

processions of that last glorious Sunday with heavy hearts and a sense of impending parting from a dear person. The sadness of farewell filled them with a quiet grief, for none can easily leave that hallowed spot without shrinking. For in and about the Grotto one senses the almost physical presence of Our Lord and His Holy Mother, and whilst sunning in their gracious presence one is free from the distractions and worries of this world. No one sees a newspaper, nor hears the wireless, so no one knew anything about the General Election, nor railway strikes, nor other unpleasant happenings.

But alas, at the ungracious hour of 5.30 a.m. on Monday, May 23rd, the pilgrims were back again at Lourdes Station. The sick pilgrims, up since 3 a.m., though not cured, were happy and greatly consoled, and the thought of twenty-eight hours of travel to Victoria could not depress nor sadden them. Many were hopeful of returning to Lourdes with the National Pilgrimage of 1956! They sang the Lourdes Hymn again as their train passed the Grotto, but their voices were husky with unshed tears, and they couldn't make the high notes, nor sing with the gay abandon they found at the Grotto. Later, as they got away from the Pyrenees, and the sadness of their farewell, the pilgrims settled down to the business of visiting the sick in the ambulance coaches, and of getting home again.

Yes, Lourdes is definitely a sacred spot on earth, and God willing, there will be a big English Pilgrimage there again in May, 1956.

Notes—

1. The Catholic Nurses' Guild of Great Britain gave an inscribed dinner trolley to the Azibe (hospital) at Lourdes. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster blessed it during the National Pilgrimage and it was put into immediate use.

2. Whilst the English Pilgrimage was in Lourdes, the Austrians came in thanksgiving for their liberation. They carried in procession a huge candle to the Grotto, bearing the inscription, "Gratia, 15th May, 1955," for their liberation.

G. M. H.

A Girl Four Thousand Years Old. . .

By Jean V. Manevy.

Public Information Division, World Health Organization.

An incident in the daily life of the Leader of a World Health Organization Malaria Control Team in Iraq.

IT WAS BECAUSE DR. LUIGI MARA had a bone to pick with Sheik Salam that we discovered the "Necropolis of Dolan," which is about four to five thousand years old or more.

Dr. Mara said to me:

"Sheik Salam has hidden all the children of Dolan. Let's go and talk to him. . . ."

Warned of our approach by the mysterious news transmitters which exist in countries without telephones, Sheik Salam awaited us, dressed all in white, before the entrance to his village.

He invited us to lunch—a meal taken in his summer hut which, in our honour, was spread with carpets and adorned with cushions. His aides, armed to the teeth with daggers and revolvers, their chests wrapped round with cartridge belts, gave orders to the servants who handed round enormous copper dishes full of boiled meat (chicken, turkey, mutton); white, firm rice cooked exactly right, spiced vegetables, exotic fruit, and honey still in the comb.

There was a scorching mid-day sun, but the drinking water was cool although it did nothing to attenuate the aroma of turpentine of the native "arrak." It came straight from the stream in which the vegetables had been washed and from which the water in which they were cooked had also been drawn. Ducks and children refresh themselves in the same stream; the women wash clothes in it and the men use it for their ablutions in preparation for prayer. At the end of the meal the servants poured a thin stream of water over our

fingers and offered a white cloth. Some dogs, an old man and a child watched our leavings hopefully.

The Dolan "fellahin" were taking a siesta inside the few houses of the village, made of dried mud and covered with leaves. A grey donkey was looking for green foliage on the roof of a house and pulling out anything he fancied.

After some smiling excuses accompanied by much gesticulation, the Sheik confessed that he had, in fact, hidden the children but that was because he was not certain whether Dr. Mara's team had not come to Dolan to impose taxes or to take a census of males for military service.

"Now that I know you are here because of malaria, you can see everyone."

"Malaria" was the only word of Sheik Salam's speech that I understood; he spoke Kurdish and one of his men translated into Arabic for the benefit of one of Dr. Mara's men who, in turn, interpreted to us in English. This was a lengthy proceeding, but it was not the only reason why the meal lasted several hours.

We were, in fact, in a part of the world, on the borders of Iraq and Iran, where time seems to have less meaning than elsewhere. We talked, and talking takes time if people are to be persuaded.

Sheik Salam gave his views on international politics as far as he knew them. Then Dr. Mara started on his favourite subject—malaria. It is a subject he knows well, being Leader of a W.H.O. Team which, during the past 12 months, had protected 200,000 people from this scourge—Kurds living in about 1,000 villages in the province of Sulaymaniah, where the Government of Iraq had given Dr. Mara a free hand. During the present year he aims to protect a further 300,000 people.

The Sheik did not seem unduly worried about malaria.

"We have always had it. . . ." he said.

Dr. Mara finally convinced him by the following argument:

"You have 200 workers in your village?"

"Yes."

"You think you have, but you haven't. And I will explain why. Your 200 fellahin all have malaria. They are incapable of working six days every month, that is, 1,200 man-working days are lost every month, and 14,000 every year, which equals the work of 40 men. Therefore, although you think you have 200 men to cultivate your land, you really have only 160."

After all this had been translated, digested and absorbed by all the guests, there was a long and impressive silence.

"And was it always like that?" asked Sheik Salam.

"Always," replied Dr. Mara.

Then he recalled the history of the Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian empires whose splendour had aroused the envy of their neighbours, so that eventually they were invaded. With the invaders came disease; the country was depopulated and what had been an earthly paradise was transformed into desert. Dr. Mara recalled that Alexander the Great had also died of malarial fever in Babylon after vanquishing Darius in battle—at no great distance from where we then were.

It was at this point that Sheik Salam asked:

"Would you like to see our old tombs?"

And so we discovered the "Necropolis of Dolan." Following the Sheik and his aides, we climbed the "tell" which dominates the village. The ground was red with pottery shards which would have made the mouth of the most experienced archaeologist water.

The Sheik and his suite kicked the shards about with their bare feet—they were not interested in them: it was tombs they wanted to show us.

"Here they are."

First with our bare hands and then with daggers borrowed from the Sheik's men, and finally with a curious triangular spade, we gently, carefully unearthed three clay funeral urns about a yard wide and decorated with friezes. In the first two, a few bones had fallen to dust.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)