarah so that Dr. Moerdyk can get the lay of the land there while taking his second year of language, so that he will be ready to open up medical work there next year when he finishes language training.

You see, the building we are using now for the school is the Lansing Memorial Hospital, because it was built and supported by the Lansing family and that money may not be used for anything but medical work. Since mission medical work in Basrah is not so necessary any more and Mr. Dykstra has been asking for a doctor and hospital in Amarah for several years, the Lansing Hospital Fund is going to sell this building in Basrah to Mr. Van Ess for the Boys School and the Fund will be transferred to Amarah for the construction of a new hospital there. Amarah is a good station for medical work, not only because they have no good doctors there of any kind, but it is also the center of a large tribal area, and a mission doctor could accompany Mr. and Mrs. Dykstra on their tours with the launch, which would be a great help. Doctors are always welcome and would provide a good opening wedge, an opportunity to get to know and work with the people in those remote areas.

November 30, 1924

How time goes. Tomorrow is the first of December and by the time you get this letter it will be the New Year already. Please give my Christmas and New Year's greetings to Grandpa and Grandma and all the uncles and aunts.

We had Thanksgiving this week. This station is quite a big family now, but we still had Thanksgiving dinner all together at the big house – that is the house in which the Bilkerts, Miss Kellien and the Jacksons live.⁶⁰ We surely had a good dinner. We dismissed school for the afternoon, so we didn't have to hurry, and we were at the table until after three o'clock. Then we sat around and talked and played the phonograph. After that John Jr. entertained us



⁶⁰ In later years this would become the Gosselink house, where our parents lived for almost forty years and where I was born. The single women, Miss Kellien and the Jackson sisters, moved to a newly constructed house on the outskirts of Basrah City, on the same property where the new Girls School was built in 1930.

with a Thanksgiving program given by himself and assisted by Alice and the two Bilkert children – poems, songs, the Pilgrim story, etc. Nobody could eat much at night so we just had some pickings from dinner. We sat around telling stories and playing hearts. Mrs. Van Ess had gotten some popcorn from Montgomery Ward, and so I improvised a popper from an old tin box and we popped corn over the open fire in the fireplace. It was a cool night, so the fire felt nice and cozy.

I took a bunch of boys on a bicycle hike to Germat Ali, the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates, about ten miles above Basrah. We were studying about the two rivers in Geography class and so it was mainly the Geography class that went. Not any of these boys had ever been there before. It is funny that I who have been here just two years should be showing these places to these boys who have lived here all their lives. When we got back, one of them said they would like to go on such an excursion again, and I asked where they wanted to go. They said I should decide that since I know these places better than they do.

Yesterday we left here at about nine o'clock, all on bicycles. We stopped at several place along the way. At one place there was a small lock in an irrigation canal and I had to explain how it worked. At another place we came to a ferry across the river – one which is drawn back and forth across the river on a cable. They had never



seen anything like that. Then we came to a field where there was a small patch of cotton growing and they looked in awe at that – some of the bolls had already burst open and were all fluffed out. Finally we came to the junction of the rivers, but even with the rivers there in front of them, they didn't seem to understand the lay of the land until I drew a map on a piece of paper, and showed the relative position of the cities along the river and where it

flowed into the Gulf. Even then, when a river steamer just happened to pass by bound upstream for Baghdad, they seemed surprised and asked why it was going in that direction. . We started back by another route so that we could stop at the port where all the ocean going steamers stop, and we looked at one of the Bombay mail steamers which was there. We also watched some of the big port cranes at work and saw how they can lift a Ford or some two or three ton weight on or off the steamer as easily as they would a toothpick. We got home at four o'clock and it had certainly been an interesting day. We hadn't taken any lunch but we just bought some at different places as we went along. We got some fresh Arab bread, some radishes and some hard boiled eggs. Then we came by a camp of Ma'dan, Marsh Arabs who keep cows and buffaloes and supply the town with milk. There we got some of the finest "robe" I have ever had. Robe is quite a favorite article of food here and goes well with native food. It is thickened sour milk, like you make cottage cheese from.⁶¹ So we had a peach of a meal.

⁶¹ Yogurt, a staple of Middle East cuisine, was not well known in the United States, certainly not in Iowa, until a commercial version was introduced and patented by Dannon in 1947.

December 7, 1924

Brrr -- ! it's cold. It has been cold all week and to be out in the sun feels good. We haven't any snow here but we've got a pretty good imitation – our garden is full of white chrysanthemums. We've got some in color, too, and also several other kinds of flowers, and we've all got bouquets galore – and they stay fresh for such a long time. Miss Kellien was counting the bouquets in their house the other day and she said they had seventeen scattered around the house from kitchen to garret.

Last night while I was sitting thinking about what I would write about, the fire engine came rushing past. I went out to look and the whole sky was red and full of smoke. It looked as though the whole world was on fire. At the same time Mr. Van Ess,



Bilkert and everybody came out. It looked as though the fire might be right next to the Girls School, so we started off on a run.

We found the school safe enough and the fire to be quite a bit further on, so we went on and found a space larger than a square block all in flames. The space had been full of "serifas" – the small huts built of reed mats, the homes of the very poorest people. How the fire started nobody knows, but once a fire gets started among these reed huts, which are built almost on top of each

other, they go up like paper and there is no stopping it, and these people hardly had time to save anything. There they were out in the street with only the clothes they had on and perhaps a blanket or two and a few boxes. There they were, several hundred of them, at nine o'clock on a cold night and no place to go. Some had not even found all their family members, though it was believed that nobody was hurt by the fire. When we left, the police department was looking after them as much as they could, but they couldn't do much for a big crowd like that. If only the mission had some kind of poor relief fund, but we have to scratch for everything we can get just for our regular work.

December 15, 1924

We've been overwhelmed with guests this week again. The Van Peursems arrived this week – they also traveled overland from Beirut. Mr. Van Peurse and the two boys slept with me – that is I provided them with beds in this building and they washed and dressed in my rooms. Mrs. Van Peurse and the two girls stayed with the Van Esses and they all ate over there. They are a nice family. Did you ever meet Mrs. Van Peurse and the children? The children aren't a bit spoiled as, I am afraid, John and Alice are. They gave me the parcel you sent along with them. Nina's picture is surely nice with her bobbed hair. The socks are almost too nice to wear, and the beaded

watch fob is very nice, too. Crissy also sent a package but with orders "not to open till Christmas" so I'll have to wait to see what she sent.

Mr. Barney also arrived this week. They are going to be stationed in Bahrain this year and came out all the way by sea, via Bombay. Now Mr. Barney has come here to get his books and everything else they left here when they went on furlough. And Mr. Moerdyk had with him for a couple days a member of the British Bible Society. So we were pretty well full up and busy, too, helping these people. The Van Peursems had to buy quite a few things here and lay in supplies which they can't get in Muscat, and we helped Barney gather up his stuff and pack it. They all left together this morning on the boat. I got a letter from Mr. Pennings this week and he said he had been in Pella a couple times and once had stayed with you, as you wrote some time ago, too.

Mrs. Van Ess and Ruth Jackson have been busy this week trying to get something done for these people that were burned out last week. They forced a thousand rupees (\$300) out of the city council and then tackled some of the rich people of the city, but they were hardly able to get \$200 more. After two days of canvassing they had almost \$500 and with that they went to the bazaar and bought quilts and flour and rice, and then they got the "mukhtar" (headman) of that burnt out district to bring all these people together and each family got a quilt and two pounds of rice and flour for each member of every family. That will keep them for a little while at least. One quilt is hardly enough for some of the big families, but . . . There were over a hundred families and nearly eight hundred people. They are still without shelter. It is still bitterly cold and the rains are beginning to come. I don't know what these people will do. One nearly becomes a Bolshevik when you see this situation here and know that in another part of town there are people with so much money and property they don't know what to do with it, but you can't squeeze a cent out of them to help these poor people.

December 21, 1924

We have been having rain by the wholesale this week and we are having still more of it today. Everything is soaked and the roads and streets are a fright. It is almost impossible to get about without getting covered with mud. It makes it awful for those people who were burned out. Mrs. Van Ess and Ruth Jackson have still been busy canvassing for them, and they have had a little better luck this week.

Thursday night Mr. Van Ess and I went to a show given by a Jewish society. They gave a sort of play on Joseph and his brothers, reviewing everything from the time Joseph had his dream to when he was governor of Egypt and old Jacob moved to Egypt with his sons and their families. It was very well done. The different characters were portrayed well and the costuming was good. Some of the men, with their great big black beards, had the map of Palestine written all over their faces. And they made it go along in good time, too – there were no lagging waits as there usually are with these shows.

This week will be Christmas. We are having Wednesday afternoon, Thursday and Friday for vacation, that's all. My chief occupation lately has been repairing toys and things that were broken in the mail on the way from America for both the Bilkerts and the Van Esses. I spent one whole evening helping Mrs. Van Ess fix dolls' eyes. She had received a batch of dolls of the kind that close their eyes when you lay them down, and most of their eyes had been jarred loose or bumped out of place, but we got them all fixed up again.

December 28, 1924

Well, Christmas is past again and we've had a dandy time. Wednesday afternoon vacation started and Mr. Van Ess and I "manufactured" a Christmas tree and put it up in their home and trimmed it. In the evening after dinner, everybody came – those in the big house, also – Bilkerts and the girls – and put their gifts around the tree, and then we went over to the big house again to sing carols and hymns with the piano. The Bilkerts brought a very nice piano out with them. Next morning first thing we got our presents from the tree, and Santa Claus was pretty good to all of us. I got a couple of books, some good home made fudge and peanut brittle, a nice pillow cover, etc. I got a nice shirt from Crissy, but I am afraid there won't be much left of it after the "dabee" has had it in the wash a couple times.



Most of us went to the English Church service in the morning. We didn't have any service in our church because both Mr. Van Ess and Mr. Bilkert were busy all day long with callers who came to bring their greetings and stay long enough to drink a cup of Arab coffee and "drink" a cigarette, as the Arabs say. Mr. Van Ess said they had over a hundred callers during the day, not counting school boys. Mr. Moerdyk had gone to Amarah to spend the holidays with his brother and family and the Dykstras. They also invited me, but I think I will go at Easter when we will have more time and the weather will be nicer. We all had Christmas dinner with the Van Esses. Somebody from Baghdad had sent down two turkeys, and we had them both with sweet potatoes and cranberry sauce from Montgomery Ward and a lot of other good things.

It surely has been cold here. Christmas morning was clear and bright and stayed so all day, but in the morning there was a heavy frost on the grass and a sliver of ice on the water. That is the first frost I have seen in this country. Today it is cold and rainy and feels as if it is going to snow.

Friday afternoon the boys had their school show. Several of the boys read papers they had written about Christmas or gave short speeches or recited poems, and they had three short plays, one real serious one – acting out a bit of an Arab tribal story

– and two short comic things made up by themselves. The whole program was pretty good. Some of these boys are natural actors.

Monday noon – It's colder than ever today – there is ice on the water puddles all over, even up to now (noon) and the sun is shining. It hasn't been so cold here for years. Mr. Van Ess says he has never seen it so cold in Basrah.

January 4, 1925

Well, it's 1925 – a Happy New Year to you. This is the last lap for me. From now on the time until I go home will become noticeably shorter. I am afraid I won't have very much time at home tho, especially if I go to school. I'll have to start off again almost as soon as I get back. You know the Bilkerts were at the Hartford School of Missions last year. I have talked with them and am more and more convinced that that is where I ought to go. The only argument against it is that it is so far from home.

We had no school on New Year's Day, but that was not so much because of the day itself as that there was the inauguration of a new literary society to which all our teachers belong and they asked to have the day off. We didn't do much celebrating except that in the evening we all had dinner together at the big house.

It surely has been cold here. Two nights last week the temperature went down below twenty-six degrees. One night the frost burst the water pipe which comes into my room and it also burst a couple pipes in the big house. We had loads of chrysanthemums in our garden but they are all frozen. The gardens all around have a large part of their vegetable crops killed by the frost, especially tomatoes and cucumbers. That's new history for Basrah, especially for the freezing of water pipes, not that it has never been so cold before, but that there was never a water system here until the War.

January 11, 1925

I received your package yesterday, and all of it looks good, believe me, though we haven't had a chance to try it yet. I am going to keep the cured beef for myself and nibble at it along with some crackers and cocoa for "coffee-tijd" after school. I gave the bacon to Mrs. Van Ess and I think she is going to serve it tonight in sandwiches for our Sunday night station supper. Thanks ever so much for it and thank Grandpa and Grandma for the beef. It hardly seems worthwhile to send it tho when you have to pay so much postage. However, I am awfully glad to get it. I guess this is the last time you will be sending anything, because soon it will be getting warm again and it won't take the trip out here. I hope you will have a supply laid in when I get home next summer.

We had Week of Prayer this week. It was all in Arabic so I didn't get so very much out of it. Still, I am getting so that if I know the subject they are talking about and they don't use too highfalutin Arabic, I can usually get quite a bit of it. Anyway, it

does me good just to be there because I know we are in God's special presence there and others are discussing and praying about things concerning His work and His kingdom.

We had meetings every afternoon in the church soon after school, and Mr. Bilkert, who is now in charge of evangelistic work here, had given most of the leadership of the meetings into the hands of some of the native congregation. They did very well, and we were surprised at how many of the native Christians came out to the meetings. There seems to be a different spirit among these Christians. Mr. Moerdyk worked hard with them last year, encouraging them to take on their share of the leadership, so they started doing different things and found that they rather liked it. They have even started organizing themselves into a regular congregation, and every once in a while our Bible shop manager or one of the teachers takes a turn at preaching. There seems to be a much nicer spirit among themselves and toward the mission as well. The women's society, which Mrs. Van Ess organized, has even sent something to the Women's Board Jubilee Fund.

We had a big joke here this week. They have been having elections for the new Iraq parliament. Here they don't do it on one day but the election extends over several weeks. This week they began counting votes and there were over ten million votes while the population of the country is only about three million. The mistake is believed to be where the tribal shaikhs have voted for their whole tribe, estimating the population and accordingly getting that many votes. Some of those shaikhs must have estimated pretty high, forgetting that when the conscription for the army comes along they may have to furnish men in proportion to the number who voted. Now they have discarded the whole election until a more reliable census can be taken.

January 18, 1925

Happy birthday to you on your 16th birthday, Bob. I hope I am right in your age this time. I hope you don't get a breakdown from all the work you had to do a while back, book reviews, typing contests, orations, etc. all at once. If you give me a few days to practice up a bit I'll still run you a race in typing when I get home again. Gosh, I want to write all the time as if you were still a kid, as you were when I left home, but now you have become pretty much of a man and have put away childish things and I have to write accordingly. You are coming along, Bob, but I wonder if you ever give much thought to your duties in the more serious part of life – not that you aren't a good Christian in your heart but our duty lies beyond that. I pray that God may give you wisdom to see aright the way before you.

We've been having some distinguished guests here this week. An older lady and her daughter, Mrs. Standish and Miss Standish, direct descendants of Miles Standish are making a trip around the world and stopped by here to visit Mrs. Van Ess, who used to know them in college. We also had a German Baroness here this week. She is a writer and quite a socialist and writes for socialist papers.

January 25, 1925

Well, I've added another country to my list of "countries visited" this week. Mrs. Alcott – you know she is an officer on the Women's Board of Foreign Missions – and her daughter had gone to India where her son was to be married, and of course she visited all the mission stations of our church while she was there. Now, on their way home, they have been coming up the Gulf on the slow mail steamer which stops for a day at each port, giving them a chance to visit all our mission stations, too. The boat always stops at Mohammerah, twenty miles down stream on the Persian side of the river. Mr. and Mrs. Dykstra came down from Amarah to meet Mrs. Alcott, and he said he was willing to go down to Mohammerah with the launch and bring them back, so they wouldn't have to wait a whole day down there. The problem is that nobody knew exactly when they were coming. We got a wire from one of the Gulf stations saying that they would arrive in Mohammerah on Saturday afternoon, so the Dykstras, Miss Kellien, Mrs. Van Ess, Ruth Jackson and I started off Saturday noon and got there in a couple hours. But there was no boat. We waited until about six o'clock, when the company office said it would not come because it couldn't cross the bar at the mouth of the river after dark. So we started back. About half way back to Basrah is the border post between Iraq and Persia and we had to stop and report to the police and customs post. While we were trying to get to the landing, the launch ran into a mud bank in shallow water, and we could not get off, especially as the tide was falling. The only thing to do was wait until the next tide lifted the boat off again, which would be a little after mid-might. At about ten, a river tug came along and stopped on its way to Basrah, so it was decided that Mrs. Van Ess and Ruth and I would go on the tug, and the Dykstras and Miss Kellien would make themselves comfortable on the launch and go back to Mohammerah in the morning to wait for the steamer. We got home a little after mid-night, which was good because we found that people were worried about us. They had heard that the steamer would not arrive until Sunday evening. We had no way of letting the Dykstras know, so I suppose they are still waiting.

February 1, 1925

School has been going pretty well all along. We've got right up to two hundred boys now and we are crowded to the limit. We ought to have more teachers but we haven't the money to get them. Maybe money will loosen up a bit pretty soon, at least if we are going to receive any benefit from that Jubilee Fund. I'm still enjoying my work as much as ever. Just teaching itself would get a little tiresome sometimes, but there are always things that keep monotony away. Funny things happen, too. You know that Oriental people – Jews, Arabs, Indians, all of them – make a lot of gestures with their hands when they speak. The Arabs have many gestures, just a certain twist of the head or something that means more than you can say in a sentence. We get to use them, too, and sometimes when I am talking with somebody I realize that I have been making a perfect whirlwind of myself. Well, the other day in school, one of the boys was reading his lesson

aloud, just an ordinary lesson, but he was jerking his head back and moving his hands on the book, and finally he came to a place where it said something about a large crowd, and he let go of the book with one hand and made a wide sweeping gesture – altogether unconscious of doing it. That was too much for me and I burst out laughing, and then I had to apologize to him quickly and explain what I was laughing about. He looked a little foolish then, but I bet he thot to himself that I was the dippy one.

You don't seem to have taken very favorably to my Hartford proposition. I don't know what Pennings or Van Peurseem may have said to you about it, but Van Peurseem said he thot it was a good idea. The Bilkerts were there last year and they were pleased with it, and Mr. Van Ess has recommended it from the first. As for Hartford not being true to doctrine, I am not going to Hartford to take any seminary course or theology. It is pedagogy, Islamics and education that I want and I have found that I can get these at the Hartford School of Missions. You said that Pennings said they offer education at Western, but I have found that they offer very little in education and nothing in Islam. And another thing, of all the Western graduates here in the mission, none have a good word to say about Western's influence for foreign missions. On the contrary, they say Western discourages anyone from going to the foreign field. Even Bog spoke of that during his first year of seminary, and I think it was that atmosphere that made him change his mind about going to the foreign field. I must say I am not attracted to Western. Even if I didn't go to Hartford and wanted to take a regular seminary course, I think I would go to Princeton or some place like that. The trouble with all these places is that they are so far from home.

February 8, 1925



Yesterday I went on another bicycle excursion with some of the boys. This time there were fifteen and we went to Zubair. It was a long trek, nearly thirty miles out there and back and it was quite windy – which is bothersome on bicycles – but we made it alright. They all had a good time. Some of them had never been there before. We roamed around the bazaars and camel market, visited a Beduin camp just outside the city, watched them weave cloth for their tents, and saw some other things. We started at ten in the morning and got back at five-thirty.

Dad, could you write me once more about what you may be able to do to help me with finances next year. You may have answered me before but perhaps it was in one of the letters that went lost last summer. And I'll give this as fair warning to all – Crissy and I have written back and forth a good deal but it is almost impossible to try to plan anything when you have to wait two or three months for

each other's answers. But the latest is that if it is at all possible, we are going to get married sometime not long after I get back, and then we will go to school together. If not that, then I may want that old Midland farm for a couple of years. Ha!

Lovingly as ever,

George



George Gosselink

Let George Do It

It has been suggested somewhere that the best preparation for an assignment to the Arabian Mission was not medical or theological training but the experience of growing up on an Iowa farm. The qualities ingrained here were self reliance, mechanical know-how, inventiveness, and an ability to make do with the materials at hand.

Dirk Dykstra had all these qualities and used them well in the service of the Mission. He was the only one who could keep the old British Army surplus launch running, and while he did he and his wife Minnie toured the lower Tigris and Euphrates and the marsh area between, making personal contact with the tribal people in the hinterland of Amarah. When the Dykstras were assigned to Muscat, the launch had to be sold, and that mission outreach was lost. He brought the old windmill down from Bahrain to Amarah and installed it on the bank of the Tigris where it continued to provide water for the Mission compound and its neighbors for years, even after his departure. When the Mission hospital in Kuwait received the gift of a Cole lighting system to provide electric power for the hospital, Dykstra was dispatched to install it. In Basrah he took on the responsibility of building the new Girls School. In Muscat he supervised construction of the Mission hospital, introducing the use of concrete to Oman, and completed the whole project well under budget.

Dad had those qualities too, and although he was not called on to undertake such large projects, he quickly established a reputation as the one to call when anything needed doing. John Van Ess relied on him to make the relief maps needed for geography classes, assemble sports equipment, repair and refurbish furniture, and generally look after the physical maintenance of the school. Mrs. Van Ess found that he could repair her children's toys. When she received some popcorn from the U.S., Dad devised a popper out of an old biscuit tin. When Leonard Woolley arrived to give an illustrated lecture on his discoveries at Ur, Dad was dispatched to repair and operate the overhead projector. He loved gardening and took on the job of landscaping the Mission compound and planting fruit trees and flowers.

As a musician, he played the piano and picked up some familiarity with the eleven string oud, or lute. In the chapel, he played hymns on the old pump organ, reading left to right for English services and right to left for Arabic.

Many years later he supervised the construction of a new house in Basrah, when the old "big house" was taken down to make way for a new road. He designed the building, directed the work of the head mason and builder, devised a hand operated cement mixer (much to the delight of the mason), and fashioned some of the woodwork himself on his Shopsmith.

Although he was a minister by profession, led services in the Mission chapel and often filled in for the padre of the Anglican church, he was never entirely comfortable in the pulpit. And while he was a teacher and principal of the Basrah School for many years, he was always conscious that he had had no

formal training in education. He was always happiest in his woodshop or in the garden. He enjoyed working with his hands, fixing things that broke or finding solutions to challenging problems. His colleagues in Basrah came to depend on him, and although it became something of a joke, their quick response any problem was always, "Let George do it."

Letters February 16 – July 12, 1925

February 16, 1925

You asked when the Van Esses are going to leave. They are planning to leave about the 20th of March but are going to spend about a month in Europe and won't get to America until the latter part of May. I shall miss them a lot when they leave. They have always treated me as one of the family – their house has always been home to me. But I won't be left alone – the rest are as fine a bunch as ever was.

When the Bilkerts first came they stood aghast at the way everyone ordered me around, asking me to fix this and do that, as if it were my business to be the man of all work around the place. But they got into the way of doing it too pretty quick. The other day Mrs. Bilkert heard from somebody that I had once fixed the church organ and the next time she saw me she said she had one of those little folding portable organs that fold up like a suitcase and she said there were four or five notes that wouldn't play. So I told her to send it over and I would try to fix it in my spare moments. When the thing came I found that there were only about four or five notes that would play. I opened it up and found that the moths had eaten every particle of felt in the whole thing, the strips below the reeds that keep the air in, so that no matter how hard you pumped the air kept escaping and you couldn't get enough pressure to blow the reeds. I didn't know what to do about it because I knew there wasn't any felt to be gotten in town, but then I thot of that old hat of mine and I cut it up into strips and put them in, and the thing played fine. I brought it back to Mrs. Bilkert and she said it played better than when it was new. Anyway, the next day she sent me a big dish of tutti-frutti fudge.



I am getting to be as much an uncle to little Margaret and Monteith Bilkert as to John and Alice. Montieth hollers, "Hello, Uncle George." if he sees me half a block away. He is only about three or four years old and he talks as if he is half stewed – all his s's are like sh's. The other day he said, "Shocksh (Socks is their little dog) bit the tashels off Alish's shweater."

February 22, 1925

I was talking with Mr. Van Ess one time this week about what I would do next year and mentioned to him that you had written about what Mr. Pennings had said to you – that Hartford was not true in doctrine, etc. and that after his wife had gone there he had had to right her again in some things. I told him that in all seriousness, but he began to laugh, and he told all the rest of them and they all laughed, too. Everybody has been "rehearsing" this week how Pennings must have "pulled his wife back." Last year

when they started off from here for home, they had one car loaded with baggage, and when they arrived at the station and Pennings opened the door to start unloading, their thermos bottle, full of sterilized milk for the baby, rolled out, fell on the ground and broke. The instant it landed, Pennings said, "There goes ten rupees!" The first thing that entered his mind was not the inconvenience of crossing the desert without good milk for the baby but the money he had paid for the thermos. Now whenever someone mentions Pennings' name, someone else will say, "There goes ten rupees!" He is really a fine, sincere man but he is funny about some things.

Mr. Van Ess said later that I, or you either, didn't have to worry about the orthodoxy of Hartford. He said that the kind of upbringing he had had and was sure I had had makes us strong enough to hold our own against any discordant doctrines which might be heard at Hartford, and anyway, doctrine does not enter in at all in the courses they offer in Islamics.

March 1, 1925

Oh, the dullness and drabness of the missionary life! Ha! Ha! Rather it is just the opposite. There are twice as many things that you have to do or want to do than you have time for. Yesterday I thought I was going to have a day to myself so I could get some things done that I have been trying to get to, and then all sorts of things happened to keep me from my work. First, without warning, Mr. Hakken from Bahrain rolled in. He has been having trouble with kidney stones or something. Dr. Dame had done everything that could be done for him in Bahrain, but there was still no relief, so he sent him up here to get an x-ray at the government hospital. They have no x-ray machine there and here there is a good one with an expert British doctor to run it. So they will see whether an operation is necessary. Then just a little after Mr. Hakken arrived, an old man and his wife arrived and a few minutes later another man and his wife came. They are all missionaries in Java with the Methodist Board. Of course there was lots to do to help these people – looking after baggage, train reservations, showing them around, so my own work was set aside. Anyway, when there are interesting people, especially as interesting as these, a person can't just go off on his own work, which can be put off, but wants to visit and talk with them. One man was especially interesting. He was nearly eighty years old but as spry as a chicken. They left on the train for Baghdad the same night, but Mr. Hakken will be with us for a week or more.

This week one of our teachers became the proud father of another baby boy, but from his behavior you wouldn't have known it. He was in school the day before and he was there also this morning as usual as if nothing had happened. But the strangest thing was that his Mrs. was in church the Sunday before, just two days before the baby was born! They seem to think nothing of it at all. This week also our school janitor got word that a new son had arrived. He is Armenian and his wife and people live in a refugee camp about twenty miles above Basrah. He usually goes home about one weekend a month. When he got this news he never even asked for leave to go home but worked faithfully to the end of the week and went home at his usual time.

March 9, 1925

Mr. Hakken is still here and may be here for some time more. He has been running a fever all week, the same kind he had in Bahrain. Dr. Dame had said it was not malaria but due to his kidney problem. The x-ray showed no stone in his kidneys, but a blood test showed that he was full of malaria – a triple case, they said. How Dr. Dame could have missed that nobody can understand. Anyway, we sent him over to the nursing home where he could get the best care and treatment, and he seems to be getting better already.

Professor Wooley, the archaeologist at Ur, was here this week to give a lecture at one of the British Clubs about his work this past winter. He had a lot of pictures of things that they had found and also a lot illustrating every phase of their work, and Mr. Van Ess offered him the use of our magic lantern, the only one in town. That meant that I had to go over in the afternoon to get the machine and screen rigged up and then run the machine during the lecture at night. It was a very interesting lecture. They have had a successful season. The things that they found this year did not date back further than the things they found last year – about 2500 to 3500 B.C. – but they have added so much to their knowledge of the life and culture and religion of the people of that time.

March 23, 1925

I am sorry I didn't write last week, but that is the first time I have missed. I may have been too late for the mail a couple times before but never a single week have I skipped altogether until last week. That's a pretty good record, so I guess I may be excused.

You see it was this way – I went up to Amarah and since there was no way of getting letters down from there to catch the mail, I didn't write. Besides, I was too



busy. A week ago last Friday we had our school graduation exercises. Three boys who finished school last year, but the exercises were put off because of the heat, were given their diplomas, and at the same time we had a farewell for Mr. Van Ess. Our spring vacation started that afternoon and I started for Amarah right after the program. I went on a native launch that goes back and forth all the time. We left here at about five o'clock and were supposed to make the trip in about twenty hours, traveling all night, but

the river was rising so there was a stronger current and we had some engine trouble so we didn't get to Amarah until Saturday at midnight.

It surely was an interesting trip up the river. I spread out my bed on top of some boxes of tea, had a parcel of eats and thermos of tea and had a great time. There were about thirty other passengers and it was a great study of life. One little Persian Moslem returning from a pilgrimage to Kerbala and Nejaf was the cock of the boat – all gave him honor. One Arab carpenter and his son, with his hand and foot powered lathe and box of tools. Three brothers who had been to Basrah on a spree. A group of Jews, men and women, going to Ezra's tomb. All packed together like sardines in a tin. Stories told in Arab fashion, mostly gestures, were going all the time. It was amusing to see the perfect unconcern with which each went according to his own inclination, unmindful of those about him. If he wished to pray, he made his ablutions, spread out his mat, and prayed where he was, even in the midst of a group of story tellers, and the story tellers, joking and laughing, went on unmindful of the prayer performed in their midst. If he was hungry, he pulled out his bag of bread, cheese and garlic and ate. If he wished to sleep, he pushed others off his blanket and slept. At night two or three together who may never have seen each other before crept under the same blanket, heads covered but feet sticking out. Several had laid in a supply of Basrah fish, and these hung in bunches from the roof of the launch and added to the general perfumery of oil, petrol, smoke and dirt. The boat also carried a cargo of scores of bags of wheat and rice.

We reached Gurna, the junction of the two rivers, at about mid-night, Ezra's tomb at eight the next morning and Kalet Salih at three in the afternoon. It had been very dry for a long time and farmers all over the country were complaining bitterly – sheep and cattle were dying by the thousands, and there wasn't any chance of a grain crop at all. But when we went up the river they had just had a nice shower of rain and the river was rising, not flooding but bringing the water into the irrigation ditches and over the land at last. Before this all the farming and tribal population had been downhearted and complaining because of the drought, but now they were happy, so in places you would see groups of them with their spades up in the air, shouting and doing their dances, or in other places they were plowing, cultivating and tending to their crops. All were in the highest spirits because this year's crop would be saved. The rain is a blessing, not only because of the much needed water but because the water carries so much silt and deposits it in a thick layer all over the land, making it fine for a big rice crop.



We expected to get to Amarah by seven, but after leaving Kalat Salih we had engine trouble so we didn't get in until midnight. Dykstra was still up waiting for me. I had a nice time with the Dykstras and with the Moerdyks, too, who are supposed to be studying the language. But so many people come to see Dr. Moerdyk with their sicknesses that he has very little time for studying. He is not supposed to be doing anything but studying, but he simply can't keep his hands off his doctoring.

Both the Dykstras and the Moerdyks have houses very nicely located on the Tigris River. The town is situated on the fork of the Tigris and the Jahala rivers and most of the town is one nice long straight street along the Tigris with a large covered



Dirk Dykstra

bazaar branching off from it and another street branching off along the Jahala.

Amarah is a great tribal center and all do their trading there. It is also in the midst of a big farming district – rice, wheat and some cotton. The best bricks in the country are made here, too. Amarah is also the chief center of the Sabeans, who are probably descendants of those mentioned in Job 1:15. They are nearly all silversmiths – inlaying designs in silver

with black antimony. Zahroon, who is the most skillful craftsman in the sect and does really wonderful work, lives in Amarah.

Dykstra was busy installing electric lighting in Moerdyk's house and I helped some with that. I went a couple times with Moerdyk to call on some of his patients, and I went over to play badminton several times at the Hartleys. He is the irrigation officer in the district.

One morning Mr. Dykstra had some business up the river and I went along, and we stopped at one of the big regulators they use in the branch rivers. Iraq certainly is a topsy-turvy land. The country is so flat that every year as the river overflows, it leaves a deposit on its banks and so the river has gradually raised itself until now it is above the level of the surrounding country and only the high banks keep the water from spreading all over. Then, too, usually branches of rivers bring water into the big river, but here they take water away from the river. They are distributaries rather than tributaries. The result of this is that the river at Baghdad is much larger than at Amarah and lower down. These branch rivers flow into smaller and smaller streams in the marshes and then come together again and enter the big river just above Basrah. Now they have regulators on these branch rivers to control the amount of water which stays in the big river, to maintain navigation, and how much flows into the marshes.



Another day all of us went in the launch down one of these branch rivers and visited one of the big shaikhs of that district. He had a tent put up in the middle of a field of barley and there we were entertained all day. A corps of about thirty men carried our dinner from the place where it was cooked, about half a mile away, to the tent, so you can imagine we had enough to eat.

I had planned to return in the launch with Mr. Dykstra, who had to go down to Kuwait again, and we expected to leave on Saturday morning, but then he got a wire telling him that the steamer for Kuwait would be leaving on Saturday afternoon. He had invited several people to dinner Friday night and couldn't get away, so we had the dinner as planned and soon after that we packed up and started for Basrah. We started at about eleven o'clock, traveled all night, and got to Basrah Saturday noon. The old launch chugged along without stopping a single moment. When we got here we found the boat wasn't sailing until Monday morning. So he left this morning and Mr. Hakken also – he seems to be alright again. The Van Esses are busy finishing up their packing and are leaving tonight.

March 29, 1925

School has started again and Mr. Moerdyk is at the wheel. Ramadhan, the month of fasting, also started this week, so that makes starting school after vacation a more difficult thing. It has also suddenly gotten warmer – the temperature was up to 105 degrees. But we are on a half day schedule, beginning at six in the morning with no school in the afternoon. That is not only because of the weather but also because of Ramadhan. Even if the boys don't fast, they are up most of the night with their family and friends and so it is impossible to keep them awake in the afternoon.

The Van Esses left last Monday evening. Our station seems a pretty small crowd now and I certainly miss them. Their house has always been as much of a home to me as any place outside of my real home could be. The Bilkerts have been busy moving over to the Van Ess house this week.

April 5, 1925

April showers bring May flowers. The saying may fit here, too, but it gets a little twisted up. Yesterday, beginning at noon, we had a bad dust storm – the whole sky was filled with dust and you couldn't see the sun at all – in fact, it was so dark we couldn't read inside without a light. Then towards five o'clock we got thunder and lightning worse than I've seen it in Basrah, and a little later it started to rain and we had a regular down-pour for a little while. It was a refreshing little rain. You should have seen the first drops that came down. They were as dirty as could be from the dust in the air. I was out when it started to rain, and the rain made spots on my clothes as if I had been splashed with mud. Rain in April is uncommon here and some say it is bad, because the date trees are in full bloom now and each tree has to be carefully pollinated by hand, and if it rains, the pollen is washed off the blossoms again.



We have already been having loads of flowers, but some of the plants were stunted by the severe cold we had earlier. The roses are just beginning to bloom. We lost some trees in the cold and some plants, like the oleanders, survived but lost branches, so they won't blossom as much this year.

April 12, 1925

Today is Easter. We are not likely to forget that out here. We have been almost mobbed by the parents of Catholic children who wanted their children excused from school from last Thursday until next Tuesday. They do things right in this country – there is nothing small about their feasts and celebrations – one or two days is not enough. But they didn't get much satisfaction from Mr. Moerdyk. He wouldn't give permission and told them there was a long list of others eagerly waiting to take their places. The Syrian, Chaldean, Armenian and all other kinds of Christians have been holding two or three services every day this week. Indirectly we have heard that the Chaldean bishop in one of his sermons this week damned us and all Protestants to the nethermost depths. Right next door to us, Father John of the Cross has a small Carmelite chapel and orphanage for Armenian children, and he has been terribly busy all morning, with early mass and bells ringing and all sorts of celebrations. Even the Church of England here has been having special services all week long. Their padre is very "high church" and has his confessionals and processions and masses and everything else. I don't see why he doesn't call himself a Catholic and be done with it. Besides this, the Jews have been having their Passover this week and the Moslems are still having their Ramadhan. It got to be almost impossible to cope with it all, so Mr. Moerdyk dismissed school on Friday and we will try to take a fresh start on Monday.

I've just come back from our Arabic service. The whole world and his wife were there. People who don't come to church twice a year were there. One of them became angry and got up and left because Mr. Moerdyk didn't pass him the communion plate. To most of them, Easter is just a time for feasting and celebration and they show no understanding of the real meaning of Easter. After church nobody stayed for Sunday School, they were all too interested in their own enjoyments for the rest of the day. Everybody was inviting everybody else and they are spending the rest of the day visiting each other and having a good time. Of course they are not all like that. Some of them are real good Christian men and women.

What do you suppose Mr. Moerdyk told me this week? He said that Mr. Potter had written as if he was expecting me to start for home this spring and he had already sent Moerdyk, who is the mission treasurer, my travel allowance. Whee!! I almost got right up to pack my grip. But he must have gotten his wires crossed, because it has always been the understanding that I would stay to the end of the school year. Besides, it would leave Mr. Moerdyk in the lurch if I went now. Moreover, Moerdyk says he refuses to give me the money for the trip home until school has closed, so I guess I am stuck.

I realize that I have been banking altogether too much on your supporting me in school next year. I didn't have any business taking that for granted, but I didn't know what else to do. It surely is going to be a problem for me, especially as I want to get a whole pile of books. In your last letter Princeton stock seems to have come up a little, especially after you talked with Heemstra. Sure, I agree with you that Princeton is fine, but there is this about it: I don't want to go to school merely for the sake of going to school. I am going to school to get something that will be of use to me and that as quickly as possible. Mr. Van Ess is a Princeton man, you know, and so I have been able to learn a little about Princeton from him, but he is advising me to go to Hartford. Princeton does offer Arabic and also Islam, but very little of it, and not so much from a missionary point of view but as a general cultural course, along with Buddhism and other religions. I don't know if they offer any courses on pedagogy. But at Hartford they give special courses in missionary education with special attention to the different problems of each field. And Professor MacDonald of Hartford is an authority on Islam and teaches it from a missionary point of view. So there you are. Don't think I have given up on Princeton altogether. I've sent off for a Princeton catalogue and other information and maybe that will show me something new.

April 19, 1925

Well, only five days more of Ramadhan and then we can get a fresh start on things. I should think these fasters have had a comparatively easy time this year, because it hasn't been really hot at all. Today it is almost cold, and last night it rained so much that the ground was wet all day today, very unusual for April. But it made the grass and trees look fresh. We're overwhelmed with sweet peas. Everybody has vases and bottles and anything else that will hold them full of sweet peas. We've got roses, American beauties and ramblers, hollyhocks and corn flowers. Oleanders are trying their best but are still suffering from the frost. Pomegranates are in full blossom. They have a bright red wax-like sort of flower, and these among the deep green of the leaves makes the tree look like a Christmas decoration. We have quite some grape vines, too, and they are going wild this year, climbing all over the space between the date palms. Yes, our garden looks pretty nice now.

Last Thursday Mike Schnurman and a friend of his from the Baptist mission in India came thru on their way to America. You remember Mike came out on the same boat I did. They came in the morning and left again in the evening by train for Baghdad. They were going to stop off at Ur. His mission lately got sort of worked up about work among the Moslems – that is, Zwemer stirred them up about it last year. They have a good many Moslems in their area – and now they want him to go home and prepare for Moslem work, and it is his intention now to do that. He doesn't know yet where he is going to school. His plans are no more fixed than mine. He said he had thought of Hartford but is more inclined to go to McCormick in Chicago. I don't see that he will get much on Islamics there. He says he is not going to Holland or Princeton either.

April 26, 1925

We had an expedition to Ur this week. Major Yates invited us to go with him and arranged for us to leave on the eleven o'clock train on Thursday. He had his own reserved car with kitchenette and cook on board and so we all used it as a dining and parlor car. He had also switched a special two compartment coach to the train for us, so we traveled like royalty. Ruth and Rachel Jackson and I went. The Bilkerts were also going but Mrs. B. wasn't well and Margaret came down with fever, so they didn't go. And Mr. Moerdyk couldn't go because he got guests from Bahrain at the last minute. After the train started we had tea in the Major's car before turning in and the next morning we had breakfast there, too. We got to Ur



Junction at 8:30 in the morning. The ruins of Ur are about two miles from the station, and since walking in the spongy soil was difficult, the Major got a trolley, which took us to a point nearer to the mound. The whole mound covering the area of the old city is probably two or three miles around, but the main part of it, the sacred enclosure, bazaars, etc. comprise only a small part of it on one side.

During the past three years, Professor Leonard Wooley has been excavating there for the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania. He lives in a small house right among the ruins built of old Ur bricks. He has been making some very good finds, dating back to two or three thousand years B.C. The main part of the ruins is the ziggurat, a large square structure built in stages, about seventy-five feet high with a temple for the moon god on the top. Most of the large ancient cities of Mesopotamia had ziggurats – the Tower of Babel probably was one – and they represented God's mountain. It is thought that the Sumerian people were originally from the mountains in the north and the ziggurat was their attempt to create a mountain on the level plains where they could worship their mountain deities. The ziggurat at Ur is probably the largest and best preserved, but it has eroded and there is nothing left of the temple on top. There are other temples scattered around, as well as other large buildings and storage areas connected to them. In one of the rooms last year hundreds of gold beads and pieces of jewelry were found. South of the ziggurat were the bazaars and residence districts, where houses and shops have been excavated. All thru the ruins were all kinds of records on clay tablets in cuneiform, telling of every phase of life of the people of those days. School records were found showing that pupils had to learn multiplication tables 60 X 60. And they have found



records of contracts, marriage certificates, codes of law, and all sorts of things. It surely is interesting.

We spent nearly four hours among the ruins and then went back to the station where the Major had ordered a big lunch in the Railway guest house. We loafed there until three o'clock when the Major took the train back to Baghdad. The Jacksons and I had to wait until 6:30 when our "private" car was again hitched to a train for Basrah. We got back to Basrah Saturday morning at 5:30. We have to thank Major Yates for a wonderful time and the chance to see Ur.

Ramadhan is over again. The feast following Ramadhan began last Friday, so we had no school, and today is the last day of the feast. They have the bigger part of their celebration in an open space right next to our compound, and we have the



pleasure of listening to all the noise, beating of drums and creaking of the old wooden hand powered merry-go-rounds and swings and the whole works. It is a regular county fair and more so – games of chance, balloon vendors, vendors of many colored poisonous looking drinks and candies. People save up during the whole year so they will have more to spend during the feast. They all come out in new clothes. Women who otherwise hardly ever come out on the street go about now without even a veil. Thousands crowd into that small space. They believe in "early to bed and early to rise." This morning at sunrise they were already at it again. Last night at seven o'clock already everything was quiet. And they keep on going right thru the heat of the day, and it was hot, too, and dusty! But that makes it all the merrier.

May 3, 1925

I was glad to get two letters from you this week, including one which you mailed April 13th. It came in just three weeks. By the way, perhaps I don't need to tell you, but you don't have to send any more letters than which will get here before about the tenth of July.

I don't know yet how I'll take my trip home, that is I haven't got anyone yet to go with me. Not that I can't go alone, but it would be so much more pleasant and interesting to have some company. I've been writing a young fellow in Tehran. He is leaving about the middle of June but wants to see Palestine before going on to Europe, so I may catch up with him some place yet. My plan is to go from here to Beirut, like Mr. Moerdyk and I did last summer, then by steamer which stops at various Mediterranean ports – Cyprus, Smyrna, Constantinople, Athens, Malta, Naples – then by train to Rome, Florence, thru Switzerland to Holland, then to London for the British Empire Exhibition, then New York, Chicago, and Pella. How is that? You had better get the car tuned up!

Mrs. Bilkert hasn't been well this week, not severely, but the doctor ordered her to stay quietly in bed for a few days. The rest of us are healthy as can be. Miss Kellien, who has otherwise been full of fever hasn't been sick a day this spring. They had a couple of days vacation at the Girls School last week, so she decided to take a few days extra and go up to Baghdad to visit Mrs. Thoms. Mrs. Thoms belongs to our mission but since she came back from furlough last winter we've loaned her to the new United Mission to help start school work in Baghdad. She has been having trouble getting started there – a lot of government red tape – and was kind of discouraged, so Miss Kellien jumped up and went to visit her.

I bet this letter sounds kind of disjointed – there have been a bunch of boys in the room, looking at pictures and papers and making a racket while I am trying to write – while at the same time there is very little to write about. School is going along fine – we've got two hundred on the roll now after Ramadhan.

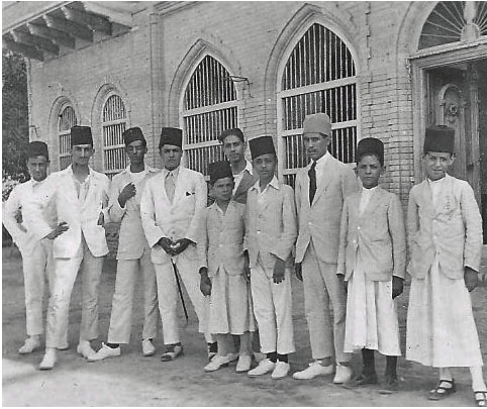
May 17, 1925

I don't remember how much I have told you about Miss Strang. She was stationed in Kuwait and became very sick and the doctors there didn't know what they could do for her, so they sent her to India to recuperate. When she got a little better, she said she wanted to return to Kuwait, but the doctors insisted that she could not come back until she had had a thorough physical exam and in any case she should not come back until after the hot weather season. She, however, said she had received visions that she should go back to Arabia immediately, but she would not submit to an examination because of her belief in faith healing. The doctors, tho, stuck firmly to what they had said. And now, what do you suppose – here she comes rolling into Basrah this week altogether without warning. She says she has resigned from the mission and wants to stay here in Basrah just temporarily, but is not going home. That's all she will say, but it seems she is intending to start work independently.⁶² There are a few more people like that around here, one in Zubair – resigned from the mission for some reason years ago but refuses to leave these parts. What can you do with people like that? They don't belong to the mission and the mission isn't responsible for them – still they are alone and fellow citizens and former colleagues and we can't shift responsibility for them altogether. They know we won't let them starve, and they take advantage of that and just stay.

I guess you understand that it is better for you not to circulate this Miss Strang business too much. Such things broadcast at home don't do the mission any good. This mission stands out for the fact that we all work together and never have any internal trouble among members of the mission. It is only when a crank like this case gets in that the cog slips a little, but even then – like a Ford – take out the bad part and the thing runs along as slick as ever without it.

⁶² Grace Strang continued her missionary service in Iraq with the United Mission of Mesopotamia.

Yesterday all of us teachers and Mr. Bilkert were invited to dinner at a place about eight miles down the river with a man who has been in exile from Iraq for several years and has only recently come back. He was quite a big character in politics



around here before and during the War, and after the War the British High Commissioner in Iraq didn't trust him, and was a little afraid of him, and had him exiled on a very flimsy excuse. King Faisal was also afraid of him and wouldn't let him come back until he promised to stay out of politics. His family – a large family, four wives and a host of retainers – were in Basrah all the time he was away and last year we had six of his sons in school. This year three went to Beirut and three are with us still. We surely had a big feed – the most delicious Arab food I have ever

*tasted. He is quite a character, and talk – he talked a blue streak all the time we were there, even tho he was supposed to be having some fever.*⁶³

May 31, 1925

I've just come back from our Arabic service where we sang as our closing hymn "John Brown's Body" – at least that tune. Mrs. Bilkert was at the organ and I don't believe she realized what the tune was until she had played about a score, and then she started to look queer, and then she glanced at me doing my best to suppress the giggles and she burst out with a snort. Mr. Bilkert was in the pulpit and hadn't realized what the tune was either, and he got as red as a beet. But of course the rest of the people in the congregation didn't think it was anything but a hymn tune and they sang with vim and seriousness.

By this time you will be having Commencement over there. We still have five more weeks of school. I don't know exactly when we will close. There is a Moslem feast of four days beginning about the third of July and we will have to close for that as it is one of their most important, the Hejira, or the beginning of the pilgrimage rites in Mecca. We haven't had to deal with that other years because, you see, their year is eleven days shorter than ours and so it works back that much every year. Last year it happened just at the close of school. Now if we close school before the feast, it will make a short school year, but if we start up again after the feast and go for two weeks, it will be very late. You can guess what I'd do if I had to make the decision.

June 7, 1925

We had a little excitement here this week. We got robbed – or rather our "dobe" got robbed of our laundry. Dobees are our Indian washermen. Well, he came

⁶³ This was Sayyid Talib Pasha, the Naqib of Basrah. See page 74.

back the morning that he usually brings back our clothes with a terrible tale of woe, that he had been robbed, etc. We gave him a letter to the police and got them busy working on it, and we ran around some ourselves, but so far nothing has turned up. The police believe that the dobees themselves are at the bottom of it. That dobee bunch isn't above doing a thing like that if they think they can get away with it. If we don't get the clothes back we may be able to make the dobees pay for them, but just now that doesn't give us any clothes to our backs and we are all pretty short of clothes now. I didn't want to get anything more before going home. The Jackson girls are pretty badly off. They lost seven dresses between them and don't have any to spare since they were going to lay in a new supply in India this summer. I lost three suits of whites and a nice shirt that Crissy sent me last Christmas and some other things. Mr. Moerdyk didn't lose anything and that's what makes it look funny, because he owed the dobee for about three months work while the rest of us had just paid him off. A couple of the boarding school boys lost several suits, too. I've got several extra pants and Mr. Bilkert has offered to let me use a couple of his extra coats, so I can get along. Rachel Jackson saw a man walking along the street with a barrel on his back and she said, "Here comes the dress I will have to be wearing soon."

There surely isn't much news around here lately. School is going along fine. There has been quite an argument in the papers lately, articles attacking all foreigners and replies to those articles. Our schools especially were attacked. But we keep out of it altogether – we let others do the arguing – and it doesn't seem to hurt us much. More students are registering all along. We've got over two hundred on the roll now, more than we have ever had.

June 14, 1925

Well, a month from now I will be well on my way home. The close of school has now been set for July 10. What do you mean by saying that that you hope I won't start out alone? Suppose there is no one to travel with – must I stay here then? Anyway, I am still hoping to catch up with this fellow from Tehran. I'll promise this much: If I don't get anyone to travel with, I'll come home more directly, not stop off at so many places. But then what do you want me to do if you are afraid to have me wire when I get to New York – just let you know nothing until I walk in on you at breakfast and tell you I've arrived? If you don't hear from me you will be even more worried. But you will be getting my letters from all along the way, at least as far as England, and crossing the Atlantic there is not much danger of being kidnapped or "accidented" so there is nothing to worry about.

I guess I'll come home and take a course in medicine. I've become a regular clinic doctor here. It seems these boys don't know how to take care of themselves. They eat all sorts of indigestible stuff and pretty soon they get all tied up in their bowels. The boarding school boys who go home over weekends get stuffed and pampered with all sorts of stuff, and when they come back here they come to me with their complaints. I keep a stock of quinine and aspirin and Epsom salts on hand all the time – salts seem to be the favorite thing around here. But last week I bought a big bottle

of castor oil and that seems to do the trick. And the thing about that is the boys don't mind taking it at all, they take it as if it were maple syrup. I usually make a "sandwich" – that is, a drop of castor oil in a little orange or lemon juice in a cup. You see we can get orange or lemon juice here in bottles, all prepared, and you just put a little of it in a glass of water and you have a fine drink. The other day I gave a little fellow a "sandwich" and told him to drink it down fast, but he started sipping it as if it were the best thing he had ever tasted.

June 21, 1925

We've had a busy weekend and a big exodus. Mr. Dykstra brought Dr. and Mrs. Moerdyk down from Amarah last Thursday in the launch and the Moerdyks and the two Jacksons left for their vacation in India on Saturday, so there was lots to do to help them get away. Miss Kellien was supposed to go also, but she backed down at the last moment, said she didn't need a vacation and wouldn't go in spite of the fact that everybody urged her to go. She is in good health now, but she is subject to fevers and should not wear herself down. Mr. Moerdyk bawled her out, but she is a confirmed old maid and nothing on earth can change her mind when she is set on something.

June 28, 1925

I'm getting impatient with writing letters. Getting it done every week whether there is anything to write about or not – and there is not much to write about now. Well, I won't have to write so many more times. Soon I will tell you the news.

About the only thing we talk about here lately is what is to become of our mission work. This mission is nearly twenty thousand dollars in the hole and the Board isn't doing anything or allowing anybody else to do anything to make it up, but instead they say that the appropriations will have to be cut next year. You see the Arabian Mission was organized separately from the General Board – that is separate from the missions in India, Japan, etc., and so it has a separate treasury. All the money that the churches send in now goes to the general fund unless it is specifically earmarked for the Arabian Mission, and so since most of the churches don't know that it is not all one, the Arabian Mission gets the short end of the deal. Furthermore, when any of our people are home on furlough, the Board sends them out on speaking tours to arouse interest and raise money, but the Board will not use that money for our mission but puts it in the general fund and gives our mission only a small percentage of it. Then, too, the Board thinks we are an expensive mission, that we spend more than is necessary. We keep asking for more money and they keep saying we have had enough. It's almost like the man who said his wife was such a terrible spendthrift, she was forever asking for money. Someone asked him how much he gave her, and he said, "Oh, I never give her anything." If the Board would realize how we have to squeeze every cent before we let it go, but they don't. They won't believe that our school is running into debt this year and also nearly every other department of our mission work. Instead they keep on sending out new missionaries – a new couple is coming out next year. They expect us to expand and open

up new work, all without an increase in appropriations, rather with a large cut in appropriations. The Board has been planning for a number of years to unite our mission with the General Board and we on the field have been urging that, but they are slow about it. Now they say it can't be done because we are so deeply in debt. So what to do?!

Well, it's regular summer weather, and it is hot and busy and everything else is per usual, and I guess you've noticed from the tone of my letter that I am feeling sort of contrary, or down in the mouth, or something – mentally. Physically I've never felt better. But I'll close before I load any more pessimism on you.

July 5, 1925

Yesterday was the Fourth of July. I wonder what you all did to celebrate. Did you go to the river for a family picnic again? I celebrated by starting to pack my trunk, or at least going over my things to see what I will take along. I am getting excited already about starting – a week from tomorrow it will be.

We had two days of no school this week because of the feast which I have written you about. It is supposed to be the beginning of the Hejira, or pilgrimage rites and ceremonies in Mecca. One would think people would make this a season of prayer and special religious services – well, they do have special prayers in the mosques – but for most people it is just a big party. The whole population was out again in the brightest colors, with drums going on all the time, and singing and dancing. The screeches of the Ferris wheels, see-saws and swings fill the air. Gambling and games of chance do a rushing business. All part of the celebration. Well, it is over and tomorrow we begin the last week of school.

Mr. Van Ess wrote that he was dickering with a fellow from Rutgers to come out here next year. I hope he finds somebody to take my place. Mr. Moerdyk will be in a nice mess if no one comes. One of the other teachers is leaving, too, to go to Beirut and attend school there. We will go together as far as Beirut. So Moerdyk will have to find another teacher in his place, too.

From the Chronicle, I see that things are humming in the Pella churches. Third Church decided by a good vote to introduce English services. How much will that be – two services? You never told me that Walcotten had died. You just wrote that some of the First Church Seceders had gone over to Second Church since Walcotten's death, so I concluded that he must have died some time ago. But, never mind, soon after you get this letter I will be there myself to get the news first hand, and you won't have to write me about it.

July 12, 1925

Well, I'm all set to start – an hour more of packing and I'll be ready. I got my banking done yesterday. My! I feel rich. Mr. Moerdyk gave me a bigger check last

week than I've ever had before in my life – 2500 Rupees! – my last two months' salary and travel money. No wonder missionaries get such small salaries – the expense of sending them to the field or sending them back is nearly equal to a year's salary. I don't expect to use all Mr. Moerdyk gave me, but they always give you a liberal amount for emergencies and all that is not used must be refunded. Also, I got a half fare rate on the railway to Baghdad fixed up because, you see, I am in Education!

Friday was the last day of school. We had class right thru the last period and had no closing exercises except a few speeches of farewell and thanks, etc. etc. by some of the boys and teachers. I got my share of it, altho I don't know what it was all about, because it was in Arabic. They even asked me, in Arabic, to say a few words – so that is a poor reflection on the English I have taught them.

I had a letter from Potter this week and Mr. Moerdyk had one from Van Ess, saying that they now have a young fellow from Rutgers as a good prospect for coming out to take my place. The boys are continually asking me who is coming in my place. They say they won't let me go until someone else is here. They were here yesterday most of the time while I was packing and trailed me wherever I went. Some of them have been here again today.

Well, I am too excited to do any more writing. I'll see you all soon after you get this. Tomorrow night I leave Basrah. One of the teachers is going with me as far as Beirut, so that will be good company.

Your loving son and brother,

George



Oliver Butler

Mahalas on the Shatt el Arab



Bahrain Photographer

The Arabian Mission Annual Meeting, Bahrain 1929

Back Row: Rachel Jackson, Elizabeth Dame, Victoria Storm, Dorothy Van Ess, Josephine Van Peursem, Dr. Rottschäfer,* Elda Hakken, Regina Harrison, Bessie Mylrea, Christine Gosselink, Everdene De Jong, Gertrude Pennings, Edwin Calverly, Mary Tiffany, Ester Barney, Gerrit Van Peursem, Cornelia Dalenberg, Ruth Jackson

Second Row: Gerrit Pennings, John Van Ess, Fanny Lutton, Dr. Van Keersen,* Miss Dodd,* Duke Potter,* George Hulst,* Fred Barney, Harold Storm, Sarah Hosmon, Minnie Dykstra

Front Row: George Gosselink, Gary De Jong, Paul Harrison, Bern Hakken, Stanley Mylrea, Louis Dame, Dirk Dykstra

*Visitors from the Board of Foreign Missions and Arcot Mission in India

Epilogue

In 1929, Dad and Mother were appointed as missionaries to the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church of America. They left that fall and arrived in time to attend Annual Meeting in Bahrain. They were sent to Basrah for two years of language study, following which Dad was assigned again to the Basrah Boys School, where he taught English and Bible. He became Principal of the school in 1949 when John Van Ess retired. Mother worked with Dorothy Van Ess with young girls from poorer families who could not go to school, offering classes in literacy, sewing, health and child care. After 37 years of service, they retired in 1966, the year the Mission celebrated its Diamond Jubilee.

Though it was still a time of some hope and optimism, there were already signs of the hard times to come. In 1969, the Iraqi government seized the schools in Basrah and expelled all foreign missionaries in Iraq. It had already expropriated the hospital in Amarah ten years earlier. Over the next two decades, the Mission itself decided to close most of its institutions in the Gulf stations. The Mission would not survive to celebrate its Centenary.

The history of the Arabian Mission is a remarkable story of service and ministry. While it was never able to win many converts or establish a self-sustaining indigenous church, over the years it gained a wide acceptance throughout the area and won the respect and friendship of kings and shaikhs, of merchants and camel drivers and all the many people who had contact with it. The Reformed Church of America still supports some missionaries in the area, but the Arabian Mission essentially ceased to exist by the early 1980s, after the discovery of oil brought new wealth to that part of the world and local governments took on the responsibility of providing education and medical services for their people. Still, the reluctance of the ruling powers of Kuwait, Bahrain and Muscat to accept the closing of the mission hospitals, even after they had established their own facilities, is a testament to the value they placed on the presence of the missionaries. Indeed the American Mission Hospital in Bahrain was not closed but continues to operate under the sponsorship and with the support of the Emir of Bahrain.

It is difficult to assess the contribution which the Arabian Mission made to later developments in that part of the world, though its influence, especially in the early days, can not be denied. But perhaps that is not the point. Lewis Scudder has written, "In the end, the achievement of the Arabian Mission was one and one only: the demonstration of faithfulness in service to a call divinely given." (*The Arabian Mission Story*, p. 431) Beyond that, the missionaries themselves would probably have said in typically Arab fashion, with typically Arab literalism, "Only God knows." And they were content with that.



Oliver Butler

Ashar Creek

Appendix A: Letters from Mission Colleagues

1. From Bernard Hakken to Jennie Gosselink

Bombay, India
September 21, 1922

My dear Mrs. Gosselink:

We have completed another portion of our journey and so I thought I had better write you again to let you know how George is getting along. I am glad to say that he is getting along about as well as anybody could possibly get along and he seems to be enjoying the trip immensely. As far as I know, he has never lost his cheerful disposition for one minute and has been one of the finest of traveling companions.

We were particularly fortunate in the fact that we had such a fine man as Rev. Moerdyk to look out for us and to show us how to do things. I suppose that George has written and told you how fine he has been. We were also fortunate in the weather conditions. At no time was there a storm of any kind all the way which made it very fine for us.

We leave here tomorrow on the last part of our journey together because George will stay in Busrah while we undoubtedly will be sent to Bahrain for our language study. I suppose that we won't see him for two years or possibly only one, but I am sure that he will get along in fine shape, because he is the kind of man that will always be liked wherever he goes because of his disposition, character and ability. It has been a real pleasure for us to know him and to associate with him. It has also been a pleasure to write you, and if at any time in the future you may want any information I can give or I can be of assistance to you in any way, I will be glad to do so.

Very sincerely yours,

Bernard D. Hakken

2. From Dorothy Van Ess to Jennie Gosselink

Basrah, Mesopotamia
June 11, 1924

Dear Mrs. Gosselink,

I meant to write you a long time before this, to tell you how much my husband and I appreciated the letter which you and Mr. Gosselink sent us last

December. We almost feel as though we know you all, for it seems as though George is a member of our family. We are looking forward to seeing and knowing you all when we come to America next year.

We have become as attached to George as though he were really our own young brother (I am not quite old enough to claim him as a son!). It has been the greatest possible pleasure to have him in our home. My mother has grown so fond of him this winter too, and he has done a great many thoughtful things for her. As for John and Alice, they feel that they own "Uncle George," body and soul! They were delighted with the Easter cards which Nina sent them and they send her their best thanks.

You said in your letter that you wondered if George was always as optimistic as his letters sound. I can tell you that he always seems so to us! I have never seen a person with so few "ups and downs" – it is all "up" with him. There has certainly been a blessing on his work in the school, which is no doubt one reason for his being contented. The school boys all think the world of him, and he has lifted such a load from my husband's shoulders. He has thrived on Arab food in the boarding school, and I really think he looks much healthier than when he first came. I wish you could see what snug quarters he and Mr. Moerdyk have, each with their own suite of rooms! It is very sociable for them to be there together – although I must say George always seemed perfectly happy even when he was alone with the boys. We think that he has a wonderful disposition. I know, being a mother, that you will be glad to know that your boy is appreciated.

I hope that he told you what delicious bacon sandwiches we had for our "station" Sunday night supper, from that last "home cured" which came from Pella – we all sent a note of thanks! We have very pleasant times here, and are looking forward now to another moonlight picnic on the river before our family leaves for Persia. Our last such picnic was a celebration for George's birthday, though not on the very day.

We are leaving on the 20th for our vacation in the Persian mountains – a little early, as my husband is rather tired and run down. George and Mr. Moerdyk are anticipating a fine time in the Lebanon this summer.

Will you please give our very best regards to all your family – including the grandfather and grandmother, of course. You may always rest assured that George has his own "folks" in Arabia. With all good wishes,

Yours very sincerely,

Dorothy Van Ess

3. From Dirk and Minnie Dykstra to George Gosselink

*146 Tigris Front
Amara, Iraq
July 14, 1925*

Dear Mr. Gosselink,

Here's wishing you a safe, pleasant and interesting trip to the U.S.A. It has been ever so nice to have you with us these three years and we are looking forward to the future with gladness when we can welcome you once more to the field and to our circle. Let us hear from you occasionally so we can keep in touch with you. Till we meet again. Harmoodee sends salaams "wajid" and "come back."

Sincerely yours,

Minnie W. Dykstra

*Amara
July 15, 1925*

Dear George:

This date tells me that you will soon be leaving us for the U.S.A. and I am hastening to shake hands with you by means of this letter, and also to ask you for your address at home so that we can put some of our "valuable time" in writing you a letter. Trust you will have a good trip all the way, and will find the folks at home in the best of health.

I am sorry that I had to leave you so unceremoniously at that time and that I burdened you with some of my things left behind. Still, in the years to come it will be a pleasanter thought that I left some of my things than if I had taken some of your things with me. So after all, it might have been worse.

Our latch string is always out, and we shall be glad to put you up in Amara till you can find a home to live in, and also be glad to get it for you and have it fixed up, so be sure to let us know what it is you want and when you want it, and Presto, it will be ready.

Sincerely yours,

D. Dykstra

Appendix B: George Gosselink's Recollections

The following remarks, titled "Recollections", are undated but were probably written by Dad in the late 1970s for presentation at a reunion gathering of former members of the Arabian Mission.

Christina and I were fortunate in being sort of "in-between" members of the Arabian Mission. We were personally acquainted with and colleagues of the pioneers, Dr. Samuel Zwemer and James Cantine during their final years on the field. We also knew the Barneys, Jim Moerdyk, Fanny Lutton, the Van Esses, the Dykstras, the Mylreas, and the other who followed soon after.

I went out in 1922 as the first "short termmer" to the Basrah Boys School and Christina and I went out together in 1929 as career missionaries. It was soon after that that the new generation of missionaries started coming out and we had a wonderful fellowship in the work with them. During all this time we had a fine relationship with members and officers of the Board in New York, Chamberlain, Potter, Schafer, Luben, Buteyn and more. When we retired from active service in 1966, a new generation of missionaries had begun coming out to the field whom we never learned to know as intimately. At the same time there were changes in the structure of the Board and the management of the mission. But the purpose of the Church and its mission work was still the same – to share the message of the Gospel with people all over the world who needed it so much.

Most of my career service was with the Basrah Boys School, at first as a teacher and later as principal and teacher. I had the great privilege of teaching Bible classes in the school to all the students, whether Christian, Jew or Muslim. I always tried to do that in a positive way, without debate or argument. Much of what we did in class was memory work, the 23rd Psalm, the Beatitudes and other portions. I was always amazed at the way the Muslim students seemed to have an answer to every claim of the Christian faith, and it was difficult to keep away from argument. But there was one thing for which they did not have an answer. I could testify to my faith in the living Lord and Savior, that he died as a sacrifice for my sin and the sins of all who would accept Him as Savior, that he rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, but even so was always present with me by his spirit, even there in the classroom.

The climax of my service came near the end of my career on the mission field. We had long been agitating for new school facilities. Our old buildings were beyond repair. We finally got the approval and appropriations for a new school building, and this was constructed in 1964-65. It was a beautiful plant and it was dedicated with three days of observances. The first day we invited all the officials of the area: the governor of the province, the mayor of the city, the director of education, and the great and near-great of the city. The governor cut the ribbon and declared the plant officially open. The second day we invited representatives of the Christian churches of the city: the ancient Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches. They had always been Christian, from early

apostolic times. They were mostly of Armenian and Assyrian backgrounds, many originally from eastern Turkey. They had never surrendered to the Muslim invaders but had preferred to pay tribute rather than give up their Christian faith. Some had become Protestants through the mission efforts of the American Board in Turkey. Around the end of the First World War these Christians had been subjected to very severe persecution and assassination by the Turkish army and many had fled as refugees to Syria and Iraq and established their churches there. Representatives of these groups came to our dedication service. For the third day we invited all the former students we could contact. It was an informal get-together. Most of them sat around talking and recalling former days in school, tricks they had played on teachers and other students, and that sort of thing. Two groups were rather excitedly talking together, and what do you suppose they were doing? They were vying with each other as to who could recall the greater number of Bible passages they had memorized in school, some as long as twenty-five years ago. Friends had often asked why we continued to work in Arabia when there was so little favorable response to the Christian message. Our answer always was that we believed that that was where God was calling us, and if we remained faithful we could leave the results in His hands. That day, hearing these boys repeat those passages of Scripture, I thought that if there were nothing else I had been able to do in Basrah over the years, this was something that would stay with them now, and prayerfully, for eternity.

Christina's work was mainly with the women and girls. She had the "Tuesday" girls, the "Wednesday" girls, and the "Thursday" girls, and the groups were known as clubs. These girls did not otherwise go to school. They had to stay home to help with the housework and take care of younger brothers and sisters. After all, why educate girls? But they were able to come to the Mission one forenoon a week for playground activities, Bible lessons, singing, health lessons and sewing. Afternoons Christina often went to call at these girls' homes to visit their mothers. The girls, according to Arab custom, felt that they had to provide some kind of refreshment for their guest, perhaps a head of lettuce or a bunch of radishes or a cucumber. But they had been taught that cleanliness was important and so they took the lettuce down to the irrigation canal and gave it a good dousing before serving it to Christina. Now this was an all purpose canal. It was where they washed their clothes and dishes but it also served as their toilet. Christina says that often as she was returning home she was sure that she was coming down with dysentery or cholera or some other dread disease. But she dared not refuse their hospitality. And the Good Lord was very good to us and kept us in comparatively good health as long as we were there.

One afternoon a week Christina had a prayer meeting for the mothers of these girls. We had a very dear Christian friend named Khatoon, who was blind, but she had learned to read Braille in both English and Arabic. One year we sent for a complete Bible in Braille for her. Our postman used to come around on a bicycle to deliver our mail. But one day he stopped to say that there was a big batch of parcels at the post office which he would not be able to deliver on his bicycle and asked that I come and get them with my car. They were the Braille Bible, rather a bulky matter, and they filled the whole back seat

of the car. We gave them to Khatoon, and she read through the whole Braille Bible at least twenty times in as many years. We also subscribed for the Sunday School Times and one or two other magazines in Braille for Khatoon. She often found interesting articles in these magazines and she would set them aside to read again sometime. But she said that when she got back to them later she found them old and stale and she wondered what she had ever seen in them in the first place. But that was never true of the Bible. As often as she read it she found it fresh and learned something new from it. Christina sometimes asked Khatoon to come to lead the prayer meeting for the women, and she read to them from her Braille Bible with her fingers. This amazed the women who were all illiterate. They said, "We have eyes but we cannot read. This woman has no eyes, but she can read."

Since our retirement it is not often that we are able to hear from these our former friends in Iraq. But we continue to pray for them. The seed of the Gospel has been sown in the hearts and lives of both the boys in our school and the women and girls of Christina's groups. Our constant prayer is that that seed may still grow and produce fruit for His Kingdom in the land where we served so long.

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