

### Speaking Of Things To Eat—How About A Tasty Dinner With An Arabian Sheik?

Here is a communication from Russell Brown, son of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon J. Brown, of Mason, Michigan. (Mr. Brown publishes The Ingham County News), which will probably make you grateful for the simplicity of the American menu. Russell, some years ago, went to Texas for his health, got a job with a big refinery, and some months ago with his family went to Persia, to look into the oil business there. Right now Russell and his family live on an island near Persia, and what follows is his narration of a dinner with an Arabian sheik. Tighten up your belt, folks, pay no attention to your stomach's rumblings, and get a mouthful of the following:

"After a swim we were con-

ducted to the roof of the home. All Arabs of wealth have homes with flat roofs enclosed by walls. The roof is reached in this hot climate. Of course, the guests were not offered chairs because Arabs have no chairs or beds in their homes. An Arab squats like a cowboy or sits on his feet. An Arab never seems to stretch out. On the floor of the roof were beautiful and costly rugs and pillows beyond count.

"We reclined on the roof and talked until the moon was high, about 10 o'clock. The reason for the lateness of dinner is because all the talking is done before instead of after dinner. One does not talk during the meal and afterwards guests have their choice of going to sleep or going home, but a guest must not sit around and try to make conversation. A swell idea, I think.

"The night was beautiful. We were above the tops of the date palms and it was certainly a thrill when the moon rose out of the gulf and shed its light over the palms. At 10 o'clock the servants came and placed a big mat about 10 feet in diameter on the floor and then brought a cloth and laid over it. Then the servants marched in with the biggest silver platter I have ever seen. It must have been six feet long and four wide. It was oval.

"On the latter was a sheep. I mean a sheep—tail, head, feet and all. The platter was placed on the cloth and around it were placed four smaller platters, each about three feet in diameter and each

heaped with rice and chopped almonds. Then delicious ripe dates were scattered around.

"There weren't any chairs to draw up. We merely sat down. There were not two acceptable ways. One is to fold your legs under you and sit on your feet. The other is to put one leg under you and the other in front with the foot flat on the floor and the knee sticking straight up to your chin. The latter has the advantage of offering a longer reach.

"After everyone was seated, two servants passed around. One servant held a pan and the other a pitcher. You held your right hand under the pitcher and over the pan and the servant pours water over your hand. You wash your hand by rubbing the fingers against the palm. Your left hand remains by your side. After washing, you are ready to eat. You can touch no food with your left hand. You have no spoons, knives, forks or plates. Dishwashers have it easy in Arabv.

"The host being courteous, serves guests the best help-out but after that it is every man for himself. The highest dignitaries are given the choicest morsels. I gave thanks for once that I am only an assistant superintendent for the choicest and most desired tid-bit of the sheep is the eye. Our host dug the sheep's eye right out, handed it to Mr. Deacon, then dug the other eye out and handed it to Mr. Lipp. Mr. Deacon ate his. I know, for the night so fascinated me that I couldn't take my eyes off him even though I wished to. It was just like watching a horrible accident or a suicide.

"Next the host broke open the skull by using a sharp bone. He

pulled out a handful of brains and handed them to me. My stomach turned a couple of flops. I swallowed a couple of times just to see if I could and then I passed my hand around my mouth with most of the brains coming to rest on my chin and shirt front. After the host had made the rounds he started eating in earnest and the guests started picking.

"One just reaches out and pulls off a hunk of meat, gulps it down, reaches inside the carcass and grabs a handful of dressing, squeezes the grease out of it, wads it into a ball, puts it in his mouth, grabs a handful of rice, squeezes it in a ball and slips it into the mouth.

"Inside the sheep was really wonderful dressing. There were also six whole chickens and some eggs with the shells on. The chickens were stuffed with English sparrows. So we had sheep stuffed with chicken and eggs and the chickens stuffed with sparrows. No famine there.

"During the dinner nothing is said except an occasional grunt of thanks. Toward the end our host did try to urge us to eat more. To him we were not eating at all. He told us a couple of Bedouins would sit down and do away with a whole sheep. To help us along the host would reach over and pull off a strip of sheep or reach in and grab a handful of dressing and hand it to us. I'll say this. The food was really good if one could forget the sights or else be blindfolded. The fresh dates were delicious.

"You can imagine how messy one gets. An Arab can eat and keep quite clean. He flips the rice into his mouth, his hands not

touching his lips; but I had dressing, grease and rice on my face, my shirt front and my pants. The one-handed business makes it even more difficult, especially when it comes to handling chicken.

"After we had finished our dinner, the pitcher and pan were passed again. Maybe the other guests could get the grease off their hands but I couldn't with my mine. I smelled like a sheep. Of course, the Arabs have heavy beards that need sweetening so the next move the servants makes is to sprinkle the feasters with rose water to kill the sheep smell.

"Next comes the coffee. It is coffee in name only. It tastes like a mixture of Lysol and crude oil. To be polite, a guest must drink two cups. Thank Allah, the cups are small. Only one cup is used for the entire assemblage. The servant is standing waiting for the cup while you're drinking and everyone is watching so there is no opportunity to cheat.

"I have purposely left out the deep and hearty belches broadcast through the dinner. To be polite and to show due appreciation of the food one must manage a few belches during the course of the dinner. And he must save one good long one until he rises. Then he lets go with both barrels. I was more than satisfied with my belching

and I am sure my artistry was appreciated by mine host.

"Rising—that's something else again. Sit on your feet for a good hour and see if you can still rise. The American and European guests could not easily navigate so instead of going home immediately we laid down and catnapped for about an hour. Then we had feeling back in our legs and feet and quietly took our departure. The first thing I did on reaching home was to take a good hot shower to remove the mutton and rose water.

"Women are not present at Arab feasts. In Arab homes the women never eat with the men. They eat at the same time but in another part of the house. Nearly all the women are veiled and I have yet to see one I would call charming. The desert

women wear hideous masks instead of veils.

"We are all well. The weather is unacceptably hot and humid but cooler days are ahead. School is to start September 15. Joanna and

Russell are looking forward to it. Joanna has become quite a swimmer this summer. She dives and swims in water eight and 10 feet deep and does all the strokes. Russell does not take so well to the water."

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