

## LETTER

(for private circulation only)

FROM BISHOP AND MRS. JOHNSTON

Frensham 3534.

At : Rosebarton,  
Rowledge,  
Nr. Farnham,  
Surrey.  
January, 1957.

Dear Friends,

We ask you to forgive a circular letter. Since arriving in England on the 17th November, you have all been so kind in sending us messages and Christmas greetings, but we have found it difficult to answer them personally or to send greetings to all our many friends scattered in many parts of the world.

You may know that we cut short our visit to England in the summer of last year in order to return to Egypt at the time of the Suez Canal crisis. We arrived back in Egypt on the 8th August and were at once involved in the many problems which confronted our Chaplains, Missionaries, Churches and communities. We travelled a great deal, mostly to the Canal Chaplaincies, and made one memorable visit to Alexandria for the annual El Alamein Service. During this period our communities and congregations were rapidly dwindling, owing to the repeated warnings from the British Embassy that all who had no compelling reason to remain should leave Egypt. The country remained calm and there were no outward signs of tension, no riots or demonstrations such as had marked previous political crises. Things began to take a serious turn on Sunday, 28th October, when there was a general strike throughout the Arab countries in protest against the arrest by the French of the Algerian leaders. There was an uncanny calm and quietness in Cairo — was it the calm before the storm? From then on the tempo of events and the tension increased; Monday, the 29th, the invasion of Sinai by Israel; Tuesday, the 30th, Israelis reported only 30 miles from Suez, and in the evening of the same day the British ultimatum to Egypt; Wednesday, the 31st, bombing attacks started on military objectives. We could see the flares and hear the bombs dropping on Almaza. Then on Monday, the 5th, came the dropping of parachute troops followed by landings on the beach to the West of Port Said and the French landings at Port Fouad. During all this time we were at the Cathedral where, in the Bishop's House, the Provost's House and in the Clergy Flat, we were receiving missionaries of the English Mission College, the Nile Mission Press and the British and Foreign Bible Society, who had been compelled, for one reason or another, to leave their own Institutions and homes. Looking back on those tense days, one thing stands out very clearly, the absence of real anxiety. We were conscious in the daily worship in the Cathedral and in fellowship with the friends who had taken refuge with us of the presence of a Companion—"Lo, I am with you alway"—and in our daily readings together a Voice spoke to us from the Word of God. Thus were we sustained and strengthened.

servants had been in tears and leaving our pets (faithful "Tutti" and "Figaro"—dog and cat) and family treasures collected over 40 years was a terrible wrench. And yet there was one text of Scripture which constantly recurred during that parting — "As having nothing, yet possessing all things" — the "all things" of God's love, of the spiritual realities that sustain in times of crisis and make our glorious Faith so relevant to all experiences, of the friendships that make life sweet — these all remained.

We had been fortunate in obtaining seats in the second aircraft to leave Cairo International Airport after repair of the damage caused by bombing. We were treated correctly at the airport, but I regretted parting from an old friend, my portable typewriter, which I was not allowed to bring. The aircraft was a luxurious K.L.M. Constellation and we had a most comfortable journey to Amsterdam. We left Cairo at 11.30 a.m. (L.T.) and arrived, after stops at Athens and Frankfurt, at 10.30 p.m. (L.T.). At Athens I was able to get a message (the first) about our expulsion to the Archbishop of Canterbury and on our arrival at Amsterdam we were greeted with a most welcoming reply, asking us to go straight to Lambeth on arrival. From our Hotel in Amsterdam we were able to telephone to our daughter, Marion, and to give her the first news of our departure from Cairo. The next morning (the 17th) we continued our journey by K.L.M. to London and were met by Marion and Pat. We were also greeted by press photographers and reporters. Driving straight to Lambeth, we had the kindest of welcomes from the Archbishop, to whom I gave a full report of the events in Egypt leading up to our hurried departure.

On leaving London we drove to Blindley Heath Vicarage, where we remained for three days with Pat and Marion. They were in the throes of packing for the move to Otley in Yorkshire, where Pat is now Vicar. The peace of the quiet countryside after the turmoil of the last days in Cairo—where the city was given over to military preparations to meet the invasion—was unbelievably wonderful. After Blindley Heath we spent five restful days as guests of Sir Christopher and Lady Summerhayes in their lovely home in Limpsfield.

We are now staying at the above address, where we have been made most welcome by Mrs. Bamber, Marion's mother-in-law. We have often been here on visits and it is hard to think of a lovelier part of England. This will be our home until at earliest the end of February, when it is possible that we may go abroad again for a short temporary appointment. In the meantime, our very kind doctor here has advised rest from official engagements until the end of February. We are greatly enjoying the Services in the Parish Church and the friendship of the Vicar, Dr. A. R. Winnett, and it is a joy at times to assist in the Services. For me, there is a sense of home-coming as I knew this district well as a young man in the years before the First World War.

Since we returned, most of our friends and all the English clergy and missionaries have come home, most of them expelled. They are scattered all over the British Isles. Our thoughts and prayers are with you, wherever you are.

The first interruption in the work of the Cathedral came with the arrest of our Verger, Aziz Wassif, who was a friend to us all and who had served the Church faithfully for so many years. This was a sad blow. We have not heard of him since and he is very much in our thoughts and prayers. We could learn no reason for his arrest. On Sunday, the 4th November, Services were held in the Chapel of the Cathedral and in the afternoon I was given permission by the Minister of the Interior to visit the British Embassy and to hold a Service for the Embassy staff who were "incommunicado." About 60 attended this Service, the Ambassador reading the Lesson. Father James, of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Cathedral, accompanied me on this visit and said Mass for his flock. Later that week the Embassy staff left and the Swiss Legation took over the British Embassy and did noble work in discharging their responsibility to British residents. During this time, as tension was increasing, we were virtually confined to the Cathedral precincts, though there was no question of "house arrest." On Sunday, the 11th November, Remembrance Sunday, about 40 people attended a Remembrance Day Service in the Chapel; other Services during the day were normal, but the congregation was restricted to our own "family" at the Cathedral.

After Evensong on Monday, the 12th, and while we were standing on the steps of the Cathedral, a representative of the Ministry of the Interior arrived with a list of British residents—among them were the names of the Provost and myself—who were to leave the country within seven days. He expressed regret and said that all "facilities" would be granted to enable us to comply with the order. Later these facilities turned out to be exit visas only and we had to make our own arrangements for leaving Egypt. This was to prove difficult as the ports and aerodromes were closed and money in our Banks had been sequestrated.

The expulsion order came as a great shock. Gladys and I had determined and hoped to remain as long as the Church was allowed to carry on—whether Egyptian or British—and we had been repeatedly assured by our Egyptian friends that the authorities would not interfere with the work of the Church. The day after the order had been served upon us, I saw the Swiss Minister and asked that he would make representations on my behalf to the Minister of the Interior. He was good enough to do this, but without avail—the Ministry was adamant that the 60 or so British residents on the list should be out of the country within seven days.

My last Service in the Cathedral was on Wednesday, the 14th, when I celebrated Holy Communion. During the Service I thanked God for 40 years' happy ministry in Egypt and the question came repeatedly "Could this be the end?" Only God knows the answer to that question. That day I hurriedly handed over responsibility for the Egypt part of the Diocese to the Archdeacon, Adeeb Shamma. He has been a close friend and loyal worker for many years.

As we drove past the Cathedral on our way to the Airport and looked at the Cathedral and our home for the last time (?) on that Friday morning, it all seemed so unreal. Our

What of the future? We must hope and pray for healing of the wounds—for a restoration of good relations between Britain and Egypt—for the continuance of the work of our Church in Egypt. We cannot be certain about anything, but we can, in our thinking about the country that has given us so much happiness and of people who have been, and still are, our friends, pray that out of what seems tragic disaster may come better understanding and selfless service and that God's Kingdom of Peace may be established in the Middle East. As far as we ourselves are concerned, we just have to wait for events to fashion themselves. We hope and pray that we may be able to go back to the land where we have lived and worked so happily. Through our Egypt Church Association, which is now working so hard for the good of the clergy who have returned, we shall go on supporting the Diocese by prayer and the raising of funds. We shall think especially of the Archdeacon, Adeeb Shamma, of the clergy and congregations who have shouldered such heavy responsibilities. We are confident that the Church in Egypt will come through this trial greatly enriched and that her witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be stronger than ever.

Thank you for all your kind remembrance of us at Christmas and for the many messages that have come to us. May God bless and guide you through the difficult days ahead.

Yours affectionately,

FRANK and GLADYS JOHNSTON.