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THE PERSIAN PROBLEM

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H. J. W.

THE
PERSIAN PROBLEM

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RIVAL POSITIONS OF RUSSIA AND GREAT BRITAIN IN PERSIA WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE PERSIAN GULF AND THE BAGDAD RAILWAY

BY

H. J. WHIGHAM

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE critical moment is fast approaching when the question of supremacy in Persia and the Persian Gulf must be decided. It is a question involving not only our trade with that part of the world, and the prosperity of thousands of British Indian subjects, but also the peace and security of our great Indian dependency, the safety of that splendid highway from Gibraltar to Shanghai, which has been developed and defended for so many years by the power of Great Britain, and finally, the destiny of the British Empire itself. Our danger lies not so much in our failure to recognise the importance of the Shah's kingdom as a piece on the check-board of Asia, as in the apparent inability of our rulers in Downing Street to grasp the fact that the game is already in progress, and that without an immediate move on our part, the *dénoûment* cannot long be delayed. And it is imperative that the move should be in the right direction. We are playing against an opponent who thought out his plan of campaign long ago, and has never lost an opportunity of carrying that plan into effect. His game is masterly and consistent because he knows all the time what is his final aim. We, on our part, have hardly even

studied the openings; not only are our own moves made at random, without rhyme or reason, but we so little appreciate our opponent's game that our countermoves are made entirely in the dark, and may or may not prove temporarily successful, but can hardly affect the ultimate result. In a word, we are without a policy in the Middle East, and unless we find one very quickly, the game will be finished, and we shall be left lamenting.

It has been my object throughout the following chapters to delineate the present situation of affairs in Persia and the Gulf from a political and commercial point of view, and to indicate the policy which that situation requires. From the time that Lord Curzon produced his great work on Persia, there has been a considerable literature dealing with the subject, in which the general reader will find many references to the growing influence of Russia at the Court of the Shah, to the expansion of Russian trade, to the general decline of British commerce and prestige, and to the necessity for strong action upon our part. But I have nowhere seen any consistent attempt to arrive at the real facts of the case, or to suggest any definite line of action. A general statement that Russia is driving us out of the Persian market is of little value, unless it is accompanied by at least a few statistics in order to show, in the first place, how far the statement is true, in the second place, by what means Russia is attaining her ends, and in the third place, in what manner we can advance to meet the tide of Russian invasion.

For my own part, I came to Persia with no prejudices whatsoever as regards the Persian question beyond the general notion, acquired through some personal experience of Russian policy in China, that we should be very foolish to repeat in Persia the fatuous inconsistencies of our attitude towards the Russian occupation of Manchuria. To permit Russia, or any other Power, to acquire rights and concessions in a half-civilised country which can only end in the occupation of that country, and thereafter to spend three years in nagging and making protests against an occupation which the youngest clerk in the Foreign Office must have seen to be inevitable from the first, is a course of action most lowering to our national honour, and detrimental to our chances of success. We do not prevent Russia from attaining her ends, but we do as far as possible irritate her and arouse her hostility.

In visiting Persia, therefore, I was determined to find out whether it was possible to avoid a similarly humiliating policy with regard to Russia's descent upon the territory of the Shah. And in order to arrive at any conclusion it was necessary to find out first of all what our interests were in Persia, and what they were capable of becoming; secondly, how far Russia was encroaching upon our domain, and thirdly, whether it was possible to stay that encroachment. For I am convinced that if Russia must have Persia, and with it, a naval base upon the Gulf or the Indian Ocean, then the sooner we make up our minds to it, and concede the point

with a good grace, the better for all parties concerned.

The results of my inquiries led me to the conclusion that we cannot possibly make the concession without a great loss to our prestige and our commercial prosperity in the Middle East; they further proved to my own satisfaction that the expansion of Russian influence even in Northern Persia is far from being the natural process which most writers take it to be. Captain Mahan, for example, the most strenuous opponent of Russian designs upon the Gulf, thinks it quite reasonable that Northern Persia should in time fall entirely under the domination of Russia owing to the proximity of the two countries; while our influence cannot be expected to extend very far beyond the shores of the Gulf. An examination of the facts of the case on the spot would have shown him that distance is not always a question of mileage. At the present moment Teheran is only a very little nearer to the commercial centres of Russia, as far as cost and facility of transport go, than it is to Manchester; and whenever railways are built in Persia, and are kept open on equal terms to all nations of the world, the markets of Northern Persia will actually be more accessible to British merchandise than to Russian. It must always be cheaper to carry goods by sea to the Gulf, and to transport them over the 500 or 600 miles between the Gulf and Teheran, than to bring them all the way from Moscow to Teheran by rail. This is a most important, if rather obvious, fact which has been

entirely overlooked by most writers upon Persian questions.

It may well be asked, then, why it is that Russia, with so little advantage in point of distance, is so rapidly absorbing the trade of Northern Persia. In the following pages I have gone as far into this question as the chaotic conditions of Persian statistics will allow, and I have reached the conclusion that to begin with, the commercial predominance of Russia has been greatly exaggerated owing to the publication of erroneous figures, and furthermore, what progress she has made at our expense, has been achieved not through greater proximity or enhanced facility of transport, but through a deliberate system of premiums and State encouragement of trade which has for its end the commercial conquest of the whole country. The Russian Government has the wisdom to see that, once our commercial interest in Persia is gone, the British public will never raise a finger to prevent Russia following up her economic victory by a political conquest. And so it suits M. Witte to make us believe that we are in fact losing ground very rapidly in the trade of Northern Persia, knowing perfectly well that if that belief becomes a settled point of view, the whole campaign is practically finished. Those writers, therefore, who complain dolefully of our vanishing trade and prestige without taking the trouble to get at the real facts of the case, are doing the British cause a poor service indeed. My visit to Persia led me to take a different course. I found that British trade had not declined to anything like the extent that has generally been

supposed, that the Russian progress had been effected only by lavish expenditure on the part of the Russian Government, that even the northern markets of Persia would be at our mercy if we were fighting on equal terms, and that we can still adopt measures which will at least to some extent counteract the Russian system of direct State assistance to trade which we could never bring ourselves to adopt.

It will be found that the remedy lies first and last in the improvement of communications and the gradual extending of British influence over Southern Persia. And there is only one way of improving communications to any marked extent, and that is by building railways. This is a matter of such paramount importance that I make no apology for dwelling upon it again and again in the following chapters. I was so thoroughly convinced of the necessity of railways connecting the markets of Persia and Mesopotamia with the Gulf that I was surprised to find very few advocates of railway building among British merchants or British officials in Persia; so much was this the case that one was almost driven to the conclusion that there must be some inherent obstacle in the way of railway building in the kingdom of the Shah, which was not apparent to the ordinary traveller. What that obstacle is I have never been able to discover. It is quite true that Lord Curzon took in his book a very pessimistic view of this particular form of enterprise and regarded railways as things of a dim and distant future. But the crisis in the affairs of Persia has been drawing

visibly nearer at a rapid rate since Lord Curzon's book was written, and nothing short of heroic measures on our part will avert a catastrophe. Moreover is not the extension of the Quetta Railway to the borders of Seistan the handiwork of Lord Curzon himself? In Teheran all great enterprises are regarded with a jaundiced eye especially by the British, owing to the frequent failures of such undertakings in the past. But here is a case where the past offers no analogy. For it may broadly be stated that until railways are built, no great industrial venture, and no effort to exploit the mineral wealth of Persia can possibly succeed. Railways, therefore, stand in a different category from all other enterprises.

Nor is it true that the money would never be forthcoming to build railways in Persia. I know for a fact that £10,000,000 of capital would be found to-morrow for the purpose if the British Government were to offer substantial assistance either in the shape of forcing the matter on the Shah's notice or of guaranteeing a small interest for a certain number of years. But why should the British Government bear the expense? Simply because we must either bear the expense or abandon Persia to Russia. Russia is already spending £100,000 a year at a modest computation, in pushing her trade in Persia; she actually sank £300,000 in the Teheran Resht road which she can never get back except in the shape of prestige, and she would not flinch at further sacrifice of a like nature. How can we possibly expect to stem the tide of her advance if we are not

prepared to make similar sacrifices? And how can our statesmen reconcile with their consciences a policy of a blind adherence to the *status quo* which they must know perfectly well Russia only respects in outer appearances?

We have reached the parting of the ways when we must make up our minds either to act quickly and to spend our money freely on a given line of action, or to retire gracefully from the field and allow Russia to reap the rewards which, to be quite impartial, a country with a real and definite policy deserves. In describing my journey through the Gulf and Mesopotamia and Western Persia I have endeavoured on the thin thread of personal experience to string together a series of essays of which the double aim is to show what our position actually is to-day in the Middle East, and how imminent is the danger of our losing that position which has been built up in a hundred years of not inglorious history.

It would be impossible at this time to visit the Gulf and Western Persia without taking a keen interest in the outcome of the Bagdad Railway Concession which is of supreme importance in the politics of the Gulf. I have, therefore devoted several chapters to a study of the German railway scheme as it affects the future development of Mesopotamia. Here as in the case of Persia, our Government seems to have acted in the most hand to mouth manner and to have possessed at no time a definite policy of its own. The mistake was long ago made of regarding a Mesopotamian Railway

simply and solely as a means of communication between the Mediterranean and India, and never as an engine for the resuscitation and development of Mesopotamia. The Germans having no direct interest in India, looked at the enterprise from a different and far more practical point of view, and have now made it apparent that a railway from the Bosphorus to the Gulf is not at all outside the sphere of practical politics, and is, indeed, the one thing needful above all others for the regeneration of Asiatic Turkey. Slowly we are coming to see the value of this point of view. But it would puzzle the greatest of the prophets to know what are the real sentiments of the British Government with regard to the Bagdad Railway, and it may be doubted if the members of the Cabinet have any definite idea on the subject whatsoever. And yet there is no more important matter before the eyes of Europe at this moment than this very matter of the Bagdad Railway; and if I can assist any reader who is not familiar with the country or the conditions of the people through which the railway will pass, to form any definite notion of what our policy should be, I shall have attained the object with which the chapters on the Bagdad Railway were written.

In conclusion I have to state that the following chapters, which contain the substance of a series of articles written for the *Morning Post*, would not have been printed at all but for the opinion expressed by a serious student of Persian politics, that they might add a little badly needed light to the discussion of the affairs of Persia and the Gulf.

If they contain information of any value whatsoever, they owe it in the first place to the kindness of the present Viceroy of India, who not only advised me to go to the Gulf but instructed his subordinate officials in that part of the world to give me all assistance in their power; and in the second place to these officials themselves who showed to me, as indeed they do to all travellers, the most unfailing courtesy and hospitality. I am especially indebted to Colonel Kemball, the British Resident in the Gulf, who not only allowed me to accompany him round the Gulf on his winter tour of inspection, but was kind enough to read most of my letters on the Gulf before they appeared in print. I have elsewhere acknowledged the generous assistance given me by General Houtum-Schindler and by Mr. Rabino, the manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia in Teheran.



A PICTURESQUE VIEW OF MASKAT

The British Consulate is hidden by Fort Zaladi in foreground

CHAPTER II

FRENCH INTRIGUES AT MASKAT

MASKAT, which is reached from Karachi in some forty-eight hours by the mail steamers of the British India Company, lies about three hundred miles down the Arabian coast from Cape Musandim, and is, therefore, outside the Persian Gulf proper; but its natural strength and historical prestige combine to make it inseparable from the politics of the narrower waters which in the past it has always influenced and at times dominated.

On a clear morning you may bring up the jagged mountainous coast of Oman at a distance of thirty or forty miles, and an hour or so later the mud-coloured houses of Muttra, clustered together under the rocks, become visible over the steamer's bow; but the presence of Maskat, save for a glimpse of a yellow Portuguese fort, is quite unsuspected until the coast is almost reached, and a deep cove suddenly discovers itself on the port bow, land-locked on every side save the north, with a white flat-roofed Arab town occupying the shelving southern beach straight opposite. On the east and west sides of the cove are precipitous rocks, those on the eastern side composing an island three hundred feet high, barely separated from the town by a shallow passage,

in the middle of which stands a Portuguese fort with a double row of embrasures exactly balanced by a similar erection overhanging the town on the west. The harbour, though only a little over a mile long by half a mile in width, is more capacious than it seems, and save against a north-east wind is admirably secure. One is struck immediately, not merely by the picturesqueness of the town, with its gleaming houses lying like a white bar between the black rocks and the turquoise sea, flanked by the aged yellow masonry of the forts, but also by the wonderful strength of the place, which with very little assistance from human art can be made impregnable both from land and sea, while the tiny cove with its precipitous sides can give protection to six or seven men-of-war riding at anchor under the eastern bluff.

At present Maskat is at the mercy of the smallest gunboat of any modern fleet, which, standing across the mouth of the cove, could soon reduce the Sultan's Palace on the sea-front to ruins without coming inside the range of the old smooth-bore cannon of the forts generously presented to the Sultan by the Government of India. The forts were built by the Portuguese and completed, according to the inscription on the western pile, in the year of the Spanish Armada, when there was a Portuguese Viceroy in India; and they were admirably adapted to the requirements of that age. To-day the Cossipur guns are not much better than the old Portuguese cannon which bear the date 1606, and in the *émeute* of 1895 it is credibly asserted that their round shot

frequently fell short of the Sultan's Palace, which is not a quarter of a mile away, and on a much lower level. It is precisely because Maskat is so defenceless to-day, and might be made so impregnable to-morrow, that it is a place of considerable value on the chessboard of Indian politics, more especially as from its position it forms a strong outpost beyond the gates of the Persian Gulf, which lie between Cape Mussandim and Bunder Abbas. And just as Russia is looking greedily towards Bunder Abbas, so France, the ally of Russia, is always ready by intrigue and subtle agitation to push her influence at the Court of Maskat.

In order that we may protect our vital interests in the Persian Gulf it is necessary that we should first of all understand the position in which we stand with regard to the Arabs of the coast, and more especially the Arab ruler of Oman.

In the years which followed the downfall of the Portuguese Empire, Maskat came under the domination of the great Nadir, Shah of Persia. But the Persian yoke, which never rested heavily on Oman, was vigorously thrust off by Ahmed Bin Said, a camel-driver of Sohar, who founded the present dynasty about 1741; and in 1769 Maskat definitely and finally refused to pay any tribute whatsoever to Persia except for the leased territory of Bunder Abbas, on the mainland of Persia itself.

The century which followed that step saw the rise and fall of the Oman power. Ahmed Bin Said and his son Seyid Sultan, who usurped the throne from his elder brother, were fighting monarchs, who

established a maritime empire from Zanzibar, on the African coast, to Gwadur and Bunder Abbas, in Persia, and even threatened Bushire and Basra. It is probable, however, that the acquisitions of territory on the African coast led to the final extinction of Maskat as a sea power, for the great Seyid Said, who succeeded Seyid Sultan after an interregnum about 1807, preferred, not unnaturally, the more tropical vegetation and less torrid climate of Zanzibar to the barren rocks of Maskat, and towards the end of his long reign, which closed in 1856, he confined his attentions so exclusively to his African possessions that but for the continual intervention of Great Britain, or rather the East India Company, the dynasty must have fallen and Maskat would long ago have become a dependency of Nejd.

Our first treaty with Maskat was entered into in the year 1798, and provided for the total exclusion of French and Dutch trade, and especially French influence, from Maskat. The treaty bears the mark of the period when Napoleon and the Emperor of Russia were putting their heads together to discover a plan for the invasion of India. It is curious that just a century later in these same waters we are compelled to protect ourselves against an alliance of the same two Powers. Two years later Sir John Malcolm visited Maskat on his way back from the capital of Persia, and not only ratified the treaty, which had been brought about by our native agent, but provided for the residence at Maskat of a representative of British birth. The stipulation, as we learn from Morier, who travelled up the Gulf a few

years later, was carried out in only a desultory fashion owing to the desperate climate of the Arab stronghold, and it was not until 1840 that a British agent was permanently established at the Court of the Sultan, and even he had his residence at Zanzibar until the two kingdoms were separated.

In the meantime Seyid Said proved himself the firm friend of Great Britain, to the extent even of joining heartily in the campaign of 1819–20 against the pirates and—a thing which is even more extraordinary—in our anti-slavery programme, which was initiated about 1822. He was, apparently, an eastern potentate of the best type, with an almost inordinate love for the British. Captain Hart, of the British Government vessel *Imogene*, has described a visit to Zanzibar in 1834, in the course of which he had many interviews with Seyid Said, who begged him to accept a fine seventy-four-gun cruiser on behalf of his king, and asked him to encourage British trade, in spite of the fact that by far the greater majority of the vessels trading with Zanzibar at that time were American. It is unfortunate that Seyid Said left to the world no worthy successor to his throne. A man of wide views and wonderfully catholic taste, he had wives of almost every creed and shade, from the granddaughter of a Persian monarch to an Abyssinian slave, and Captain Hart has left it on record how the Sultan was disappointed at the first letter of the Queen of Madagascar, in which she offered him a young princess, but regretted the law which forbade her to marry him herself. Yet of all his progeny those only survived him whose Negro

blood made them hereditarily incapable of government. Seyid Thoweyni, who finally succeeded him on the throne of Maskat, by his fatuous policy and villainous treachery had already before his father's death done his best to ruin Maskat, of which he was the Deputy Governor after 1840. Many times did Great Britain come to the rescue when Maskat was assailed by the Wahabis of Nejd, by the chief of Sohar, by the Sultan of the Jowasmi tribe, the hereditary enemy of Maskat, and even by the more distant power of Egypt; and once Maskat had been clean gone if the British Government had not instantly summoned Seyid Said from Zanzibar to repair the ruin brought on his kingdom by the vile trick by which Thoweyni had entrapped the Sohar chief and so raised up a confederacy against himself.

But the return of the Sultan to Arabia for a few months from time to time could only temporarily avert the downfall of the power of Maskat. Thoweyni already in 1852 paid a tribute of 12,000 crowns to the ruler of Nejd, and his hold of Bunder Abbas and its dependencies was constantly disputed by Persia until his death in 1866, when the rule of the Sultan was confined to Oman, with the addition of a strip of the Mekran coast about Gwadur.

In the meantime, after Seyid Said's death, Zanzibar and Maskat had been separated on condition that Seyid Burgash, who got Zanzibar, paid a compensation of 7200 rupees a month to Thoweyni, his elder brother, who got the poorer province of Maskat. This arrangement, which was made by Lord Canning's

Commission, is a striking instance of the influence exerted over the twin Sultanate by the British. Thoweyni was murdered in 1866, probably by his son Salim, who succeeded him, and reigned for two years; but the throne finally went to Seyid Turki, a brother of Thoweyni, and, like him, the son of an Abyssinian mother, who asserted his authority in 1871. His offspring, Feyzul, now sits on the throne of Maskat. There was some doubt when Lord Curzon visited the city in 1889 whether the British Government would recognise the succession. But since that time Seyid Feyzul has proved himself an honest ruler, and is now on the best of terms with the political agent.

It will be seen from the foregoing brief survey that the critical years for Maskat were from about 1840 to 1866, when Thoweyni was *de facto* ruler of the kingdom. In those years we did undoubtedly save the capital of our ancient ally Seyid Said; and there would be no Maskat at all to-day but for our good-will. At the same time it must be pointed out that we were content to preserve Maskat from extinction, and moved no finger to save the territories of Maskat on the mainland of Persia. In 1849 and 1850 Seyid Sultan was forced to appeal directly to the Resident of Bushire to save Bunder Abbas, but our representative was unable to act promptly on his own responsibility, and the Sultan, left to his own resources, merely succeeded in staving off surrender by a monetary payment to the Persian Governor of Fars, who was threatening Bunder Abbas. That was the thin end of the wedge, and twenty years

later there was an end of the Sultan's rule in Kishm, Ormuz, and Bunder Abbas.

It is probable that in keeping to our time-honoured policy of non-interference except to stop actual warfare in the Gulf we lost a great chance. If, instead of backing up Persia in her claims, we had stood out solidly for the rights of our older ally of Maskat there would have been no Persian Power at all in the Gulf to-day; and we should have had to deal only with a friendly and obedient Arab ruler instead of a feeble Government which is under the thumb of Russia. In point of fact, "we put our money on the wrong horse." And yet it would be unfair to blame those who were responsible for our policy in those days. The power of Maskat was most rapidly on the decline in the decade between 1850 and 1860, a period in which we fought two great wars and had other things to think of than the Persian Gulf; nor could the statesmen of the Fifties quite foresee the time when the shadow of the Northern Colossus should have lengthened to such an extent as almost to darken the waters of the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately, we cannot repair the mistakes of that period; but we can guard against a repetition of them.

Having by our action on many occasions saved the throne of Thoweyni almost against his own will, even if we did not preserve the empire which he was determined to throw away, we further placed him under an obligation by securing for him the Zanzibar subsidy when he succeeded to Maskat. His own weakness very soon obviated the necessity for the

continued payment of this tribute by Zanzibar, and it was not until 1873 that the British Government undertook to pay the sum itself as a reward for the final abolition of slave markets in both Maskat and Zanzibar. It is important to bear this point in mind, because it might otherwise be supposed that Great Britain, having taken Zanzibar under her protection, was legally or morally bound to continue the annual subsidy. This is so far from being the case that the British Government two years ago made it abundantly clear by stopping the subsidy that the Sultan received it only by the goodwill of his powerful ally; for he could certainly never have compelled payment on the part of Zanzibar. It can hardly be doubted, then, that in view of our past services, and of the present helplessness of Maskat against foreign attack, from which our gunboats preserve him, and finally of his yearly stipend, the Kingdom of Oman is practically, though not nominally, under the protection of Great Britain. It is true that the Sultan still enjoys the privileges of treaties made with his grandfather by the French and American Republics, and these treaties grant the extra-territorial rights usual to European Powers in the East. But it must not be forgotten that the French Treaty of 1844 was only made with the permission of the British Government, and it did not prevent us from taking over the Protectorate of Zanzibar in 1890.

It would be inconceivably foolish in the light of past events to relinquish one tithe of our moral rights over Maskat; and yet to-day we are constantly on the verge of admitting that we have no stronger

claims to exert our influence in Oman than the French, who have never done a single thing to advance the country or develop its trade or police its waters. It was only in 1894 that a French Consul was appointed to Maskat, but before that time the French had been a thorn in our side by encouraging Arab dhows to fly the French flag, and so engage in the prohibited slave trade with impunity. This indefensible habit became so common that in 1891 the Sultan of Maskat was driven to issue an order, with the full approval of the Indian Government, in which his subjects were warned not to resort in future to this method of protection. Since 1891 he has twice been informed that he has the Indian Government behind him in this matter, and in June of 1900 he went to Sur, accompanied by the British political agent, harangued the dhow owners, and got their assurances that those of them who were flying the French flag would henceforth give up the practice. Next year, however, the French cruiser *Catinat* arrived at Maskat, the senior naval officer interviewed the Sultan, and afterwards, M. Ottavi, the French Consul, went to Sur and undid all the work of the previous year. The dhow owners who had agreed to give up the use of the French flag have not done so, and the result is that the flag question remains just where it stood before 1891. The Sultan is sincerely desirous of exerting his legitimate rights in the matter, but he cannot do so in the face of the French Consul's opposition without firm backing from the British Government.

Questions of this sort cannot be left to convenient

occasions. The Sultan is fortunately on the best of terms with the British political agent at Maskat, but that is all the more reason for backing him up when he is trying to act in the best interests of his country. Nor can we dismiss the whole matter as trivial. The very folly of the French in thwarting our anti-slavery efforts is sufficient in itself to indicate that they have some motive beyond the mere desire to protect Arabs who are engaging in the illegal slave traffic.

Our position in the matter is not too clear. The French tried exactly the same tactics at Zanzibar, where our best efforts to stop the traffic between the mainland and the islands were spoiled by the dhows, which crossed under the French flag to Pemba with perfect impunity. But when the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890 put Zanzibar and its dependencies directly under our protection we were able to employ a very strong argument against the use of the French flag on Arab dhows. Since French gunboats could not patrol the waters these dhows would have gone free altogether if right of search had been refused to British gunboats. Morally the case of Maskat is on exactly the same basis, since there is no record of any slave having been set free by a French gunboat. Technically, however, we have no protectorate, and we can only stop the abuse through the Sultan himself, and it would be unpardonable weakness on our part to refuse him support simply because our consent to his action in 1891 was the consent of the Indian Government and not of the British Foreign Office.

Such a course would not only be discreditable, but it would be fatal in its results.

Nor is there the slightest reason for hesitation now. The French Treaty gives the French Consul jurisdiction over *bonâ-fide* French subjects in Maskat or its dependencies, but it was never intended that the French flag should protect the Sultan's own subjects from the arm of the law; and the abuse is doubly wrong when the French flag is used, as it constantly has been, to screen slave-traders from detection. It is impossible to believe that the French Government or the French people would uphold such an abuse if it were really brought home to their notice. But the question has also its political side. It is only four years since M. Ottavi carried through a secret agreement with the Sultan whereby the small port of Jissa, five miles south-east of Maskat, was granted to the French Government as a naval station. The intrigue leaked out, it is said, through a paragraph in the French press, and the British admiral very quickly put a stop to its ratification by a threat of instant bombardment. The danger was averted, but the French had shown their hand, and every doubtful action on their part must now be watched with suspicion.

Knowing what one does of French Consuls in the East, one is almost driven to the conclusion that M. Ottavi is one of those officials whose constant aim is to undermine British influence and cause annoyance to British officials at any cost. It is a curiously unsatisfactory game to all parties con-

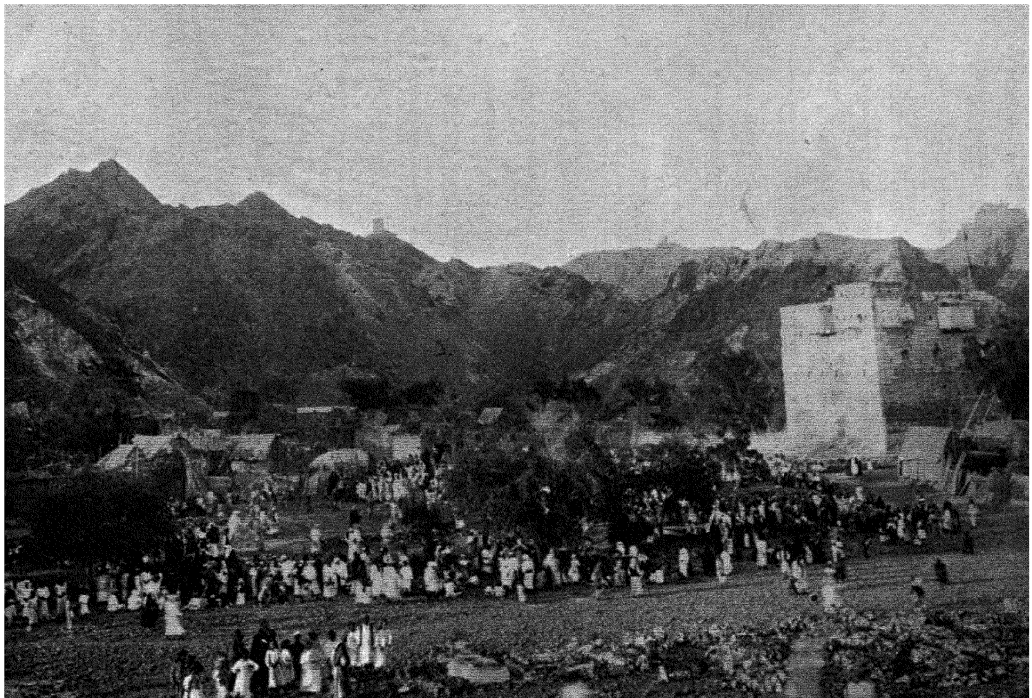
cerned, but it is one which is undoubtedly persisted in by many French Consuls and political agents, and has now an increased importance on account of the Franco-Russian Alliance. There used to be, and, perhaps, still is, a paper published in Arabic at Beirout which is spread over the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Littoral, and seldom fails to produce an article inspired by the French Consulate at Maskat in which Great Britain is decried and every little action of the British agent viewed with suspicion.

For the present the French are quiescent. The Jissa incident was a fiasco, and M. Ottavi has been removed to another sphere of action, having found something more than his match, perhaps, in the new British political agent who arrived at Maskat in the autumn of 1899. But the dhow question is not settled, and may at any moment become acute, so that M. Ottavi, though he has been succeeded by a consul of a very different type, has not laboured altogether in vain.

Even without the assistance of the French Consul our relations with the Sultan of Maskat cannot be free from difficulty. It has recently been pointed out in an able article by Mr. Cantine, of the American Mission, that the Sultan is on the horns of a dilemma. If he displeases us he loses his subsidy, which is a matter of considerable importance to him; if he follows our advice too closely he is bound to incur the hostility of the Sheikhs of Oman, over whom he exercises a somewhat precarious suzerainty. But the dilemma would be in

no way serious if he could depend on our thorough support. The slightest show of military strength would be sufficient to overawe the Arab tribes of the interior, who have apparently very few soldierly qualities. This has been fairly well proved both in the affair of 1889, which Lord Curzon describes in his book on Persia, and again in 1895, when the Bedouins were incited by the Sheikh Saleh to enter the town of Maskat by stealth and seize the Sultan's Palace. In both cases protracted fighting took place without any adequate result in the shape of a casualty list, nor would it be possible for the town to be attacked at all if the hills behind were even moderately well defended. The affair of 1895 was one of those regrettable incidents which happen in diplomacy as well as in warfare. The British political agent of those days had a great opportunity of asserting British supremacy in Maskat when each side in turn appealed to his authority. Instead of settling matters with a firm hand, he left the Sultan to make his own bargain with the Bedouins, and contented himself with sending in a heavy bill of damages.

Of course it may be argued that we desire no supremacy in Oman nor in any part of the Arabian Peninsula outside of Aden. We have, moreover, an agreement with France of over forty years standing, whereby both Powers renounce all intention of territorial acquisition in the kingdom of Oman. Yet, in spite of that agreement, circumstances have forced upon us certain obligations with regard to Maskat until we have reached a position where we do exer-



THE WELLS OF WADI ON A FESTIVAL DAY

The Square Fort guards the water in case of attack on Maskat

cise a protectorate over the Sultan in all but name. He accepts our subsidy; his chief adviser is the British Political agent; the very life of his capital depends upon its commercial intercourse with India, carried on by means of British steamers; and he is now put in direct communication with the outer world by the extension of the Indo-Persian cable to Maskat. The so-called Kingdom of Oman, over which the Sultan owns hardly more than the shadow of authority, can only advance on the road to civilisation by coming more and more under the influence of a European power, and we owe it to our past history to take care that that European Power is Great Britain and none other. Nor could a single stone be thrown at us on account of any action we may take to open up the interior of the Arabian Peninsula. Of all passages in British history there is none which shows the British Government in a better light than that which deals with the Nineteenth Century history of the Gulf. Fifty times at least in the past hundred years we have had an excellent opportunity of annexing as much Arabian territory as we liked, but on every occasion we have set our faces against territorial aggrandisement, and aimed solely at the pacification of the Persian and Arabian seas. And not content with destroying the power of the pirates, we have courted unpopularity, and still court unpopularity, with the Arabs by our anti-slavery policy. Starting in 1822, we gradually forced on the various tribes more and more stringent treaties, until to-day slavery is as illegal in Oman or the Gulf as it is in

the State of New York, and our men-of-war alone of all the navies of the world have spent torrid summers in stamping out the evil. That we get little thanks for it is a matter of course. Indeed, there are those who tell us that we benefit nobody by it, least of all the slaves, who rather enjoy slavery than otherwise. Still, whatever political force we may lose by it, no true British subject would ever regret for one moment the self-imposed task nor forego his privilege of holding out freedom to every one who seeks his protection from the bonds of slavery.

Whatever unpopularity we may earn in this direction might be easily counteracted by firmness of political control, and it is the bounden duty of those who are responsible for our foreign policy to see to it that no other Power is allowed a territorial footing on the coast of the Arabian Peninsula or the shores of the Persian Gulf.

The prospects of Oman belong more properly to a chapter on the trade of the gulf in general. But it may be said here that of the trade of Maskat, which amounts to nearly half a million sterling per annum, the bulk is in the hands of British or British-Indian merchants, the shipping is entirely British and native, and there are some two thousand Indian subjects of the King-Emperor in the dominions of the Sultan. The French, who are our only political opponents in this sphere, have practically no trade at all and very little prospect of any in the future, and yet they would like to undermine our influence and, if possible, secure a harbour on the coast. In

the face of such designs, it is necessary for us to make it abundantly clear, not only that we shall suffer no encroachment, but also that should we at any time find it necessary to assert a more definite control over Oman we are under no obligation whatever to grant compensating advantages to France or any other Power on the Arabian Peninsula.

CHAPTER III

THE PEARL ISLANDS OF THE GULF

LEAVING Maskat, the steamers of the British India company visit Jask, Bunder Abbas, and Lingah, on the Persian coast, cross to the islands of Bahrein, near the opposite shore, recross to Bushire, and finally wend their way through a foot of mud on the bar of the Shat-el-Arab to the Turkish port of Basra. But since the plague at Bombay and Karachi necessitates quarantine at the Persian landing-places, I was unable to visit Bunder Abbas and Lingah on the upward journey, and am compelled, therefore, to jump immediately to Bahrein, leaving the Persian towns to be dealt with later.

Despite the quarantine nuisance, which one must admit is unavoidable, the voyage in itself is intensely interesting to those who are not familiar with the Arab in his native waters nor with the weird, and often grand, scenery of the rugged Persian coast. The navigation of the Gulf, which is entirely destitute of lights and imperfectly surveyed, is not without its attractions even to the unnautical traveller for whom the chart may still have a fascination in such a sea of rocks and headlands and forlorn islands; while the captain who has spent his life navigating the Gulf may still find excitement in

waters where the book is often at strange variance with his sounding-lead. There is a sad story of a captain of a tramp steamer who lately came all the way from Beira on the African coast to Bushire, near the head of the Gulf, with no better guide than a cheap atlas; yet as soon as a kind friend gave him a few charts to help him on to Basra, he promptly went hard aground.

Then, apart from the excitement of navigation, there is plenty of new colouring in the motley crowd on board, where Moslems and Hindus, Sheikhs and horse-dealers, pilgrims and pearl-merchants are huddled together on deck amid a strange confusion of cargo and household goods, among which sheep and goats and gazelles contentedly stray. During the earlier part of my journey the Fast of Ramazan was still in force, and during its continuance good Moslems, even when they are on a journey—though some claim a dispensation on that account—only eat by night, and great was the anxiety of my fellow passengers for the coming of the new moon. On the first night of the calendar moon the sky was hazy, and the Koran recks nothing of calendars, so that the rejoicings were loud on the second evening, when the thin silvery band was faintly visible as the sun sank behind the rocks of Cape Mussandim. As chance would have it we were steaming away from Bunder Abbas at the moment, and the course from there to Lingah necessitates so many and such rapid changes of compass that the glad Arabs, who had instantly fallen to prayer and thanksgiving, were sore put to it to keep their faces towards Mecca.

The habit of prayer, while it speaks well for the religious fervour of the Arab, has its drawbacks on the circumscribed deck space of a Gulf mail steamer. It was my fortune to travel in company with a Sheikh of the mainland who went on a journey, like the great barons of old, attended by his whole retinue of hawkers and sword-bearers, menials and mullahs, of whom the last named were so conscientious in their duties that there was no moment of the day or portion of the deck which was secure from their desperate supplications.

But the triumph of cacophony was achieved when we left Lingah on the evening of a day's gluttony—there is no other word for the reaction after Ramazan—and the biting, rending "shamal" caught us fair on the beam in very mid-gulf. All night long above the howling of the wind and the racing of the screw a despairing wail of "Yah Ali, yah Hussein," went up to the unheeding heavens, mingled with the more variegated appeals of the Banian merchants and their wives, who, not content with calling upon every god in the Hindu calendar, interrupted their cries to urge the Shiah Moslems of Bahrein to fresh endeavours, in order that no possible means of salvation might go untried. I believe the captain narrowly escaped deification when he steered his ship safely through the shoals into Bahrein harbour the following afternoon. It was a night worth experiencing, but not lightly to be repeated.

The little archipelago, of which Bahrein proper and the Island of Maharak are the only considerable

members, being in the very centre of the famous pearl oyster beds of the Gulf, has an importance far above its intrinsic merit as a group of habitable islands, and has passed through many vicissitudes, including the inevitable Portuguese conquest, Persian domination, subjugation to Maskat, and attacks from the Wahabis, the Turks, the Egyptians and the British.

The present ruling tribe of Utubis came over from the mainland in the eighteenth century, conquered the Persian Shiah Mohammedans who were then in possession of the islands and are generally alluded to in the old reports of the time as the "aborigines," and from the beginning of the ninteenth century to the present day they have continued—with one brief interval of Maskat rule—to hold their own, thanks to the protection frequently afforded them by Great Britain.

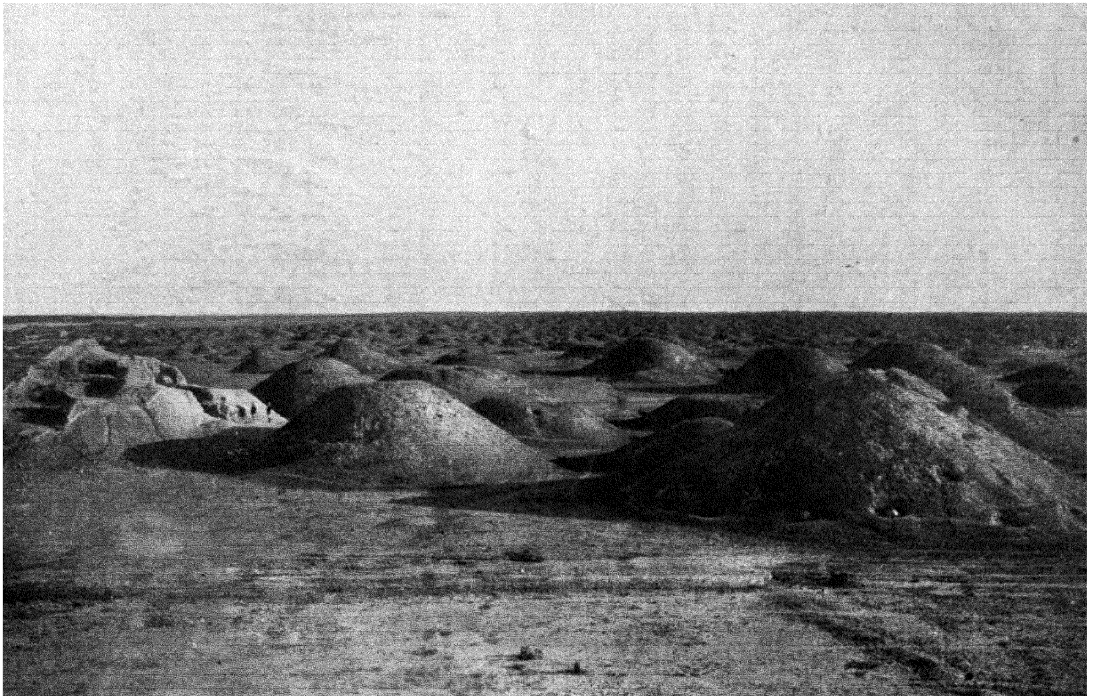
As long ago as 1815 the Bahrein chief appealed to the British Resident for support against Maskat, and obtained a sort of informal assurance of friendship which encouraged him to stand against the Imam of Maskat and defeat him with heavy loss; but the Sheikh subsequently—a year or two later—showed that perfidy which was characteristic of his successors by openly joining the pirates who were then in the zenith of their reign of terror. In 1820, after the great campaign of the British against the pirates, Bahrein was willing enough to subscribe to the anti-piracy contract of that date.

In the years that followed the Utubi rulers did their best by a craven and foolish policy to ruin

their rich possessions. In 1836 we find the Sheikh Abdulla paying tribute to the Wahabis, at a time when the Wahabis were still the scourge of the Gulf, in order to get protection from them against the designs of Persia, and two years later he is buying his freedom from Egypt; while his sons, by their cowardly tyranny over the so-called "aborigines," or Persian Arabians of the islands, are gradually driving the population over seas and reducing a once fertile garden to a desert.

It was at this point that the Imam of Maskat implored the British Government, without success, to annex Bahrein in order to save the islands from utter disaster—a striking tribute to our influence, coming as it did from a ruler who had always wanted Bahrein for nimself. The British Government, however, was bent on abstaining from any acquisition of territory and from all interference in the internal quarrels of the tribes; so the affairs of Bahrein went from bad to worse until Abdulla was attacked and driven out by his grand nephew Mahomed-bin-Khalifa in 1843.

For seven years the ex-chief of Bahrein was a danger and a menace to the peace of the Gulf, and once more the British Government had the offer of taking Bahrein under its wing by restoring Abdulla, who was profuse in his promises. But again the Resident declined to interfere and Mahomed-bin-Khalifa was able by desperate resorts to hold the position he had usurped. At one time he was paying the Wahabis four thousand crowns in tribute to keep Abdulla safely away in the interior of Nejd, a



PHŒNICIAN MOUNDS, BAHREIN

course which merely resulted in his having to fight his grand-uncle on the coast just opposite Bahrein. Then Turkey stepped in and attempted to gain Mahomed's allegiance by promise of protection, while Persia dallied in turn with both Mahomed and Abdulla.

In despair, Mahomed threw himself on the Resident's mercy, and urged on him the advantages of a close agreement between Great Britain and Bahrein by which the British Government would have asserted a suzerainty over the pearl islands. But for the third time in the course of less than twenty years the Resident was forced to forego the opportunity of annexation in deference to the established rule of conduct laid down for herself by Great Britain, and nothing more than expressions of goodwill passed between the Sheikh and the British representative.

It is worth while dwelling on this period in the history of Bahrein, because the annals of the time show most clearly that here, as elsewhere in the Gulf, Great Britain refused absolutely to succumb to repeated temptations towards territorial acquisition and gave one more proof of the singlemindedness of her civilising policy in the Gulf. Surely it was no small thing to put aside so steadfastly a prize for which every other ruler within hail was greedily contending.

Finally Abdulla died at Maskat on his way to Zanzibar, and Mahomed was left in acknowledged possession of Bahrein. Still, though his grand-uncle was removed from the scene of action he was yet

open to the intrigues of more powerful foes. His intense conceit, combined with entire lack of the ability to run straight, left Bahrein so open to foreign encroachment, especially on the part of Turkey, whose hand had already been stretched out to the coast of Arabia, that in 1861 the British Government was driven to complete a treaty with the Sheikh by which he was bound to abstain from piracy, war, and the slave trade, in return for the protection of Great Britain against foreign aggression. In other words, it was made clear that the British Government would not tolerate the encroachment of any foreign Power, with or without the Sheikh's consent, in this part of the Gulf.

Mahomed proved as faithless as his predecessors, with the result that a brazen breach of the treaty was rewarded in 1867 by the bombardment of Manameh, the capital of Bahrein, and the Sheikh was deported to Aden. Isa-bin-Ali, his nephew, was set up by us in his stead, and still rules in Bahrein. The protection policy has been elucidated in further treaties, first in 1880 when the Sheikh agreed to make no treaties with and grant no coal depots to foreign countries, and to receive no foreign consuls without our consent; and, secondly, in 1892, when he undertook to alienate no territory to any foreign Power. It should be added that Bahrein joined in the Anti-Slavery Treaty of 1847, and by the agreement of 1861 was thrown open to all articles of our trade subject to a 5 per cent. duty *ad valorem*. We have thus in the course of a hundred years, during any period of which we might easily have

annexed this emporium of the pearl trade, arrived, with the strongest disinclination, at the stage of protection.

Mr. Zwemer, who lives in Bahrein and knows the island well, has this to say on the subject: "Oppression, blackmail, and bribery are universal, and except in commerce and the slave trade English protection has brought about no reforms on the island. To be 'protected' means here strict neutrality as to the internal affairs, and absolute dictation as to affairs with other Governments. To 'protect' means to keep matters *in statu quo* until the hour is ripe for annexation."

It is necessary to point out that Mr. Zwemer, who is elsewhere strong in his commendation of British policy in the Gulf, is here hardly as fair to us as he might be. To begin with, the development of commerce and the abolition of slavery make together a rather large exception to the statement that "English protection has brought about no reforms;" nor is it easy to understand why it is that two American writers, Mr. Cantine and Mr. Zwemer—Northerners, too, *bien entendu*—find so little to commend in the whole anti-slavery campaign undertaken by Great Britain in these waters at enormous expense and with so little material reward. In the second place, has Mr. Zwemer considered what would be the present state of Bahrein if it had fallen, as it inevitably must have done but for our protection, under the influence of Persia or the sway of Turkey?

I am prepared to admit that Bahrein would

commercially and judicially be better off if it were regularly annexed by Great Britain ; but what outcries against us would there not be throughout the world if we were to annex the pearl-beds of the Gulf, what talk of land-grabbing and insatiate greed! Besides, matters have evidently changed since he wrote the above paragraph, even though it was only three years ago or less. I find that in the whole of last year, there were only two cases of burglary and one of murder—a fairly good record for a population of 60,000 people, among whom no reforms have been brought about. One begins to wonder, indeed, whether reforms in such communities are always an unmixed blessing. As for the official tyranny and corruption which undoubtedly exist, as they exist everywhere in the East, among Eastern races, it is only fair to say that there has been an enormous improvement in this direction since the British agent, Mr. Gaskin, was stationed at Manameh in March 1900, instead of the native representative.

On the whole, whatever one may think about the wisdom of our policy in the Gulf, we have much to pride ourselves on from a moral point of view in the fact that, next to the barren post at Bassiduh, on the Island of Kishm, which is still British territory, we do not possess a foot of land on the shores of the Gulf which we have spent so much time and so many lives in opening to the peaceful trade of the world—and this in spite of the fact that there is absolutely no Power which could say us nay if we cared to annex the whole coast-line of the Gulf.

Bahrein being, all against our will, nearly British

territory, possesses a great interest for us at the present moment. After Koweit, Bahrein is as desirable a naval station from a geographical standpoint as one could find in the Gulf. It is situated just about halfway between Cape Mussandim and the mouth of the Shat-al-Arab, it is extremely fertile, and possesses an excellent water supply—an unusual luxury in these parts. The climate, which was long ago ranked with that of Maskat, Kishm, and Bassidore as the vilest in this quarter of the globe, has been in reality greatly traduced, if we are to credit Mr. Zwemer and various Europeans who have had a real experience of its character. Personally, I can testify to its being almost unduly cold and bracing in winter, and the summer heat cannot be compared with that of Maskat or Kishm, if the thermometer is any criterion. The harbour was considered a good one fifty or sixty years ago—I suppose because the intricacy of the channels among the shoals rendered pursuit into Bahrein difficult in the days of piracy and dhow warfare. In reality it is a very bad harbour indeed, being not much more than a roadstead protected on the south by Bahrein proper and on the east by the little Island of Maharak, and exposed to all winds which come out of the N.E., N., or N.W. The shore shelves so gradually that it is impossible for a steamer of seventeen feet draft to come nearer than a mile and a half to the town, so that cargo and passengers alike have to be carried first by boats, and then by the donkeys for which Bahrein is famous to the beach. Still, the harbour

could doubtless be improved and made moderately effective.

It must not be forgotten that the little squadron in the Gulf needs very badly a station of its own, where the men could occasionally get ashore and find recreation and fresh water; and failing Koweit, Bahrein is, perhaps, the best place that could be selected. As a trade emporium, the islands are likely to increase in importance owing to the fact that they are the distributing-centre for all the Arab coast west of El Katr, and will soon, perhaps, secure the trade of the coast east of Katr as far as Cape Mussandim, which up to the present has been supplied by Lingah on the Persian coast, where the new system of customs worked for the Shah by Belgians is ruining business. But the chief value of Bahrein lies in the pearl-fisheries, which are apparently an inexhaustible source of wealth.

Fifty years ago about £70,000 worth of pearls were exported from the coast. In 1901 the "record" figure of £475,341 was reached at Bahrein alone. Naturally, with such an article of export, Bahrein has a great buying capacity, and our fellow subjects, the thrifty Banians of India, do a roaring trade in the import of rice, which they sell on credit at the beginning of the pearling-season at a rate of interest equivalent to about 100 per cent. per annum. Bahrein also exports donkeys of a fine breed, which fetch sometimes as much as £25 a head in Persia.

Altogether, the trade of Manameh and Maharak is in a flourishing condition, and amounted in 1899

to £1,300,000. In 1900 the figures were lower, owing to a failure in the pearl catch. But in 1901 the high-water mark was very nearly reached. Since the British agent has come to Bahrein there have been indications of an increased desire on the part of merchants to trade there, and Bahrein Arabs as well as the Banians look to the British Resident to further their interests.

The population of the islands is put by Mr. Zwemer at 60,000, which is short of the 360 villages which are said to have existed on the island before the scourge of the Utubis and other piratical tribes laid it waste. But with good government and security from attack, the Island of Bahrein proper, which is 27 miles by 10, would soon become again the garden which it once was. It will also in time have a valuable trade connection with the interior of Arabia. At present El Hasa and El Katif face the islands on the mainland and control a great trade-route. They, in turn, are controlled by Turkey, which is utterly powerless even to police her own territories. Just before I visited Bahrein, two caravans to and from the interior were attacked by brigands close to El Hasa and robbed of nearly two lakhs of rupees. The Turkish authorities, with their apologies for troops, are quite unable to bring the offenders to book, and so the El Hasa route is rendered practically useless. When the Turks finally vanish from the Gulf, as they must eventually do, this valuable trade may be reopened, or rather opened effectually for the first time, and Bahrein will then attain a greater importance, though Koweit

must, with its fine harbour, be the chief port of entry for Nejd.

The revenue of Bahrein consists chiefly of the customs, which are farmed out by the Sheikh to a Banian for 120,000 rupees (about £80,000), besides a small tax on pearl-boats and an impost on law-suits. For the size of his territory, the Sheikh of Bahrein is a very rich man, and might be much richer if the customs were properly collected under British management. This is one of the reforms which really is needed, since a properly conducted Customs Department might improve the harbour beyond recognition, and so benefit the trade of the islands to a large extent.

As it is, *pace* Mr. Zwemer, British protection means much more than mere regulation of external relations. Bahrein is already a prosperous little mart, and, as might be expected, it is a German merchant of an enterprising nature who is reaping the benefit of our influence.

CHAPTER IV

CRUISING ON THE PERSIAN COAST

On reaching Bushire I was fortunate enough to find the *Lawrence* about to start down the coast with the Resident on his usual winter tour, and availing myself of the kind invitation of Colonel Kemball I was able not only to land at Lingah and Bunder Abbas, which I had already seen from the deck of the mail steamer, but also to touch at many points on the coast which are seldom visited by European travellers.

It was intended first to stop at Tahiri, the site of the ancient Siraf, whose ruins still proclaim its past splendour. But a strong southerly wind not merely precluded a landing on the open coast but played such havoc with our appetites that we were glad to find a kindly refuge in a little bay, about a hundred and twenty miles down the coast from Bushire, where we were secure from anything but a north-west wind.

The shores of the Persian Gulf have been frequently abused for their lack of decent harbours, a reproach which is so misleading as to necessitate a few words on the subject of the coast-line, which I have examined by the aid of field-glasses, from Jask to Bushire.

The great plateau of Persia, which resembles in many respects the veldt of South Africa, breaks precipitously towards the sea all along the southern boundary of the country. But the abrupt mountains, though they frequently seem to hang right over the waters of the Gulf, never quite project to the shore, but are protected from the waves by an intervening space of shelving land which varies in width from one to twenty miles. There is, therefore, no place on the Persian coast where the mountain scarp so intrudes on the sea as to form a natural harbour. At the same time it rises so abruptly and so near the shore, that the rains which scour its face have no time, even if they were frequent enough, to combine into a great river before they reach the sea, or vanish in the torrid sands at the foot of the cliffs. The only variations in this grand but monotonous landscape are formed by occasional spits of sand and coral which run out into the sea at Bushire, for instance, and Naband and Jask, and by islands like Sheikh Shuaib, and Kishm, and Ormuz, which, lying off the mainland, form channels which are more or less protected from the prevailing winds. It is quite true that the protection which is given by the sandy spits at Jask and Bushire is not only poor in itself, but rendered even less useful by the shelving bottom, which prevents an ordinary cargo-steamer from coming near the shore. Still, they form the beginnings of harbours which might easily be improved, as, for example, in the case of Bushire, where a little dredging would convert an open roadstead into a splendid haven. Then, again, the

Islands of Kishm and Ormuz are so situated as to provide almost unlimited anchorage, which at present is never used. As for the Arab coast, which I shall come to later, it possesses some of the finest harbours in the whole of the East.

Just opposite to our anchorage was a little fortress flying a red Arab flag, one of the many Arabian villages on the Persian coast which were pirate strongholds in the early days of last century. A small party from the *Lawrence* landed about a mile further up the beach to look for gazelle, and its members were shortly accosted by a somewhat ragged horseman with a good rifle slung over his shoulder, who eagerly inquired what our business might be, and explained that the Sheikh had been unable to go out to call on the ship on account of the weather. When we went to see the Sheikh, who was sitting in audience at the gate of his fort surrounded by a picturesque crowd of Arabs, armed for the most part with modern rifles, we discovered that it was not the weather so much which had delayed his coming as the fact that, not being an expert in flags, he had suspected our arrival to be in some way connected with the new Belgian customs, and he was prepared—so, at least, he assured us—to give the new custom-house officials a warm reception. As the village, like many of the Arab villages on this part of the coast, pays but a nominal tribute to the Persian Governor of Dashtistan, and exists on a meagre export of tobacco and a considerable import of firearms, which is strictly prohibited by the Persian Government, one could

understand and appreciate the feelings of the Sheikh towards the new Belgian *régime*, which, though it has been in force on the Persian coast for close on two years, has not penetrated to the smaller villages, which keep up all the brisker trade in rifles since the regular ports have been closed to the illicit traffic. It will be interesting to know, when the time comes, if the Sheikh proves as good as his word, and repels the unfortunate customs intruder with force of arms.

Personally, as one visiting the Gulf for the first time, I was amazed to find the whole coast dotted with villages which not only are inhabited by more or less pure blooded Arabs, but actually fly the red Arab flag over their little strongholds, and own only such allegiance to Persia as custom and a habit of non-interference has rendered mildly acceptable to both parties. One can only arrive at the conclusion that since the Persian Government, which is, perhaps, the most inefficient in a hemisphere of inefficient Governments, without a single battalion of troops, is able to maintain its sway over the once turbulent tribes of the coast, these tribes, in spite of their ferocious-looking riflemen, are sunk to a depth of cowardice which sadly belies their piratical ancestry.

The old Sheikh, who was almost Nubian in colour, and endeavoured to conceal his age by a foppishly henna-dyed beard, grew quite communicative when he discovered that we were not custom-house officials, and he displayed a certain amount of political acumen. He chatted about the Koweit affair, in which our conduct appeared to him very

mysterious; for were we not ostensibly supporting Mabaruk, while all the time we were harbouring in Bombay a brother of Mabaruk's bitterest enemy? To take both sides in a vendetta is a course for which there is abundant precedent in Arab history, provided that you have an ulterior motive in deceiving both parties. But granted that we meant Mabaruk well, there seemed to be no sane excuse for failing to do away with the enemy when he was within our gates: and as we could never in a hundred years have explained our attitude to the Sheikh we returned to the question of the customs.

In the establishment of Belgian officials over the customs of the country he saw clearly the finger of Russia, whose influence he seemed to deplore, not because he dreaded Russian rule so much as because the new *régime* might interfere with his legitimate profits. He even went so far as to discuss the rifle trade, whose centre is Maskat, until he suddenly remembered that he was speaking to strangers of an illegal practice, and pulled himself up short. We returned to the *Lawrence* with the impression that, on the whole, the Persians are possibly making a mistake in arousing the antagonism of tribes which they only rule by sufferance, an impression which was of necessity mixed with contempt for the people who allowed themselves to be so ruled.

Next day we left our shelter, but owing to stress of weather we were again forced to find protection from the wind under lee of the island of Sheikh Shuaib; for it was useless to go on to Lingah as

long as the south wind made a landing there impossible.

Sheikh Shuaib is a desolate, wind-swept island, where a few wretched villages sent their hundred or so male inhabitants to the shore to discover the reason of such an unwonted spectacle as that of a British gunboat a mile off shore. They, too, mistook us at first for the Belgians, and having no rifles such as are possessed by the Sheikh whom I have already mentioned they tried to frighten us off their territory by assuring us that small-pox was rampant in their villages. They seemed intensely relieved to find that we were merely British, and therefore had no designs on the trade in arms, which they too enjoy with the Arab coast.

By this time the south wind had blown itself out, and we were able to push on to Lingah, which is some two hundred and eighty miles from Bushire, and under the jurisdiction of the Governor of that place.

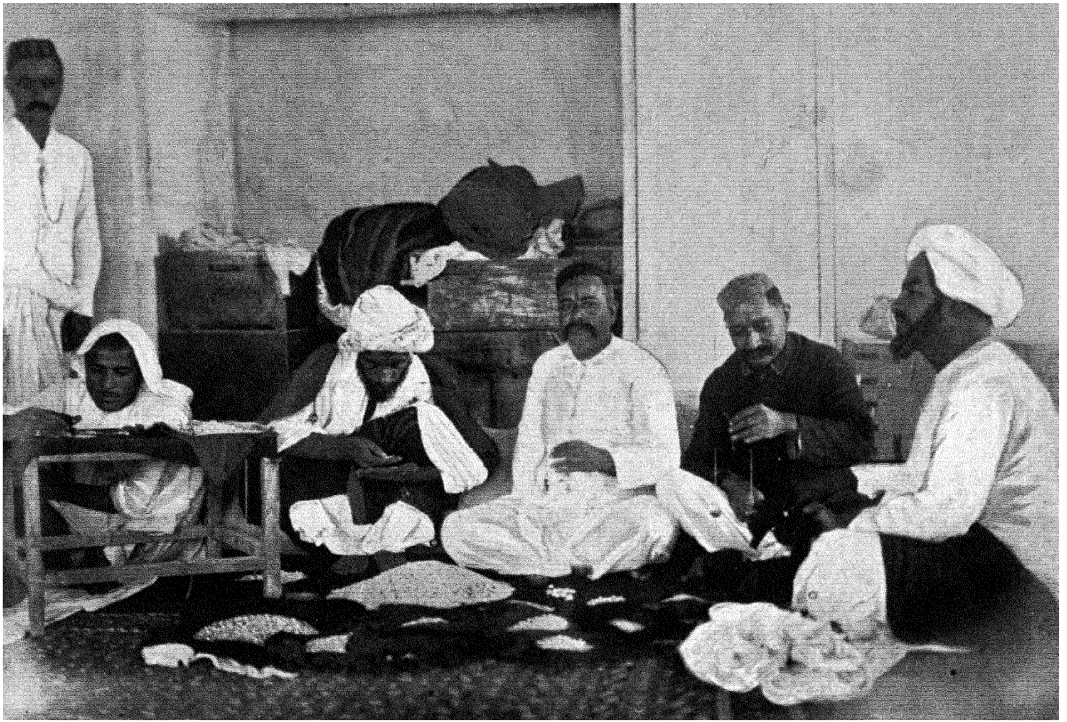
Lingah is generally considered to be the prettiest port on the Persian coast, an opinion which is based perhaps, on the few extra palm-trees which adorn its environments and the peculiarly rugged rampart of mountains in the background. In reality all the coast towns present exactly the same features, a low straggling line of flat-roofed, mud-coloured houses along the beach, flanked to right and left, perhaps, by groves of date palms, an arid sandy plain behind, tilted slightly upwards towards the solid mountain wall. The palms may be more or less numerous, the houses, as at Bushire, a little

more pretentious than usual, the outline of the mountains a shade more fantastic, as where Grubb's Notch behind Lingah—a cone in a V-shaped depression—resembles exactly the foresight of a rifle; but it is hard to say which place is most picturesque or most dreary. Lingah boasts a blue-tiled minaret and a small dock as its distinctive marks, but as we had to land at low tide the dock in no way lessened the discomforts of that damp operation; in fact its chief use seemed to be to give a resting-place to a large buggalow which had once got in during the spring tides and was unable to get afloat again. Once ashore, we were able to gather some idea of the wealth of the place by a visit to the bazaar, where in clean stalls were displayed the wares of India and Maskat, of Arabia and Birmingham, of Germany and Persia, the chief articles being the piece-goods of Bombay and Manchester, and the carpets of the country. The townspeople who thronged about us in the narrow covered way, both Arabs and Hindus alike, were sufficiently well, and sometimes even gorgeously, dressed to betoken a fair measure of prosperity. The town was originally a haunt of the Jowasmi (Kawasim) pirates, whose power was finally broken by the British expedition of 1819–20, during which Lingah was sacked and its boats burned.

Since 1819–20 Lingah continued to be ruled by a Sheikh of the Jowasmi tribe, under allegiance to Persia, until 1887, when the *Persepolis*, the one ship of the Persian Navy, arrived in the roads and set up a Persian Governor. The Arabs made little

or no resistance, and have remained ever since under direct Persian rule with one short interval in 1898, when the Sheik Mahomed, a descendant of the old Arab rulers, executed a miniature *coup d'état*, but in a few months was compelled to succumb to the Darya Begi, or Persian admiral, who, arriving with the awe-inspiring *Persepolis*, found no difficulty in re-establishing Persian rule. The Arab population is perhaps 10,000 strong, yet the gallant admiral was able to reduce the citadel with two hundred Persian soldiers, the marks of whose bullets are still fresh on the towers of the fort. Now there is not even a single real Persian soldier in the place. When the Resident went ashore to return the Deputy Governor's call he was received by a guard of perhaps thirty armed men whose motley clothes and variegated methods of saluting plainly asserted, what was undoubtedly the fact, that they had only a few minutes before been recruited from the byways of the bazaar.

The Deputy Governor described himself as a native of Lar, the capital of the province in which Lingah is situated. But his physiognomy and dress alike indicated a strong mixture of Arab blood. Though Lingah is in Laristan the Deputy Governor is under the Governor of Bushire and struck one as being of less importance than the Armenian who collects the customs under the new Belgian administration, and has certainly less authority with the natives than the Arab Mullah who rules over the morals of Lingah and occasionally displays his religious fervour by broaching the



PEARL-DEALERS AT BAHREIN

casks of wine or beer imported by infidel foreign merchants.

Here, as elsewhere, the Belgian customs form the chief topic of conversation. The prosperity of Lingah depends almost entirely on her trade with the Arab coast on the opposite side of the Gulf. As a port of entry for the interior of Persia it has long ceased to be of any value, since Shiraz is supplied by Bushire, and Yezd and Kerman by Bunder Abbas. It is doubtful, indeed, if it sends any goods beyond the limits of its own province of Laristan, on the Persian mainland. On the other hand, it has become so useful as a distributing-centre for the so-called Pirate Coast, which is absolutely devoid of harbours which steamers can visit, that during the last half-century Lingah has increased in wealth faster than any other port in the Gulf. Fifty years ago, according to Lieutenant-Colonel Pelly's report of 1863, the customs of Lingah were farmed for 200 tomans instead of the previous 100 tomans. A little later, owing to the representations of the more heavily taxed Bunder Abbas, the impost was raised to 2000 tomans, and in 1863 Colonel Pelly guessed the trade of Lingah to be equal to about one-fourth of the trade of Bushire, which was then reckoned at roughly sixty-two lakhs of rupees. The figures of 1900 show a total of three hundred and six lakhs for Bushire and a hundred and forty-five lakhs for Lingah, which points not only to a greatly increased total for Lingah, but also to the much more rapid growth of her trade as compared with that of Bushire. In reality the increase at Lingah is partly due to the

fact that she is a distributing-port, and the same items constantly appear both as exports and imports. Yet, allowing for all the vagaries of the Gulf trade reports, there can be no doubt about the rapid improvements since Colonel Pelly's days.

On the other hand, if Lord Curzon's figures are correct, there has been a great falling off since 1889. The export of pearls, for instance, has fallen from something over £300,000 in 1889 to £225,000 ten years later, and the sterling value of the import of cotton goods is just half as great to-day as it was when Lord Curzon visited the Gulf.

Lingah, therefore, having reached the height of its prosperity about 1890, is now once more on the downward tract—a tendency which must be attributed to the rival claims of Bahrein, which will become more and more the emporium of the Gulf, and especially the centre of the pearl trade, now that it is definitely under British protection. This is a subject to which I shall return in discussing the general trade of the Gulf. It is sufficient for my present purpose to point out that, though Lingah is in some ways more central in its position than Bahrein, it has not the advantages of being under the protection of a great trading Power, and therefore is bound to suffer at the hands of its rival.

In the face of this gradual decline we found the Persian Government in the process of doing its very best to precipitate the ruin of this clean little mart, through the agency of the Belgian customs. According to the old treaties with Persia foreign merchants can only be subjected to an import and export duty

of 5 per cent. *ad valorem*. In actual practice the duty exacted was considerably less than 5 per cent., some articles like foodstuffs being entirely free, while the customs, being farmed almost invariably by natives of India, were not likely to press hardly on the Indian merchants who held the bulk of the foreign trade in their hands. The Belgian *régime* came into existence in March 1900, and though the new officials began rather cautiously, they very soon raised the duties to an effective 5 per cent., thereby causing great dissatisfaction all along the coast. In the case of Lingah the impost was peculiarly hard to bear, because, being levied on imports and exports alike, it frequently was applied to the same goods twice, these goods being intended for re-export. This is a process which would be considered unfair in any other country in the world, and is actually contrary to the spirit of our treaties with Persia. The result is shown in the growing inclination of the merchants to change their market to some spot under another flag. Those of them who own sailing-craft are already shipping direct to the Arab coast, and many others will be driven to make Bahrein their headquarters.

There is another way out of the difficulty for the merchants of Lingah, and it is one which has already suggested itself to some of them. Right opposite to the town of Lingah is the west end of the Island of Kishm, of which about a square mile has for many years been British territory. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there must have been a far larger town on that site than the

present Lingah to judge from the extensive remains of the old Portuguese settlement. Now, why should not the trading part of Lingah be transported to this spot, which we call Bassadore, and which, being British soil, would be beyond the reach of the Belgian customs? In other words, why not create a free port like a miniature Hong Kong in the Persian Gulf?

We were able to form at least a superficial idea of the qualifications of Bassadore as we landed there after leaving Lingah. This was the headquarters of our troops and ships in the Gulf after the expedition of 1819. The troops were originally quartered at the opposite end of the island, close to the town of Kishm, but when five or six officers and half the men had died of heat, while the thermometer burst at 160° inside a tent, they were removed to Sallack Point, opposite to Henjam, and finally in 1821 to Bassadore, where they remained for two years. After that Bassadore—our corruption of the native name Bassidu—continued to be a depôt for the Indian Marine down to 1879. The climate is only less oppressive than that of the town of Kishm; but certainly it seems no worse than that of Lingah on the mainland, since the station is on a small promontory, surrounded on three sides by the sea, and well removed from the mountains, which so often screen the coast towns from the breeze. When we landed we found a small masonry pier still in good repair, which is only useful at high water, the scanty remains of the naval station in complete ruin, sixty or seventy tons of coal long since spoiled by exposure

to wind and weather, a few rusty anchors, a well-filled and long-disused graveyard, and an aged Arab resembling the ghost of Robinson Crusoe's Friday, whose business it is to keep the British flag flying over this desolate spot. The old station consisted of a small plateau rising from 40 ft. to 100 ft. above the sea, about a mile or a little more square, and cut off from the rest of the island by a clearly defined depression. The greater part of the plateau is covered with the ruins of the old Portuguese town, which are nothing more than heaps of stone and the more recent remains of the naval depôt. There is no drinkable water on the plateau except what is collected in tanks from the rainfall. The tanks are in wonderfully good repair, and were half full of water owing to a twenty minutes' fall in December; they may now be used by the people of Lingah, whose supply, from a similar source, has run completely dry through thirteen months of drought.

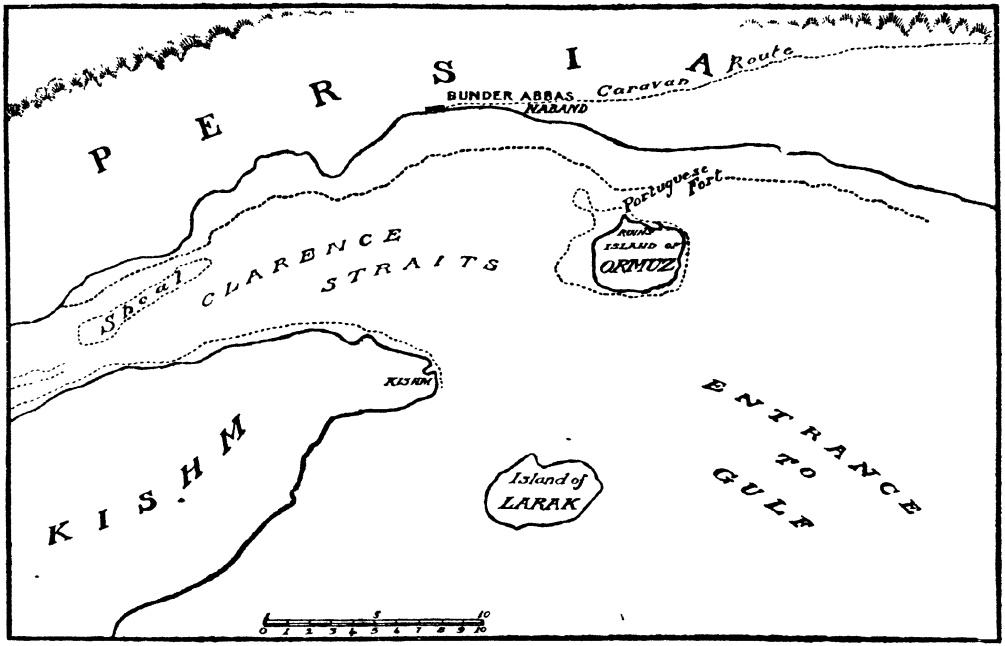
As a naval station Bassadore is partly condemned by the very fact of its abandonment; yet it is superior in respect of harbourage to most of the existing ports of the Gulf. There is deep water within half a mile of the shore, but the approaches are through shoals by channels which give soundings of only twenty feet at low water. Still, at high water, the biggest ship afloat could make its way in if the channels were buoyed. The anchorage is unfortunately exposed to the south-west wind, which is one of the worst that haunts the Gulf, so that it cannot be deemed altogether satisfactory.

As a distributing-centre Bassadore would have several advantages over Lingah. It is just as conveniently situated with regard to the Arab coast, and, being British territory, it would not be subject to the vexatious tyranny of the Persian customs. It would be strange, therefore, if the action of the Persian Government should lead to the founding of a new mart in the Gulf under the British flag. If such should prove to be the case the Persians would have only themselves to blame, since nothing but a natural and spontaneous exodus of the merchants from Lingah could restore to active life this abandoned piece of British territory.

It has been the opinion of many British authorities in the Gulf, from the days of Sir John Malcolm down to the present time, that the trade and general prosperity of the Gulf would be greatly increased by the establishment of a free port under British rule, which should be at once the headquarters of our naval squadron, and the distributing-centre of our trade and the trade of all nations. In other words, what has been wanted is a Hong Kong or a Singapore in this part of the world. As it is there is no real emporium, for Bushire has no commanding position in trade, and never will have under Persian administration; there is no station for our squadron and last of all the British Resident, the "uncrowned King of the Gulf," has his abode on Persian soil. I am very far from saying that Bassadore will answer the purpose as a British free port. It has the disadvantage of being only a small part of a Persian island; it is a desperately barren spot, without a

drop of water save what the grudging heavens vouchsafe in the form of an infinitesimally small rainfall, and there is no room for a catchment system such as provides the port of Aden. Its situation is central as regards the Arab coast, but it commands no trade-route either to the interior of Persia or Arabia; while the harbour, or what is dignified with that name, would require considerable artificial aid before it could be accepted as by any means adequate.

If any money is to be spent on making a harbour there is at least one place which would far sooner repay the trouble than Bassadore, and that is Bahrein, which is fast becoming the most important trade centre in the Gulf. But even here one would not be inclined to force the natural course of events. That a free port will sooner or later be established under the British flag in the Gulf, I have not the slightest doubt; but its position will be largely decided by the development of the new routes into the interior, and more especially the final alignment of the Turko-German Railway. But there is no reason why, in the meantime, a flourishing little settlement should not grow up again on the ruins of Bassadore, where at present only flocks of pin tailed grouse, and a few freed negroes, enjoy the protection of the British flag.



The map shows the position of Bunder Abbas and the islands of Ormuz and Larak in their relation to Kishm

CHAPTER V

SHALL WE GIVE RUSSIA BUNDER ABBAS?

LEAVING Bassadore, we skirted the south coast of Kishm for three hours, until we came opposite the end of a red range of volcanic hills, which runs down at right angles to the shore from the centre of the island. Here we landed to explore the famous salt caves that have been for centuries the only valuable asset of the island, which is said to have produced quantities of corn, and vegetables, and wine in the days when Nearchus sailed the Gulf in support of the conquering hosts of Alexander the Great. The caves, which are apparently very numerous, can be discovered only by following up the streams of salt which run from the foot of the red hills to the beach. The entrances are generally a few feet high, but the interiors widen out into cathedral-like halls, with vaulted roofs, from which gleaming stalactites of pure salt hang like icicles. The cave that we first entered tunnelled its way sheer through a hill five or six hundred feet in height, into a little valley beyond, in the circumference of which there were other cave mouths like gigantic rabbit burrows at the foot of the hills. The floors of all the caves are pure salt, into which the foot sinks as in the sands of the sea, and the supply seems well-

nigh as inexhaustible. The outer surface of the hills are red with iron oxide, except where they are discoloured by sulphur, and they are so destitute of vegetation as to make the existence of gazelles about their slopes almost miraculous. The salt industry is carried on by a few Arab dhows, and is evidently guarded somewhat jealously by the Sheikh of Kishm. It can hardly be doubted that with scientific exploitation this part of the island might be made to yield a valuable output of sulphur, iron, and perhaps copper, as well as salt. The caves in any more accessible part of the world would be a mine of wealth to an enterprising agent for holiday tours.

Just east of the caves, and easily visible from the red hills, is the Island of Henjam, which, lying off the south coast of Kishm, forms a channel that might be converted into an excellent deep-water harbour. Passing to the southward and then turning again north-east we ran between Kishm and Larak, and dropped anchor off the town of Kishm, which is at the extreme eastern point of the island, just sixty miles from Bassadore on the west, and which contains the residence of the Sheikh. We found the town in partial ruins, owing to an earthquake that occurred a year or two ago, and we had difficulty in believing the Arab guide, who put the population at 7000. It is, in fact, a settlement of very little importance, being the capital of a peculiarly arid island, whose agricultural wealth, if it ever existed, has long since vanished, and whose mineral resources, which may be considerable, are quite undeveloped.

The small population subsists for the most part on a meagre carrying-trade similar to that of Lingah, but on an infinitely smaller scale, and likely in the same way to be spoiled, such as it is, by the new customs administration. The climate in summer was fatal to the British force which was camped a mile or so from the town in 1820, and it is intolerable even to the natives, who desert it altogether if they possibly can during the worst months.

From Kishm we went to Ormuz, a small island nine and a half miles to the eastward of Kishm, if anything more desperately barren. Save for a low spit running out north towards the mainland, Ormuz is a mass of volcanic hills four miles in both length and breadth, rising to a height of 690 feet, and resembling irregular heaps of red earth and white lime. The red is oxide of iron, the white is salt. There is no water on the island except what is collected in tanks from the scanty rainfall, and very little life of any sort beyond a few hundred fishermen huddled together in huts on the site of the old Portuguese city and the ubiquitous gazelle, which seems to thrive on red ochre, and is credibly asserted to slake his thirst in the salt waves on the beach.

Ormuz, which was once the richest mart of the East, the great emporium where the trade of the East met that of the West, is now a barren island, scarcely inhabited, and about as picturesque as any piece of waste land which has recently been turned over to the tender mercies of the jerry-builder. Yet on closer inspection one has no difficulty in believing

that the little spit of level ground which projects to the north and ends in the ruins of a once impregnable fortress was the site of a city of 40,000 inhabitants. In fact that number might be well within the mark, for of the square mile and a half of level ground between the fort and the hills there is not a yard which is not covered with the rubble of ancient habitations now sunk in sand and coated with salt. The fortress is interesting as being the strongest of the many defences that the Portuguese built for themselves along the shores of Arabia and Persia, as the special work of the great Albuquerque himself, and as the cynosure of many experienced travellers. One can well imagine that Ormuz, with its frowning stronghold and beautiful churches and clustered white houses reflected in the blue waters of the Gulf, with its bulky galleons and rakish frigates lying at anchor beneath the castle, was once a pleasing sight to eyes that had grown weary with the long beat up the barren Arab coast. It is a sight that is never likely to be seen again, however, even though the Moin-ut-Tujar has got a concession to exploit the island, and Ormuz should send red ochre in tramp steamers to London in place of the pearls and silks and spices which once burdened the argosies of Portugal.

From the fort to the mainland is not quite three miles, but Bunder Abbas, which is all that is left to represent the glories of Ormuz and Gombroon, is some distance along the coast, and altogether twelve and a half miles from our anchorage at Ormuz.

To tell again the history of Bunder Abbas and its

neighbouring Islands of Kishm and Larak and Ormuz would be simply to borrow, and spoil in the borrowing, the admirable little historical fantasia—if the metaphor may be allowed—which is by no means the least charming part of Lord Curzon's "Persia." It will be sufficient to indicate the position which Bunder Abbas holds in the trade and politics of the Gulf to-day, and to speculate for a moment on the probabilities and possibilities of its future. In following my brief argument I would ask the reader to bear particularly in mind that Bunder Abbas is the port which Russia is supposed to have ear-marked for herself, and which writers in the *Spectator*, the *National Review*, and the *Fortnightly* have recommended as an acceptable offering to our Asiatic rival. Unlike Lingah, Bunder Abbas is no longer a distributing port for the Gulf to any appreciable extent, nor does it to the slightest degree fill the proud place of Ormuz as a half-way house between East and West. It is simply the terminus which connects the long caravan route from Yezd and Kerman with the sea; otherwise there would be no possible reason for the existence of this long line of dingy houses built on a dingy shore, destitute of fresh water, and caught between the direct rays of a pitiless sun and those which are reflected from the sheer wall of mountain rock that rises to the height of 7690 feet just fifteen miles to landward. From Bunder Abbas to Kerman the distance is 380 miles, and thence to Yezd there are a good 200 more. As far as Yezd the Bunder Abbas route should have matters all its own way as

far as foreign trade is concerned. But up to the present time Bunder Abbas has aspired, not without success, to spread its tentacles to Teheran in the north and Seistan and Meshed in the north-east, and even sends a portion of its trade beyond the bounds of Persia to Kabul and Central Asia.

In the year 1900 there was a sudden decline of between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. in the total value of the Bunder Abbas trade, for which the British Vice-Consul assigns five reasons:

(1) The change of administration in the customs.

(2) The growing popularity of the Nushki route, which is a rival as far as Seistan and Meshed is concerned.

(3) The insecurity of the Bunder Abbas-Yezd route.

(4) The embargo on the export of cereals.

(5) The heavy rates for transport which obtained during the year.

Of these causes some at least are merely temporary, especially the first. For the opposition with which the establishment of the Belgian *régime* was met in its first year disappeared to a very large extent in 1901, and this opposition was possibly the most serious hindrance to the trade of the twelve months. For general purposes, therefore, it would be better to take the returns of 1899 as more truly representative. In that year the total trade of the port amounted to 1,12,16,160 rupees, or £747,730 sterling. Of this over thirty lakhs were exports, and nearly eighty-two lakhs imports. Of the total bulk of the trade £629,268 was with Great Britain

and India; that is to say, we held 84 per cent. of the import trade. Every steamer that touched at the port during the year flew the British flag. Parenthetically it may be remarked that the trade of Russia with Bunder Abbas in 1899, and I believe all previous years, was absolutely *nil*. From these figures it will be seen that though the business of Bunder Abbas falls a long way below that of Bushire, which in the same year amounted to, roughly, one and a half millions sterling, and even falls considerably short of Lingah's £1,150,000—though here the figures are rather misleading owing to the inclusion of the re-exports—still the total is sufficient to show that the trade of Bunder Abbas is by no means a small quantity. When we compare the figures for 1899, the date on which Lord Curzon based his calculations, it will be found that with regard to most articles of commerce there has been little alteration in the imports, except in the case of tea, where the figures have risen from 600 to 3000 tons. The exports, on the other hand, have suffered a distinct decrease, especially in the amount of opium sent to China, which is due, it is alleged, to the adulteration of the article.

In 1901 the total value of the trade rose to £575,000 which was a great improvement on 1900, but still a long way short of 1899. It is to be noted that Russian trade is now represented by imports to the value of £2746 carried in the subsidised steamers which now run between Odessa and the Gulf.

On the whole the commercial condition of Bunder Abbas cannot be regarded as satisfactory since it is

bound to lose a large portion of the tea-trade which alone has increased in the last ten years, but which must now follow the Quetta-Nushki route. The Nushki route, starting from Quetta and skirting the south-west corner of Afghanistan, is not only shorter, as far as Seistan and Meshed is concerned, but it is now well patrolled right through Beluchistan, and is practically as safe as Piccadilly. It has yet to obtain the sanction only given by custom in the East, but seeing that the Bunder Abbas route is still most unsafe—two caravans having been attacked within two weeks of our arrival at Bunder Abbas, and robbed of all their goods—it is almost a matter of course that in time the Nushki route must absorb all the trade between India and North-east Persia, which is tantamount to saying that Bunder Abbas will continue to deal only with Kerman and Yezd, and possibly Teheran. Now that the Karun route is thoroughly opened Teheran must be omitted, and nothing but Kerman and Yezd remains. We are thus reduced to the conclusion that instead of taking the 1899 figures as a true criterion in judging the prospects of Bunder Abbas we ought rather to regard the meagre total of 1901 as the truer estimate for the future. At any rate, we may be justified in saying that the record so far reached, which is about three quarters of a million pounds sterling, is likely to remain a record as long as present conditions hold good. On the other hand, this small total by no means represents the possibilities of Bunder Abbas, though it may rather more than exhaust the probabilities.

Under a less fatuous government than that of Persia the caravan route to Yezd, which is now the scene of yearly depredations, might be rendered very easily secure. The other day, when we were in Bunder Abbas, the brawny Afghan traders had volunteered to go out to punish the marauders who had cut up a caravan within fifteen miles of the sea-port. The Persian Deputy Governor was unable to accede to such a proceeding, and yet had nothing better than an ill-armed mob to send out on a fruitless punitive expedition, which could never come within a hundred miles of the culprits.

It was suggested by Lord Curzon that the presence of British Consuls at Kerman and Yezd and Bunder Abbas might in some way render the road more open. We have now British representatives at two of those places, but it is difficult to see how they can do the work of the Persian Government and the Persian Army combined. Again, the arbitrary embargo on the export of cereals throughout the past half-century has been a constant hindrance to trade by discouraging the cultivation of the soil and reducing the buying capacity of the population, yet the Persian Government still persists in enforcing its foolish veto. If this embargo were removed and the caravan route thoroughly secured against attack, which is not too much to ask of even so impotent a Government as that of the Shah, the trade on this line of import and export might be considerably encouraged. But even so there is a limit to the possibilities of the trade which is distributed from a port by a caravan route among people whose numbers and

habits and requirements are practically stationary. The only chance for a great improvement at Bunder Abbas lies in railway development. Whatever form the future railway system of Persia may take it is almost certain that a line will eventually join Bunder Abbas, Kerman, and Yezd. When that is the case it is reasonable to suppose that one penny a ton per mile for the carriage of goods will be considered a high charge and Yezd will be brought within a day of the coast. At the present time, though it is quite impossible to arrive at a definite charge for transport on the caravan route, since it varies enormously from month to month and even from day to day, still £12 per ton from Bunder Abbas to Yezd may be taken as a more or less typical price, and it works out at something like 5*d.* per mile, the journey occupying not less than thirty-two days.

Any little improvements, which may affect trade for the present, are as nothing when compared with the revolution that would be created by a system of haulage which would reduce the price of carriage to one-fifth or less of the present charge, and the time of transit from thirty-two days to twenty-four hours. Nor are we altogether justified in disregarding the possibility of such a change. Bunder Abbas is at present a port of entry and exit for about half a million pounds' worth of British-Indian trade, and the principal merchants of the place are British-Indian subjects. In the event of Persia adopting ordinary modern methods of transport that trade might indefinitely increase and would continue to be largely British-Indian, provided the railway

system was in the hands of no hostile Power. At the very worst Bunder Abbas must always be the outlet for the trade of the rich centres of Kerman and Yezd. Yet we find writers of high standing recommending the gratuitous surrender of this port to Russia, the avowed rival of Great Britain in the trade and politics of Persia.

From a commercial point of view there is but one possible argument in favour of allowing Russia a free access to the Gulf. I have pointed out that the trade of Bunder Abbas and its general prosperity, to say nothing of the concomitant prosperity of its hinterland, depend first of all on the security of the routes and a more enlightened policy of administration, but secondly, and to a far greater extent, on the opening up of the country by railways. The question is whether or not we should be content to allow our trade in this quarter to languish and die away under existing conditions, or, by encouraging the Russians to come to Bunder Abbas and to connect that port by rail with central and northern Persia, we should indirectly assist the regeneration of the Shah's dominions.

I do not see any escape from the conclusion that of the two alternatives the second is decidedly preferable. If there were only these two alternatives I would almost be persuaded to follow the lead of those writers who advocate the encouragement of Russia in this quarter of the globe. But I do most emphatically assert that there is another and infinitely better course open to us; and that is to insist on the development of Lower Persia under

our own management and protection. That we should ever have allowed Russia to get a practical option on railway concessions in Persia argues a deplorable want of foresight in our dealings with the Shah. There can be no possible excuse for our acquiescing in the further renewal of the Russo-Persian railway agreement when the present term expires. Whatever form the future railway system of Persia may take, it is almost a matter of course that the great plateau will be connected with the Gulf and the Indian Ocean by lines running at right angles to the coast, just as in South Africa the railway arteries go from Capetown and Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, and Delagoa Bay from the coast to the upper veldt, cutting the edge of the tableland at right angles. The Bunder Abbas-Kerman-Yezd route is one that naturally suggests itself as being commercially advantageous, and from an engineering point of view not only feasible but greatly preferable to the exceedingly arduous Bushire-Shiraz way. There would be no more difficulty in constructing a line from Bunder Abbas to Kerman than there was in connecting Capetown with De Aar by way of the Hex River Valley. If anything the Persian tableland by the alignment mentioned, would be more easily reached. But this railway and all other railways in Lower Persia must be controlled by Great Britain, provided always that the Shah's Government is unable to cope with the task. If this means the partition of Persia, then Persia must be divided, unless we are to allow Russia to dominate the whole kingdom. That there is any

great danger to us in such a partition a study of the map of Persia enables one to deny. All Persia, as Lord Curzon has pointed out, is divided into two parts by the great Salt Desert, which runs for five hundred miles from north-west to south-east, and presents a barrier as insurmountable as the bleak Karakoram or the snows of the Himalayas. Those writers who dread our coming to close quarters by land with Russia have overlooked this important strategical fact; otherwise they would surely be prepared to admit that it were better to extend our influence and government, if need be, to this natural boundary, than to surrender to our rival one of the most important bases in all the Indian waters.

It is a truism to say that Bunder Abbas controls the Persian Gulf. The most elementary knowledge of geography will convince any one of that—Bunder Abbas including, of course, the Islands of Ormuz, Larak and Kishm, without which Russia would never accept the place, even as a free gift. What is not so generally recognised, however, is that Bunder Abbas can be made into as fine a naval base as there is anywhere in the world.

The description which is usually given of the port conveys the idea of an open roadstead which only enormous expense could convert into a tolerable harbour, which would then be open to attack from the sea. A casual look at the map will show that this is very far from being the case. Just to the west of the present town—which is itself a good way east of the original Gombroon—the Clarence Straits between the Island of Kishm and the main-

land gradually narrow down until they are less than three miles in width, and yet they contain abundance of deep water. It is here that the Russians, if they ever came to Bunder Abbas, would make their naval base, about ten miles west of the present town, where all the navies of the world could manœuvre without running into one another. The main drawbacks are a shelving beach, which would necessitate some dredging, and partial exposure to a south-east wind, which is greatly obviated, however, by the shelter afforded by the Islands of Larak and Ormuz and the east end of Kishm. At any rate a tenth of the sum which the Russians have spent already on Dalny would be quite sufficient to make a magnificent harbour anywhere towards the eastern end of the Clarence Straits. Once made it would be absolutely secure from attack, since forts on the Islands of Kishm, Larak, and Ormuz would prevent any hostile ship coming within twenty miles of the anchorage. Indeed, it would be impossible for any traffic to go on into the Gulf without the permission of the Power which might hold Bunder Abbas and its adjacent islands.

Imagine Russia with her fleet secure inside Kishm and her railway connecting Bunder 'Abbas with Central Asia on the one hand or Tiflis on the other, with her Cossacks dominating Persia as they do Manchuria at the present moment. What vestige of influence would there be left to Great Britain anywhere in Persia? What chance would there be for our growing trade with that country against a close-fisted rival who would control the railways and

the main entrance to the Gulf? But this is not by any means the worst of such a situation. With a Russian base at Bunder Abbas either we should have to withdraw our men-of-war from the Gulf altogether, and forfeit the position which we have built up in a hundred laborious years, or we should be compelled to resort to the no less objectionable course of occupying a flying base on the opposite shore as a counterpoise. It would be Port Arthur and Wei-Hai-Wei over again almost to the last letter. Russia would hold a well-defended port at the end of a railway system which would give her complete control of the country through which it ran. We on the opposite shore would be driven to occupy a port which is not connected with anything at all in our system and would be a useless drain on our resources. Just opposite Bunder Abbas, at a distance of something over fifty miles, is the finest natural harbour on the whole coast of Arabia. It goes by the name of Elphinstone's Inlet. As a harbour it compares favourably with our acquisition at Wei-Hai-Wei; the surroundings are rather more barren than the Shantung promontory, and the climate is said to be worse than anything on this side of the river Styx. Except that Wei-Hai-Wei has the advantage of being a pleasant summer resort, which Elphinstone Inlet assuredly has not, it would be difficult to find a more perfect analogy. And with all the experience we have had in China it is impossible to see how we could avoid repeating the Wei-Hai-Wei episode if Russia were really to acquire Bunder Abbas. Then we should be forced

to provide a fleet of four or five battleships, with a first-class cruiser or two, since we cannot imagine that Russia is going to acquire Bunder Abbas as a health resort. Our Indian coast, which is far from being strongly defended, would become instantly vulnerable, and the people of Great Britain, the long-suffering taxpayers, would find themselves face to face with a constant menace to their Indian Empire, with the necessity of adding a new fleet to the British navy, and fortifying a new naval base on a barren spot where the heat is more intolerable than in any part of our existing tropical possessions.

The more one contemplates the result of such a disastrous policy the more is one amazed that there should be found sane people in Great Britain to advocate it. And what is the most amazing part of it all is that the advocates of this strange line of action ask us to give gratuitously to Russia what she has never had the audacity to ask, and what in any case is not ours to give. Personally I am convinced that Russia will sooner or later attempt to reach the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean. The presence of the cruiser *Varyag* in these waters, plainly sent round as an advertisement to the natives, the subsidising of ships at absurd rates to create a spurious trade, the evidence of little intrigues in the neighbourhood of Bunder Abbas, the anxiety of Russia to retain the monopoly of railway concessions in Persia—all these things for any one who has studied Russian methods in the East point to one conclusion. But whatever her

intentions may be—and they have never been veiled in this respect—Russia, which up to two years ago had not a vestige of trade in these waters, and now, owing to her recent endeavours, has only an infinitesimally small portion of the whole, could hardly yet have the face to openly suggest that she should plant herself down on our very doorstep for the purpose certainly not of friendly intercourse, but of direct menace. Yet what she could not possibly demand we are, for some vague friendship to be gained in return, to give her freely, at the cost of enormous increase in our naval expenditure. By what right do we give away Persian territory? How is it to our advantage to encroach thus vicariously on the integrity of a country which we have been at such pains to preserve intact? I can only conceive one possible argument in favour of such a course, which must run as follows. Persia is already so much under the thumb of Russia that we might as well hasten on the final *débâcle* and know the worst. If this is not Russophobia in its most abject form, there is no meaning in that hackneyed term.

One must admit that the Shah's government is already an anachronism in the existing stage of the world's development, and our policy of jealously guarding the integrity of Persia is daily becoming more and more of a sham. But the true corollary of that policy is surely not to assist Persia to become an integral portion of the Russian Empire, which is exactly what the result of giving Russia a port on the Gulf would be. If Persia must come

under foreign domination, it is due to our Indian Empire to see that that portion of Persia in which Indian trade is most vitally interested should be controlled by the British Government; nor can there be any strategical advantage in allowing Russia to bring her borders up to our Beluchistan frontier, supported by a naval base in Indian waters, in preference to selecting another and more effective conterminous boundary in Persia which would leave the Gulf and the Indian Ocean entirely in our hands. It is just because I believe that Great Britain can still hold her own against Russia in Asia—which I take to be the reverse of Russophobia—that I see no necessity for giving away a strong piece in the game without the slightest necessity or without any kind of tangible *quid pro quo*.

As a matter of fact, the dominating position of Russia at the Court of Teheran is apt to be exaggerated; for if she holds the whip hand over Persia in the North, we can equally if we like control the weak Government of the Shah in the South. It may have been forgotten by many that Bunder Abbas and its adjacent islands were not Persian territory at all fifty years ago, and would not be to-day if we had raised our finger to assist our ally the Sultan of Maskat, who was formerly in possession of them for at least half a century. It may further be news to some of those who have not visited the Gulf—it certainly was to me—that there is not a single really Persian village or town on the coast of Persia from Mahommerah, on the Shat-al-Arab, to

Gwadur, on the Beluchistan border. Every town, village, and island is inhabited by Arabs, with a very small sprinkling of Persian blood among them, over whom the Persian Government would be quite incapable of asserting its authority should any concerted rising take place. It is only a year or two since there was a temporary overthrow of Persian authority at Lingah; the Sheikh of Kishm would like to declare his independence. And for some time it was an open question whether the Arabs of Mohammerah would submit to extension of the new customs *régime* to that port.

The only reason that can be given for the acceptance of Persian rule by the coast people is one which holds good very often in the East. The Arab, like most Orientals, is made to be governed as long as he is not interfered with in his domestic arrangements, and he willingly bows to the powers that be, just as his relatives across the Gulf at El Katif and El Hasa and throughout Nejd acknowledge the overlordship of the Sultan of Turkey, which is backed by no real power whatsoever. Still, Persia must never forget that she governs her coast only on sufferance, and at the very first whisper of any intrigue we could seize every port she possesses in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean without firing more than a few blank cartridges. This would be a pity, for it would deprive the Shah of a large and growing source of revenue.

The fact is that our supremacy in the waters of the Gulf gives us an enormous power over Lower Persia whenever we like to exert it; and it is a

pity, perhaps, that owing to our policy of "prudential reserve" with regard to Persia—the phrase was coined by Morier nearly a hundred years ago—we are apt to let the Shah fall into error respecting the true balance of affairs, and at the same time to give reason to the faint-hearted to suggest that since Russia has the half she may just as well have the whole, and have done with it. There are obvious reasons why we should still prop up for the moment the crazy structure of the Persian Government, but we cannot for ever stop the hands on the clock of history. If we are indifferent to the modernising of Persia there is another Power which assuredly is not, though that Power, too, may have its own reasons for not hurrying on the *dénoûment*. There are so many nations besides ourselves which turn keen eyes towards the crumbling Kingdoms of the East that to pursue for ever the cult of the *status quo* is not possible, even if it were desirable. When the time comes for the regeneration of Persia we shall have practically no choice between turning over the country to Russia and doing part of the regenerating ourselves. If the regenerating alternative is a troublesome and expensive task it is bound to be far cheaper and more expedient, not to say more honourable, than the policy of total abandonment.

CHAPTER VI

VISIT TO THE PIRATE COAST

FROM Bunder Abbas on a clear day the Arab coast is distinctly visible outlined against the sky, between the Islands of Larak and Kishm, which stand up in the foreground. The distance is exactly fifty miles from the little pier at Bunder Abbas, but it is less than thirty from Larak across to Cape Musandim on the Arab side of the Gulf; so that the Power which holds Bunder Abbas Bay with Larak and Kishm as its outposts has complete control over the narrow waters at the entrance of the Gulf.

Having set down Captain Boxer, the new British representative at Bunder Abbas, and left him to support existence as best he might in the only possible house of the place, out at the wells of Nabaund, a mile or two along the shore from the smelly little town, we started about midnight, not sorry to leave this desolate part of the earth, and full of admiration for the long-suffering agents of the British Empire, who, at a moment's notice, may be sent from a pleasant officer's mess in a cheery Indian cantonment to the barren sands of a filthy Persian port, where the mail steamer calls once a week; where there is, perhaps, one other European with whom to associate; and where the summer

climate—which lasts for eight months out of twelve —has taxed the originality of writers for many centuries to find language commensurate with its horrors.

At daybreak the *Lawrence* found herself under the shadow of that rugged, mountainous promontory above which hover the protecting spirits of sea and air, to whom, it is said, Arabs and Hindus alike offer sacrifices at the beginning and ending of their voyages out into the unknown Indian Ocean. Certainly the spirits of the air have chosen a far from ambrosial resting-place, since of all the barren, arid, rock-bound coast of the Arabian Peninsula this cape is, perhaps, the most gloomy and forbidding. The whole promontory, which may be fifteen or twenty miles in length, and so perforated with inlets that it is at one spot near the base only 400 yards in width, reminds one of an enormous system of slag heaps round the mouth of some Titanic coal pit.

We were making for Elphinstone's Inlet, one of the many natural harbours of the promontory, and by all means the best. It is so completely land-locked that its presence would never be guessed by any one unacquainted with the coast. Steaming along beneath the shadow of Jebel Shem, a mass of rock which rises to 3000 ft. between us and the morning sun, we suddenly become aware of an opening into the side of the mountain, to which the attention of the mariner is directed by a small pillar erected on a little island just opposite, by the staff, perhaps, of the Indo-European telegraph, which once had a station here.

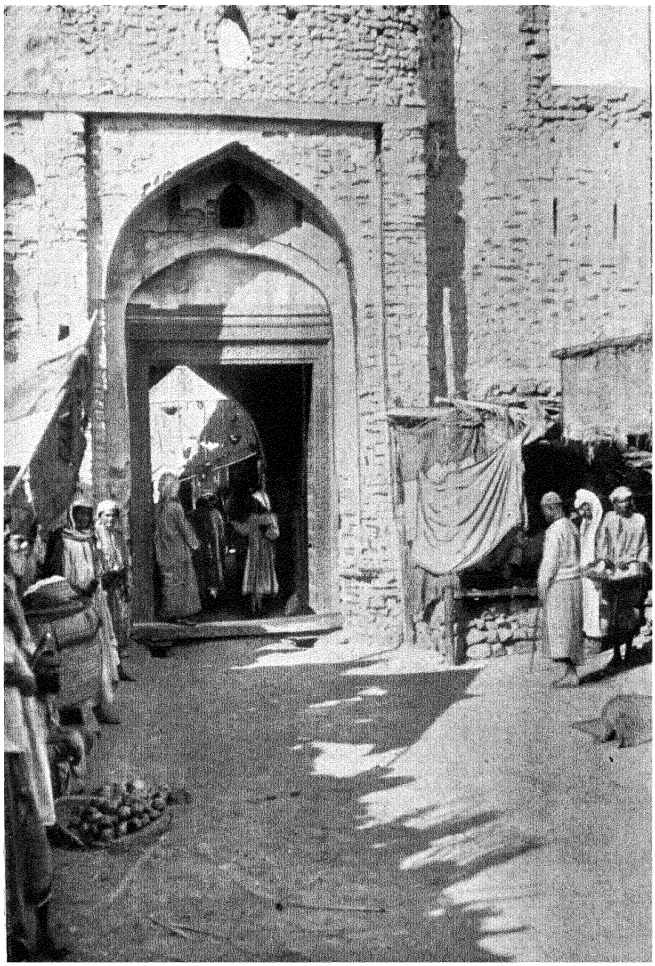
Once inside this gash in the rock wall the *Lawrence* found herself at the beginning of a long arm of the sea, which extends for seven and a half miles to the foot of another mountain called Sibi, of the same height as Jebel Shem, and which is so irregular in shape as to vary constantly from half a mile to three miles in breadth. The sides of the inlet are mostly precipitous and completely devoid of vegetation, rising about a mile inside the entrance to a sheer precipice, which extends nearly to the top of Jebel Shem, and must be considerably over 2000 ft. Opposite this precipice, which is on the north side of the inlet, there is a diminutive island, with the remains of the telegraph office built there as a landing-place for the Gulf cable forty years ago. It is almost a relief to know, even at the present moment, that the station was abandoned about three years later. What the telegraph officials must have suffered during three years on this wretched little island, surrounded on all sides by frowning walls of rock, accumulating and reflecting the terrible heat of the Arabian sun, it is quite impossible, at least in this pleasant winter weather, to conceive. There are seventeen fathoms of water in most parts of the inlet and ten fathoms right up to the shore. This is the harbour which we should be compelled to take and hold if we should ever be weak enough to allow Russia to acquire Bunder Abbas.

Perfect as the harbour is from a defensive point of view, the climate is so awful in summer as to make it almost untenable for Europeans. It may

be argued that Bunder Abbas is just as bad. But this is not quite the case. The residential part of Bunder Abbas might again be transferred to the Island of Ormuz, which is distinctly cooler than the mainland, and which was, as we know, the site of a great city, full of the merchants of all the seven seas, three hundred years age. Besides, behind Bunder Abbas Ginao rears its mighty bulk, a sheer 7000 ft. and more, with a great plateau behind it, where fruit and grain grow, and where life, if not too pleasant, is quite supportable at a height of 4000 to 5000 ft. This ready-made hill station could be brought within a few hours of Bunder Abbas, by rail, and would go very far to mitigate the pains of the Persian Gulf summer.

Colonel Pelly, who long ago saw the necessity of creating a naval station and trade emporium in the Gulf, suggested for the twin purpose the village of Khasab, which lies in a well-sheltered cove just outside the mouth of the Elphinstone Inlet, and being gifted by Nature with fresh water—a rare commodity in the Gulf—is distinguished under the dark cliffs by a grove of palms and a little vegetation. But though the climate would be a little less torrid than that of the Elphinstone Inlet itself, the heat, even of the January day, when we steamed past Khasab, was sufficient to make one pause before recommending the place as a desirable naval or mercantile base.

As we were returning from the far end of the inlet we were surprised to find the quiet waters alive with antiquated fishing craft, from which



STREET SCENE IN AN ARAB TOWN

almost naked men shouted to us in some outlandish jargon, waving at the same time their poor wares of dead fish to attract the foreigners' attention. Being in mid-channel with seventeen fathoms under our keel it was impossible to stop and interview them, though it was all we could do to keep the paddle-wheels of the *Lawrence* free from the poor creatures' boats. We were left, therefore, to take it for granted that these were Colonel Pelly's "singular race of men, driven by stronger growths of humanity into this remotest corner," who are also mentioned by Lord Curzon and called by him Shihiyins.

Leaving them to their undisputed possession of this weird harbour, it was our pleasant duty to proceed along the Arabian coast of the Gulf and to visit the Sheikhs of the pearling villages, who are called the Trucial Chiefs because they are bound, originally by an annual truce, and now by a perpetual treaty, not to indulge in any hostilities by sea. Every year the British Resident visits the different villages, distributes rewards, listens to complaints, and smooths down differences. The first treaty was in 1806, when the British were compelled to bind down the piratical Jowasmi tribe to respect the British flag. But as the Jowasmis—turned from peaceful traders into fanatical brigands by the influence of the Wahabi Chief of Nejd—continued to carry on their depredations with frightful cruelty to captured crews, and on one occasion attacked and boarded his Majesty's ship *Minerva*, and murdered the entire ship's company,

it was necessary first in 1809, and again ten years later, to send against the pirates large expeditions, which so completely crushed their power that since 1820, when the first general treaty was made with the coast Sheikhs, no great expedition has been necessary. The Gulf has been free from piracy on a large scale. Still the practice was from time to time carried on under the guise of warfare, so that in 1835 it was found advisable to bind the Sheikhs by a truce lasting six months, that is to say, during the pearling season, not merely to abstain from piracy but to avoid all hostilities by sea. So successful was this truce found to be that it was annually renewed until 1843 when it was extended for ten years, and on the expiration of that term in 1853, it was made a perpetual treaty. It is the business, therefore, of the British Resident to take care not only that no piracies are committed on the Gulf, but that no wars are carried on between independent Sheikhs and the parties to this arrangement are not only the Sheikhs of what is called the Pirate Coast, but also the Chief of Bahrein, and the Chief of the Promontory of Katr, who was bound down to keep the peace in 1867; though we have had constant trouble with the last named power ever since the present Sheikh Jasim succeeded in 1878, and put himself under Turkish protection.

Nominally the jurisdiction of the Resident extends only as far as the seaboard, and even so there is a case on record where the ex-Chief of Bahrein applied for leave to fight against the usurper, his grand-nephew—a fight which would involve operations on

the sea. The consent of the Resident was given, but I believe this is the only instance of war by sea being permitted since the first signing of the truce in 1835, and even then the ex-chief was defeated on the mainland before he could put to sea. In actual practice the jurisdiction of the Resident holds good in an informal way even on the mainland. There are continual feuds between the different chiefs, who, debarred from fighting by sea, can hardly be restrained from attacking each other by land. Still, these feuds are frequently settled by appeal to the British representative.

We had an excellent instance of this when we reached Abuthabi. A certain tribe under the Sheikh of Abuthabi wished to settle on land claimed by the neighbouring Chief of Shargah, who was determined to prevent what he considered an attempt at land-grabbing. Hostilities were already rendered difficult by the treaty; for the Resident can and does forbid any supplies to go to the disputed spot by sea, and a land commissariat is much more expensive. Yet the Sheikh of Abuthabi, a magnificent Arab, being the greatest Sheikh on the coast, felt that he could not possibly give in, especially as he had spent 20,000 rupees on getting an army ready. He would be a laughing-stock, he said, if he drew back now.

Such is the moral influence of the British Resident that in the course of an hour's talk he persuaded the Sheikh to give up his warlike ambitions, and the result will be an amicable arrangement. In point of fact, the Sheikh of Abuthabi did not in his heart

of hearts want to fight, and he will be only too glad if he can "save his face" by saying that the great British Government will not let him fight.

Thus it comes to pass that an arrangement which was originally brought about to protect the pearl trade, which is the very life-blood of these Arab tribes, has become a means of preserving the peace on the mainland as well. Properly speaking, the Trucial Chiefs inhabit just half the Arabian coast of the Gulf, which is divided into two parts by the Promontory of Katr. But Katr and Bahrein are included in the treaty by separate agreements, and it is only because the Turks have been allowed to extend their sway over Katr and Hasa and Katif that any piracies still go on beyond the mouth of the Shat-al-Arab, which, being under Turkish rule, is still a haunt of robbers. It was distinctly unfortunate that we ever allowed Jasim to succeed to Katr in 1878, or at least that we allowed him to accept office under Turkey and introduce a Turkish garrison into Bida, the chief village of Katr. This was only the natural result, however, of the carelessness which permitted the Turks to occupy Hasa and Katif—opposite to the Island of Bahrein—under the pretext of putting Abdullah bin Feyzul back on the throne of Nejd. This happened thirty years ago, when we still tried to restrict our influence as far as possible to the waters of the Gulf, and professed entire indifference to whatever might happen on the mainland. Thus, though we acknowledge no Turkish authority over Katr, we allow a Turkish garrison to remain in Bida, the head village of Katr; and we

fully admit the claims of Turkey over Hasa and Katif, which is tantamount to giving over these fertile districts to robbery and brigandage for ever. It would have been quite simple to have treated Hasa and Katif as we did Bahrein, to which the Turks also make, even to-day, absurd claims, and if we had done so there would have been no vestige to-day of real Turkish authority backed by troops on the shores of the Gulf. So plain is this to the eye of the most casual observer that it is difficult to understand what in the world our Government was thinking of thirty years ago when it allowed Turkish troops to settle permanently on the shores of the Bight of Bahrein.

As for our own influence over the coast, no one can doubt its beneficence, and it is especially gratifying to see how the British Resident is able to transcend the actual treaty, and act as arbiter in disputes which, not so long ago, would certainly have led to instant bloodshed. To the eye unaccustomed to the Arab character there is something distinctly amusing, if it is not almost pathetic, in the spectacle of these handsome, black-bearded, hawk-eyed men, in the very costume of the picture Bibles of our youth, patriarchs and dictators in their own little spheres, yet so completely outside the world of to-day, that it is impossible to treat them otherwise than as very young school-boys, who must be encouraged to be good by presents of expensive toys. There is no one in the world, not even among the royalties of Europe, who can surpass the Arab Sheikh in that natural dignity which expresses no thought of self-

conceit, but is at the same time instinct with the quiet pride of race. Yet there is no one who is so completely childlike as this same magnificent patriarch, who does not particularly want to fight, but is afraid of being laughed at if he holds back. It is difficult to believe that the splendid looking chief who walks majestically along the deck of the *Lawrence*, followed by a picturesque retinue of Arabs and Negro slaves, is the same person as the old man you see half an hour later squatting on a carpet in the stern of a fishing-boat, eagerly tearing open the paper wrapping of his present to see how the British Government has treated him. After all, he and his tribesmen are so completely cut off from communication with the outer world, that it would be unfair to expect too much of them in the way of enlightenment. They live along the shores of a barren peninsula, entirely dependent on the pearls of the banks for their subsistence. There is not a possible harbour on the whole coast between Elphinstone's Inlet and Bahrein, the shore being exposed to the prevalent winds of the Gulf, without a vestige of protection. At Ras-al-Khaima, the ancient stronghold of the Jowasmi tribe, we were able to communicate with the shore because there was no wind. At Umm-ul-Kawain (Amulgavine), which we next visited, the fine long-boat of the Sheikh was badly bruised by contact with the side of the *Lawrence*, and when we reached Shargah, the present capital of the Jowasmis, a shamal (north-west wind) had set in further up the Gulf, and for forty-eight mortal hours we were tossed helplessly

to and fro on the crests of an in-rolling sea, until we were very near setting off to Bushire with the work of the tour unfinished.

When at last, on the third day, the old Jowasmi Chief came out with the British Agent—both splendid specimens of the well-born Arab—and he attempted to commit a statement of his grievances and requirements to writing, he fell so sick with the tumbling of the *Lawrence* that he was obliged to cut short his letter in the middle. At Debaye the sea was not quite so bad, and at Abuthabi it had reduced itself to a slight swell, and we were able to go ashore and visit the town. The town is really nothing more nor less than a collection of wattle huts on a sand-spit, with a few stone buildings, occupied by the Sheikh and his brother, and a little bazaar built in stone by the enterprise of our fellow subjects from Karachi, who have something like a monopoly of the foreign trade.

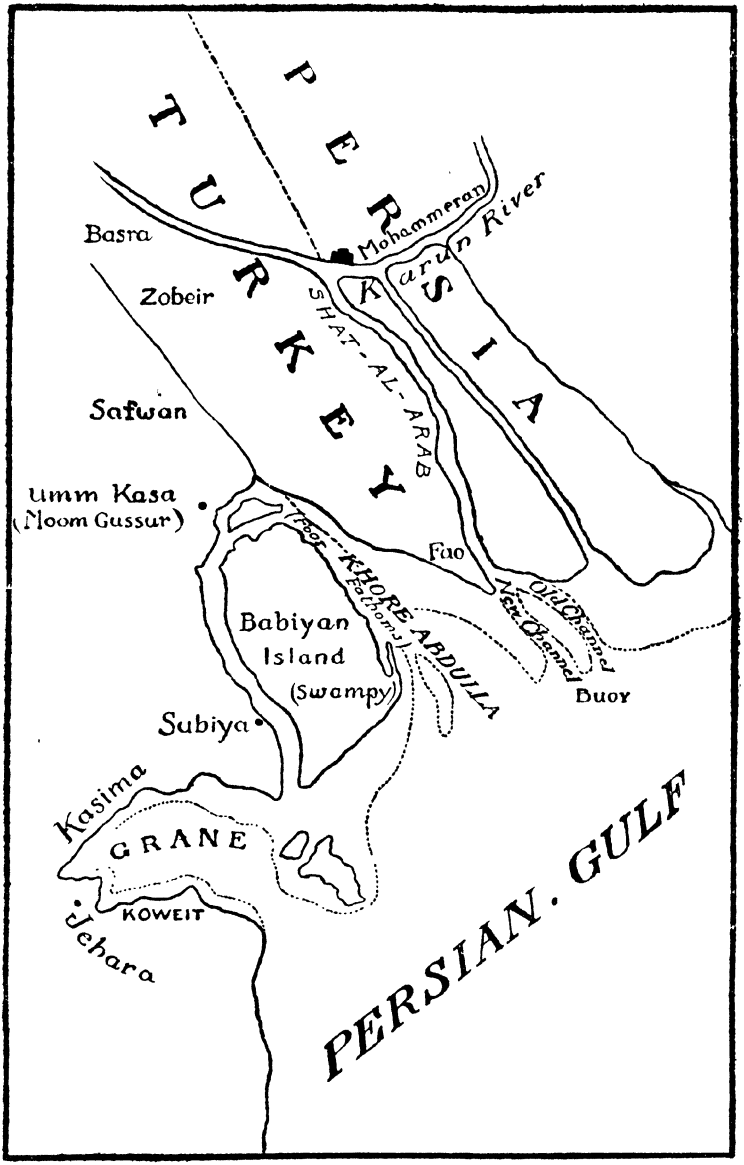
It will be seen, therefore, that no merchant steamers could possibly call at these Arab ports, and their foreign trade must be carried on by means of some distributing-centre like Lingah or Bahrein, to which their native craft can ply. At each stopping place, the Arabs crowded on board to inspect the British gunboat, and at each place presents were distributed according to the importance of the Sheikh, and his deserts. Shot-guns and rifles, telescopes and phonographs, were bountifully dealt out to these great, dignified grown-up children, who, childlike, were not at all above making their wants distinctly known. One Sheikh who got a

shot-gun said he would much have preferred a rifle; and another—Abuthabi, I think—startled the Resident by asking for a steam launch, one of the few things we did not keep in stock. Occasionally, on these tours, slaves make their escape to the British ship, and claim manumission. This time we only had one application, at Lingah. At Abuthabi we discovered on going ashore that the Sheikh had given strict orders for no boats to leave the shore, except with his permission, during the visit of the *Lawrence*. In this way he keeps his slaves, and avoids friction with the protecting Power, whose anti-slavery policy is the one thing which the Arab can neither understand, nor pretend to admire in our behaviour.

They are, on the whole, a rather delightful people in their primitive simplicity. For a short time they were so inspired with the Wahabi religious craze that they ceased to be peaceful traders, and became the most bloodthirsty pirates. But it is quite apparent that they never really wanted to be pirates, nor is there much trace of the Wahabi religion left among them now that the old fanatical power of the Nejd reformers has been crushed by the Rashids of Hail. They exist on the pearl trade, which on the Pirate Coast alone may amount to £300,000 a year (not including Bahrein), and they have often abandoned a vendetta in the middle in order to attend to the more lucrative business of the pearl season. They are now held strictly to their engagements by the British Government, through its Resident at Bushire; and there is probably not

an Arab on the coast who has not cause to bless the British Government, even if he fails to understand why Great Britain should spend large sums of money in protecting an industry by which no British merchant is directly profited. He rather regards the British Resident as a benevolent being belonging to another sphere of existence, whose acts are to be no more called in question or accounted for than the ways of the winds and the waters.

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The positions of Safwan and Umm-Kasa are conjectural, but those indicated above are sufficiently accurate for practical purposes. Umm-Kasa (Moom-gussur) controls the Khore Abdulla. The Turks have now occupied Safwan and Umm-Kasa with a half-battalion at each, and they desire to occupy Subiya, which would give them the north-east corner of Koweit Harbour. Subiya can certainly be claimed by Mubarek.

CHAPTER VII

THE IMPORTANCE OF KOWEIT

THOUGH Koweit is one of the cleanest and most prosperous ports in the Gulf, there is nothing in the aspect of the place or its surroundings to suggest the anxiety of nations concerning its political independence. Undoubtedly the "Grane" or "horn" on which it stands is a noble sheet of water, containing a deep anchorage of some twenty miles east and west, with an average breadth of five. A low island lies half way across the wide mouth of the bay, and as the south shore is convex and the north concave, the inner half of the horn is practically land-locked, producing a harbour with anywhere from twenty to thirty square miles of deep water. The shore shelves gradually, so that at no place is it possible for a large ship to come much nearer than a mile and a half to the shore, that being the distance at which I found H.M.S. *Fox* lying in five fathoms off the town when I visited Koweit. It would, therefore, require a large expenditure of money to make a really satisfactory port, with landing wharves and docks, anywhere on the shores of the Grane.

The general aspect of the landscape is more dreary than that of any other port that I have seen on the Gulf, and that is saying a great deal. There are no

rugged mountains in the background as at Bushire or Bunder Abbas; indeed, the land is so low on all sides that it is barely visible across the bay. The date groves, which redeem Lingah and the pirate towns from absolute barrenness, are here conspicuous by their absence, though there are a few at Jehara, which is at the extreme head of the horn. One solitary tree rears an unblushing head a mile or more to eastward of the town of Koweit, constituting by its singularity a mark to navigators. The only other features of the landscape which offer themselves as aids to seamen are an old ruined fort a few miles inland from Koweit, a tomb on the island at the entrance to the harbour, and a clump of date palms on the south coast outside the entrance. In all Arabia it would be difficult to find a more featureless monotony.

The town, which is on the south side of the "Grane," has risen to a respectable degree of prosperity, as Arab towns go, by the fact of its being the natural port for the interior kingdoms of Nejd and Jebel Shammer, now joined under one ruler, and also by reason of the wise economy of its rulers, who have always kept it practically free of duty. It is also the gate of one of the many pilgrim routes across the Arabian peninsula to Mecca, and that in itself means money in the pocket of the Sheikh. It seems, moreover, to have kept, perhaps through its position, more or less aloof from the everlasting feuds of the Arab coast which were so disastrous to trade in the earlier part of last century; and, what is remarkable in this country, the Sheikhs, up to the

time of the late chief's removal, had enjoyed long reigns and had died in their beds.

The population of Koweit has been variously estimated at different times by visitors as 10,000, 12,000, and 20,000; probably the second figure is as correct as such estimates can be. The number of sailors belonging to the port has been put as high as 4000, so that it is clearly seen that Koweit is a maritime principality, dependent on the sea and the commerce of the sea for its riches. The land about it produces nothing at all, and the dominions of the reigning Sheikh might as well be limited to the town of Koweit, the summer residence among the date trees at Jehara, and the shore of the Grane if it were not for the fact that the family of the chief has grown rich from the commerce of the port, and has been able to acquire valuable properties on the Shat-al-Arab, which are even now a source of dispute and litigation.

A description of the town and the harbour will not, however, disclose any reason for the presence of a big second-class cruiser like the *Fox*, just off the little port; nor for the trenches round the town dug by British marines, nor for all the hubbub about Koweit in the Press of Europe during the last two years. Of course there is the harbour, the best by all odds in the Gulf. But why should we be more anxious about the harbour now than at any other time in the past fifty years? It is true that the Grane has gained a new importance since the Germans came to the fore in Arabian politics with their Mesopotamian Railway which should

find its best access to the sea in the harbour of Koweit. But Koweit was on the political carpet even before the German Commission, which travelled from Bagdad to Basra in 1900 to hit upon a provisional alignment for the railway. Nor can we attribute our increased interest in the place to the quarrel between the Sheikh of Koweit and the Amir of Nejd, since we have always disavowed any right or desire to interfere in the internal disputes between Arab rulers as long as they avoid hostilities by sea. The fact of the matter is that the present situation is the outcome of all these conditions with a few more besides which cannot be appreciated without examining the recent history of this part of Arabia, and bringing it up to date. The subject is, for most people, a dull one and I shall endeavour to be as concise as possible.

To explain the existence of Koweit at all, it is impossible to do better than to quote a government report of 1874, where Colonel Pelly, who, as British Resident in the Gulf, visited Koweit both in 1863 and 1865, gives the history as follows:

The family of the present Sheikh (1863) has ruled at Koweit some five generations (250 years), for as these men live to the good old age of a hundred and twenty years their generations are, of course, nearly double ours, or about fifty years each. Originally the Sheikh's progenitors dwelt in a small fort called Moom-gussur, situated at the head of the Khore Abdullah, near Bunder Zobeir. They were the pirates of the North of the Persian Gulf and the lower channels of the Shat-al-Arab. But about 250 years ago the Basra authorities attacked and expelled them. The original Sheikh then came down the Boobian creek with his followers and debouched on the bay at present known as that of Koweit or Grane. Crossing the bay, he settled down on its southern shore

and there erected a fort or "khote," hence the name Khote or Koweit. The term Grane is rather applied to the shore line of the entire bay from its resemblance to the curve formed by two horns ("keor" or "ghern," meaning horn). The settlement was subsequently increased by the son of the founder, who erected the longer portions of the present walls, which, however, have since been again extended along the shore line as the increase of population from time to time demanded.

Perhaps no conjuncture of circumstances could have seemed less favourable to the creation of a thriving commercial settlement than the arrival of a band of Arab pirates upon a barren shore, with brackish water and backgrounded by a series of Bedouins. Yet what is the fact? Here is a clean town with a broad and open main bazaar and numerous solid stone dwelling-houses stretching along the strand and containing some 20,000 inhabitants, attracting Arab and Persian merchants from all quarters by the equity of its rule and by the freedom of its trade. . . . The sailors of Koweit are highly reputed, and there may be some four thousand of them afloat; but Koweit sends to Muscat for boat builders, as they are esteemed superior workmen. . . . Horse forage comes in part down the Boobian creek from Bunder Zobeir. Mutton, which is good, and milk, butter, &c., they receive from the Bedouins, who flock to the town and are pitched in tents or huts all along the outside of the walls. These Bedouins are not allowed to enter the town armed, but they sell at the gate, where the chief daily sits and looks on. Koweit may boast of some 6000 fighting men within its walls, but the policy has been to keep the peace internally and with all its neighbours; and it pays no tribute to the Amir Feyzul, but maintains friendly relations with him. It receives no tribute, revenue, or customs from any one, save small offerings at the gate or from merchants, amounting to 20,000 reals (Austrian dollars) per annum, and a complimentary present of dates from Basra, in token of suzerainty and for the supposed protection of the mouths of the Basra river. The government is patriarchal—the Sheikh managing the political, and the Kazee the judicial, departments. The Sheikh himself would submit to the Kazee's decision. Punishment is rarely inflicted; indeed there seems little government interference anywhere and little need for any.

"When my father was nearly a hundred and twenty years old," remarked the Sheikh to me, "he called me and said, 'I shall soon die. I have made no fortune, and can leave you no money; but I have made many true friends; grapple them; while other States have fallen off around the Gulf from injustice or ill-government mine has gone on increasing. Hold to my policy, and though you are surrounded by a desert, and pressed on by a once hostile and still wandering set of tribes, you will still flourish.'". . . . The water at Koweit is brackish, but fever is unknown. Dysentery and ophthalmia are rare; and when men commence begetting new families at eighty and die at a hundred and twenty the country cannot be considered as prematurely exhausting.

Colonel Pelly gives in the above terms his report to the Indian Government. The condition of Koweit socially and commercially might be described to-day in exactly similar terms. But politically the scene is changed. The Sheikh of Koweit, instead of being surrounded only by wandering tribes, is likely to be ground between the Powers of Turkey and Great Britain, with Germany and Russia interested spectators of the game. Only a few weeks before I visited Koweit three large British men-of-war, with two attendant gunboats, lay off the town in the magnificent harbour. The squadron is now reduced to a cruiser and two gunboats. The young officers of the *Fox* have already introduced the Arabs to the game of football, and they are likely to require a permanent cricket ground at Koweit. Indeed, the Sheikh says he is quite anxious to learn the British game of cricket.

The change was originally brought about by the untimely death of the late Sheikh Mahomed, who, along with his brother Jirrah, was assassinated by



MUBARAK, SHEIKH OF KOWEIT

another brother the present chief Mubarak. This, though a common enough event in Arab principalities, was a sufficiently unwonted incident in the annals of Koweit to create a new situation. Beyond the fact that Mubarak was obliged to sleep in a different chamber each night for some time to avoid assassination himself, he does not seem to have suffered from a guilty conscience nor to have been in the least ashamed of himself. The British Government had no interest in the matter, nor could the avowed policy of Great Britain in the Gulf allow her to interfere, since it is a fact that if Great Britain were to interfere whenever an Arab Sheikh is done to death by an aspirant to the Sheikhdom, she would have little time to attend to the weightier affairs of the Persian Gulf. Mubarak contented himself with obtaining some acknowledgment of his succession from Turkey, and then he proceeded to upset all the tradition of his race by embarking on a career of conquests in the interior, which he would have done very well in all the circumstances to leave alone.

It must be remembered that in 1886 Mahomed bin Rashid had gone to Riad to rescue the Amir Abdullah from two nephews who had imprisoned their uncle and usurped the supreme power in the Wahabi dominion. Mahomed bin Rashid defeated the nephews, but he took the rescued Abdullah back to Jebel Shammer with him, and henceforth the house of Saud, the great Wahabi dynasty, was overthrown and the Bin Rashids were rulers of all Nejd. Now we know from Colonel Pelly's report that Koweit was on friendly terms with the Wahabi

ruler Feyzul, though it is distinctly stated that no tribute was paid to Riad; but it is not to be supposed that the astute rulers of Koweit were likely to move a finger to help Riad against Bin Rashid, since as long as Koweit gets its share of the pilgrim trade it did not matter much who ruled over the interior. There was, it is true, an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the heirs of the Wahabi rulers to recapture Riad in 1890, but it does not appear on record that Koweit lent a helping hand on that occasion. But now Mubarak, having usurped the Sheikhdom of Koweit, must needs call attention to himself by a glaring departure from the wise and the peaceful policy of his forefathers, by espousing the cause of the Wahabi claimant, and marching in 1900 to the attack of Hail itself, the capital of the Bin Rashids. Of course, Mubarak has an excuse. He maintains that Abdul-Aziz, the present Bin Rashid, had given support to the sons of his murdered brother Mahomed; and that he had no choice but to march out and attack Bin Rashid before Bin Rashid had a chance of striking. If this is the case it may still be pointed out that Mubarak's defensive campaign attained to rather large proportions, since he had at one time captured Riad and Oneyza, and was getting very near to the stronghold of Jebel Shammer itself, when he was finally checked and severely defeated, a younger brother losing his life in action.

Mubarak, who is not more truthful than other Arabs, denies the defeat altogether; but the fact remains that he came back to Koweit in a desperate

state, his troops riding six men on a camel. From that time Bin Rashid has not only re-established his rule throughout Nejd, but is able to act on the offensive against Koweit, or has been until a short time ago, when Riad is said again to have fallen into the hands of the Wahabi claimant. So we arrive at the point when Mubarak found himself confronted with the hostile Amir of Nejd, and with only his battered forces to put against him. It really does not matter very much how Mubarak came to fall out with Bin Rashid. It may be, as he says, that he had to strike in his own defence, or it may be that he was wantonly bent on a career of aggression, if not conquest. But in any case he was *de facto* ruler of Koweit, and as such we could not allow him to succumb to the power of Nejd. It is nothing to us that one Sheikh should murder another in the same family and usurp power; but it is quite a different affair when a great Power of the interior like Nejd threatens to encroach on a maritime principality, and thus disturb the mystic *status quo*.

So far the course of events is moderately simple. Mubarak is threatened by Nejd, and we step in to save him from extinction. But the part played by Turkey in this embroglio has still to be accounted for. When Mahomed Bin Rashid overthrew the Wahabi power in 1886 he had the sense to secure his position as ruler of Nejd by avowing his allegiance to the head of the Mohammedan religion. Not that he paid tribute to Turkey. On the contrary, he received, and his successor still receives, a considerable sum—£4000 a year when the provincial treasury

can meet the demand—to safeguard the pilgrims on their way through his territory to Mecca. Turkey professes to govern Nejd from Basra and from El Hasa ; but as a matter of fact the Bin Rashid family is virtually independent, and the Turkish Government would rather accept a proffered allegiance, however nominal, than risk a rupture which might destroy all shadow of Turkish dominion throughout the Arabian Peninsula. It is easily understood, therefore, that when Nejd came to blows with Mubarak, each ruler defending the cause of the claimants to his opponent's throne, Turkey, in spite of all her promises to Mubarak, could hardly do otherwise than support the Amir of Nejd.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Turkey was already in 1899 contemplating some move against Koweit, even before Mubarak took up arms against Nejd, and by her suspicious intentions necessitated a show of activity on our part. But her hostile attitude has not been clearly proved, and in any case it would be a sheer waste of time to explore that particular passage of the labyrinth of Persian Gulf intrigue. It is sufficient for our purpose to define the situation at the close of 1901, when Mubarak found himself face to face with the victorious Amir of Nejd, seeking not merely the restoration to their rights of Mubarak's nephews, but vengeance on Mubarak for his campaign of the previous year, with Great Britain willing to protect him but Turkey distinctly against him, and made even more hostile by the fact of his relying on the power of Great Britain.

At this juncture it seemed good to our Government to assert the independence of Koweit, as one step, at least, towards the destruction of that shadowy Turkish supremacy which is such a serious drawback to the progress of Arabia, and especially that part of Arabia which lies along the shore of the Persian Gulf. It was the more necessary to take action at a time when other schemes were afoot, and the harbour of Koweit, by becoming acknowledged Turkish territory, might be alienated to the Power which is proposing to build a railway through Mesopotamia to the Gulf. The question that naturally arose was whether or not Koweit was tributary or subject to Turkey. The answer depends a great deal on the interpretation of certain words, like "suzerainty," "sovereignty," "tribute," &c. In the records of the Bombay Government, where the history of the Gulf during the first half of the last century lies encased, there are at least three references to the position of Turkey with regard to Koweit, and all three show a distinct acknowledgment of Turkish supremacy, though I cannot find any proof of tribute paid by Koweit to Turkey. Two of these references are due to Captain Kemball, a trustworthy authority, who states that the people of Koweit "acknowledge the sovereignty of the Ottoman Porte," but adds that it is "purely nominal." He, like Colonel Pelly in the passage quoted above, speaks of the subsidy paid in kind by the Turkish Vilayet of Basra to the Sheikh of Koweit in return for his supposed protection of the mouths of the Shat-al-Arab from piracy. But this is a local arrangement which could not be

held to imply direct suzerainty. Still, both Captain Kemball and Colonel Pelly agree in saying that the people and Sheikhs of Koweit always have acknowledged the suzerainty of the Sublime Porte (Kemball says "sovereignty"), Colonel Pelly adding that "the Arabs acknowledge the Turks as we do the Thirty-nine Articles, which all accept and none remember." Again, Lord Curzon, writing in 1891, says: "Koweit now nominally forms part of the Vilayet of Basra, to which it pays tribute." Yet it is quite certain that Koweit did not pay tribute to Busrah in 1891, and probably did not at any time do so. Lord Curzon appears to have followed Colonel Pelly's report fairly closely in his description of Koweit, and has taken the idea of tribute from the colonel's loose use of the word "tributary" which he in one passage applied to Koweit, though he had just previously stated most distinctly that Koweit received rather than paid tribute to Basra.

The point is perhaps rather a fine one. Yet it is possibly worth while to make it clear that there is no historical proof of any tribute being paid by Koweit to Turkey at any time since the founding of the present town on the bay, and therefore, though it would be a mistake for us to try to ignore the evidence of some acknowledged power of Turkey over Koweit in the past, we are certainly, in maintaining now the independence of Koweit, depriving Turkey of no territory or source of revenue to which she can advance a shadow of a claim. We are merely asserting that a vague suzerainty, based on no actual

occupation of territory or exercise of power, cannot be construed into tangible political authority. But then a further question has still to be answered—Under what flag is Koweit? Assuredly not under ours; for we maintain Mubarak's independence. On the other hand, we can hardly allow him to fly the crescent of Turkey. Yet this is the flag which he has for many years used, the reason as given nearly forty years ago by Colonel Pelly, being that the Sheikhs of Koweit found it more convenient to trade with Bombay under the Turkish flag than under an unrecognised Arab ensign. This is doubtless a reason, but it does not alter the difficulty of the present situation. Mubarak says that he did not fly the Turkish flag at all, but one of his own which is identical or almost identical with the crescent banner. But then Mubarak will say almost anything when he is hard put to it. At all events there was a great sensation created in diplomatic circles when it was telegraphed that a British naval officer had hauled down the Turkish flag at Koweit, and some versions had it that he had substituted the Union Jack. Of course, this was a fabrication. The British senior naval officer at Koweit had nothing to do with Mubarak's flag, and Mubarak is certainly at liberty to fly his own colours since we have proclaimed his independence to the world. Unfortunately, we have made a slight reservation which, to the Arab mind, may seem like splitting straws. Viscount Cranborne openly admitted in the House of Commons in January 1902 certain ill-defined rights of Turkey over Koweit.

This may possibly be a good move from the point of view of the European diplomatist, but it hardly fits in with our actions on the spot. One of the great stumbling-blocks of Gulf politics has always been the pretensions of Turkey to a sovereignty which she cannot possibly make effective, or even justify from a technical point of view. When we steamed into Koweit Harbour we distinctly intimated by our actions that we and not Turkey had the right and the power to interfere in the affairs of the Sheikh, and having hopelessly compromised him in the eyes of the Turk by our gratuitous friendship, we could hardly do less than free him for ever from a bond which was neither a protection nor a benefit in any shape whatsoever. To assert now that he is still liable to that ill-defined bond is to leave him in a very false position, not wholly independent, yet a traitor to the Power to which we say he is bound by an indefinite tie. And all this difficulty because we are slaves to the *status quo*. Last year (1902) Mubarak was in a most critical position. The Amir of Nejd, egged on undoubtedly by the Turkish officials on the spot, was threatening him on the land side; his trade with the interior was ruined, the lucrative passage of pilgrims was stopped, the Turks were deadly hostile to him, and his nephews were bringing a law-suit in the Turkish Courts to recover valuable date-bearing properties entered in the name of their father on the Shat-al-Arab. There was a growing feeling against him in Koweit itself, and the cause of his nephews was being financially aided by Yusuf bin Ibrahim, the

brother of the dead Sheikh's wife, a partner in a rich Bombay firm. It is true that British gunboats and cruisers were lying in front of his town ready to shell an enemy which had no intention of attacking him outright, but one cannot imagine that Mubarak, who in his heart of hearts cares as little, it may be supposed, for the British as for the Turks, was greatly consoled by the prospect.

He had, in fact, played his cards rather badly. To begin with, it is a fatal mistake, when you go in for murdering a Sheikh whose seat you want, to leave any of his progeny alive. It is almost as fatal to overlook a rich brother-in-law. Having raised himself to power by such questionable means, the man I have described should have been content to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness instead of raising up the power of Nejd against himself. Still, such are the sudden changes of fortune in Arabian politics, that he seems now to be weathering the storm. Riad has undoubtedly fallen again into the hands of the Wahabi claimant, whose name apparently is Abdul-Aziz bin Rahman bin Saud, but I cannot be sure about the genealogy. The Amir of Nejd was at one time in 1902 reported to be in a desperate state; but the news from the interior is not trustworthy, and the long quarrel between Bin Rashid and Mubarak has yet to be decided. In the meantime the Turks have not been idle. They have occupied Safwan and Umm-Kasa between Zobeir and the Khore Abdulla, giving them command of the head of the Khore, and they propose sending troops to a place called Subiya,

which is down the Boobian creek, so near the north-east corner of Koweit harbour as to give them a practical command over the entrance. In other words, they mean to stake out as much of the Arabian shore of the Gulf as is left to them before it is too late.

Naturally enough, Mubarak claims Safwan and Umm-Kasa and Subiya as his own, though he has but the vaguest notion of their geographical position or, indeed, of any geography at all. His claims to Safwan and Umm-Kasa may not be very strong, though Umm-Kasa is apparently the spot called Moom-gussur by Colonel Pelly, from which the Koweit tribe originally came 250 years ago, driven thence by the power of Basra. Subiya contains a farm of his arch-enemy Yusuf bin Ibrahim, and so might be considered a dependency of Koweit, and should certainly be kept free of Turkish power, since it might be made to command Koweit harbour. On the other hand, if Mubarak can lay no claim to these spots in the desert, it is equally pertinent to ask what really valid claims has Turkey to put forward. The whole matter would not be worth arguing about if it were not that Umm-Kasa is situated near the head of the Khore Abdulla, and, if the charts are correct, the Khore Abdulla would make an excellent harbour for the terminus of the German railway, failing Koweit; and it, therefore, behoves us to see that Turkey assumes no undisputed territorial claim to a harbour on the Gulf, which she might afterwards alienate to a foreign Power. It would be in accordance with the proverbial irony of fate if our

strong action with regard to Koweit should result in Turkey establishing herself at a strategical point which she would never otherwise have dreamed of occupying. For some unknown reason it has always been considered that the harbour of Koweit is the only suitable port on the Gulf for the terminus of the Bagdad Railway, and yet, if the charts are to be trusted, the Khore Abdulla contains a channel four fathoms deep at low water, with a basin a great deal deeper at the head, near Umm-Kasa. Undoubtedly great changes have taken place since Colonel Pelly found four fathoms of water right up to Zobeir, for in those days the Khore Abdulla was practically a mouth of the Shat-al-Arab. But it is a simple matter to verify the charts, and one rather wonders why we have not done so sooner. Last year a British gunboat did explore the Khore, and, I believe, found that there is plenty of water for deep-draft ships nearly as far as Umm-Kasa. If this is the case, the Koweit question loses some of its importance unless Mubarak can make good his claims to Umm-Kasa, for the latter place becomes a possible terminus for the Bagdad Railway. It is to be noted that in the latest report of the railway scheme no mention is made of Kasima, the exit originally chosen for the railway in Koweit harbour. It is merely stated that the railway will terminate at some point on the Gulf. There can be little doubt that the Turkish Government was inspired by the German Embassy to occupy Umm-Kasa without loss of time.

CHAPTER VIII

PERSIAN RULE IN THE DELTA OF THE SHAT-AL-ARAB

MOHAMMERAH, which with as much precision as is possible in this part of the world may be called the Arab capital of Arabistan, or that portion of the Tigris and Karun Delta which is on the Persian side of the Shat-al-Arab, has enjoyed in recent years a disturbed history analogous in a certain degree to that of Koweit. The Arab tribes inhabiting the delta of which the Cha'b with its many subdivisions is by far the most important, have reached that state of dependency on Persia which would in a few years have been attained by Koweit in its relations with Turkey had it not been for the timely intervention of Great Britain. There was this also in the condition of Arabistan, which led to the extension of direct Persian control, that the Arabs were much more numerous and inhabited a far larger territory than their brethren at Koweit, and being split up into different branches, practising the usual internecine feuds of all Arabs, they have fallen an easy prey to the aggressive but not otherwise formidable power of Teheran.

Throughout the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries the Cha'b Sheikhs, with their

headquarters at Fellahieh, a long way east of Mohammerah, were among the most powerful chiefs on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Gradually, however, they felt the pressure on both sides of them of Turkey and Persia, and after paying tribute to both States alternately, they veered towards the side of Persia, the final step being taken when Jabir Khan, of the Mohaisen tribe, succeeded his father at Mohammerah, and was recognised by the Persians as chief of all the Cha'b tribes, to which his own family had formerly been subservient. The Persian Government, by thus setting up a ruler over the Cha'b, whose very continuance in power was dependent on support from Teheran, obtained a hold over the delta country which would have been impossible with the Cha'b united under a Sheikh of a Cha'b family. Jabir was succeeded in 1881 by his son Mizal, who appreciated like his father the necessity of leaning on Persia, and was rewarded by a politic absence of Persian interference. The Persian Governor-General of Arabistan resided at Shushter, and received the revenues handed over to him by the Sheikh of Mohammerah, but beyond an occasional official visit at which costly presents exchanged hands, he left the Sheikh to manage his own affairs in the way that pleased him best. This was the state of affairs when Lord Curzon visited Mohammerah in 1889. Lord Curzon predicted a more direct exercise of Persian authority in the near future, and went so far as to say that the Persian Government was not likely to tolerate such a show of independence in any Sheikh of Arabistan after Mizal's death.

The opportunity for verifying that prediction has now occurred. In 1897 Sheikh Mizal met the fate of so many rulers over the Cha'b, and fell with three bullets in his body, fired from the rifle of his own Commander-in-Chief. There are excellent grounds for believing that the murder was indirectly the work of the Sheikh's brother, Khazal, who now rules in the dead man's stead. It should be remarked in parenthesis that these frequent assassinations which bring no punishment with them, are not so reprehensible as they may at first appear. To begin with, the Arab puts a very small value on human life. The other day, in the heat of argument, an Arab in the streets of Mohammerah, to close the discussion, lifted his rifle and shot his man through the head, whereon a bystander, the brother perhaps of the victim, took quick aim and killed the first Arab. The only comment on the occurrence was that the Martini—which has been largely imported of late—was a dangerous weapon. But besides this carelessness of life, which is by no means an unpleasing trait in the Arab character, there is another factor in the case which must not be forgotten. The Arab owns no law but the law of the tribe; and one of the chief of the tribal laws lays down that any man, be he Sheikh or hind, who acts against the tribe, or in such a way as to endanger the privileges of the tribe, is a traitor, and liable to be shot down without mercy.

I am not aware that Sheikh Mohammed of Koweit had ever been guilty of a sin against the tribe, beyond the fact that he would not fall in with the warlike

views of his brother, Mubarak. But in the case of Mizal, Sheikh of Mohammerah, it is easy to see that his policy of leaning on Persia might be construed by the Arabs as a policy of treason, destined to undermine and destroy the ancient privileges of the Cha'b. Hence, what would seem to us a dastardly outrage may have been regarded by the Arabs as an act of justice.

The Persian Government was merely interested in the matter in so far as it might prove a loser or a gainer by the succession of Khazal. The new Sheikh was bound, like his brother and father before him, to look for support to Teheran, and to pay his revenue promptly. But he has also shown himself to be an administrator of no mean ability, and he may even entertain ambitions not less dangerous to himself than those of his imitator, Mubarak. At all events, he has, though of the Mohaisen tribe himself, united the Cha'b as they have seldom, if ever, been united before, and is perhaps the most powerful Sheikh that Arabistan has ever known. Even in the days of his father, and of his brother, the Cha'b Sheikhs of Fellahieh were always more or less independent of Mohammerah. But now Khazal keeps the Sheikhs by him in Mohammerah, and Fellahieh is a sort of Arab Republic, paying taxes, however, to Khazal.

To this extent therefore, Lord Curzon's prediction has not come true, for Mizal is dead, and yet a more powerful successor lives in his place who is probably less amenable to Persian influence, inasmuch as he is more secure in his dealings with the tribes. On the

other hand, the time has now come, which Lord Curzon foresaw, when the Persian Government is about to assert its authority more definitely over the delta country, and the issue is not yet clear. The establishment of the Belgian custom officials throughout Persia has been the immediate cause of the move on the part of the Central Government. For two years after the late M. Simais introduced the Belgian system into Bushire and Lingah and Bunder Abbas, Mohammerah continued to go its own way, the Sheikh collecting the customs as of yore and remaining practically supreme in his own sphere. But in the beginning of 1902 a Belgian official was told off to go to Mohammerah and inspect the ground for future operations. He came up with a great flourish of trumpets, backed by the entire Persian Navy in the shape of the gunboat *Persepolis*. He also talked rather proudly and intimated that unless the Sheikh immediately handed over the customs the Governor-General of Arabistan, who is the Shah's own son, would come with an army and teach the Arabs a lesson. The *Persepolis* anchored in the river off Mohammerah, ready to blow the town to pieces if opposition were shown.

But the Belgian had reckoned without his host. The Arabs, who are armed almost to a man, resented to the utmost this attempt to foist a foreign authority on them. It is not merely that the various chiefs have been accustomed to levy dues at different points along the Karun by a method not unlike the likin barriers of China and object not unnaturally to losing this source of income; but on general princi-

ples they are prepared to resist the establishment of a system by which they will not only suffer financially but may be robbed of some part of that freedom from restraint which the Arab prizes so highly. The result was that the commander of the *Persepolis*—who rose to the post of chief officer of the Persian navy from the humbler position of river pilot for the merchant steamers—not liking the look of things at all, and fearing for the safety of the one ship of the Persian navy, made a clean bolt for Bushire, taking with him the discomfited custom-house official. The Shah's son, who was to descend on Mohammerah from his Governor-General's palace in Shuster and bring the Arabs to their senses, contented himself with leaving Shuster to take up a strategic position still further away from the Arabs at Dizful, and there the matter rested for six months.

The Persian governor of Arabistan was evidently incapable of bringing the Sheikh to terms; so the powers that be at Teheran had resort to diplomacy. The Sheikh's agent was invited to the capital where he carried on negotiations for some time with M. Naus, the Controller of Customs. Matters were finally settled in the Eastern way. The price was fixed, the Sheikh was bought over, and the Belgian *régime* is now established at Mohammerah.

Yet in coming to such an agreement with the Persians, the Sheikh, who has married a Persian Princess, and may already be regarded with some suspicion by the Arabs, runs a very serious risk of meeting the same violent death which he provided for his own brother. The Arabs do not acknowledge

the Persian claims to rule over them beyond the necessity of paying revenue to Persia, which they regard not so much as a token of dependence, but as a monetary payment for the protection which Persia affords to them, or has in the past afforded to them against Turkey. The issue was one of no little importance; for if the Persian Government were to prove itself incapable of vindicating its authority, and the whole of Arabistan should fall away from its rather precarious allegiance to Teheran, an enormous change would take place in the politics of the Gulf, and the Shah, with his already failing prestige thus rudely shattered, might lose in a moment his control over the whole Persian littoral of the Gulf and Indian Ocean.

How to get about from one place to another in the Persian Gulf in these days of rigid quarantine is a question to tax the ingenuity of a blockade-runner. Having enjoyed the hospitality of the *Lawrence* on her journey to Koweit, I was able to avail myself of her partial immunity from quarantine at Basra, and spent the two days that were demanded of her by the voracious Turkish health officer in the luxury of her wardroom, which was a great deal better than spending ten days on the wretched insanitary quarantine island, which is the lot of every one who arrives in Basra on board the British India mail steamers. But even so I was not much nearer Mohammerah, since I could not visit that port, which is only eighteen miles down the Shat-al-Arab on the opposite bank, without doing five days quarantine on my return to Basra; and this in spite



DATE GROVE, BAS

of the fact that there is no plague or infectious disease at all at Mohammerah, or at any other port in Persian territory. In reality the regulation is a pure farce, since it is impossible to prevent natives of the country going backwards and forwards by "bellam," the Arabian counterpart of the gondola. Europeans, however, by their dress and their scarcity are almost bound to be caught, which makes the regulation even more absurd, since it is only operative against Europeans, who hardly ever fall victims to plague. Still, as I was a stranger in the place, and less likely to be closely watched, I left most of my kit in Basra, and dropped down the river to Mohammerah, trusting to luck to get back unobserved. When the time came I found the feat of running the lines almost disappointingly simple. There are certain Arabs at Mohammerah who make a living out of conducting native passengers past the Turkish guards on the river to Basra. The Turkish soldiers at the different guard-houses on the banks are partners in the business, which thus becomes profitable to all parties concerned, including the passengers, who only pay a few "krans" per head to get through. There is a little more risk about passing a European through the lines, since there may be inquiries about his sudden arival at Basra; consequently the tariff is rather higher, though not exorbitant considering the number of consciences that must be bought.

When I had completed my visit to Mohammerah, I got into my "bellam" along with my conductor, whose business it was to square the officials, and

after waiting for the tide to come up the river, we got away about half an hour before sundown. The remaining minutes of daylight were spent in polling up the Persian shore of the river past the Sheikh's residence at Feilieh, just a mile above Mohammerah, and underneath the beautiful new palace which the Sheikh has built for his royal Persian bride. Half a mile further on a creek marks the end of Persian rule on the Shat-al-Arab, and the Turkish boundary is shown by a couple of wattle huts, from the roof of which the crescent banner is displayed. Before reaching the creek my "bellam" put into shore to await darkness. The four Arabs in the boat, including the briber of Turkish officials, got out on the bank, spread their straw mats, and murmured full and fervent prayers towards the glory of the departing sun, which was throwing a blood-red stain on the quiet waters of the great river. The scarlet turned to crimson, and the crimson to dull purple, as the gun from the Sheikh's palace declared that the sun was set, and the day done. Then, the prayers finished, we ship the bamboo poles, and paddle swiftly and silently across stream, till we gain the deep shadow of the date-palms, showing black against the evening sky, for the river is narrowed by an island here, and there is no escape from the watchers, unless the "bellam" can pass unobserved in the dense shadow, which is intensified by the afterglow of sunset behind the trees. I am even compelled to relinquish my cheroot, and a recalcitrant rowlock must be coaxed to give up its groaning.

Breathlessly we creep along by the bank, but all

to no avail, since the Turks have had their eyes on us before we crossed over, and a boat is waiting to intercept us. Except, however, for the pleasure of evading the guard, the capture makes no difference to the final result. My conductor has ready a few krans, which he immediately thrusts into the willing hand of our interceptor, and we proceed on our way with only a brief and inevitable argument with regard to the amount which ought to be paid for a European. Then the river widens out, the tide is running strong, my four Arabs lengthen the swing of their paddles, and away we go up mid-stream in the brilliant moonlight, completely unashamed. An occasional shout of "Ho bellam!" from the shore only quickens our stroke, until we are going along at six miles an hour, secure from capture, and free from further toll. By nine o'clock we have passed the quarantine station at Basra, and the faithful Sultan heaves a sigh of relief as he turns the "bellam" towards the shore under the bows of the Turkish guard-ship, and we feel ourselves free men once more. Our conductor is well pleased, too, for he has run us through the blockade according to contract with only a single call on his purse, which leaves him a handsome profit. Though an accomplice to this bribery and corruption, I cannot pretend to the slightest compunction, nor have I the least fear that in publishing my own crime I shall make the way of bribery more difficult for future quarantine runners, since I am certain that the Turkish officials recognise so fully the advantage of a system which allows a few of their soldiers to

collect their pay, which they would otherwise get with extreme difficulty, that they are not likely to put a stop to the immoral practice.

At Mohammerah I found the political situation as I have described it above, the Governor-General resting on his oars at far away Dizful, and being in no way inclined to use force to compel the Arabs to accept the new customs *régime*. Mohammerah is an unprepossessing village about a mile up the Karun River from the point where it joins the Shat-al-Arab. One reason of its meagre aspect is to be found in the policy of the late Sheikh Mizal, who feared lest the place should by becoming rich in outward appearance, attract the cupidity of the Persian Government. Since his untimely death a more independent attitude has been taken up by his brother Khazal, so that the village is being gradually improved by the building of good brick houses. At the corner where the two rivers meet there is the British Consul's house on the north side and the ruins of an old fort just opposite which was reduced by the British men-of-war in 1856. It is now wholly dismantled and is used as a quarantine station. A mile up stream on the Shat-al-Arab is Feilieh, where the Sheikh lives, and where his two river steamers and steam launches are moored. Higher up again his Princess's palace, standing out white against the date-palms on the bank of the river, is almost an imposing edifice. Half a mile beyond that, as before said, the Persian territory ends, and Turkish misrule begins. The opposite or right bank of the Shat-al-Arab is, of course, entirely Turkish. The Sheikh

has four guns under a canopy at Feilieh, which stand always ready to return the salute of the mail steamer, and his people are plentifully supplied with the rifles which for short are called Martins. The tribes have never been more united than now, they own no sort of allegiance to the person of the Shah, they hate Persian rule though they have embraced the Persian religion, and it is quite possible that they may be encouraged in their contumacy by the example of Koweit.

Whatever may be the outcome of the crisis the future condition of Arabistan could hardly be worse than the present. Readers of Lord Curzon's "Persia" are familiar with the aspect of the fruitful country as it presented itself to the traveller fourteen years ago. There has certainly been no improvement since then. Situated at the junction of two navigable rivers, in the heart of as fertile a delta as there is in the world, Mohammerah should be a flourishing port and market-place. But the agricultural wealth so enormous in potentiality is sadly dwindling away under the worst government the world knows. With the exception of the rice lands about Fellahieh and the date gardens which form a fringe along the river banks there is no irrigated soil in a huge delta which is peculiarly fitted for irrigation; even the old natural channels, of which there used to be six according to the old charts, are rapidly drying up, until only the Barmeshir is left beside the main course of the Shat-al-Arab. The Government, so far from undertaking public works, which are conspicuous by their absence

everywhere in Persia, has actually gone out of its way to discourage the production of grain by putting an embargo on all cereals leaving the country. The result of this fatuous policy is to convert Arabistan, which ought to be as rich as Lower Burma, into an almost starving community. The only one who does not lose is the Sheikh, who gets a large part of his revenue in grain, which, in spite of all embargoes, he must export. In other words, he has a monopoly of the grain trade, and grows rich on it.

But Mohammerah is not only the centre and natural port of what ought to be a rich grain-producing country; it is also the port of entry for the famous Karun trade route which was opened at the instigation of Great Britain to foreign trade in 1888. The route, indeed, is a double one, bifurcating at Ahwaz, about seventy miles up the Karun from Mohammerah. From Ahwaz the enterprising firm of Lynch Brothers has built a road through the difficult Baktiari country to Isfahan, which ought to compete on most advantageous terms with the Bushire-Shiraz route to the same place; the other trade channel is by way of Shushter, Dizful, and Khoremabad into Northern Persia. It is just sixty years since Lieutenant Selby took Layard across the Ahwaz Rapids and close up to Shushter in the gunboat *Assyria*, proving that the Karun was navigable for merchant steamers. It was not until nearly half a century later that the route was thrown open to foreign trade, and at the present day there is one steamer plying every fortnight between Mohammerah

and Bunder Nasri, the new commercial village just below Ahwaz, and one steamer, the *Shushan*, running between Ahwaz and Shushter. The *Shushan*, having been brought down for repairs during the winter, was still waiting for a freshet to take her up over the Rapids. The *Malamir*, which Messrs. Lynch Brothers run on the Lower Karun, cannot possibly pay her expenses, and while I was at Mohammerah came down from Bunder Nasri with exactly one package as cargo. As for the two caravan routes which the Karun is supposed to open up, the Ahwaz-Isfahan road is now finished, but little patronised, while the Dizful Khoremabad line is chiefly used by tribes of brigands and wild lions. In other words, the much-vaunted Karun route, in spite of the money spent on it by the British pioneers of this part of the world, is not much more advanced to-day than it was fourteen years ago.

And yet, as compared with the Bushire-Shiraz route, it has great advantages. The average time occupied in the journey from the mail steamer at Mohammerah to Isfahan *viâ* Bunder Nasri has been reduced to an average of twenty days. The journey from Bushire to Isfahan can hardly be done in less than thirty. Prices for mule freight vary so enormously during the year that it is impossible to draw any accurate conclusion; but roughly it may be stated that where it costs £10 a ton to carry goods from Bushire to Isfahan, the charges from Mohammerah to the same place, including steamer freight on the Karun, will not exceed £7. And when it is considered that the last-named calcula-

tion is made on the basis of existing charges when the new road is just open, it will be seen that the Karun route as far as Isfahan and beyond is concerned might be made just a 100 per cent. cheaper than the Bushire-Shiraz journey.

It may be asked, then, what stands in the way of the development of the Karun route. There are many reasons which contribute to the disappointing result. First of all, the new road is hardly yet ready for traffic. It is apparently impassable in winter, there are hardly any decent caravanserais on the way, and the first two stages are devoid of water. All these objections can be overcome in time by expenditure of money; but it is a question whether or not Messrs. Lynch will be prepared to go on advancing money for the road without more encouragement than they have yet received from their own Government. As it is, the money advanced by them to the Baktiari chiefs for the building of the road has not yet been recovered, and may not, perhaps, be recovered without some difficulty. Secondly, there are vested interests in the Shiraz route, and the muleteers are accustomed to it, and it is difficult here as elsewhere to introduce innovations into the East. Thirdly, the Persian Government is not in the least anxious to assist the merchant, whether he be foreign or native, as is proved by the fact that nothing is done to put down the robberies of the Lur tribes on the Dizful road, which up to date has been almost useless as a trade route. Still worse is the embargo on the export of cereals, which by a stroke of the pen robs the people

of their main source of wealth, and so deprives them of their purchasing power.

It must not be supposed that the trade of Mohammerah has not increased at all by reason of the Karun route. On the contrary, the returns for the year 1900 show that the volume of exports and imports is just about double what it was in the year 1891, when the first report on the trade of Mohammerah was published. But the totals for 1900, which amount to £115,339 for exports and £281,854 for imports, are still woefully short of what they should have been under decent administration. The increase is not always traceable to the opening of the river to foreign trade. The export of horses, for instance, which accounted in 1900 for £45,580, is entirely due to the heavy export duty levied on horses by the Turkish Government, which prevents their leaving the country by the usual channel of Basra. Again, both exports and imports show a considerable increase owing to the fact that Mohammerah has become in recent years a distributing-centre for the Turkish side of the Shat-al-Arab, and especially for Koweit. On the whole, therefore, the Karun route, if not a failure, has been hitherto a great disappointment, and while of the three main reasons given above two may be removed in the near future, it would need the most sanguine temperament to believe that the third and most important will ever be got rid of without strong pressure from without. The Persian Government is, after all, the main stumbling-block, whether it be on account of its

active malignity or its passive incompetency, and as long as our own Government is content to treat the powers that be at Teheran with such distinguished tenderness as it has in the past, no great improvement need be expected. The mere posting of consuls, though good in its way, is not in itself sufficient to smooth away obstacles to trade.

I have already pointed out that our two consuls on the Bunder Abbas Kerman route have not prevented, and cannot prevent, the constant raids on the caravans passing through that country. Equally our consul at Mohammerah—and no one in the Gulf is better able than he is, by experience, to grapple with the Arab and the Persian—cannot unaided go out and reduce the Luristan robbers to subjection or collect subscriptions from the Baktiari chiefs. It is the business of the Persian Government to do these things, and it is the business of our own Government to hold the Persian Government to its engagements. At the present moment a new source of wealth is being opened to Mohammerah through the concession granted last year to a British syndicate to exploit the petroleum of Persia. The intention just now is to bore for oil in the district west of Kermanshah and bring it by pipe to Mohammerah for shipping. The success of this enterprise would make Mohammerah a place of great importance in the politics of Southern Persia.

CHAPTER IX

THE POSITION OF TURKEY IN THE GULF

BASRA is fifty-eight miles from the mouth of the Shat-al-Arab, which has a channel deep enough for the largest steamers, except at the bar, where there are only nine or ten feet at low water. There are two passages over the bar, the shortest and easiest being the one now in use, where the steamers have to cross over five miles of shallow water. This bar is the one obstacle in the way of Basra becoming the great port of entry for Turkish Arabia. The mail boats crossing at half tide can take about fourteen feet up to Basra, but the larger ocean steamers of Messrs. Strick and Messrs. Buckland must lighten before entering and leaving the river, and are forced to employ supplementary cargo-boats running backwards and forwards between Basra and the bar. Whether or not a deep channel could be dredged and kept in a workable condition is a matter for experts. It would, at all events, be a costly undertaking, though I have been told that the older and more tortuous channel could be rendered practicable with a proper system of buoys and a reasonable amount of dredging. In any case there is no chance of improvement under the Turkish *régime*. Even the buoys in the present channel have been put

in places by the British India Steam Navigation Company, and are kept up by it, and it is a marvel to the uninitiated how the navigating officer ever manages to come on the outer buoy at all, fixed as it is far away from all sight of land, in waters where currents are strong and irregular. Sometimes a little search is necessary, and then twelve hours may be lost by missing the tide.

We were more fortunate than that on the *Lawrence*, for, leaving Koweit overnight, we made the buoy soon after daylight, with as much precision as if it had been a mountain, and were in the river opposite Fao, the telegraph station, at eleven o'clock. Here we gained our first experience of Turkish quarantine. The junior officer went ashore with our mails and despatches, and, though we have not been within a thousand miles of plague-stricken Karachi, he can only speak to the British telegraph clerks with a Turkish official standing between to ward off the foul infection which the Turks apparently attribute to every foreign race. The despatches must be handed over to the Turk, who takes them gingerly between finger and thumb as if they belonged to some species of venomous reptile, powders them carefully with some disinfectant, and then passes them on to their proper recipient. Owing to this ridiculous tomfoolery the poor clerks, who must in any case lead something of a dog's life on the sand-spit at the mouth of the river, are even robbed of what little pleasure they might get out of an occasional visit to the weekly mail steamer.

Forty miles further up we drop anchor for a

moment at Mohammerah to pick up the British Consul's despatches, and an hour after dark we have passed the quarantine station and found a berth just opposite the creek leading to the town of Basra, which is about a mile back from the river.

The Shat-al-Arab, with its broad stream and deep mud channel is a fine water-way for trade, and sufficiently picturesque owing to the thick belts of date-palms which line both shores, and especially the Turkish side. As the *Lawrence* ploughed her way up stream, she drove hundreds of wild duck before her, keeping them always, however, just a shade beyond the range of a twelve-bore. Partridges, plump and excellent for the table, frequent the islands and the shore, and snipe, in any other season but this abnormally dry one, offer sufficient inducements to the sportsman. On the right bank the date-gardens are well irrigated, and above Mohammerah there are constant signs of life and average prosperity. Abu Khassib, the centre of the date industry, is passed a few miles above Mohammerah on the Turkish side, and soon afterwards a large mansion which might be taken for a hydropathic establishment at home, gives evidence that even under Turkish misgovernment Arabs occasionally grow rich.

Before visiting the sights of Basra we were compelled to do forty-eight hours' quarantine, which was a harmless infliction as we spent it on board the *Lawrence*, but which raises the whole question which I have dealt with in describing my visit to Mohammerah. Considering that I came twice to Basra,

and altogether did only forty-eight hours' quarantine on board the *Lawrence*, it ill becomes me, perhaps, to complain, since most travellers have on each occasion of arrival to spend ten days in an insanitary hovel on an island in the river. Still, for the public good, a protest should be made against an abuse which only affects Europeans to any great extent, and is a considerable hindrance to trade. All the mail-steamers have been at least ten days out from Karachi before they reach Basra, and yet a full ten days' quarantine is exacted on arrival, contrary to all the rules of the Venice Convention, and against all the dictates of common sense. It is exactly as if all passengers by P. & O. steamers were obliged to do ten days' quarantine on arrival at Marseilles. What happens is that all the natives who can afford it, get off at Mohammerah and finish their journey by "bellam" (the native river boat), hiring an experienced man to bribe their way through the quarantine guards. The Europeans in most cases would be caught at the game, and so they alone, who hardly ever catch plague, are compelled to do quarantine.

But this is not the most ridiculous part of the system. All other steamers or sailing-boats coming from anywhere else in the world, and having touched at a Persian or Arab coast port, are subject to five days' quarantine, though there is no plague or epidemic of any sort at any of the Persian ports. The term used even to be ten days, but it has been reduced lately to five on account of representations made by the British Consul. Thus the *Lawrence* coming



VIEW ON THE CREEK AT BASRA

from Bushire would, properly speaking, have been liable to five days' detention, but being a government boat she escaped with two. This concession was made after the Russian gunboat *Gilyak* came up the river and was put in quarantine. The Russians very soon settled matters by telegraphing to Constantinople. After that the Turks could hardly refuse similar privileges to British men-of-war. Even when you have got ashore, your difficulties are not over, for a supposed outbreak of plague at Bagdad has lately necessitated quarantine of five days against that city, and there have been times when the opposite sides of the river were quarantined against one another. Since the foreign trade and shipping of Basra are almost entirely British, these regulations interfere mainly with the comfort and profit of our countrymen. If the trade were Russian, there would probably be a different tale to tell.

Basra is distinctly pleasing to the eye that has grown weary of the barren gulf landscape. Along the river front are the houses and go-downs of the foreign merchants, and the Custom House, all good enough brick buildings, showing white against the dense background of date trees, though the epithets *vastes et bien comprises*, used in a recent pamphlet by an enthusiastic French doctor, are perhaps a little too strong for these modest mansions. Between the Custom House and the premises of Messrs. Gray and Mackenzie, the Basra creek runs up in pretty perspective to Basra proper, which is about a mile from the river. The Wali has his residence on one side, and other rich natives have houses overlooking the

creek, which have a certain architectural beauty, chiefly due to the "shanoshin" or projecting windows, mullioned in wood, the seats of honour in the various houses. Underneath the windows the bellams, well built and graceful, ply to and fro, while an antiquated swing bridge fills the middle distance; and in a photograph the place almost merits the title of the "Venice of the East" which some hyperbolical traveller once applied to it. But only in a photograph. In real life the tide falls twice a day, leaving eight feet of noisome mud on both banks, and at best the creek is little more than a picturesque *cloaca maxima* which also serves to provide drinking water for the poorer people. The rich can afford to send a mile away to the Shat-al-Arab for theirs. It is surprising, in the circumstances, that cholera epidemics are not more frequent. The bazaar is fairly clean and more extensive than any of those I had previously visited in the Gulf, but there are no local industries beyond the packing of dates, and the shops are full of the usual blue packets of French sugar, Maskat turbans, and Manchester atrocities. The main trade of the place depends on the export of dates, which in the year 1900 amounted to £380,000; wool from up country accounted for £256,080; barley, £382,122; and wheat only £35,379. Sesame seed and liquorice are the only other articles of importance in a list which shows a total of over one and a half millions sterling. The report for 1901 was disappointing owing to the fact that the rainfall has been terribly scanty in the last eighteen months and

the up-country districts are almost in a state of famine.

The date trade is apparently a rather speculative business, depending a good deal on the output of figs and other dried fruits in other parts of the world. If there are not enough figs to go round, English and American children, it seems, take kindly to dates, but they do not clamour for them if they can get anything else in the dried-fruit line. Hence an enormous export from Basra, such as occurred in 1900, is almost sure to cause a glut in the market unless there should have happened to be a simultaneous dearth of figs, and so prices fall, and the year 1901 is apt to be a bad one for the exporters. For wheat, on the other hand, there is always a market, and it is sad to note that the whole amount of wheat exported in 1900 from Mesopotamia, the granary of the ancient world, was 144,516 cwt. Various reasons are assigned—lack of transport facilities, want of rain, want of irrigation canals, over-taxation of the peasantry—but the main and sufficient reason is to be found in the the Turkish Government.

The imports for 1900 were also satisfactory in so far as they exceeded the total of the previous year, but as they amounted in all to £1,264,055, while a decade earlier, only three years after consular reports for Basra were instituted, the total was £1,117,319, it cannot be said that vast progress is being made. The reason again is not far to seek. Seventy-five per cent. of the imports of Basra are destined for Bagdad and for Persia, *viâ* the Bagdad-Kermanshah

route. To carry this trade there are nominally seven paddle-steamers running between Basra and Bagdad, four belonging to the Turkish Government and three to Messrs. Lynch Brothers (Limited). But of the four Turkish boats two are nearly always laid up, and they all run so slowly that on the average only one Turkish steamer leaves Basra each week. Messrs. Lynch, who took over a concession granted in the 'thirties to the East India Company, according to which three British merchant steamers and two armed vessels were allowed to run on the river, are now confined to one steamer a week by the Turkish Government, so that their third steamer is employed only when one of the two others requires docking. The amount of cargo, therefore, that can go from Basra to Bagdad is limited to the amount that two weekly steamers can carry, each taking a barge alongside.

The Turkish Government cannot afford new steamers, and Messrs. Lynch, who can, are not allowed to add to their fleet. Even the barge towed alongside is a recent concession which the Turks want to recall, as it was granted only in order to remove a temporary congestion. None of the steamers are of modern construction, consequently the carrying capacity is extremely limited, so that the most liberal estimate of the amount of cargo that can be taken up or down the Tigris is less than nine hundred tons a week. The result is that there is a constant surplus of cargo lying in the yards of Messrs. Lynch which can never be worked off, and the freight charges are correspondingly high. The

distance from Basra to Bagdad is roughly five hundred miles by river, the passage is five days (with luck), and the charges amount to 36*s.* a ton. That is to say, it costs as much in most cases to ship from Basra to Bagdad as it does from London to Basra. The railway route from Bagdad to Basra or Koweit should not exceed three hundred miles, so there is ample room for railway competition provided the authorities do not limit the size of the trains to five cars a day. They are quite capable of doing anything equally foolish. In any case, until a railway is built or the river service vastly improved it is a physical impossibility for the trade of Bagdad and the Kermanshah route to increase to any marked degree, and Basra as the port of entry for that trade must suffer sympathetically. As it is, the British community seems more flourishing here than elsewhere in the Gulf. Besides the firm of Lynch Brothers there is the prosperous house of Grey and Mackenzie, who act as agents for the British India steamers; Messrs. Bucknall and Messrs. Strick, who run steamers direct from London to the Gulf, have also their agents; and there is a branch of Messrs. Hotz and Co., a firm which is partly British and partly Dutch. Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and even Italians, are settled in Basra, but among the great commercial nations Great Britain reigns supreme. The British community is large enough to keep a club in existence and to organise tennis and billiard tournaments. Its members can even raise a cricket eleven, and do battle with the gunboats that come up the river for water. They

cross the river and spread a cocoanut matting in the desert, and the man who can make his fifty—everything run out—in the heat of the day has indeed earned his laurels. Basra was undefeated until the *Lawrence* arrived and proved victorious by a single run.

Of sport there is an abundance if you are content with wild fowl, sand-grouse, partridges, and snipe. The wild boar which frequent the marshes are shot for their tusks, but cannot be utilised for pig-sticking except at a great distance from Basra. With the aid of the *Lawrence* launch we visited the marshes and followed the wild duck about for ten miles or more in native dug-outs, and slaughtered three pigs on a reed island. Shooting pig on foot is not a wildly exciting game, except under conditions where you have half a dozen Arab gillies all armed with Martinis, who go perfectly mad at the sight of the unclean beast, and let off their rifles with extraordinary rapidity in all directions. The sport is thus attended with considerable danger to every one except the pig.

These marshes, which are really immense lagoons stretching to the horizon on every side, are formed by the overflow of the Euphrates, the ancient canals which carried the water off being completely choked up. In a country therefore that merely needs a little irrigation to make it a mine of agricultural wealth there are here hundreds of square miles of good water going to waste in the desert.

It requires a very short residence inside the limits of the Turkish Empire to arrive at some idea of the

extraordinary incompetence of the Turkish Government. Right opposite the mouth of the Basra Creek a dredger lies stranded in the mud of the river bank, having never earned a single piastre to repay the cost of bringing so expensive a machine all the way from Europe with the avowed purpose of improving the channel of the Shat-al-Arab. A little higher up the rusty carcase of a rakish blockade runner of the American Civil War is hidden in a creek where she was grounded after doing a single trip to Bagdad. The Turkish Government had bought her at a high price to supplement the river service, but could not afford the coal to keep her going.

The Provincial Treasury seems to be constantly at a loss how to raise the most trivial sums of money. The other day, when Bin Rashid was twelve miles away at Zobeir, waiting to co-operate with Turkey in an attack on Koweit, the order came from Constantinople to Basra that the Amir of Nejd was to be paid his subsidy in full. The amount was, I think, £T2000; but in any case it was quite beyond the capacity of the Wali's exchequer. A draft was tendered on Bagdad but scornfully rejected by the Amir's agent, who knew better than to accept a Turkish I O U. Finally half the sum was scraped together by hook or crook before the Amir departed with no great respect, it may be supposed, for his liege lord. Yet the Turk goes happily along on his bold career as careless of results as the Last of the Dandies, profuse in promises and recklessly extravagant on the verge of bankruptcy. The troops are rarely, if ever, paid, yet the garrison of Basra is

being strengthened to admit of a strong policy on the Gulf. Detachments have been pushed out to Safwan and Umm-Kasa, and while I was at Basra a battalion was ordered to El Katif, and the pretty brigantine *Sohaf* was told off to act as transport. But the *Sohaf* could not leave the river because it was quite beyond the powers of the Basra Vilayet to provision her. Perhaps, too, she did not altogether relish the idea of meeting British gunboats in the Gulf. She is armed with six 4-inch breech-loading guns, but it is quite possible that her ammunition is lacking, and her steaming powers are almost contemptible. Yet this is the ship which was sent with orders to Mubarak when there were three British men-of-war in Koweit harbour.

You will learn most extraordinary lessons in natural history by coming to Basra. The Turkish commodore, who is a delightful old gentleman, is convinced that Australia is inhabited by an aboriginal race with tails two feet long. It was the commodore who discovered that the wealthier classes in England pass the winter in diving-bells at the bottom of the sea for the sake of the greater warmth thus obtained, while in Scotland, he maintains, there is an aristocracy which dwells entirely in baskets suspended from high bridges. One can see that the assertion respecting Scotland might be based on pictures in the illustrated papers when persons of distinction were let down in baskets during the construction of the Forth Bridge; but the origin of the diving-bell theory is wrapt in mystery. Personally, I found the Turkish authorities most agreeable

people. The commodore of the port rose, according to his own confession, to his present rank by means of a crib which he employed in a wholly unexpected examination; but he is nevertheless an interesting if not altogether competent official. The Wali, who has lately come to the Vilayet of Basra, is a type of the courteous Turkish soldier. His predecessor made rather a muddle of the Koweit affair, and it was doubtless considered politic to employ an officer of engaging personality who is entirely without initiative. As Wali of Basra he is an independent Provincial Governor, but as commandant of the Basra troops he comes under the jurisdiction of the Field-Marshal of the Bagdad Army Corps, whom I found at Basra taking charge of the Koweit question. The Wali was most interested in the Bagdad railway scheme, which attracts him greatly, as from a military point of view he is keenly alive to the advantages of quick communication. Naturally we did not touch on the dangerous ground of Gulf politics. Here the field-marshal is supreme, and since the old Wali went there has been a closer watch on the telegraph wire to prevent official secrets leaking out. It is known that the affairs of the Gulf are still engaging the attention of the Turkish Government, as the postmaster at Basra is so busy sending official telegrams that he has no time to serve out postage stamps to ordinary customers.

I have already touched on the strategic importance of Umm-Kasa which the field-marshal has occupied with his troops, so it is unnecessary to go into the question again, though it may not be out

of place to emphasise the point that the occupation of hitherto deserted spots in a country which may be nominally Turkish, but has never been properly demarcated, might properly be regarded as a breach of the *status quo*, certainly as serious as any action which we might take at Koweit.

The whole Basra Vilayet is, of course, entirely Arab in character and population, the only Turks being the officials and the thousand or twelve hundred troops which occupy the town and the river banks of the Shat-al-Arab, and belong to the Bagdad Army Corps. To the eastward the Turko-Persian boundary is more or less defined, but to the west and south-west it is impossible to say where Turkish power begins or ends, though the Turks themselves would probably claim the whole Arabian Peninsula. Until some line of demarcation is determined, the movement of troops in disputed territory is more than we ought to allow. Zobeir, of course, the old Basra, twelve miles to westward of the river, and once joined thereto by a canal long since choked up and useless, is in undisputed Turkish territory: but whether Safwan or Umm-Kasa, between Zobeir and the Khore Abdulla, can be properly regarded as Turkish, any more than Koweit, is open to question.

The question of the date gardens claimed by Mubarak is a private matter, and must be settled by the courts; but the occupation of Umm-Kasa is a different affair altogether, and belongs to the sphere of international politics.

There can be no doubt that the recent occurrences

in Koweit have dealt a severe blow to Turkish prestige in the Gulf. Already the Arabs, who certainly do not love Turkish rule, have begun to talk of the Shat-al-Arab as a British stream, and at Mohammerah the Cha'b recognise the rise of British influence at Koweit as the beginning of the end. If Turkish ascendency goes at the mouth of the Shat-al-Arab, then Persian rule will, it is said, go too, and the whole delta will become British. Even the children at Basra who are employed on the buildings of the new British Consulate, and who sing all day long at their work—to the detriment, it must be confessed, of the work—have learned a new song, which they proclaim with great vigour. The first verse announces that there are four British men-of-war anchored at Koweit, and the second goes on to say that the Turkish flag has been lowered and the Union Jack floated in its place. So out of the mouths of babes and sucklings the Turkish doom is foretold. This is undoubtedly an extremely sanguine view of the future; but if it were to be fulfilled, the Garden of Eden, which is only sixty miles above Basra, might blossom again, and the paradise of the ancients might be regained out of the present wilderness.

CHAPTER X

THE COMMERCE OF THE GULF

As I have described at some length the ports of the Persian Gulf, many of which are rarely visited by Europeans, and then only by British officials who are debarred from describing them, except in Government reports, which few people ever dream of reading, it remains only to take a general survey of our political and commercial position in these waters, which are every day assuming greater importance in the eyes of the trading nations. Politics and commerce are so inextricably intertwined at the present day that it is almost impossible to treat them separately; yet as a general survey cannot be undertaken in the space of a single chapter, it will be as well to make the attempt, and deal first with the trade question, and afterwards with our general policy.

In discussing trade questions in this part of the world, it is inexpedient for several reasons to refine too much in the matter of figures, for the simple reason that the existing statistics must from the very nature of things be inaccurate. The annual reports are compiled by the British Consuls from ship's manifests, and from such information as the merchants of the different ports volunteer to give.

There is practically no record of the merchandise that is carried up and down the Gulf in native craft, and the customs, even under the new system, in Persia, give but a vague clue to the real statistics. It seems rather absurd, therefore, to be particular to a rupee where the number of lakhs cannot always be relied on, and I shall confine myself, therefore, to very round figures.

For trade purposes it is best to regard Maskat and Mohammerah, and Basra as Gulf ports—though geographically they are distinct from the Gulf—because their commerce is of a similar nature to that of Bushire and Bunder Abbas, and moves through precisely the same channels. Politically also, with the exception of Basra, they are within the sphere of the British Resident at Bushire.

The trade of the Gulf is carried almost exclusively by British steamers, or steamers running under the British flag, and by native craft. The British India Company has a weekly series of steamers running up and down the Gulf, with an average of 1000 tons or a little over. Each steamer gets 1000 rupees (£66 12*s.* 4*d.*) a round trip for carrying the mails, but is not otherwise subsidised. There is the Bombay Persia Line, chiefly owned by Parsee merchants in Bombay, which sends a steamer up the Gulf about once in three weeks, and there are two firms, Messrs. Bucknall, and Messrs. Strick, who run direct steamers, about once a month, between England and the Gulf, at rates considerably cheaper than the P. & O. charges from London to Bombay. The Messageries Maritime used to run a

monthly steamer from Bombay in connection with the Marseilles boat, but that service has completely fallen through, and in 1900 one Austrian and one Turkish steamer alone came to the Gulf to vary the monotony of the British flag. In 1901 the Russians descended on the scene with two heavily subsidised steamers, which created considerably greater excitement than the arrival of a new comet, owing to the suspicion with which every Russian move is regarded in this part of the world, and I have been told on good authority that the subsidy is £5000 a trip. Whatever the success of the venture may be in the future, it can hardly be regarded as a remunerative enterprise up to date, especially as the *Korniloff* is not made for the Fao bar, and on one occasion had to wait two weeks for sufficient rise in the tide to carry her over. At all events up to the present the British flag may be said to monopolise the trade of the Gulf as far as steam traffic is concerned.

What that trade amounts to must be gathered from a collation of the trade returns which appear in the Administration reports of the Gulf, and the annular consular reports on the foreign trade of Basra and Bagdad. The total trade of the whole Gulf in the year 1900 amounted in round figures to £8,640,000. This total is probably swollen by duplicate entries on the export and import sheets; but, on the other hand, much of the merchandise borne in sailing-craft escapes notice, and may be taken to balance the error of double entry. The figures for 1900 were decreased as far as the Arab

ports and Lingah were concerned by a failure in the pearl beds, but, on the other hand, there was a larger export than usual at Basra, and the trade of Bushire was considerably above the average, so that for the general commerce of the Gulf, the year 1900 may be considered fairly typical. There is no way of ascertaining in many cases where the articles of import originally came from, since they are almost inevitably carried in British bottoms, but as the same articles exactly are imported to all ports of the Gulf, and Turkish Arabia, and as the reports for Bushire, Bunder Abbas, Lingah, and Bahrein do differentiate between the various nationalities, a more or less trustworthy indication is given of the proportionate shares of foreign countries in the Gulf trade. These figures show that of the exports of the Gulf, 40 per cent. go to British India and the British Isles; while of the import trade, the United Kingdom and India together are responsible for over 63 per cent. And it must be remembered that in the remaining 37 per cent., British and British Indian firms are deeply interested, since the whole amount is carried in British ships, consigned for the most part to British or British Indian firms, and often sold at retail by British Indian settlers. Out of a total of more than eight and a half millions sterling, this proportion is by no means inconsiderable, and is large enough—especially when the potentialities are weighed—to make the Gulf very well worth holding. In contrast it may be stated that France sends less than 4 per cent. of the imports (mostly sugar), Austria 1¼ per cent., Germany less than 1

per cent., and Russia for all practical purposes may be left aside, her contribution being, comparatively speaking, infinitesimal.

The question that next arises is: What are the prospects of this trade in which we are so vitally interested, and what are we doing to develop it? Our great authority for things Persian, the present Viceroy of India, found the trade of Persia, and particularly of the Gulf, in an exceedingly promising condition—promising, that is, for Persia—a little over ten years ago. He happened to visit the Gulf at a time when the opening of the Suez Canal, and the development of steam communication with Bushire and Basra had raised the foreign trade of Southern Persia and Arabia from insignificance to at least a respectable figure. He states, for instance, that in the fifteen years between 1873 and 1888 the trade of Bushire had increased by 5,000,000 rupees, and in rather shorter space Bunder Abbas had made a similar advance. But when we look back over the intervening period between 1889 and 1900 we shall find no equivalent progress. There has been no retrogression, it is true; on the contrary, a few steps forward have been taken, but there is certainly no comparison between the progress made in the period 1890–1900 and that made in the previous decade 1880–1890.

To give a few examples. One finds that the whole trade of Bushire, which in 1889 was £1,325,898, has risen to £2,030,000 in 1900. But the trade of Lingah, which was given as £1,176,086 in 1889, is only returned as £966,000 in 1900, while

the commerce of Bunder Abbas has dropped from £689,635 to £433,000 in the corresponding years. Similar results would be arrived at by going all round the coast, nor must it be argued that 1900 is an unfair year to quote owing to the failure of the pearl banks, for, whereas the year was a bad one for Lingah and Bahrein, it was a record season for Bushire. It would be tedious and useless to wade through the figures of each previous year. The conclusion to be drawn is invariably the same, that, except in a few special directions, the trade of the Gulf has increased very little since it reached, about 1889 or 1890, the natural level which had been made for it by the opening up of steamer communication. For special signs of progress special reasons may generally be assigned. There has been, for instance, a far larger import of tea to Bunder Abbas by reason of the fact that there has been a demand in Central Asia for the teas of India, which are everywhere ousting the China leaf; but the tea trade is likely in future to follow the new Nushki route. Bahrein, too, in 1901 took a great leap forward owing to the abnormally large take of pearls, the establishment of a British Agent there, and the gradual inclination of the Indian and Arab traders to make Bahrein the distributing centre for the whole Arab coast. The opening of the Karun route has also brought a small increase of prosperity to Mohammerah. But beyond a certain point the trade of the Gulf cannot increase, now that the results of the development of steamer traffic have been fully felt, until a similar revolution takes place in other directions. Two

things must happen before the imports can rise. First of all the purchasing power of the people must increase, and secondly land communications must be improved. This may appear an obvious remark, but it is one which is not always thoroughly appreciated.

To begin with, it is almost impossible for the purchasing power of the people to increase under the present forms of government which hold sway along the shores of the Gulf. Both in Persia and in Turkish Arabia the people can become richer and better able to buy the luxuries or even the necessities of life only by being relieved of the many iniquitous impositions put on them, and by systems of irrigation which will increase the productiveness of the soil. Both these conditions are out of the question in Persia and Turkey as they stand to-day. So far from encouraging agriculture both Governments do their very best to hinder it by such measures as the present embargo on the export of cereals, which takes away all inducement to sow grain. Even where there is no embargo the Government, by one means or another, exacts whatever profit the peasant may make above the mere means of subsistence, and thus renders it more advantageous to leave agriculture alone. Unless, therefore, a revolution takes place in the methods of Persian and Ottoman rule, which no one can at present foresee, it is useless to hope for any increased power of purchase in the native of Persia or Arabia. But trade might still be increased if internal communications were to be improved, because then the native would be able to

move what wares he has to sell more easily, and he would pay less for the imported articles, and so his consumption would be greater. What, then, has been done to improve the channels of trade from the Gulf to the interior in the last ten years? Practically nothing at all.

The Arab coast remains almost impervious to inland trade, as it always has been. In fact, the growth of Turkish power at Hasa and Katif and the recent warfare between Koweit and Nejd have practically closed the caravan routes altogether. The trade of the Arabian coast, therefore, is almost entirely confined to the little towns and villages which fringe the pearling coast. Maskat acts as port of entry for the whole of Oman, but there, if the inland routes are still open, they are in no way improved, nor are they likely to be for some decades to come. The four ports on the Gulf which do command caravan routes are Bunder Abbas, Bushire, Mohammerah, and Basra. Of these Basra and Bushire are by far the most important. Of the whole trade of the Gulf Basra is responsible for 32 per cent., Bushire for 24 per cent., Bunder Abbas for 6 per cent., and Mohammerah for not more than 4½ per cent. All these places are really ports of entry for the interior of Persia, since of the Basra imports at least 65 per cent. are destined for the Bagdad-Kermanshah route. Now of these four routes only that which finds its exit at Mohammerah has been at all improved in recent years. The Bunder Abbas roads to Kerman and Yezd are infested with brigands, whom the Persian Governor

of Bunder Abbas is powerless to suppress. The road from Bushire to Shiraz is just as arduous as it has always been. The charges for transport on these roads varies enormously, but the latest quotations available show rates varying from 47 to 105 krans for the transport of 775 lbs. between Bushire and Shiraz (£1 equals fifty-three krans). Taking eighty krans as an average, this works out at something like £4 7*s*. a ton. That is to say, where it costs at the utmost 30*s*. a ton to carry goods from London to Bushire it requires an outlay of £4 7*s*. to get a ton forwarded 183 miles inland from Bushire to Shiraz, and the charge from Bushire to Isfahan may be roughly estimated at £10 or £12. The camel rates from Bunder Abbas to Kerman and Yezd and beyond are equally high, so that the inland trade with Persia is limited to the articles which can bear the weight of such a tax.

When the Karun was opened to foreign trade it was expected that traffic charges would greatly decrease and trade would simultaneously prosper. I have already, in describing Mohammerah, shown how fallacious these expectations were. The new country and the new markets which were to be opened up by the Shushter-Dizful-Khoremabad route are not a whit more free of access to-day than they were ten years ago. No improvement has been made in the track—road is always a misleading term in Persia—and at this very moment the Lur tribes are a menace to all traffic. The real achievement in connection with the Karun River is the Ahwaz-Isfahan road just opened, which shortens the land

journey from steamer to Isfahan by just about half the distance from Bushire to Isfahan. Curiously enough our energies seem to have been entirely bestowed on bridging over the gap between Ahwaz or Shushter and Isfahan, instead of being directed to the more important Dizful-Khoremabad country.

No doubt the Ahwaz-Isfahan road is a great improvement on the Bushire-Shiraz-Isfahan route, or would be if merchants were in a position to patronise it, but it opens up no new market. The Bakhtiari country, through which it passes, contains no towns and practically no resources, and Isfahan is already supplied from Bushire. In building the Ahwaz-Isfahan road Messrs. Lynch Brothers evidently had in view not so much the development of a new trade, but the shifting of the existing trade of Isfahan and beyond from the Bushire-Shiraz line to the Mohammerah-Ahwaz route. But trade will not be so easily diverted in the East. If there were a great reduction in cost of traffic the merchants would be forced to a change of venue. But, the improvement in rates is not yet—whatever it may be in future—sufficient to make the new route attractive. It is merely a difference of 30 per cent. That is to say, instead of paying £10 a ton from Bushire to Isfahan, you would pay £7 from Mohammerah to Isfahan, with a break of bulk at Ahwaz. It is hardly likely that the merchants of Bushire will all emigrate to Mohammerah on account of this saving, especially as they have the advantage at present of supplying both Shiraz and Isfahan from the same base. It is quite possible

that when a sufficient number of caravanserais are built and muleteers have been induced to come and settle down with their mules in the district the Ahwaz-Isfahan route will become gradually more popular; but the final increase to the bulk of the Gulf trade will never, perhaps, give adequate returns for the amount of money spent on building the road and the bridges.

Indeed, the Bakhtiari chiefs are the principal gainers by it, since they have got something approaching to a road through their country for which they are supposed to pay—the payment up to date being purely hypothetical.

The real value of the Karun River in opening up the Dizful-Khoremabad line of country has been strangely neglected, and the Lurs continue to make all traffic if not impossible at least dangerous and unprofitable. Here, again improvement may be hoped for, but the final result cannot be large because the cost of transport will always be enormous. The Upper Karun between Ahwaz and Shuster being in the Shah's own hands nothing need be expected in the way of facilities for trade.

As far as the inland trade with Persia is concerned it may be laid down as axiomatic that it cannot increase to any large extent without a complete revolution in the management of the country. The opening and improving of roads may help a little, but very little towards benefiting both the merchants and the natives. A great change can be brought about only by the building of railways. Lord Curzon ten years ago warned his readers

against ambitious schemes for regenerating Persia by means of the iron horse, advocating rather the extension of mule tracks and roads as the precursors of railways. But in the past few years the public mind has been instructed on the building of railways, and it is impossible to agree to-day with the sentiments of 1890 in such a matter. Mule-tracks and roads are antiquated methods of communication in these days, and it is not at all certain that it is not a sheer waste of money and time to insist on the gradual evolution of trade channels by the various stages of track, road, and rail. Roads in civilised countries have long ceased to be main arteries of traffic. They can properly be regarded only as feeders. If Japan a few years ago had been persuaded that she must rise gradually to naval power by first building wooden sailing-ships, and afterwards ironclads, she would certainly not have reached the position which she occupies to-day. It is hardly less ridiculous to insist that a country must be covered with a network of roads before she is worthy of a railway. It will be remembered that the Government of India was with difficulty persuaded to build railways in Upper Burma after the last war, the same argument being used, that roads must precede railways. Fortunately, the railway was strategically necessary, and was therefore built, and proved so successful from a commercial point of view that it is difficult to understand the mental attitude of those who opposed it.

China, fortunately for herself, will be covered with railways long before she possesses a single trunk

road worthy of the name. Our Government has shown a wonderful breadth of judgment in supplying Uganda with steam communication with the sea while roads are hardly yet made. The ideal policy, therefore, for countries that are aspiring to civilisation is to cut the Gordian knot by constructing railways at once. Given railways for the main channels of trade, roads, as feeders, will speedily follow. But to insist on the road first is really to postpone progress for an indefinite period. It appears that our Government has been exceedingly backward, if not culpably ill informed, in this matter. In countries where our political interests are very great, the Government has allowed other Powers to come in and secure railway concessions which will always prove a stumbling-block to us in the future from a political point of view. Since it is of little value to criticise our commercial policy in Persia without at least suggesting a new and a better one, I maintain most emphatically that we should immediately fix our attention beyond all other things in Persia on the development of the western and southern provinces by railways. A single line joining Bunder Abbas or Bushire with the plateau would be of more service to trade than a hundred mule-tracks, and it will be a disgrace to British enterprise and to British statesmanship if any other country before ourselves carries out such a scheme.

The importance of railway communication is clearly shown by an examination of the figures of the Bagdad-Kermanshah route. In the last chapter I showed that the transit trade through Basra and

Bagdad is limited to 900 tons a week each way at the very outside. I might with more truth have said 600, but I used an outside figure in order to concede as much as possible in the argument. This is because Messrs. Lynch can only run one steamer a week each way, at the very most, towing a barge alongside. The Turks do the same. The result is that cargo is shut out constantly, and it sometimes takes six months for a bale of Manchester goods to get from London to Bagdad. The charges for freight —the Turks and Messrs. Lynch sharing a monopoly —are extravagantly high. The precise charge from Basra to Bagdad works out at 36*s.* or 37*s.* a ton, and goods carried locally, for instance, from Bagdad to Amarah, must take their chance and pay a correspondingly high rate.

Those who oppose the German railway scheme frequently do so on the grounds that it cannot be built without raising the customs tariff, which would be a serious blow to British trade.

Whether or not we should submit to the raising of the tariff is a question which I am not here concerned to answer; but it is only fair to point out that a railway could carry freight from Basra or Koweit to Bagdad at a maximum charge of 12*s.* a ton, which is exactly one-third of the present charge, and the goods would be delivered in a single day instead of spending months in the go-downs at Basra as they do now. In other words, British trade, even if it were taxed 3 per cent. higher at the port, would get far more compensating advantages by the boon of cheap and rapid transport. It may

be remembered that here, as often elsewhere, the truism about water transport being much cheaper than rail is proved to be most fallacious. So much depends on the nature of the water and the character of the transport. One can quite understand that Messrs. Lynch Bros. would lose by railway competition, and one sympathises with the difficulties of their position, being limited, as they are, to two steamers and two barges; but this is a matter which cannot be regarded from the point of view of any individual firm. The German railway, if it is built, by providing a cheap means of transit from the Gulf to the edge of the Persian plateau at Khanikin, will not only make this route into Persia by far the most frequented of all the southern and south-western channels, but it will so demonstrate the advantages of railway traffic even to the distorted mind of the Persian that an extension into Persia is bound to follow, and we shall have German enterprise, and not British, to thank for the change.

I am very far from asserting that the extraordinarily misgoverned territories of Persia and Turkish Arabia can be saved by railways alone. My main object is to show that there is a natural limit set to the foreign trade of a country which is not provided with modern means of communication, and if Persia has not reached that limit she has very nearly done so. The opening of new roads may benefit her slightly, and much has yet to be done in the way of suppressing lawlessness among the semi-independent tribes, but there can be no comparison between the progress to be made in those directions and the

enormous advance which would be brought about by the building of railways. To reduce, for instance, the time of the journey from the coast to Isfahan from thirty days to twenty-four hours, and the cost of carriage from £10 a ton to £1, would be in itself a revolution so far reaching that other changes in the treatment of the peasant, the taxing of the people, and the development of agriculture by irrigation might very well be expected to follow.

CHAPTER XI

THE POLITICS OF THE GULF

NEXT to the development of internal communications, the management of seaports and the tariff regulations may be said to have the greatest influence on trade. Real harbours can hardly yet be said to be in use in the Gulf if we leave aside the picturesque cove of Maskat, which is outside the Gulf, and supplies only the nearer parts of Oman. Bushire, Lingah, and Bunder Abbas on the Persian coast are merely open roadsteads, where a landing can sometimes only be effected with difficulty, and for days it may be impossible to work cargo. There is a dilapidated stone pier at Bunder Abbas, which is left high and dry at low water; at Lingah there is a diminutive dock, which, when I visited the port, was mainly occupied by a small sailing-ship that had got inside on an abnormally high tide, but could not be removed; at Bushire, Nature has been more kind, and cargo can be brought alongside the Custom House in boats in almost any weather, provided the boats can get out to the steamers, which cannot come nearer than from two and a half to three miles. I have shown elsewhere that a magnificent harbour could easily be constructed near Bunder Abbas, utilising the deep water of the Clarence Straits

between Kishm and the mainland. But, though it might be well worth the while of Russia to undertake such a scheme in order to provide herself with a first class naval base, the Persian Government would be quite incapable of any such alteration, and the most that could be expected would be the extension of the pier so as to facilitate the landing of cargo from the vessels and the regulation of the boat service. Lingah is in a similar plight. Nothing short of enormous expenditure on breakwaters could make it much better than it is at present, though much could be done to improve the boat service and prevent the damage to cargo and the constant thefts which take place between the steamer and the Custom House.

Bushire, on the other hand, could be immensely improved at a cost that is certainly not beyond the capabilities even of the Persian Government. The purchase of a dredger and the deepening of a very short channel would allow steamers to get close up to the town, and then the building of wharves, so that the ships could come alongside, would be a simple and remunerative undertaking. Bushire would then be one of the best of the possible harbours in the Gulf. Mohammerah at the junction of the Karun and the Shat-al-Arab, has great natural advantages, and is indicated as the base terminus of the railway which some day will run by way of the Karun and Diz Valleys to Khoremabad and North-Western Persia. But the river bar is a drawback almost fatal to the future of Mohammerah and Basra as ports for ocean-going steamers, and it is not at all

certain that the Diz Valley Railway will not eventually cross the Karun about Ahwaz and run, *viâ* Behbahan, to Bushire. The same difficulties which stand in the way of Mohammerah are even more fatal to Basra, since on that side of the Shat-al-Arab there is such an ample harbour as Koweit within easy reach. Koweit is, of course, the really great harbour of the Gulf, and it bears the same relation to the twin rivers of Mesopotamia as Alexandria does to the Nile or Karachi to the Indus, being near enough to the delta to become the natural exit for the wealth of the alluvial valley, and yet far enough removed from the actual mouths of the combined streams to avoid the silt which is brought down by their currents. The remaining port of Bahrein, Manameh, is sadly deficient in safe harbourage, yet it is not certain that a better situation for the actual haven might not be found, and in the meantime much might be done to facilitate the landing of cargo.

The question is—What can Great Britain, the most interested nation in the Gulf, do to improve its seaports? Obviously we cannot be expected to spend money on other people's harbours, even if we were allowed to do so. There was one method open to us in the case of Persia which has unfortunately been closed by recent events. When the customs of Persia were put under foreign control three years ago it might have been expected that at least a portion of the enhanced revenue would be used for the improvement of the trade channels of Persia.

The new *régime* came into force as far as the Gulf was concerned on March 21, 1900, and a full duty

of 5 per cent. *ad valorem* was immediately exacted, and finally secured in spite of the opposition of many merchants of Shiraz, Bushire, and Bunder Abbas. M. Simais, who was in charge at Bushire, actually started a scheme for a system of lighters to make the working of cargo easier and more expeditious. But his untimely death while he was in Europe on leave has knocked that scheme on the head, and his successor appears in no way inclined to follow in his footsteps.

There seems to be little doubt that Great Britain made a great error in consenting to the appointment of Belgian officials to the Gulf ports. To give the Belgians their due the work of the Custom House is done in a much more satisfactory way than heretofore; there is less damage to cargo, the thieving which was prevalent under the old system has been practically stopped, and, above all, a much larger revenue is collected by a much less wasteful system than the old way of farming the customs. The total sum collected, or, rather, delivered to the Government, under the old system was 2,400,000 krans, or, roughly, £45,300. In 1900, though the new system was inaugurated only in March, and though for a month or two business was almost at a standstill, and the full 5 per cent. could not at first be exacted, M. Simais succeeded in securing a total of £74,470, an enormous increase for the first year. But the increase for 1901 was ever so much greater. If the trade returns are at all nearly correct and a full 5 per cent. is exacted the revenue collected should amount to £170,000.

But who is benefited by this great increase? Certainly not the Persian people, on whem not a penny of the money will be spent, and certainly not the foreign merchants, out of whose pockets a large portion of the increase is bound to come. The Shah, who likes visiting Europe, is really the one person whose interests have been considered in the matter, and indirectly the Russian Government, which has lent money to the Shah on the security of part of the customs. As British and British Indian merchants are chiefly interested in the fiscal policy of the Gulf, Great Britain might very well have demanded that the Gulf customs should have been collected by British officials with authority to employ a certain proportion of the receipts on the improvement of the harbours. In China and Korea, where British officials administer the foreign customs, the system has been attended with excellent results because a liberal policy has been followed and a certain portion of the customs receipts has been employed on public works such as lighthouses, beacons, buoys, &c., which have greatly facilitated the trade of all nations. Even in Korea Mr. M'Leavy Brown has insisted that the streets of Seoul should be improved before the whole revenue of the ports was handed over to the Emperor for his private expenses. A British customs service for the Gulf might have been equally beneficial to the foreign trade of these waters, and so also to the Persian Government. It is impossible to say the same for the Belgian *régime*. So far nothing has been spent on improving the harbours, or lighting the coast, or building respectable

Custom Houses to protect merchandise from the effects of weather. Since the sad death of M. Simais it does not seem likely that anything will be done in the future.

In theory the Belgians were, of course, chosen as being entirely disinterested. In practice this is very far from being the case. Any one who has any experience at all of foreign enterprise in the East knows that Belgium is financially, if not politically, an informal participator in the Franco-Russian Alliance, and the appointment of Belgian officials at the Gulf ports is hardly less detrimental to our interests than the appointment of Russians would have been. Even the Persians and Arabs recognise that much, and regard the Belgians as the servants of Russia, which means that their appearance in Southern Persia is a distinct blow to British prestige. That the Belgians have no vital interest in the trade of the Gulf is not at all in their favour, for it not merely leaves them indifferent to any public works which might facilitate trade, and induces them to regard their functions as simply a means of putting money into the pockets of the Shah. It may not be even now too late to insist that a certain portion of the customs revenues should be spent on harbour improvements.

There is, unfortunately, no apparent chance of a similar opportunity in connection with the port of Basra, where the Turkish customs and the Turkish system in general are obstacles to trade which are almost ineradicable. The nominal import duty on foreign goods is 8 per cent., but the Turkish

officials set their own values on the goods. The Custom House is ill-adapted for the purpose of housing cargo, thefts are of common occurrence, and redress is hardly ever obtainable. But still, merchants are to arrive at a *modus vivendi* according to which losses in one direction are balanced by gains in another, the Turkish Exchequer being the only sufferer. That the trade of Mesopotamia would be enormously increased by the building of the railway with an exit to the sea at Koweit there can be no shadow of doubt. The service of river steamers is useless as a means of developing the great agricultural wealth of the country, and the Arabs, even when they cultivate the ground, have often no cheap means of bringing their grain to market. It would probably pay the British merchant and manufacturer over and over again to submit to an increase of the tariff if the building of the railway could be assured thereby.

Finally, with regard to the harhour of Bahrein, it is difficult to say with absolute certainty if the present roadstead opposite Manameh could ever be made a really good haven. A harbour may be constructed almost anywhere in these days provided money is no object. The question is whether or not the resources of Bahrein would run to breakwaters as well as dredgers. Pending the solution of that problem much could be done by building a pier and buying lighters. At present the steamer stands about a mile and a half from shore in a shallow bay which is completely exposed to any wind between a north-wester and a north-easter. The cargo is

put off into boats, which cannot reach the shore owing to the small depth of water, so at a certain distance from land the bales and boxes are transferred to the backs of the sturdy Bahrein donkeys, which finally deposit them ashore. Needless to say, the whole system is as cumbersome as any to be found east of Suez, and causes endless worry and delay, not to mention the expense.

Mr. Gaskin, our agent at Bahrein, is doing his best to encourage the Sheikh to interest himself in public works, but the task is a thankless one. The Sheikh is totally without ambition so far as the advancement of his islands is concerned, but exceedingly jealous of his prerogatives. It is difficult to get him to spend money for which he sees no immediate return, and equally hard to get him to consent to an improved method of collecting revenue which might seem to endanger his independence. Yet it is our imperative duty to develop the resources of Bahrein, which could be made a flourishing little mart if brought more directly under British rule. It is the centre of the pearl trade, the main source of wealth in the Gulf; it is already a distributing port for the Arabian coast anywhere west of El Katr: and now that Lingah is subject to a rigid tariff it might quite possibly usurp the place of that port as emporium for the pirate coast. It also commands one of the few caravan routes into the interior of Arabia. This last asset is of little importance as long as the Turks misgovern El Katif and Hasa, but is one which can never be wholly taken away, because there is an underground channel of fresh water all the

way from Riadh to Bahrein providing wells along that route and supplying the Bahrein islands with abundance of clear water—a most unaccustomed boon in the Gulf. That the growth of British influence over Bahrein has produced a good effect on trade is shown by the trade returns of recent years, and, above all, by the fact that a German merchant, the one European trader in the Gulf outside Basra and Bushire, has chosen it for his headquarters. He was originally located in Lingah, but he has found better prospects, it seems, under the auspices of Great Britain, and financially has had no reason to regret his enterprise. The customs of Bahrein are at present leased to an Indian merchant and money-lender. If the collection were put into British hands it would be easy to pay the Sheikh as much as he gets at present, lower the tariff, and still have a surplus for harbour improvements on a modest scale. It would be better, perhaps, to pension off the Sheikh at a liberal rate and administer the islands altogether, making Bahrein either a free port or one with a nominal tariff of 2 per cent. *ad valorem*. The advantage to our trade and prestige in the Gulf would be certainly great, and the risk and expense very small.

It is impossible to leave the discussion of trade affairs without a reference to the work that is being done for British and Indian merchants in the Gulf by the officials on the spot. There is probably no part of the world to which British steamers ply where you will not find merchants complaining that their Government does nothing for their interests; and it would be strange if such complaints were not

heard in these Persian waters. It is usually a question of redress of wrongs or the recovery of bad debts; and a glance at the administration reports of recent years gives a strong impression that the complaints are not altogether unfounded. It must be remembered that there is no mixed court in Persia; in fact, there is no court of any sort worthy of the name. When disputes arise between foreigners and natives they are settled, or rather they ought to be settled, through the medium of an official called the Karguzar, whose business is to stand between Persians and Europeans. In practice this official becomes simply an obstructionist. He can always be approached by the Persian debtor, and his plan of campaign is to refer everything to Teheran, which is like postponing matters to the Greek Kalends. It is obvious, therefore, that if any one is to blame for the everlasting delay in settling the claims of British merchants it is the Minister in Teheran. The most the British Consul at the port can possibly do is to jog the Minister's memory; and the Minister can only act in so far as he is supported by the Home Government. It would be much more satisfactory if a mixed court were to be instituted at Bushire for the trying of cases involving Europeans and natives, and if all reference to Teheran were avoided, except in special cases. But this is rather more than can be expected of either the British or the Persian Government. At all events it is unfair that any blame should attach to the consuls at the ports of the Gulf, who are indefatigable in their work.

It must be understood that there are sometimes cases where a British Consul will not assist a national because he will not lend himself to a dishonest cause. But merchants have surely no right to complain because British officials happen to be honest men. Besides, it is very doubtful whether or not, in the long run, foreign officials of other nations really do half as much for their nationals as the British Consuls do for theirs, for the reason that in most countries of the East where foreign trade brings foreign merchants together, British influence is so far preponderant that a British official has more power than most of his colleagues combined. I know that the merchant who complained to me most bitterly in this part of the world of his consul happened to be a German. I know also that the British agent in Bahrein did his best to persuade a British firm to take up a discovery of asphalt that he had made on the islands, and could not make it move in the matter. In the meantime the German merchant of Bahrein has stepped in and is preparing to exploit the discovery. Such cases as this make one a little sceptical when British merchants maintain that other foreign consuls do more for their nationals than the British.

As regards the general politics of the Gulf, we are interested chiefly in our relations with Russia and Germany. I have already stated as strongly as possible the objections to allowing Russia to establish a naval base at the very mouth of the Gulf; but it is not sufficient to offer merely a passive resistance

to such a step. What we want above all is a clearly defined and active policy.

When Lord Curzon promised to impeach the Minister as a traitor who should consent to Russia obtaining an outlet on the Gulf, he used strong language; but he did not even then go far enough. If it is vital that our control of Indian waters should remain undisputed, then the first steps to undermining that control are at least as important as the later advances; and the Minister should be impeached who should consent to a railway being built by Russia from Teheran, or any part of Northern Persia, to the Gulf or the Indian Ocean. Such a railway once built, the port follows as a matter of course, just as the seizure of Port Arthur was a necessary corollary of the Manchurian Railway concession. But as it would be carrying the dog-in-the-manger attitude to an extreme to hold that Persia must be kept free of railways for our political advantage, there is only one course open to us, and that is, to insist that all concessions for railways in Southern Persia must first be submitted to Great Britain, and to build them ourselves.

To suppose that railways can never be run at a profit in Persia is sheer nonsense. There are precisely the same difficulties to be overcome here as in South Africa, and as there are now six lines running from the coast up to the plateau between Capetown and the Zambesi, and running at a profit, there is no reason to suppose that Persia with a much larger population in proportion to the size of her territory, and with apparent resources of great richness, would

not support similar lines under European management. But it must be remembered that Russia is carrying out her great railway schemes as a Government, and we must at least lend Government support on our side. It is a serious disadvantage to our policy in Persia that whatever progress we make is due almost entirely to private initiative, whereas Russian enterprises have the power and resources of the Russian Government behind them.

What alignment Southern Persian railways must take is a matter for experts. The main tendency is certain to be from the coast inwards, getting up to the plateau as soon as possible by the easiest route. The one obviously indicated is the Karun-Dizful-Khoremabad route, because this line would follow the mountain furrow to a certain extent, instead of going from ridge to ridge, as a line from Bushire to Shiraz would do. Roughly speaking, a profitable system would, in the end, be obtained by a trunk line starting at the Khanikin end of the Khanikin branch of the Bagdad Railway and running by Kermanshah, Sultanabad, Isfahan, Yezd, etc., along the southern edge of the great salt desert right on to Beluchistan and India, with branches going down at intervals to the coast, of which a Khoremabad-Dizful-Mohammerah branch, and a Kerman-Bunder Abbas branch would perhaps be the most important. But such a system can only be achieved by beginning with the branches which rest on the sea-coast. The scheme may seem chimerical to-day, but seeing that only twelve years ago Lord Curzon expressed a belief that a Mesopotamian railway would never

materialise in his day, there is no reason to suppose that pessimistic views of a Persian system may not be equally erroneous. Anyhow, the main thing is to fight Russian influence by offensive measures, since a passive policy has never saved us in the past and is not likely to help us in the future.

Turning now to the Arab Coast, we are confronted by different, yet in some respects similar, problems. Because we gave up the idea of a Mesopotamian railway ourselves, we cannot with any show of reason oppose the German or the so-called German scheme. We are right, however, to bring it about if possible that such a railway should terminate at a port more or less under British protection. If it terminates on Turkish soil we may be bothered with inumerable complications in the future. The Turks have gaily promised an enormous guarantee which, even if the necessary revenues are assigned, may not always be obtainable; and then the Germans may want to seize the port to secure payment. So it would save all trouble in the future to make it impossible for any railway to terminate in the Gulf except at a port which is distinctly under British influence. That is why I lay stress on Turkish occupation of a deserted swamp at the head of the Khore Abdulla. For recent affairs at Koweit will make German capitalists and Turkish officials chary about bringing their railway to that port if another exit can be found on what is clearly Turkish territory. Umm-Kasa might be the very spot required.

Again, it must not be forgotten that the bar

of the Shat-al-Arab can be dredged and then Basra would be as good a terminus as any point on the harbour of Koweit or the Khore Abdulla.

We ought to have recognised long ago that it was essential to our position in the Gulf that any Mesopotamian railway as far as the Bagdad-Basra portion of it is concerned should not be built by any European Power except ourselves; and we ought to have set about building it long ago. Unfortunately we never do possess a clearly defined policy anywhere in the world, and so we content ourselves in this case by decrying the whole railway scheme as impracticable. Fortunately for us there are still great obstacles in the way of its realisation which cannot easily be overcome without our assistance. And that being so we may still be able to bargain for the control of the Bagdad-Basra section. But in any case we must make it clear now, and not later, that there is a doctrine for the Gulf which is not the doctrine of the *status quo* but a doctrine whereby we reserve to ourselves the right of all political development in the Gulf, while leaving the trade open to all nations. That our Government has to a certain extent followed out a theory of this sort in the case of Koweit is probably to be attributed to the fact that we have one of the ablest statesmen of the day at the head of affairs in Calcutta. But to pretend that we have not distinctly committed a breach of the *status quo* is about as futile as to pretend that black is white. I will not go over all the ground which I traversed in the chapter on Koweit. It is enough

to assert again that the conclusion of the whole matter is that Koweit has always since its founding admitted Turkish suzerainty, that for some fifty years Sheikhs of Koweit have flown the Turkish flag, that this connection, though vague, has always been political and not merely religious, and finally that our present ally Mubarak was actually confirmed in his rule by Turkey at his own instance. When, therefore, we come in and subsidise Mubarak and induce him to throw off his allegiance to the Porte, and thereby sweep away Turkish suzerainty over the most important harbour of the Gulf, if we do not thereby disturb the *status quo* there is no meaning in words. But that our action therein is improper or immoral can only be maintained by the worshippers of the *laisser faire* policy. If our interests in the gulf are threatened by the Turkish flag at Koweit, then we have no option but to get that flag hauled down. Only, having thus acted with nothing more than common sense, it is surely a mistake to partly stultify our action by admitting any Turkish claims whatsoever. Turkey undoubtedly had claims over Koweit: now she has none.

We cannot get even an indirect footing on the mainland of the Arabian Peninsula, however, without incurring new, and possibly tiresome, obligations.

We have become responsible at once for Mubarak's actions, and for his policy with regard to Nejd. In a word, Mubarak is something of a handful. He has embarked on a career of aggression and even conquest which we cannot altogether ignore. Now it

will make a considerable difference to the future of the interior of Arabia if the power of the Bin Rashids is overthrown and the Wahabis put back in their old capital at Riadh. It behoves us at least to know something of the rights and wrongs of the quarrel. From all accounts I should be inclined to back the Bin Rashids as being good rulers and better men than the Wahabis. The present Bin Rashid, Abul-Aziz, is attacking our man Mubarak, and is nominally subject to Turkey; but it is not at all certain that he might not be fairly easily brought over if he were properly approached. He must know by this time that Turkey is not only a weak Power, but financially incapable even of paying his subsidy with any promptness. Unfortunately, we have no dealings with the Amir. In fact, the only attempt that was ever made to open up political relations with the interior dates back nearly forty years, when Colonel Pelly visited the old blind Feyzul, the Wahabi ruler of Nejd in those days. Our policy of rigidly abstaining from interference in the internal affairs of the Arabs has brought us to this pass, that we are grossly ignorant of affairs happening within a few miles of our telegraph station at Fao, and we are allowing our man Mubarak to carry on a policy in the interior which, for all we know, may be extremely detrimental to our interests, and at all events, is hardly understood by us at all. It would be a more enlightened course for us to pursue if we were at once to open up negotiations with the interior, discover who really is the best man to govern Nejd, and to confirm him in his position by monetary assist-

ance if necessary. In the end we might so achieve an influence over Riadh, Oneyza, and Jebel Shammer, all of which are variously, vaguely, and often erroneously called Nejd, that we should eventually get the Turks at Katif and Hasa pinned between us and our friends in the interior, and their control over their portion of the coast strip might become limited and innocuous.

Only in this way is there much chance of the interior of Arabia being opened up to foreign trade and foreign influence. As long as the Turks are recognised as supreme, internecine warfare will continue and the caravan routes will be blocked to traffic.

There is no reason to believe that it would be difficult to extend our influence to the interior provided our policy continues to be just and disinterested as it has been in the past. It is a lesson in Gulf politics to see the Brisish Resident go round the Gulf without any show of force beyond a few guns for saluting purposes, and deal out justice with impartial hand to a lot of turbulent Arab chiefs, who, however anxious they may be to fight against their neighbours, invariably respect the Resident's wishes in this matter, and usually obey him as implicitly as a child does its father. The British, with all their experience in the East, are undoubtedly more fitted than any other Europeans to govern the Arab, who is impatient above all things of physical restraint, and full of that sporting instinct which appeals at once to the British character. The Arabs are as lazy, improvident, and untruthful as any

people in the wide East; but they are so much children of Nature, so physically strong, and such lovers of horses that they certainly strike the traveller as being the most attractive people between Aden and Vladivostok. I can see nothing to lose and everything to gain by winning over the Arabs of the interior. Their one objection to us is that we put down the slave trade, a policy on our part which they can so little understand, that they even speak of our captures as piracy, being sometimes convinced that we take the slaves, not to release them, but to keep them for our own use. But when greater precautions are taken on the African coast to put a stop to the nefarious traffic the slave trade will soon become a thing of the past, and all reason for friction between ourselves and the Arabs will be removed.

Lastly, it is imperative that we should possess a decent coaling-station somewhere in the Gulf. The general public at home is not aware probably that a British tar is unable to land anywhere in these waters except on the barren rocks in Maskat harbour, where generations of sailors have spent weary hours in painting their ships' names in huge white letters on the almost perpendicular cliffs. The sailor, officer and man, has a wretched, thankless task in the tepid waters of the Gulf. Yet I do not know that a plea has ever been put forward in his behalf. Any amount of sickness might be avoided by providing a station ashore where the men could occasionally get relaxation from the endless tedium of life on board ship, and the Gulf station might become, if not popular,

at least bearable. Bahrein seems to be the most suitable spot for such a purpose. It has plenty of fresh water, it is more or less central, and the climate in summer, though vile enough, is not so ghastly as that of Bushire or Bunder Abbas.

On the whole, apart from the question of setting up a naval station and trade emporium under the British flag, the need for the future is a more intelligent policy with regard to internal communications. It is not enough to sit on the fringe of the Gulf and keep our eyes on the sea. Great Britain may be an insular Power, but the British Empire in the East most assuredly is not, and it requires for its safety a continental policy—that is to say, an appreciation of the needs of our continental position.

CHAPTER XII

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

THE visitor to Bagdad, if he is not confronted with many modern objects of interest beyond the kaleidoscopic details of a flourishing Eastern bazaar, has an embarrassment of riches to choose from in the way of archaic ruins. The valley of the twin rivers is literally strewn with the rubble of past ages. In his way over the desert the traveller tramples at almost every step on broken bricks that date back to the Babylonian period. His eye is constantly arrested by the sheen of potsherd that was burnt blue when the Mohammedan religion was in its infancy. The few landmarks of the dreary waste are mounds of sand-covered masonry such as Akarkouf or Birs Nimrud or Babel or the Arch of Ctesiphon, whose origin or intention is still sometimes a matter for conjecture in spite of all the science on the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, most of the remains of Mesopotamia's greatness are without interest or beauty, except in the eyes of the archæologist. One visits the Arch of Ctesiphon and the ruins of Seleucia because one has ample time to inspect them while the river steamer ploughs its way up stream round the tortuous bends of the Tigris. Zobeide's tomb is

within half an hour's ride of the Residency in Bagdad, and the strange pile Akarkouf, a mass of brick-work like Birs Nimrud, with less apparent meaning attached to it, is not much more difficult of access. Otherwise it is safe to assert that few foreigners would ever go near them. For my own part, fate took me to Babylon because it happened to lie on the easiest route to Nejef and Kerbela, which have much more than a mere antiquarian interest, containing as they do rich shrines whither a yearly increasing stream of pilgrimage is directed, and which especially attract attention at present as points on the route of the much-canvassed Bagdad Railway. I am free to confess that in the event I found the ruins of Babylon much the most interesting feature of an eight days' tour, a fact which is accounted for by the presence at Babylon of the German exploring expedition under Dr. Koldwey and the extraordinarily kind way in which he and his colleagues, Dr. Weissbach and Mr. André, endeavour to make archæology easy for the most Philistine visitors.

Babylon itself is some sixty miles from Bagdad, and the journey to and fro is a matter of forty-eight hours or less if one of the waggonettes which run daily to Hillah can be secured. But it is much more to the purpose to spend at least a week in going to Babylon, Hillah, Birs Nimrud, Kifl, Kufah, Nejef, and Kerbela. In this way a little circuit is made which is usually taken by travellers in the reverse order, but which I was obliged to accomplish in the order given because, owing to the crowd of pilgrims, a

waggonette to Kerbela could not be procured and it was rather simpler to begin by riding on horseback to Babylon. The whole journey covers a distance of about 250 miles by road and river, and cannot be done comfortably in less than seven or eight days, though sanguine guides believe that five are sufficient. The best way is to start with a horse for personal use and two good donkeys, one for baggage and the other for the use of a servant and interpreter, without whom the traveller who cannot speak Arabic is hopelessly at sea. A camp bed, blankets, and a few cooking utensils are the main essentials. The owner of the donkeys runs behind and makes himself useful by stabling and feeding the horse at night. The donkeys of the country can do their five miles an hour with great ease and keep the pace up for twelve hours out of the twenty-four for short journeys, and that is more than the average rider is likely to require.

Leaving Bagdad at daybreak the caravan can make Mahmoudieh, the first village on the road, in four hours' steady going, after which a halt for breakfast or tiffin is desirable. Mahmoudieh has a fine new "khan" or caravanserai, with clean rooms, for the better class of travellers, and as this is a great rarity in Mesopotamia it may be better for fastidious people to start later in the day and sleep the first night at Mahmoudieh. Otherwise one goes on from there to Haswa, just an hour beyond the spot where the road to Babylon and Hillah branches off the main route to Mosseyib and Kerbela.

At Haswa, which is simply a "khan" with a few

mud huts outside, the accommodation for the night is far from luxurious. The caravanserai is, as usual, a large, square, fort-like structure of mud bricks enclosing a yard, round which are a series of niches four feet or so from the ground, intended to serve as resting-places. Each traveller selects his own niche and tethers his horse beneath him. If all the niches are full, there is a great, raised platform of brick in the centre of the yard, where he can spread his blankets. As the night was cold and rain threatened when I arrived, I secured the use of one of the huts outside, where horse and donkeys and servant and the owner of the hut and his family made a comfortable party for the night. There is one advantage of such a lodging—that it does not tempt the wayfarer to lie slothfully in bed. I had finished breakfast and got well on my way before the sun showed above the level horizon, and before 9 o'clock had passed Mahawill Khan, from whence a glimpse is first obtained of the big mound which marks the site of Babylon, and is still called Babel.

The scenery of Mesopotamia requires very little description. The glaring whitish-brown of the desert is only relieved by very occasional patches of green, where a canal gives water enough for agriculture. Owing to the drought this year, rain-fed crops are entirely absent. The plain would be a dead level were it not for the remains of ancient canals, whose high banks are increased in size by frequent sand-storms, and generally magnified into low ranges of hills by the ever-present mirage. Occasionally a distant caravanserai looms high above the horizon

like a great castle, growing disappointingly smaller and meaner as the traveller approaches, while towards the Euphrates marshes a great city seems sometimes to float in the distant haze, which contracts at closer inspection into a group of Arab tents. On such a featureless plain the bulky mound called Babel, though not more than 150 ft. high and perhaps 100 yards square, is an imposing landmark, standing high above the dark fringe of date trees, which marks the sinuous course of the Euphrates.

As the rider proceeds beyond Mahawill Khan, he passes a smaller mound on his left, which has been the subject of fruitless excavations. Soon afterwards he enters a perfect mesh of old and new canals, crossing and recrossing one another in an apparently aimless fashion, until he passes through a gap in one bank higher than the others and more regular, which he may or may not recognise as the great wall of ancient Babylon. By this time he has left the mound of Babel on his right hand, and has discovered that farther on to the front there are two other mounds of somewhat similar aspect, but less conspicuous because closer to the date groves by the river. On the first of these a number of dark figures are easily descried at some work which resembles a railway embankment; this is the famous "kasr" where Nebuchadnezzar once held high revelry. The second mound is surmounted by two small domes of obviously Mohammedan style, which seem absurdly out of keeping with the hoary remains of Babylonian greatness. It is here that a saintly Mohammedan has been laid to rest, perched high on

the buried structure of a heathen temple, a cuckoo's egg in the nest of a crow. The mound takes the name of the dead Mohammedan, and is popularly known as Amran. Striking off to the right front from the Hillah road immediately after passing the gap in the wall, I came in ten minutes to a date garden on the river bank hard by the "kasr" mound, where a well-made outer door and a clean brick building denoted the residence of Europeans. Dr. Koldwey, whom I disturbed in the task of sorting out basket-loads of broken bricks and pottery, came immediately to the gateway, waived all introductions, and showed me my room as if he had been expecting me for days, taking it for granted that I had 'come to stay. The hospitality of the desert seems to be infectious, for Dr. Koldwey and his colleagues, Dr. Weissbach and Mr. André, not only welcome all visitors, but take it almost as an insult if any Europeans pitch a camp within reach of Babylon instead of billeting themselves on the German Expedition; and when this hospitality of the desert is combined with a feast of learning at which the men of science contrive to make one forget the immense gulf fixed between knowledge and ignorance, the traveller is indeed fortunate.

It is sometimes said that no European can become a great Chinese scholar and keep his reason. When it is remembered that there are at least as many cuneiform characters as there are Chinese characters in Giles's dictionary — which contains, if memory serves, some 14,000—and further, that while in

Chinese each character signifies primarily a single word, in cuneiform a character may stand for a word or a syllable or a phrase, some faint idea of the difficulties of Assyriology may be obtained. Then when one understands that whereas Chinese is a living tongue, the key to the cuneiform character was lost two thousand years ago, and has to be deciphered without any aid in the shape of spoken language or tradition, one is filled with admiration, amounting almost to awe, of the men who can read off the writing on one of Nebuchadnezzar's bricks more easily than the average Englishman can read a page of Chaucer. Not that Dr. Koldwey or Dr. Weissbach are really at all awe-inspiring. On the contrary, Assyriology, if you listen to them, becomes almost a simple affair, mainly because they scorn tradition and conjecture and believe only what Nebuchadnezzar plainly tells them by his writings and his buildings. In the light of such direct history the Herodotus of our youth becomes even a more unmitigated romancer than we ever suspected him of being. Gone are Semiramis and the hanging gardens of Babylon; gone are Queen Nitokris and all her works; gone, too, it must be sadly confessed, is a great part of that Babylonian magnificence which has been the byword of ages.

The fact is that until the German Expedition came to Babylon about three years ago, nothing much better than most untrustworthy tradition was known of the great city where the Jews spent their captivity. It is very doubtful if Herodotus ever saw Babylon with his own eyes, and by the time

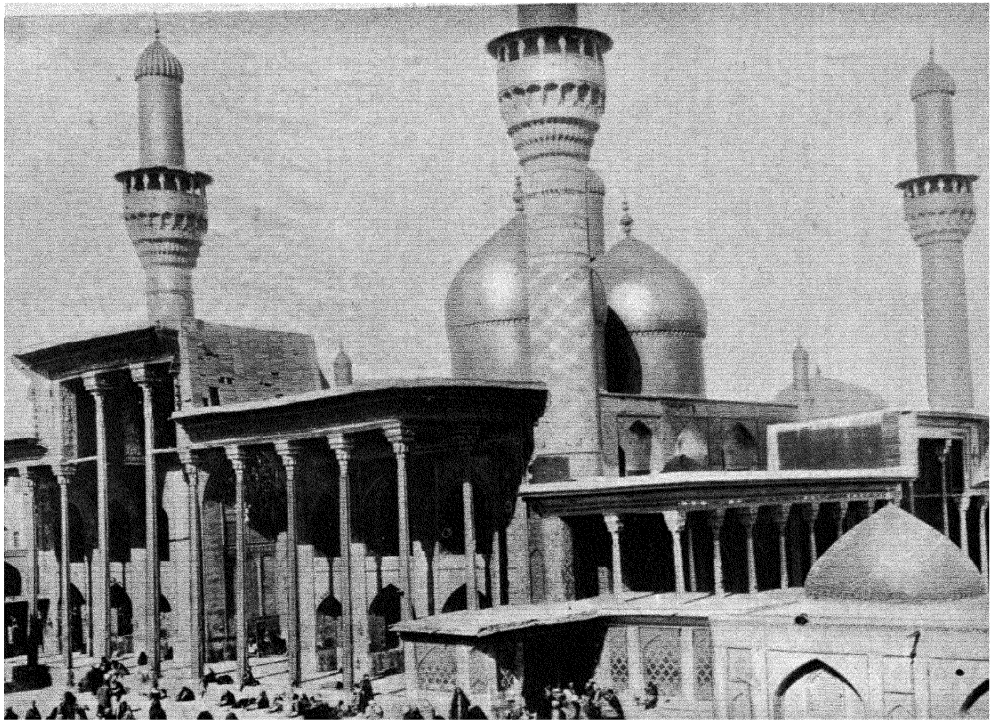
Alexander came to Mesopotamia Babylon was well on the road to ruin. Centuries of rapine and sandstorm have converted the ruins into insignificant mounds of dust and *débris* in which the thrifty Arabs have mined for the well-tempered bricks which they cannot bake to-day.

All the modern village of Hillah is built of valuable inscriptions, of which not a single word could be deciphered a hundred years ago. It so happens that September 1902 was the centenary of cuneiform knowledge, for then just a hundred years had elapsed since the first inscription was haltingly read. Fifty years ago, when the great French Expedition came to Babylon, the knowledge of cuneiform was so far behind what it is to-day that the French men of science may be forgiven for the extraordinary nature of their conjectures which gave to Babylon dimensions not far short of those of modern London with its suburbs, and thereby produced a wholly erroneous idea of what greatness in those days meant. Since then, under the auspices of Sir Austen Layard, Mr. Rassam has added something to the common fund of knowledge by valuable discoveries, but compared to the extensive and thoroughgoing operations of the Germans he can hardly be said to have done more than scratch the surface; and any traveller's book of the last twenty years will show what vague notions were held of the architecture and topography of the ancient city. To the least experienced eye the aspect of things to-day is entirely changed. Dr. Koldwey with his 200 Arab labourers assisted by a miniature railway

has laid about two-thirds of the "kasr" bare and the Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, or rather its foundations, live yet to tell the true tale of the past.

At the present day every one who builds a house in Bagdad or Basra attempts to make his roof a little higher than the rest that he may look down on his neighbour. The same desire prompted the ancient Kings of Babylon to raise their palaces on mighty pedestals, so that the whole city might be beneath them, and since the Mesopotamian plain offered no natural point of vantage they were compelled to construct an artificial acropolis of brick and mortar. Practically all that is left to-day of the "kasr" is the foundation-work or solid brick mass, though the Temple of Melita is partially existent, and enough of the flooring and partition-walls of the palaces to enable the explorer to draw fairly accurate conclusions as to the size of the rooms.

The whole "kasr" with its enclosing walls is about 500 yards by 300, and it includes within its space three palaces, a temple, and a canal, besides a portion of the famous Holy Way which Herodotus described for us. Thus the "kasr" bears some resemblance to the fort at Agra with its three palaces merging into one another, but there the likeness stops, for the citadel of Nebuchadnezzar can in no way have compared with the fort of the Moguls as far as size or architectural beauty or richness of material is concerned. Instead of the white marble and red sandstone of Agra, there is nothing but a monotony of mud bricks and burnt bricks in Babylon —good material of the kind, it is true, since they



SHRINE OF KASIMAIN

have stood the wear and tear of ages, and are still as good as new, but still bricks and nothing more. The temples were built almost entirely of mud brick with whitewashed walls—which was considered good enough for the gods—and the largest of them were wretchedly small in comparison with the shrines of to-day. As for the royal apartments, they remind one somewhat of the Emperor's bedroom in the Forbidden City of Pekin. As far as the explorations go, there is not, in fact, a trace of a room in the "kasr" which would be considered large enough nowadays for a lady's boudoir, with the exception of the great hall of the Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin incident, which may have been 50 ft. or 60 ft. long. This is the chief apartment of the southern palace, which has the advantage over the northern in point of architecture and situation. The great hall faces south with a magnificent view over the larger part of the city. Before the hall is a court with a well and two round objects which may have been the bases of pillars supporting a portico or protections for the roots of two palm-trees. Then comes the outer wall of the "kasr" going sheer down in a precipice of solid brickwork to the waterway which once was a wide canal, or perhaps a branch of the Euphrates itself. To the left the Holy Way, whose brick pavement, covered with bitumen, is almost intact, crossed the waterway by a bridge long since departed, and proceeded in a long sweep to the great temple which lies partly disclosed in the mound which is called Amran. If we could replace the Euphrates or the canal in its artificial bed, and

clothe the farther bank with date-palms and blossoming fruit-trees, if we could reconstruct the great temple on its brick mass in the place of the shapeless Amran, and build again the great edifice just to the left whose *raison d'être* is not now so much as conjectured, if we could repeople the Holy Way with the picturesque crowd of an Eastern city, or see it, perhaps, on the festival day when the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's favourite god was borne in triumph from the temple to the "kasr," and if we could fill up the dead space between the Holy Way and the distant city wall with the buildings of a great metropolis, and hear again the hum coming up to the terrace of the mart of the ancient world—if we could do all this, then, as we looked out from the hall of feasting where the concubines of Nebuchadnezzar once drank from the chalices of Jerusalem, we might not compare Babylon with London or New York or even Tokio, but we should admit that the captor of Israel had some reason to be proud of his handiwork. If for no other reason Dr. Koldwey and his colleagues would have a claim on our gratitude in that they have, so to speak, put Babylon in its place.

Historians nearly always give an exaggerated idea of past grandeur because they forget to put in the qualifying clause of comparison, and even men of science like the French explorers of fifty years ago went utterly wrong in their map of Babylon. Instead of an enormous square which included both Babel and Birs, fifteen miles apart as the crow flies, and extended over a huge space on both sides of the

Euphrates, Babylon has been reduced to a comparatively small triangle, two sides of which were formed by walls running at a slightly obtuse angle to one another with the river subtending the angle and forming the main protection on the third side, just as the Jumna forms one side of Delhi and Agra. Dr. Koldwey estimated the extent of the walls as not greater than fourteen kilomètres, or about eight miles. In other words, Babylon was ever so much inferior in size to modern Pekin. and the "kasr," though a massive structure, could in no way compare for magnificence with the Forbidden City. The great temple in the heart of the Amran mound may have been richly enough decorated with gold and precious stones, but it would certainly, if complete to-day, fade into insignificance beside the shrine of Hussein at Kerbela, and the lesser temples of Melita in the "kasr" and of Ninop beyond Amran were seemingly rather paltry affairs. What is concealed in the Babel mound will not be known until the German expedition turns its attention in that direction, but the main aspect of the city will not be altered by discoveries there. In fine, Babylon if reproduced to-day would cut as poor a figure among the world's capitals as the Ormuz of the sixteenth century would among the commercial ports of the present. The best that can be said of it is that up to the present time its glories have never been surpassed in Mesopotamia. And even taking the shrunk circuit of the real walls, it need not be assumed that all the space within them was occupied by dwellings at the same time. It is usual in the East to find

waste places within the walls of all large cities. An example is furnished by Nankin, where a good bag of pheasants may be got on any November day inside the city gates; while in Persia there are few cities which are not half composed of ruins. There is no reason to suppose that things were very different in Babylonian times, and it is quite certain that the various cities round about Babylon rose to eminence at different periods.

Another and more practical light which has been thrown on the district by the German Expedition has reference to the ancient schemes of irrigation which are rife in Mesopotamia. We should like to know if the climate of the country has changed, and if the desert was ever a forest country. That it was not greatly different from what it is to-day may be gathered from the records of Alexander's time. Nebuchadnezzar certainly used other woods than the date-palm in the construction of his palaces and temples, whose names are preserved in the cuneiform character, though they cannot be identified. But these woods may have come from the Chaldean hills above Mosul, or even from the teak forests of Ceylon and Burma. What Nebuchadnezzar does tell us most plainly is that he built canals, and he was particularly proud of his canals, and they were considered a great boon to the country. In other words, the problem which faced the agriculturist of Mesopotamia was much the same as it is to-day. Only the average visitor makes the mistake of attributing the existing remains of waterways which intersect the Euphrates

country by the hundred to the public works department of the Babylonian. The German explorers, who are practically the only authorities on the subject, say that they cannot identify any of these canals outside the walls of Babylon with the irrigation works of Nebuchadnezzar. On the contrary, the canals belong for the most part to the Mohammedan era, and, what is most important, they were never, probably, much more extensively used than they are at present. The reason why they are so numerous is not difficult to find. The Arab deals with a canal as he does with a house. He uses it and abuses it until it goes to rack and ruin, and then sooner than go in for extensive repairs, he finds it simpler to build a new one. This accounts for the fact that the canal beds cross each other, and often run close together in a way that shows conclusively that they were not all utilised at the same time. The casual observer who talks of the palmy days of Mesopotamia when the whole country was irrigated by canals needs to be reminded that there is no trace whatsoever of a great irrigation scheme for Mesopotamia, nor is it at all certain that there ever was a time when many more canals were in use than at present.

Again, the expedition, besides accomplishing excavations on a scale never attempted before, and making discoveries far beyond the dreams of previous explorers, has had a most beneficial effect on the surrounding country. Only a few years ago the mounds of Babylon concealed scattered villages, from which hungry Arabs stole out at night to rob

the caravans passing between Hillah and Bagdad. Lying in wait behind the ancient walls on the sides of disused canals they pounced easily on their prey, and made all traffic on the road risky and expensive. Now the whilom brigands are working peacefully at the excavations, having learned the advantage which regular labour has over chance depredations. I have heard it said that it will be impossible to get any decent labour for the purposes of the Bagdad Railway out of the Arabs; but Dr. Koldwey's experience rather tends to disprove this theory. In a small way he has got distinctly satisfactory results. The ordinary wage is three good piastres a day, equivalent to 6*d.* in our money, and though the ill-fed Arabs were poor workmen at the outset they they settled down to their task after a month or two of experience and regular food, and on the whole they answer the purpose exceedingly well. They cannot do the work of the European navvy, but then you can get at least four Arabs for the same pay that the poorest British labourer would demand. Dr. Koldwey can always get more labour than he requires, and I have been told by many people in Hillah, and Nejef, and Kerbela, that the supply of labour at 6*d.* a day is practically inexhaustible. When it is remembered that the soldier gets his food and clothing, and a nominal 3*s.* 4*d.* a month, which is never paid oftener than once in six months, and sometimes not even then, it will be seen that 6*d.* a day paid with perfect regularity is almost wealth to the Arab in a country where grain is exceedingly cheap. Dr. Koldwey pays his men "bakshish" for any

particular discovery which is made, partly to give them an interest in the work, and partly to prevent robbery. The result is that he has only had one case of robbery in three years' experience. Just before I arrived he had unearthed a bas-relief on the brickwork of the "kasr" which had delighted the Arabs exceedingly. It was a beast with the legs and feet of a lion, but the skin, head, and forked tongue of a snake, with a pair of horns and the tail of a scorpion, altogether a notable creature, which seemed to have stepped straight out of the vision of a Daniel or an Ezekiel. The rate of "bakshish" for such a discovery was naturally high, and the Arabs were well contented.

The main result is that Babylon, instead of being a dreary waste of sand undulations and mounds, has taken such definite shape as to suggest, at all events, to interested travellers the brave days—which were not so very brave—of Babylonian greatness. I would endeavour at greater length to show what a debt of gratitude travellers owe to the German explorers, were it not that it is foolhardy for an outsider to wander at large in the sacred fields of archæology, into which I may have already intruded too far to escape rebuke for unconscious error.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE EUPHRATES

FROM Babylon to Hillah is an easy hour's ride, the road passing through a break in the ancient wall and almost immediately entering the date-gardens of the modern town. Hillah is built on both sides of the Euphrates but the larger part is on the right bank and must be reached by crossing a rickety bridge of boats. I was the guest of a wealthy Jew who like many of his race has settled down and prospered in the Land of the Captivity. He himself was absent making a tour of his properties in Klifl, Nejef, and Kerbela; but his son who spoke both French and German entertained me most hospitably. Of course we talked of the new railway scheme which seems to interest everybody immensely from the local governors down to the Arabs in the street. The signing of the January irade had just been published in the Bagdad newspapers, though we were already well advanced into March and the news had long before filtered through to Bagdad by private channels. In Hillah the people had heard exaggerated reports. The German Consul in Bagdad had been preparing lodging for the 150 engineers and so on. These rumours I was compelled to deny even to the extent of throwing

some doubt on the prospect of the railway being built at any time in the near future. This was a blow to the merchants of Hillah whose hopes have been running rather high in the direction of improved means of communication.

The Hillah district, which from an agricultural point of view may be taken to include Kerbela, Kifl, and Kufa and all the land irrigated by the Hindiah Canal, is the most important grain-producing centre in Mesopotamia. Unlike the Bagdad country it is not dependent on the fickle rainfall because the Euphrates is a different kind of river from the Tigris, flowing at a higher level between lower banks so that a yearly inundation may be looked for with something like regularity.

That advantage is increased by the existence of the so-called Hindiah Canal, which is really a branch of the Euphrates running into the sea of Nejef and out again at the lower end under a different name. The whole country between the Euphrates and the Hindiah becomes a vast lake at high water, most of which affords splendid seed-ground when the river falls. There are also more canals in working order here than on the Tigris side because irrigation is much simpler; and generally speaking over the whole country hangs an air of prosperity which is seldom felt in Mesopotamia. Yet only a small fraction of the grain produced in the Hillah district finds its way to outside markets, because there is no adequate method of transport. A very small portion goes across to Bagdad on the backs of camels, mules, and donkeys, but that is an expensive

means of locomotion and very restricted in capacity. A larger amount of excellent rice and barley and wheat of Hillah goes by native boats down the Euphrates to Basra. Here again the freight-charges interfere enormously with profits. In a bad year when the price of grain is high at Hillah and it hardly pays to export there is sure to be plenty of boat-space at about 10*s.* a ton. In good years when there is a large surplus for export the boatmen cannot cope with the bulk and the charge is £1 a ton to Basra. Even this is a good deal cheaper than the river steamers charge from Bagdad, but it is subject to many drawbacks. The journey is a long and dangerous one. At best boats can get to Basra in ten days. Very often, and especially about the time of harvesting, the river has fallen and all traffic is stopped indefinitely. Furthermore it is impossible to ensure cargo by native craft because the first thing the Arab does when his boat gets aground or into any other difficulty is to throw everything incontinently overboard. It is the risk and the delay as well as the high freight-charge which make the grain trade of Hillah so uncertain and so much less profitable than it ought to be. If the district were tapped by railway not only would the charge to the coast be reduced 6*s.* or 7*s.* a ton as a maximum, but the supply of tonnage would be practically inexhaustible, and the delay and the risk would be eliminated.

It is hardly to be wondered at if the merchants of Hillah regard the future railway as a great boon in prospect. But why, I was constantly asked, are

Germans building the railway and not the British? And why, the next question was, does not Great Britain or any other European Power take Mesopotamia and govern it? The Hillah district has particular reason to regret Turkish Government. It may not be generally known in Europe, but it is a fact that the Sultan draws an enormous private income from the grain-land on the Euphrates. Moreover, his private demesne is constantly increasing. To be a neighbour of one of his Majesty's representatives is to see your boundary-marks moved back year by year; or else a forced sale is proclaimed in the *Gazette*. The sea of Nejef, which has recently dried up to a large extent, is of course a perquisite of the sovereign; and it suits the Sultan very well to encourage the Euphrates in its vagaries, because where the face of the earth is altered year by year there can be little fixity of tenure, and in the consequent disputes regarding the ownership it is the Arab cultivator and not his master that goes to the wall. Again, while the Arab is taxed down to the last blade of grain and the last hair on the sheep's back, the Padishah is of course exempt from all burdens and can therefore sell his produce at cut-throat rates and reap all the profit of the market. It may be supposed then that the Arab does not desire to pray too fervently for the head of his religion. The cultivator's life is one long struggle with the tax-collector, and for all the money that goes into the State coffers and the Sultan's privy purse there is not a penny that comes back in the shape of public works. Even the soldiers are not paid.

Hillah happens to be the headquarters of a brigade of the Bagdad Army Corps, so there is no mistake about facts that are only too patent. The soldier is supposed to get 3*s.* 4*d.* a month. He really gets 3*s.* 4*d.* in six months, and twice in the last two or three years even this payment has not been forthcoming. On one occasion the enraged soldiers sacked the shops as a sort of revenge. The shopkeepers went to the Wali, who simply said "What can I do? You must go to the field-marshal for redress." Needless to say the field-marshal gave none. And again, when the Sultan was concentrating troops at Divaniyeh the other day on account of the Koweit affair, all the camels, mules, and donkeys were requisitioned for transport purposes without any sort of payment. I am glad to say that before they got to Divaniyeh, which is two or three days' march from Hillah, most of the camels had bolted and left their unaccustomed riders with bruised limbs on the desert. Somehow about 9000 troops were concentrated at Divaniyeh, but how they were ever to march from there to Koweit not the field-marshal himself could say. Even with food and transport it is doubtful whether or not the Bagdad Army Corps recruited from the town Arabs, ill-paid and half-drilled, would in any way sustain the reputation of the Turkish Army. At all events the difficulty of concentrating 9000 men at Divaniyeh, 200 miles from the coast and scene of action, must have convinced the Sultan of the absolute necessity of a railway for strategic purposes.

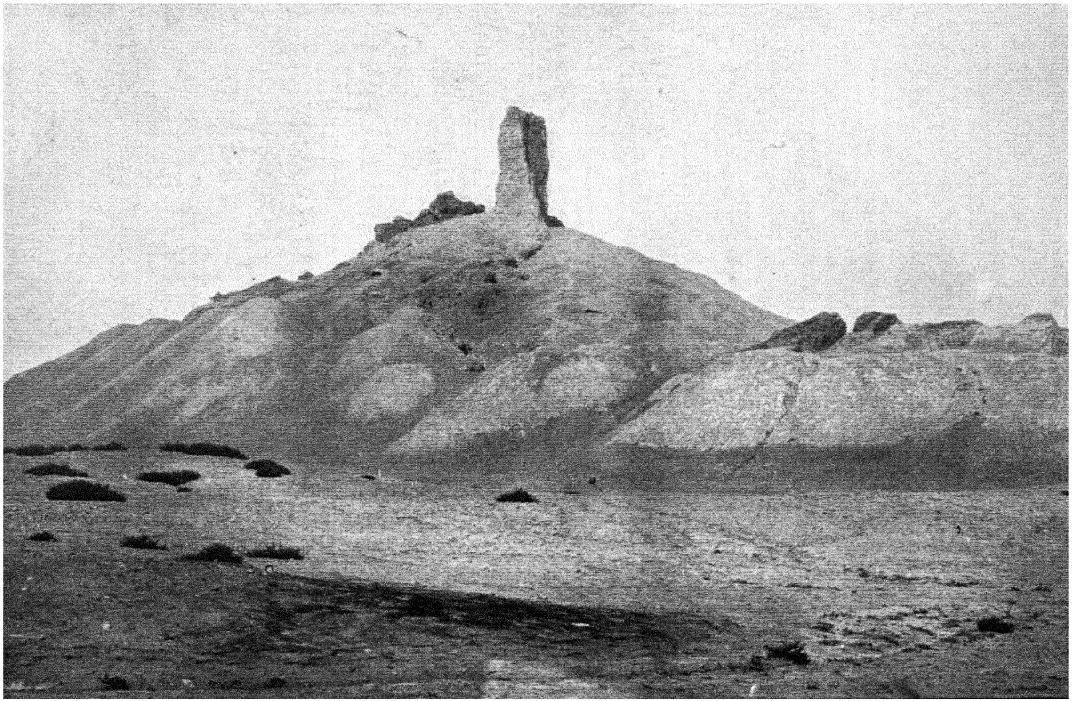
Of civil government in this part of Arabia, beyond the limits of the towns, there is absolutely none. As I was sitting on my Jewish host's verandah an Arab Sheikh had just been murdered in the fields by some men of a hostile tribe, and about an hour later we heard that the Sheikh of the hostile tribe and his daughter had both been shot dead by a man of the first tribe. Now, my host told me, there would be a feud necessitating at least a dozen murders on either side, until peace-makers should arise, and the side having made the highest "bag" in the meantime would pay a certain sum of money by way of compensation at the rate of £50 for each man shot in excess of the number killed by the other side. There is no real 'stand-up fighting in the whole business. Each death is compassed by taking the opponent at a disadvantage by a pot-shot from some safe place of concealment. It is cowardly, cold-blooded murder and nothing more. Yet the Turks do practically nothing to stop it. Every Arab you meet on the road has a gun or rifle slung over his shoulder. It used to be a long spear, but that weapon is almost entirely superseded now by the double-barrelled shot-gun which in turn is giving way to the Martini rifle, especially in the country nearer the coast.

I sympathised with my friends in Hillah, but I was unable to hold out any hopes of the immediate annexation of Mesopotamia by Great Britain which they seemed rather naively to desire. The feeling is not at all confined to the Jews. Even the most rigid Mohammedan in these parts who has conversed

with the Islamites from India, who come to the shrines of Nejef and Kerbela, owns that there is one government in the East which is run in the interests of the people.

My host, not content with entertaining me at Hillah, insisted on passing me on to his agents at Kifl and Nejef. For that I was sincerely thankful as there are no hostelries, in our sense of the word, in any of these Arab towns. My host also advised me to take a zaptieh with me, which I had omitted to do in leaving Bagdad, but as the local governor was not to be disturbed in his slumbers before nine o'clock in the morning, he gave me one of his own Arabs armed with the usual double-barrelled gun as a protector for the way. Not that the protector is really needed against attack since the Arabs rarely molest Europeans, but the mere fact of having an armed escort of even one man gives the traveller an added importance in the eyes of the natives and may save him a few annoyances.

The ride from Hillah to Birs Nimrud which stands up as a great landmark between the Euphrates and the Hindiah Canal is accomplished easily in three hours or rather less. The reputed Tower of Babel is a conical mound with a tower-like ruin on the top, the whole standing nearly 500 feet above the plain, and therefore, the highest point of vantage within hundreds of miles. On the Eastern side is a lower and much more extensive mound which conceals the ruins of the ancient city which was attached to the curious shrine. The two mounds are separated by a depression which once doubtless held



BIRS NIMRUD, COMMONLY CALLED THE TOWER OF BABEL

a broad canal. Walking over the lower mound, which is covered with pottery of the later Mohammedan era, I came on the full view of Birs across the depression, with extensive excavations on the near side of the mass and a neat camp perched half way up the slope on a little shelf above the miasma of the Hindiah river and marshes.

Here was Mr. André, who for weeks had lived at Birs superintending the excavations there and as hospitably disposed towards visitors as his colleagues at Babylon. He has already laid bare almost the whole of the temple which is hidden in the North East side of the mound and which exactly resembles in architecture the other temple built by Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon. These all consist of open courts of no great dimensions with the "adita" or image chambers opening from them. There is generally a chief "aditon" large enough for a decent sized room with smaller chambers to right and left. Behind the chambers is a narrow passage where perhaps the priests of Baal went as we are elsewhere told to rob the sacrifices offered to the god. The temple at Birs is made of mud-brick with the usual burnt brick flooring over the courtyard; Nebuchadnezzar evidently having believed that burnt brick throughout would be wasted on his gods. The walls have at some period been discoloured by fire.

Behind the temple and now forming part of the same mound is the immense cube of brickwork which local tradition has identified with the Tower of Babel. Needless to say tradition, as it sometimes does, has here proved itself untrustworthy. It was

Nebuchadnezzar who built this strange pile, making it of unburnt brick with a thick case of burnt brick outside. The whole is pierced with air-shafts like pigeon holes, apparently for the purpose of drying the bricks. The tower-like remnant on the top is solid like the rest and forms part of the general mass, but whether or not the square sides were originally carried out to the top or whether the general aspect of the building was that of a pile of cubes getting smaller by steps towards the summit no one has yet decided. Nor have the German explorers as yet explained why Nebuchadnezzar built this great block of brickwork: for so far, at least, Nebuchadnezzar himself has thrown no light on the subject. He frequently speaks of the mass to which he gave a name as well as a local habitation, but the name conveys no meaning; and all that the builder has said about it is that he built it well and strongly, the remark which he makes about all his works. On the top are masses of vitrified brick which some great fire has fused and melted and left harder than adamant. What the fire was no one knows except that the native belief that lightning did the work is obviously erroneous. I suggested that perhaps here the furnace was heated unto seven times for the faithful three who would not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's graven image. But the men of science scorned such idle conjecture. Besides there is already a place in Babylon which the learned doctors show to all visiting clergymen as the scene of the ordeal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

The nature of the contents of the mound of Birs was vaguely known before the German expedition arrived on the scene. Sir Austen Layard had extracted cylinders from one corner of the pile and Mr. Rassam had made extensive excavations uncovering part of the temple; but he never lived on the mound to superintend the work and his results, from an architectural point of view, in no way compare with the discoveries of the business-like German expedition. Yet the endeavours of the Germans have only begun at Birs, so that a great deal of light may soon be shed on this strange piece of human handiwork before many months are over. In the meantime Mr. André keeps lonely watch over his Arab workmen. If the romance of the locality has died out in the course of so many centuries his tiny camp has at least the advantage of being situated above any other in Mesopotamia and of commanding a view that can hardly be surpassed in this part of the world. North and south the waters of the Hindiah and the Euphrates have made great lakes on the surface of the desert, where ducks and geese and storks and pelicans abound. In the dry spaces the land is wonderfully green with the rich spring crops. To eastward a mass of date-trees marks the course of the Euphrates with the mound of Babel faintly visible on the horizon. To the west beyond the waters of the Hindiah a yellow belt of desert shows in strong contrast with the green of the irrigated lands out of which, just thirty miles away, the golden dome of Ali at Nejef shines like a pearl in the early morning. About the same distance to

northwards a starlike dome, catching the horizontal rays of the sun at its setting, tells where Kerbela lies hidden in a ring of well-watered date-gardens.

Leaving Mr. André to the undisturbed enjoyment of this wide landscape, I rode on in the afternoon to Kifl, which I reached an hour before sundown in time to admire the picturesque aspect of the little Jewish village which stands out like an island in the Hindiah marshes, well clothed with waving palm-leaves and conspicuous by reason of the broken minaret and tower which mark the tomb of Ezekiel. The Jews live in a group of courtyards built round the sacred structure, the whole being surrounded by a wall with only one gate in its extent, which is carefully locked by an Arab custodian each night at sundown in order that the Jews may not stray abroad. Most of the dwellings round the courtyards belong to the wealthy Jew in whose house I had stayed at Hillah. His agent received me at Kifl and gave me a charming room overlooking the inner courtyard, where I found evening service going on in the synagogue adjoining the tomb. The synagogue did not seem to be large enough for the congregation, which overflowed into the courtyard and was composed of men and boys intoning with great fervour passages from the book of the prophet. The religious ardour, especially of the boys, did not prevent their raising their eyes in curiosity to the window where the unwonted appearance of a foreigner drew away attention from the matter in hand. The women, for some reason, did not take part in this evening service, but contented themselves with going about their

household avocations, which they fulfilled *coram publico* with the usual vociferation of the East. Some of them strolled across occasionally to converse with the worshippers, while two pretty damsels bare-faced in the literal sense joked with my stalwart Arab protector who had brought them letters perhaps from their swains in Hillah.

It seemed like a pleasant family gathering, though in point of fact, there were several pilgrims from other lands present in the synagogue—one or two from distant parts of Persia and several from Jerusalem and Damascus. Of religious intolerance there was absolutely none. The Moslem Arabs share with the Jews their respect for the buried prophet of the captivity, and when I went down later to the court-yard I was allowed free access to the synagogue and the tomb chamber which is just beyond. The Jews looked on me almost as a co-religionist and I was glad to observe that the pretty damsels before mentioned did not deem it necessary to hide their pleasant features and silken gowns beneath the hideous black domino of the country as Moslem women would have done. It was with some regret that having abandoned my horses and donkeys, I prepared next morning to set sail in an Arab boat from the pleaant Jewish community to Kufa and Nejef the homes of Moslem intolerance.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SACRED CITIES OF THE SHIAHS

THE journey from Kifl to Kufa is most easily accomplished by hiring a boat and going down the Hindiah with the current. I was unfortunate enough to encounter a tremendous dust storm, which prolonged to five hours a journey that might in favourable circumstances be covered in three.

Kufa is an insignificant village on the site of the capital of the early Caliphs. It still possesses a mosque dedicated to the daughter of the Prophet, which has small pretensions to architectural beauty; otherwise Kufa is remarkable only as being the river port for Nejef or Meshed Ali, as it is more popularly called. I had no difficulty in procuring four stout donkeys, and was able to start without delay for the quaint walled city in the desert, where Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, lies entombed. As soon as the bazaar of Kufa is passed and the mound of an ancient canal behind the town surmounted, the golden dome of Ali's mosque is largely visible in the centre of a square town with mud walls, which stands conspicuous about four miles away in the midst of the barren desert. Not a tree nor blade of grass detracts from the dead monotony of the plain. The only object

that catches the eye between the canal mounds and the distant city is a rest-house in process of construction, which is being built, half way between Kufa and Nejef, by some pious Persian for weary pilgrims. Outside the walls the ground for hundreds of yards in every direction is a mass of small tombs, where the bones of fortunate Shiahs are laid to rest. To the south there are visible in the sands of the desert the foundations of a suburb that might have relieved the congestion of the city inside the walls if the plan had been carried out. For some reason or other the Sultan raised an objection, and permission is still withheld.

The power of the central government is of a curious kind, as it cannot prevent constant murders within a mile or two of the headquarters of the brigade commander, but can effectually prohibit the building of a few houses in the open desert.

Passing through a well-built gate of noble proportions, which would have done credit to a provincial capital in China, I came on a large open market-place, where the waggonettes were drawn up after their arrival from Kerbela. For nearly an hour we threaded our way in and out of the narrow streets leading off the market-place until at last we discovered my Hillah friend's agent, a handsome Arab with a numerous progeny, who conducted me back to his rest-house near the gate, where his patron puts up when he visits Nejef. It was a neat little house built round a miniature courtyard, with its front on the market-place, but entirely devoid of windows, a peculiarity

which I afterwards discovered to be of great service.

As I had still an hour or two of daylight I sallied out with my trusty courier, a native Christian of Mosul, who on such occasions assumes the language, garb, and manners of the most truculent Mohammedan, and proceeded down the main street of the bazaar, packed almost to the suffocating point at this season of pilgrimage, in order to look in at the gate of the golden mosque. We had almost reached the great outer courtyard when a Turkish zaptieh (policeman) brushed through the crowd, and began in a hectoring way to abuse my courier for allowing a Feringhi to walk through the bazaar without police escort. Up to that moment we had not attracted the slightest attention. Indeed, during the previous hour, when we had been looking for the agent's house, I might have been an Arab or a Persian for all the curiosity I excited. Now, however, everything was changed. The loud tones of the zaptieh, and his insolent attitude, immediately drew round us all the boys of the bazaar and the lewd fellows of the baser sort, and since the zaptieh was for taking me at once to the Kaimakam (local Governor) there was no way to avoid a row or loss of dignity except to be beforehand with him, and hale him before the Kaimakam on the charge of creating a public riot.

The Kaimakan, whose house was at no great distance, was profuse in his offers of help and hospitality. But I found it difficult through my courier, whose valour rather waned in the presence

of authority, to express my indignation at the behaviour of the zaptieh. I ended by extracting a sort of promise that the man would be punished, on which I put little reliance, since he sat down with perfect ease in the Kaimakam's presence, and gave a much more fluent version of the story than my servant. I was then given two aged and decrepit Turks in a sort of uniform, without swords or other distinguishing weapons, to escort me round the bazaar.

In the meantime the passions of the mob had been duly aroused by a period of waiting outside the Kaimakam's house, and I was received with a regular howl of derision, which swelled into a roar as we proceeded towards the mosque, and were jostled past the gate with hardly a chance of admiring even the fine gold-decorated archway. As we turned back towards my lodgings we passed through more open side streets where bricks were handy, and the air was soon full of badly directed missiles. The aged zaptiehs did nothing at all to stop the riot beyond occasionally pouncing on the smallest and most innocent boy available, and beating him soundly, a course which naturally added to the fury of the pack. Keeping ahead of the throng, which fortunately was rather impotent in the narrow ways of the bazaar, we managed without quickening pace to an undignified extent to reach the market-place, and enter the courtyard of the rest-house, with nothing more serious than a little brick dust on our coats to show for the one-sided encounter. The zaptiehs also took refuge in

the house, bolting the door securely, and taking advantage of the fact that there were no windows, which indeed was a great blessing, as by this time the market-place was full, and my appearance on the roof with a camera was greeted with such volleys of stones at close quarters as to put photography out of the question.

Since the crowd was causing serious inconvenience to my host, some of whose family were in the rest-house and could not get out again, I insisted on one of the guardians of the peace who had taken refuge with me going at once to the chief of the police, since the Kaimakam was obviously of little use, and bringing him to me. By this time it was nearly dark and the crowd had begun to disperse, so that the old zaptieh could go without much danger. He went, and finally returned with a genial old Turk, who was introduced as head zaptieh. From him I learned that, as I had expected, the Kaimakam had not punished the man who was responsible for all the noise in the first place, and had no intention of doing so. I therefore threatened reprisals when I returned to Bagdad; which caused some dismay, as Turkish officials do not like reports being made against them by foreigners. Finally, a compromise was effected by the guilty zaptieh being sent for and being forced to apologise and promise that the next time he saw a foreigner walking quietly down the street he would not molest him with his attentions.

I mention the incident because it is characteristic of the Turk and the Mussulman. It is commonly stated that the Shiah Mohammedans who go to visit

Kerbela and Nejef are desperately fanatical and abusive towards strangers. My own experience was that, travelling at the very height of the pilgrim season, I never once met with anything but courtesy at the hands of the pious Mohammedans either in the towns, in the roadside inns, or on the desert itself. For a whole hour I had wandered about the streets of Nejef without attracting as much attention as a European generally does in the bazaars of Bombay or Calcutta. It was only after the zaptieh began addressing me in an insolent and excited way that a mob of boys and loafers assembled, and the hue and cry once raised nothing short of a cavalry charge could stop it. But this has nothing to do with religious fanaticism, as it is exactly what would occur in any large town in Europe or America if the idlers of the street saw the police treating a strange-looking foreigner like a rogue and a thief, and knew that they could hunt the outlandish person with impunity. The action of the zaptieh is very intelligible. He raises a row in order to extract "bakshish" for quelling it, and it hurts his professional pride to see a foreigner going about without an escort, for that is deliberately to spoil trade. If there were no foreigners to escort about Mesopotamia the zaptiehs would never earn a living at all, and it does not suit the police to see a Feringhi evading the payment of "bakshish." Not that the foreigner objects to paying the customary toll in the least. Only it is much more pleasant to move about without the help of a useless escort, who thinks to add to his importance by belabouring small boys and

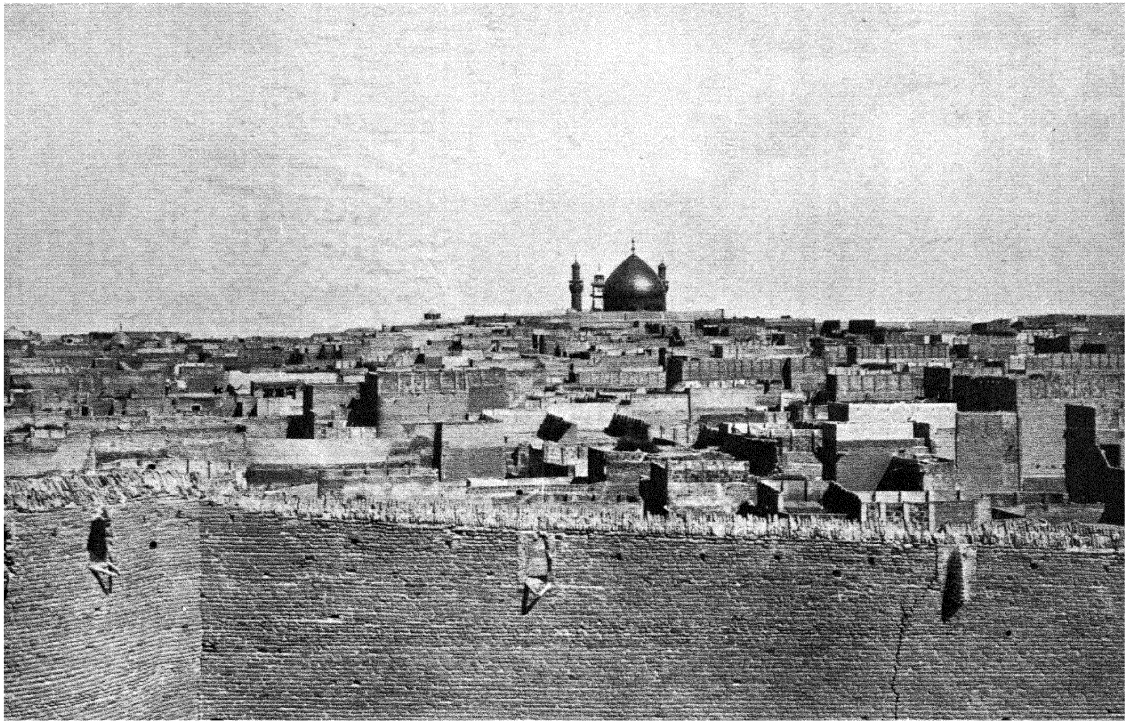
playing the bully generally. Still, since the zaptieh is sure to pounce on the stray foreigner in an Arab town and make trouble for him—I had a similar experience at Amarah, on the Tigris—there is nothing for it but to acquiesce in the custom and take a zaptieh to begin with as the lesser of two ills.

I cannot say that I was altogether sorry to leave Nejef by waggonette early next morning. To be treated like a pariah and outcast is not pleasant, even when your assailants are merely ignorant boys. Besides, my presence must have been to some degree disconcerting to my Arab host, who showed me the greatest kindness and hospitality.

I have already said that the old sea of Nejef is partly dried up—though it is never safe to make positive statements about the waters of these parts, which change from year to year. At all events a large portion of the sea is now arable land, and Nejef may almost be said to be situated in a grain-district where before were only barren desert and salt marsh.

It is quite impossible to say what the population of the town may be, since the figures given to me varied in true Arab fashion. The ever-changing, floating population of pilgrims interferes considerably with exact calculations. Thirty thousand is a moderate estimate, while at times there may be as many as 20,000 pilgrims within the walls.

Nejef is not merely important as the last resting-place of the sainted Ali, but it serves as a starting-point for a pilgrim route across the desert to Mecca,



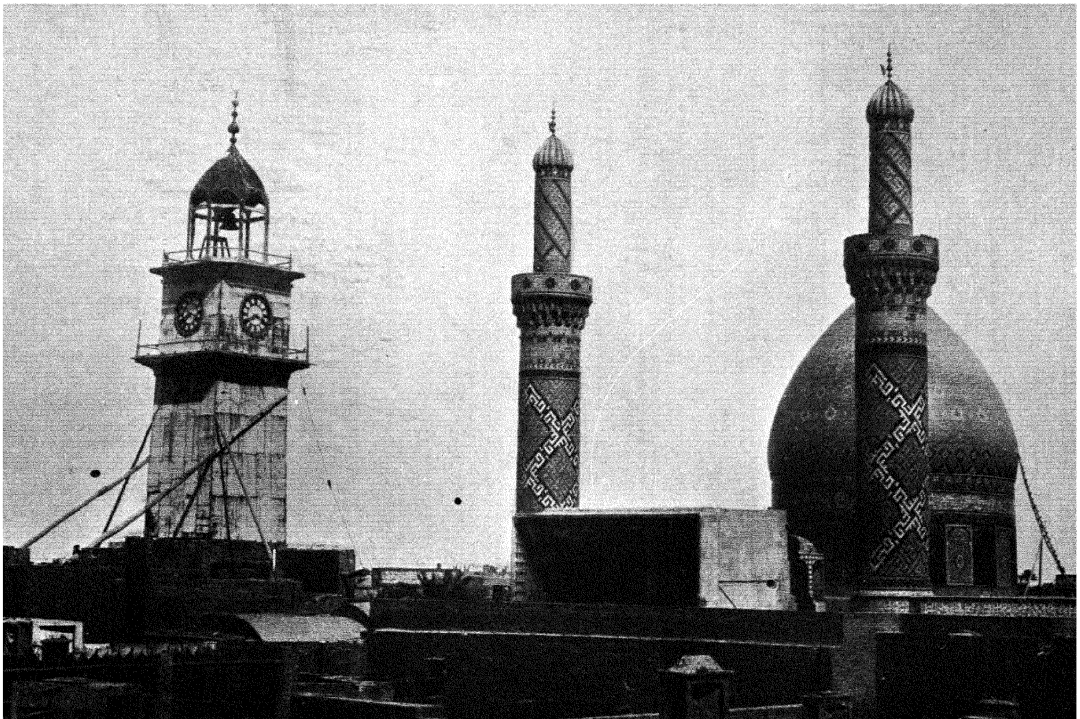
NEJEF, WITH MOSQUE OF ALI

and the advent of a railway connecting the town with the boundary of Persia would give an enormous stimulus to the pilgrim traffic. At Nejef one is on the route of the railway which comes from Bagdad across the Euphrates to Kerbela. Thence forty miles or a little more brings the line to Nejef across the desert. After Nejef the railway taps the grain-district of the Hindiah-Euphrates Doab at Kufa or another point further south, and then makes the best of its way to Zobeir and Basra and the Gulf. At this time of the year there is a constant flow of traffic between Kerbela and Nejef, though it falls far short of the immense stream between Bagdad and Kerbela. In order to avoid guesswork, I took the trouble to count the passengers on foot, and on mules or donkeys or horses, who passed us on the way to Nejef, and my total had already exceeded 600 human beings with treble the number of beasts before darkness stopped the count. This did not include the inmates of the covered waggonettes, which run daily in each direction. The ordinary number of these waggonettes is eight each way, each vehicle—which is called an "arabana"—carrying eight passengers.

Just now the horses are out at grass, and the number of arabana is cut down to four each way, though it is precisely the season for making a profit. As a rule the European can get a whole arabana for his own use by paying about 30*s*. This I found to be quite impossible owing to the limited number of horses and mules available, and I was constrained to travel with seven other passengers in a space eight

feet by four, into which our baggage had also to be taken. Fortunately the mules and horses, which we changed three times on the way, were so dead beat that it was possible to walk nearly the whole way, otherwise the journey to a European, who cannot adapt himself to cramped positions like the Arab or the Persian, would have been intolerable. As it was, when we saw at last the domes and minarets of Kerbela floating in the evening haze at the far end of the long lake which runs parallel to the route I felt inclined to utter the fervent "Ya Hussein" of the devout Shiah.

We had been going ever since an hour before daybreak, and the track, which winds along the edge of the marsh in order to keep on the hard sand just between the desert and the water, cannot exceed fifty miles at the outside. Yet, when the sun set, we still had two hours of painful flogging through the darkness, guided by the rings of flame round the great domes of Hussein and Abbas, until we came on a labyrinth of canals and date-gardens and an enormous graveyard with dim lights among the habitations of the dead, and we knew that we were close to the Sacred City. Passing through a tumble-down gateway in a ruined wall we found ourselves in wide busy streets, where I recognised so many Indian faces in the little shops which were still open that one might have fancied oneself in the outskirts of Bombay or Delhi. In one direction was heard the wild music of a Turkish military band, in another the chant of a belated pilgrim caravan was distinct above the uproar of the bazaar, while in



MOSQUE OF IMAM ABBAS, KERBELA

front of us loomed the lights of a big market-place where the babble of voices and the thronged benches of the coffee shops, the Eastern counterpart of the French cafés, with their seats out on the public street, showed clearly that the Kerbela season was in full swing.

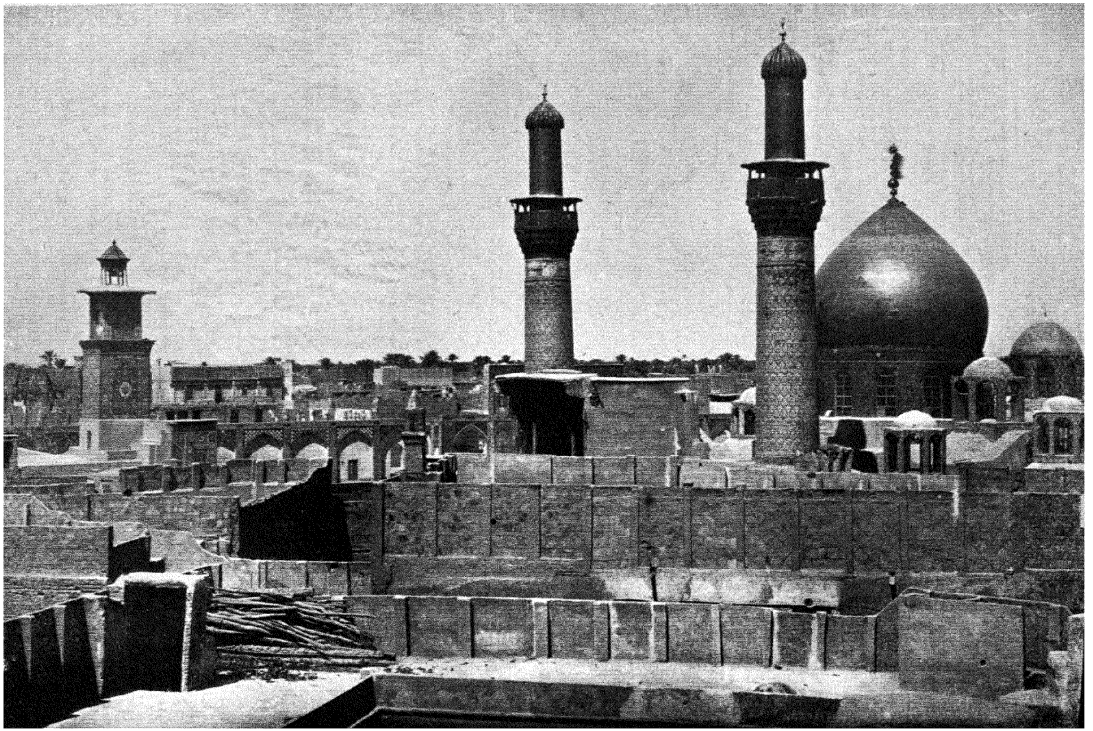
The arabana pulled up in front of a hostelry with a wonderful picture of a waggonette and horses over the door. Here I found a kavass from the British Agency awaiting me, and in five more minutes I was in a pleasant apartment of the house of the India Nawab who looks after the British Indian subjects in the city of Hussein. Next morning I found most of the distinguished people of the place had come to call on me, including the Turkish Governor, the judge, and the head Mullah. I would have given anything for a good interpreter in order to converse with all these interesting people, who spoke no European language. As it was I had to get along as best as I could with my Christian servant, whose English was limited and not at all adapted to the discussion of high politics.

The Turkish Governor wanted to know whether or not there was any trouble still in Indian waters—by which I suppose he meant to refer to the Koweit affair—and then all turned with eagerness to the railway question. I was assured that Kerbela had grown wonderfully in recent years and that it only needed railway connections to make it the most flourishing city of Mesopotamia, which, indeed, may be true, since the stream of pilgrims from Persia and India is growing to huge proportions.

The general impression was that the German Government was building the railway, and it was quite beyond the ability of any interpreter to upset this conviction.

After the reception I was able to spend some hours in the bazaar, and gaze, without attracting any attention, into the great courtyards of the mosques of Hussein and Abbas. It is difficult to get a general idea of these buildings, because the bazaar is built round their outer walls, and one comes on entrances in various parts of the bazaar rather like the different doors of the Stock Exchange. No one interferes with the foreigner as long as he does not actually enter the courtyard, but it is difficult to see very distinctly owing to the crowd of worshippers, money exchangers, pedlars and sightseers who throng to the shrines. The best view is from the roof of a neighbouring house when one has leisure to admire the gilded dome and minarets of Hussein and the enamelled dome of Abbas. The minarets of the Abbas are just being regilded by some pious Persian Shiah, so that they shine above the date-trees like twin stars. I am not sure, however, that I do not prefer the beautiful blues and pinks of the enamelled arabesque more than the glittering gold. There are several minor mosques in Kerbela and one Sunni shrine hidden away in a corner, with a tiled minaret, which would attract attention in any less wealthy city.

There are two thousand Indian subjects in Kerbela, so that my host the Nawab, who has never himself, I believe, been in India, but is a devoted



MOSQUE OF HUSSEIN

adherent of the Sirkar, has a good deal of work on his hands. The Indians are, however, well treated and give very little trouble. The pilgrims who visited Kerbela last year, he told me, exceeded 100,000, which I can well believe, as I passed over 2000 as I drove next morning from Kerbela to Mosseyib and Sikandera, the next resting-place on the Bagdad road. Indeed, the whole route from Kerbela to Bagdad presented the appearance of the trail of a great army which has thousands of camp-followers in its train. They were nearly all Persians, but of every rank—some on foot, the majority on tired mules or donkeys, and a number in the basket-like deckhouses which they built out on both sides of the patient beast of burden. Once a Nawab of Bagdad passed me riding in top-boots, with his family in a glass case behind him slung between two mules. Later on a son-in-law of the reigning Shah drove past in a tarantass, the only wheeled vehicle on the road except the arabana. Altogether it was a strange motley throng marching through miles of sand and mud to where Hussein laid down his life for Islam on the banks of the Euphrates. The coffins alone, slung in couples over the mules' backs, are sufficient in number to make a Bagdad-Kerbela railway a paying enterprise; while the general aspect of the route would put the most sanguine hopes into the breast of a shareholder in the Anatolian Railway Company.

CHAPTER XV

BAGDAD

It is hardly necessary to give any description of Bagdad, which has long been on the regular route of globe-trotters between Eastern Europe and India. The great city of the Abbasside Caliphs is now merely a commercial centre with a few notable shrines, such as that of Kazimain, in the neighbourhood, and I prefer to deal with it shortly in its relation to the advent of the new railway which is to revolutionise Mesopotamia.

The community of European merchants is not at first sight imposing in point of numbers. The Bagdad branch of Messrs. Hotz and Co. easily comes first among the British firms, and is followed by the trading-house of Messrs. Lynch—which is a separate concern from the steamer company—and Messrs. Sassoon. There is one German firm doing a considerable trade, and when that is mentioned there is little left with which to reckon. Still, there is an imposing array of foreign consuls, which seems to point out that foreign nations have at least a prospective claim on the prosperity of Bagdad. The Russians have a Consul-General for political purposes only, since trade they have none. The German house has a full-blown consul to look after its interests;

Austria-Hungary is represented by an official of wide experience and still wider popularity; the three French subjects have a vice-consul to protect them against aggression; America has a consular agent; and last, but not least, Great Britain has a Consul-General and Political Resident, whose work is far from being a sinecure, seeing that there are 2000 Indians in Kerbela alone, and a large number in Kazimain, close to Bagdad, while of the foreign trade of Bagdad between 60 and 70 per cent. concerns Great Britain and India. There is the usual foreign club, started by the British in the grounds of the British Residency. Cricket, golf, tennis, and billiards may be enjoyed in due season, and the climate is such that a European can thrive in it, as in March the wind is so bitterly cold that a fire is a cheerful necessity. Rain fell at frequent intervals throughout my stay, and during my tour through Hillah, Nejef, and Kerbela there was never a day when it was not more pleasant to be moving about out of doors than sitting in the shade. In summer the thermometer goes up to 126° Fahr., and the inhabitants descend by day to their cellars half beneath the ground, but the heat is nearly always dry, and the nights spent on the house-tops are said to be delightful. The one great drawback from a sanitary point of view is the disease which is politely called the *bouton de Bagdad*, which visits all and sundry, leaving a lifelong scar on face or hand or foot. In other respects, considering the crowded state of the bazaars and the usual habits of the people, Bagdad may be said to

be an exceedingly healthy and almost invigorating place.

Of course, as a trade-centre, Bagdad depends largely on the transit trade with Persia. The Kermanshah route is the easiest of all the ascents to the Persian plateau, and the cheapest. Hence Bagdad supplies all the Kermanshah district, including Burujird and Sultanabad, and meets on equal terms the northern current of trade at Hamadan. In Mesopotamia it supplies the wealthy towns of Kerbela, Hillah, and Nejef, taps the grain-district of Kerkuk and the wool-growing slopes of the Kurdish hills, and meets at Mosul the stream of the import trade of Aleppo. In describing my journey to Hillah, Nejef, and Kerbela I have already pointed out what a boon a railway would be to these places. It requires no demonstration to prove that the pilgrim traffic alone would make a railway from Bagdad to Kerbela and Nejef a paying institution.

The inroad of pilgrims goes on during six months of the year, and is attended with great hardships and considerable expense, in both money and time, which even to a Persian must occasionally be valuable. Already the number given for last year reaches a total of 100,000. It is easy to suppose that the figures would be doubled, and perhaps trebled, in a short time if the journey from the Persian border to Kerbela cost a few pence instead of a few pounds, and occupied as many hours as it now does days. The example of the little tramway from Bagdad to the shrine at Kazimain, which has proved to be a



BAGDAD

perfect mint of money for the shareholders, is enough to show what might be done on a larger scale to Kerbela. The extension to Nejef might not be quite so lucrative, but as the construction would cost comparatively little, it could hardly fail to bring in adequate returns. Nejef is nearly one-third of the distance between Bagdad and the coast, and the receipts on the shorter portion would leave some margin for loss on the longer part.

But there is no reason to suppose that the longer part would prove a failure. I have shown how impossible it is to convey the grain of the Hillah district to the coast without risk, delay, and expense, which take away all the profit of the trade. A railway run in the interests of the agriculturists would find the carrying of grain to the coast a large item in the receipts, as the freight would be reduced to not more than a third of the present rates, while the risk would be entirely eliminated. Moreover, the cost of building such a railway, skirting the marshes and keeping out of the way of the floods would certainly not be prohibitive. It is difficult to see, therefore, with the combination of the pilgrim traffic and the grain-trade, why a Bagdad-Basra or Bagdad-Koweit line should not pay its way.

But the through trade of Bagdad has still to be taken into consideration. What that trade is no one can exactly say, for the figures in the consular report are based only on the cargo carried by the steamers of Messrs. Lynch Bros. Even so, there is an import trade shown for 1900 of £1,372,544, a

figure which is far short of the real total when the Turkish steamers and the native craft are taken into consideration. I am assured by merchants of Bagdad that there is room for almost indefinite expansion in this trade whenever better means of communication with the coast are opened up.

Now it is usually argued that railways cannot compete with waterways, an argument which is so misleading as to be positively untruthful in such cases as the present. When the waterway is a tortuous river, with a strong current which traverses 500 miles where a railway would go 300, when its channel is uncertain and at particular periods of the year unnavigable, and when at best the steamers plying to and fro cannot safely draw more than 5 ft. or 6 ft., then the presumption is that the advantage would be all with the railway. But when the river is handicapped by regulations which prevent the development of carrying capacity so that the utmost tonnage of the steamers is reduced to a few hundred tons per week, much less than the railway could carry in a day, then the presumption in favour of the railway becomes a certainty.

A very simple calculation will show the truth of the foregoing argument. The average freight charge from Basra to Bagdad is not less than 36*s.* a ton. A railway could deliver goods in Bagdad at the rate of 12*s.* a ton. It may be argued that the river steamers could lower their rates to meet the competition, but one can hardly believe that they could lower them from 36*s.* to 12*s.* and still make a profit. It would be difficult indeed to overestimate the advantages

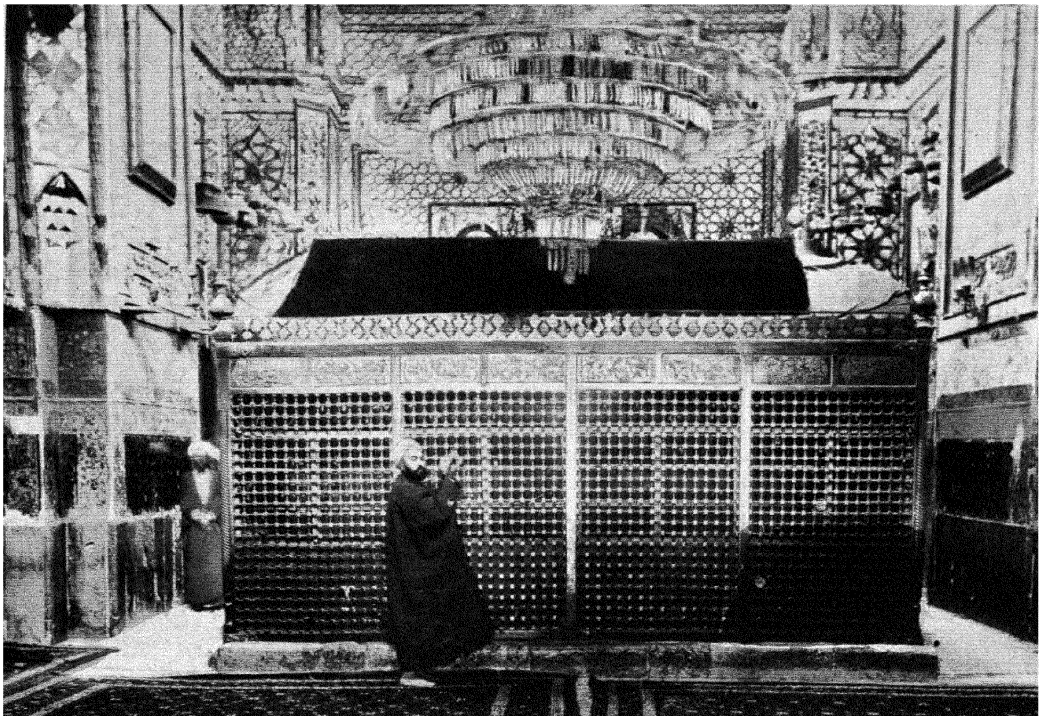
which would accrue to the trade of Bagdad by breaking down the steamer monopoly. For it is not merely the enormous freight-charges that at present hamper import, but the delay in delivery is most exasperating. It is not an exaggeration to say that goods are as often six months on the way from London to Bagdad as not, and the delay is all caused by the congestion at Basra. Of course, native boats can be hired, and are hired, at greatly reduced rates, but the uncertainty and risk of this means of transport are so great that insurance companies refuse to insure the goods. With a railway merchants would be able to guarantee quick and safe delivery, and they would suffer no such losses from fluctuations in prices as they do now. The result would be that Bagdad goods which hold their own only at Hamadan, against the imports by way of Tabriz or Teheran and Resht, would in all probability drive the rival goods out of the market, and Bagdad might even aspire to supply Teheran with Manchester cottons.

It is not merely in the transit trade that the merchants feel the want of cheap transport. Nearly all local improvements at Bagdad are checked by the enormous price of fuel. Foreigners use English coal, which can be brought up only by steamer from Basra at the rate of nearly £2 a ton, which adds considerably to the original price of the article. Natives use wood, which is even more expensive in the long run owing to the scarcity of trees in Mesopotamia. The consequence is that no works can be started which require artificial power, and they

never will be started in Bagdad until some way of importing cheap fuel is discovered.

Taking everything into consideration, then, a railway between Bagdad and the coast has everything in its favour as a means of fulfilling the proverbial long-felt want. The difficulties of construction are very small beyond the necessity of avoiding the inundations of the unruly Euphrates, and even that obstacle could be removed by a drastic system of waterworks and irrigation which almost any other Government than the Turkish would have undertaken long ago. That the Turkish Government will attempt anything of the sort now is hardly to be hoped, but the railway company should find no great difficulty in securing permission to undertake such works as will be necessary for the conservation of the railway embankment.

It is sometimes objected that the lack of cheap labour will prove a serious stumbling-block. I could find no confirmation of this view in any quarter that I visited. The experience of the German explorers is just the reverse. They can get all the labour they want at 6*d.* a day, and they find the Arab not at all intractable. The fact is that the Arab, like most Eastern natives, thinks of almost nothing beyond food and money, and the idea of getting regular pay at good rates is one that should attract him greatly. Of course, he is not a European labourer, but there is no reason to suppose that he will prove inferior to the Indian coolie whom he certainly surpasses in physique; nor will the building of a railway in



INMOST SHRINE OF KASIMAIN

the desert be subject to such long spells of heat and rain as is customary in the experience of railway builders in India.

It is to be presumed that the railway company will begin building in both directions from Bagdad. The line to the north, according to the latest information, runs between Mosul and Bagdad along the right bank of the Tigris *viâ* Tekrit. This, in the view of the Bagdad merchants, is a mistake, because it would be more profitable to cross to the left bank and take in the grain-producing district of Kerkuk. However this may be, there seems to be no such prospect of immediate success for the railway north of Bagdad such as there is to the southward, and it is curious that the railway scheme has always been spoken of as the Bagdad Railway, as if the extension to the Gulf were an afterthought and of little importance. In reality this extension, from a commercial point of view, is, in fact, by far the more valuable part of the whole scheme, and the part which promises immediate returns. That a concession for that part of the railway at least should not have been secured by a British company is a deplorable mistake, due almost without a doubt to the fact that a Mesopotamian railway has always been regarded by British travellers and British writers merely as a link in a possible continental route to India. Many writers, including such far-seeing men as Lord Curzon, and more recently Lord Percy, have endeavoured to show that such an overland route to India is an idle dream, and, therefore, the idea of a Mesopotamian railway is not worth considering.

Why the railway should not have been considered on its own merits it is difficult to see.

As things stand the part between the Gulf and Bagdad appears to have every chance of proving both useful and remunerative. The country through which the line passes is slowly increasing in prosperity, and under good government would become one of the richest agricultural districts in the world. But the point is that even under existing conditions it is not growing poorer, but richer. I have shown in a previous chapter that the irrigation of Mesopotamia was never at any one time much greater or more extensive than it is to-day, and even under the Turks the area under irrigation increases rather than decreases. The drawback to the development of the country is the lack of roads and railways, but especially of railways. In the old days grain from Hillah could compete in the markets of the world; but now that prices have fallen so much Hillah grain must rot on the ground until some method is devised of bringing it to market. A railway is the only solution. Supposing, however, that another form of government were set up in Turkish Arabia, and irrigation works were undertaken on a great scale, and the inhabitants of the country were encouraged to till the land instead of being discouraged in every way by the tax-collector, then Mesopotamia might become as rich and as populous as the Valley of the Ganges in proportion to its area. It is a mistake, however, to believe that such a state of things ever existed, even under Babylonian kings, or that it ever will exist under Turkish sultans. We have to go on

existing data. Given even the present amount of prosperity, I maintain that lower Mesopotamia can very well support a railway, and it is a great pity that a German company and not a British one means to build it.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PASSAGE OF THE TAURUS

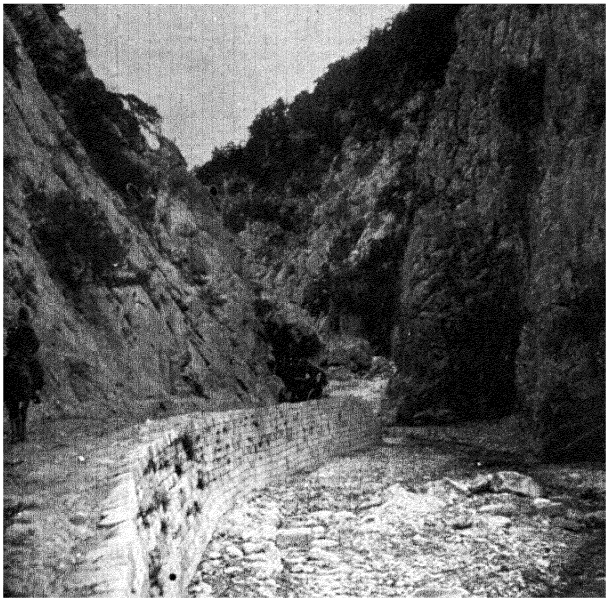
It may not be out of place at this point to jump for a moment to the Gulf of Alexandretta, where the advent of the Bagdad Railway produces a problem somewhat analogous to that which has arisen in the Gulf. Nor will it be a waste of time to describe briefly the route by which the railway will eventually achieve the passage of the Taurus.

The country through which the Bagdad Railway passes on its way from the Bosphorus to the Persian Gulf may be divided into two parts, the Anatolian plateau and the Mesopotamian plain. Unfortunately for the railway builder, it is impossible to go from the plateau to the plain without surmounting or piercing the great mountain range which acts as a buttress for the plateau and a ring fence for the plain. Whatever alignment the Anatolian railway syndicate might have chosen—and many were discussed—the Taurus must still have blocked the way; so it seems fitting that the route eventually chosen should be that which has been traversed from time immemorial by invaders from the east and by invaders from the west, as well as by the humbler traveller and merchant. This is the route which, skirting the western edge of the plateau of

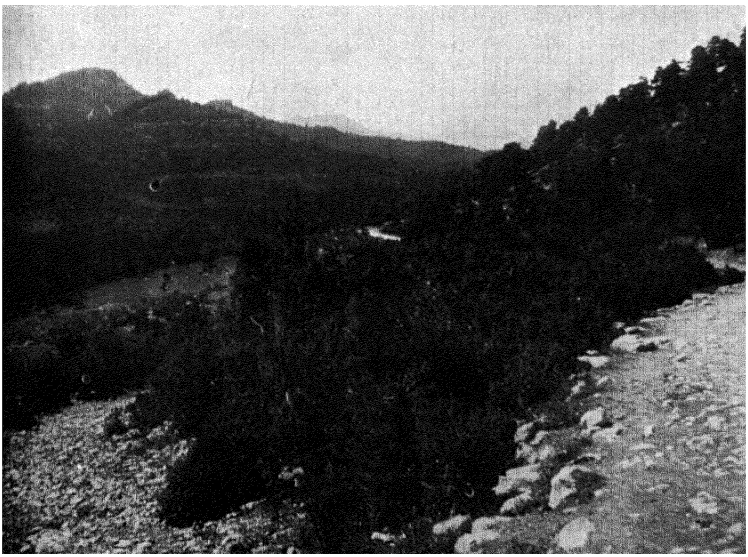
Asia Minor, seems always to be seeking a gap in the solid bulwark of the Bulgar Dagh until it hits on the ravine of the Chakit-su. Following that stream for a short distance, it turns the flank of the main range, and pierces a second ridge by means of the gorge known from Roman times as the Cilician Gates, and so debouches on the smiling Cilician plain just a few miles north of St. Paul's city of Tarsus. The descent from the plateau having been thus accomplished, there is still a serious obstacle to be overcome in the shape of the Giaour Dagh or Mount Amanus, which throws up a mighty barrier between the tiny Cilician plain and the huge, arid basin of the twin rivers of Mesopotamia. But from an engineering point of view, the Giaour Dagh does not present the difficulties which have to be dealt with in the passage of the Taurus. It is to the Taurus that one naturally turns as the great feature of the future railway.

There are no hindrances to travel in this part of the Sultan's dominions. On the contrary, the journey from Tarsus up to Konia is so simple an affair that it may safely be recommended to all tourists who have a taste for grand mountain scenery, and an open-air life. The security with which one travels in Cicilia and Karamania must be attributed in part to the excellent influence of the British Consul resident at Mersina, Lieutenant-Colonel Massy, whose recommendation will open the door of any official dwelling-place in the country, and ensure ample official protection. Colonel Massy had just set out for his summer place in the hills above

Mersina when I landed at that port, and I was glad to escape from the midsummer heat of the plain to the cool village of Gheuzni, which serves as hill station for the foreign consuls and richer merchants of Mersina. Four hours on horseback up a small mountain track ought to bring the traveller to the primitive little nest in the wooded foot-hills of the Taurus. In my own case a much longer time was necessary, owing to the fact that my Greek guide, who was hired in Mersina, had been over the track only once before. He lost his way just as darkness was coming on. We adopted, as I discovered afterwards, the identical footpath by which the Light Cavalry of Cyrus, guided by a treacherous woman, made its way through the mountain range, and took the Persian Army in the rear, while it was waiting to repel the Ten Thousand in what the Chinese would call "proper fashion" at the Cilician Gates. Fortunately we were prevented from pursuing our historical researches to the farther side of the Taurus, by meeting a friendly native, who turned us round and put us on the right track to Gheuzni. I found Colonel Massy a thorough enthusiast concerning the future of Asia Minor, and especially the region of the Taurus. Certainly there is no more enlightened ruler in Turkey, and none who has done more for the public welfare than Ferid Pasha, the late Wali of Konia, whose jurisdiction went half way through the Taurus; while the old Kurd who rules over the Adana Vilayet, if he has no such public spirit as his colleague on the other side of the mountains, has at least a wholesome regard for



THE CILICIAN GATES



ROAD THROUGH THE TAURUS

the British Consul. Perhaps a life spent largely in exploring one of the most beautiful mountain ranges in the world is conducive to a healthy and optimistic view of one's surroundings. However that may be, it is cheering to come across an optimist in Turkey, and Colonel Massy's opinion must be put in the scale against that of most foreigners, who can believe no good of Turkish officialdom, and can see nothing but ruin and decay in prospect for Turkey.

It must be admitted that the little province of Cilicia is, in comparison with most parts of Asiatic Turkey, a progressive and prosperous country. Cotton growing and spinning have been developed in recent years to a large extent. Wheat is now cultivated on a large scale, and no less than sixty American reapers have gone into Mersina in the last year. The little railway of forty-one miles from Mersina to Adana is now more than paying its expenses after a long period of steady loss. There is even, as a token of the higher civilisation, an ice-factory in Tarsus, which makes a profit on the invested capital of 50 per cent. But much requires to be done to develop the resources of this singularly favoured region. Last year, for instance, 75 per cent. of the cotton crop was lost for want of water, though there never was an easier country to irrigate. But it would cost, perhaps, £100,000 to organise a good scheme of irrigation, and who is going to invest such a sum?

Then, again, in the still more distant future, there are mineral resources to be developed which

would add enormously to the riches of the province. There is copper ore, of which over 50 per cent. is pure metal, within a few miles of the sea-board, there are rich manganese, and chrome, and silver, and coal of fair quality all waiting to be exploited. Altogether there is a field for the capitalist in Cilicia, as long as he is not afraid to invest his money under local auspices. There is no lack of information on the point if the investor will read the excellent reports issued by the British Consulate at Mersina.

At the time of my visit I was chiefly concerned about the prospects of the Bagdad railway in Cilicia, and no one could be more helpful in this respect than the British Consul, who knows nearly every yard of the triangular province between the Taurus and Mount Amanus and the Gulf of Alexandretta.

It will be remembered that the terms of the irade allow the Anatolian Railway Company to connect Adana with the sea by a short railway, to be used only for the carriage of material. Now a glance at the map will show that Adana is already connected with the sea by the railway of forty-one miles, which joins the capital of the province to the port of Mersina. Mersina is certainly not the nearest point on the water to Adana, or to the route of the railway, as it passes across the Cilician plain. But, after all, the distance is so short in any case that it seems foolish to build a new branch line to the coast when there is a perfectly good one already in existence. It might be argued, of course, that Mersina is only an open roadstead and ill adapted to the landing of

material. But this would be equally the case anywhere on the Gulf of Alexandretta with the exception of Alexandretta itself, which the Sultan will not hand over to the railway syndicate. The two places mentioned as probable sites for the railway harbour are Ayas and Youmourtalik, both on the little bay of Ayas on the north side of the gulf. But neither place is at all suitable for a port, since the landing is extremely shallow, and the silt of the river Djihun is a constant source of trouble. At both places there is a serious lack of fresh water, since the great aqueduct which used to bring water from the Giaour Dagh has long ceased to perform its functions. Possibly it might be rather cheaper to make a harbour at Youmourtalik than to throw out breakwaters at Mersina, but when there is already a railway at Mersina there can be no possible advantage from a business point of view in selecting a new site. The German syndicate may have been influenced by one of two considerations, or perhaps by both, when they applied for the right to establish a new port on the Gulf of Alexandretta. First of all, the declaration of their intention would tend to lower the value of the stock of the Mersina-Adana Railway which could not stand any competition, and so the German syndicate would be able more cheaply to buy a controlling interest in that line, of whose stock they are said to possess already about one-third. Or there may be a political interest, above and beyond the mercantile advantages, to be gained by establishing a private port on the Gulf of Alexandretta.

According to the irade of January 1902, the

branch line and port which the German syndicate is empowered to make may only be used for the purpose of landing material while the line is in process of construction, and is not to be regarded as a permanent concession. But this is not the view taken by the members of the syndicate, who openly avow their intention of creating a harbour for the export of grain entirely controlled by the railway company, which would own the grain elevators, warehouses, and wharves. It is, indeed, essential for the prosperity of the country that there should be a place of export for all the grain grown south of the Taurus as well as a great deal that is grown north of the mountains about Eregli and Nigde. The Turkish Government wants all merchandise to be brought up to Constantinople, but it would obviously be killing the goose with the golden eggs to insist on carrying wheat all the way from Eregli to Haidar Pasha when it could be brought over a much shorter distance to the Gulf of Alexandretta

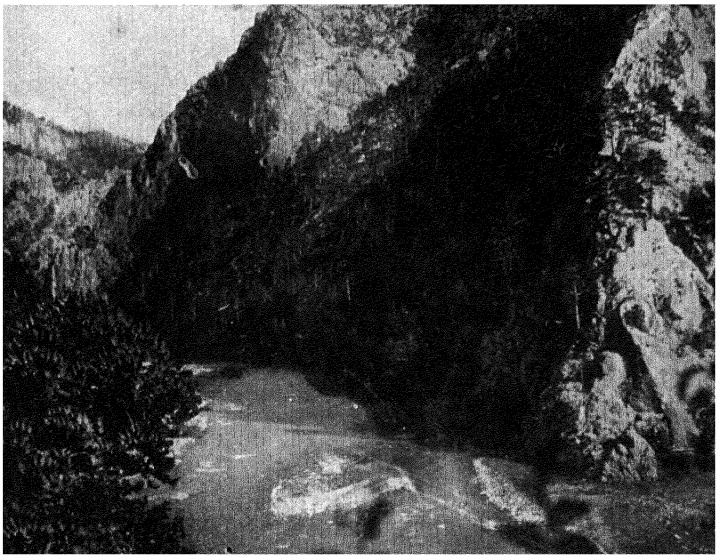
From the point of view of the general public, Turkish and foreign, it is much better to have an open port at Mersina than a purely German harbour at some other point on the gulf; and judging by past experience a harbour which was controlled by a German syndicate might in a short time come under the protection of the German Government. It is only a minor objection that Ayas or Youmourtalik is at present a convenient anchorage for our Mediterranean Fleet. The main thing that we have to prevent in our own interests, and in the interest perhaps of Turkey as well, is the establishment of

an exclusively German port on the Gulf of Alexandretta. Our action with regard to Koweit has already had the result of throwing cold water on German ambitions in the direction of the Persian Gulf, and one can hardly help drawing the conclusion from recent events that our Government has put obstructions in the way of the German syndicate carrying out its intentions on the Gulf of Alexandretta. Already the Germans have given up the Bay of Ayas as a possible site for their harbour because there the British Admiralty might have interests to protect, and though no spot has actually been decided on yet, the new harbour, if it is ever constructed, is more likely to be put down on the opposite shore of the gulf somewhere near Piyas. But whatever locality may be finally chosen, the British Government would do well to support the claims of Mersina, where there is already a prosperous community, an ample water-supply, and a branch line in existence, and where, above all, the port would be open to all nations. There seems to be no reason for conceding to Germany a private harbour in the Gulf of Alexandretta any more than in the Gulf of Persia.

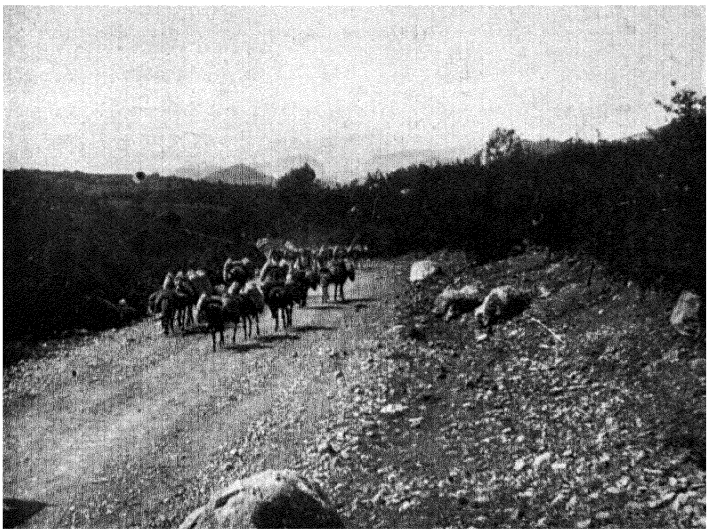
Leaving this controversial question of the future Mediterranean port of the Bagdad Railway, it is pleasant to turn to the great engineering feat which is necessitated by the passage of the Taurus Mountains. The railway, which meets hardly any difficulty after leaving Eski-Shehr, skims over the Anatolian plateau to Konia, which is the present terminus, and thereafter will run to Karaman and

Eregli at an altitude of something over 3000 feet above the sea. At Eregli it is under the very shadow of the great Bulgar Dagh, one of the most pronounced ridges of the Taurus. A few miles to the east of Eregli, however, there is a great rent in the massive range through which the Chakit-su, rising north of the mountains on the plateau above Eregli, finds its way. This ravine has been used for countless generations as the highway between the east and the west, and now the railway will be able to avail itself of nature's flaw; so that the highest point in the alignment will be on the downs above Eregli, where the Chakit-su takes its rise, and where the altitude above the sea is about 4500 feet. Having pierced the Bulgar Dagh by means of this ravine, the old road turns to the right, being confronted by a secondary range through which the Chakit-su makes its way by a cañon so narrow and precipitous that, in all human probability, it was never traversed by man until Mr. Mavrogodato, the engineer of the Bagdad Railway, cut a path through it recently in order to find a route for the line. The ancient road, instead of attempting the dangerous cañon, turns to the right, mounting up again to the watershed between the Chakit-su and a tributary of the ancient Cydnus, or River of Tarsus.

Following the tributary of the Cydnus the road is able to pierce the secondary range of the Taurus by a beautiful gorge, not so magnificent as the cañon of the Chakit-su, but still grand enough in its way, the narrowest part being known to history as the Cilician Gates.



CAÑON OF THE CHAKIT SU, THROUGH WHICH RAILWAY WILL PASS



ROAD SCENE IN THE TAURUS

I know of no more romantic spot in the world, and none more beautiful on a moonlight night in mid-summer than this wooded gorge, once the highway of nations, now scarcely disturbed by the passing of an occasional string of soft-footed camels. The gates themselves can be reached in a long day's march from Tarsus on horseback, or in the comfortable, coffin-shaped araba or phaeton of the country. Setting out his bed by a stream of clear water under the shadow of great limestone cliffs, the least imaginative traveller as he rests in the brilliant moonlight of Asia cannot fail to be stirred by the stupendous associations of the past. In this very spot the motley hordes of Xerxes and Darius have waited for the onset of Western armies. The adventurous spirit of the gallant Ten Thousand seems to breathe through the pine trees, and one might almost hear in the distance the steady tramp of the hoplites of the youthful Alexander. In the morning there are still associations, more proper, perhaps, to the sober light of day, when one passes through the gates and comes on the massive works which Ibrahim Pasha in these days of modern warfare threw across the trough between the Bulgar Dagh and the secondary range of the Taurus.

From Ibrahim's lines the route descends to the valley of the Chakit-su, which it reaches at Bozanti Khan, a beautiful resting-place, where the Chakitsu has for a moment a brief breathing space between the ravine to the north and the great cañon to the south. Here, I left my carriage for a day, and made my way on foot down the cañon where the railway

will eventually go. It was the work of hours to climb over rocks and ford the stream from side to side for a paltry mile or two until I reached a narrow part where the river was confined between two sheer walls of rock, and driven to such a fury by the constraint put on it that further advance was out of the question. I afterwards heard from Mr. Mavrogodato that the cañon opens up a little further on into a perfect little oasis, deep in a circle of precipitous mountains, and then closes in again for many miles, so that there will be from forty to fifty kilometres of almost continuous tunnelling and bridging, after which the line will emerge from the mountains a little north of Adana. This does not include from fifteen to twenty miles of ravine north of Bozanti Khan. It will be seen how important a part of the railway scheme is the passage of the Taurus. When it is completed, however, the part of the line which follows the course of the Chakit-su will rival any railway in the world in point of scenery. For though the Chakit-su is a poor stream compared with the Fraser River, yet the cañon itself is, if possible, more magnificent even than the famous Fraser River cañon of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

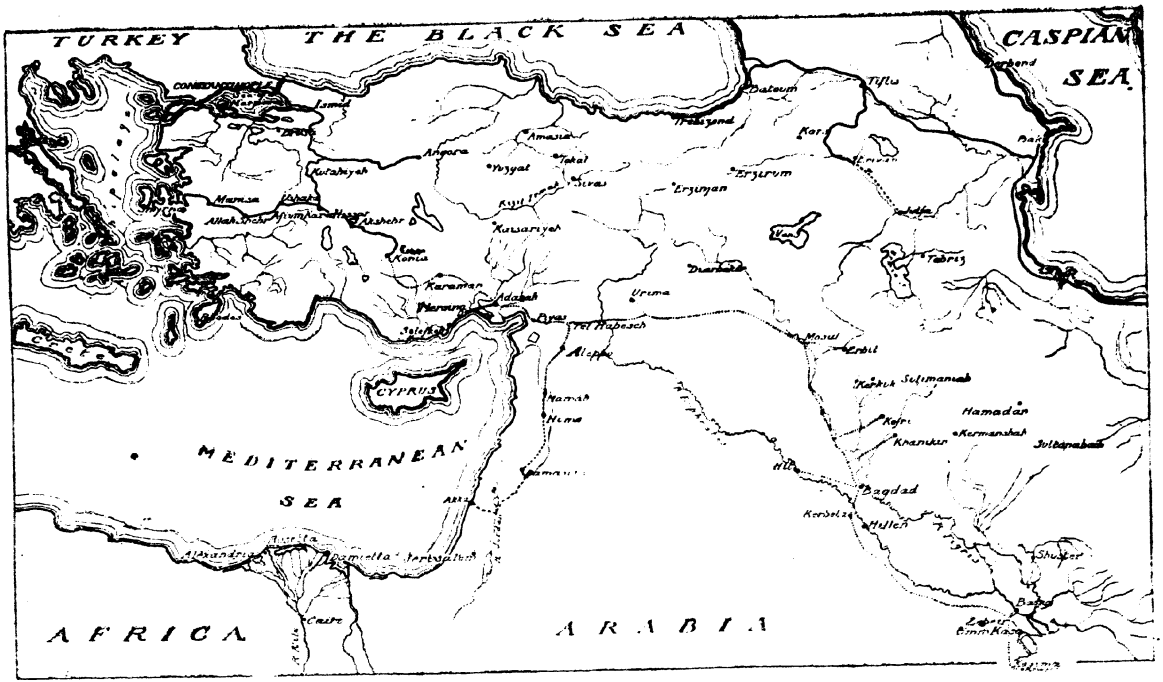
North of Bozanti Khan the scenery suddenly changes. There is a dearth of trees and a barren look about the landscape which instantly recalls the Persian plateau or the South African karoo. Once through the ravine past Chifte Khan and on to the plateau beyond, one is travelling on the open veldt with all the proper effects of endless distances and

weird mirage. Across this familiar panorama I made what speed I could by Eregli and Karabunar, and reached Konia on the fifth day from Tarsus, almost a record journey, considering that I had spent a whole day off the road at Bozanti Khan.

CHAPTER XVII

GENERAL PROSPECTS OF THE BAGDAD RAILWAY

THE question of railway development in Asiatic Turkey is of such great importance in its bearings on the whole field of politics in Western Asia that it may be well, after having dealt at various times with different portions of the subject, to form a more comprehensive view of the great scheme known as the Bagdad Railway. The irade sanctioning the construction of the railway was issued in January 1902, and in all main essentials the alignment has been definitely settled. It is possible to show that the enterprise will benefit Asiastic Turkey to an enormous extent and will repay a hundredfold the cost of the guarantee. By a friendly agreement on the part of the financiers interested in Turkey the necessary funds to provide a guarantee might very well be forthcoming. It requires a very small knowledge of arithmetic to show that a guarantee of 17,000 fr. per kilomètre is quite sufficient when working expenses are deducted to pay a handsome profit on an outlay which is not supposed to exceed 200,000 fr. per kilomètre. In point of fact, however, the capital outlay in such cases is nearly always underestimated, because though in theory it may be easy enough to build a single line of railway for



MAP SHOWING ROUTE OF THE BAGDAD RAILWAY

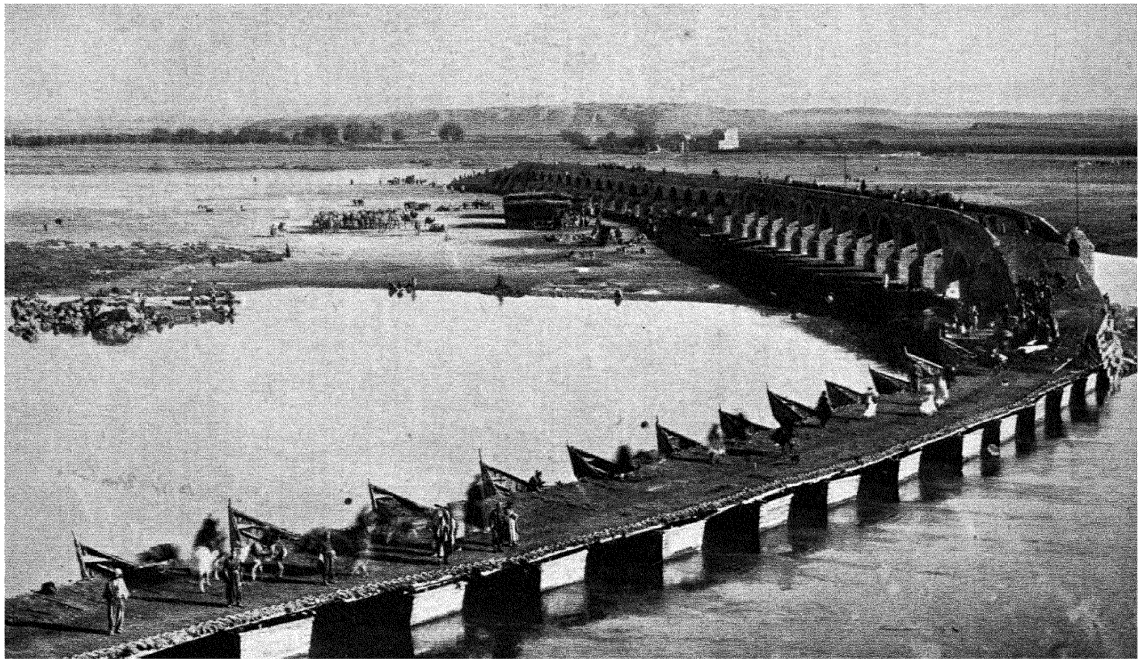
The black lines show the existing railway, the dotted lines show the route of the future railway

£8000 a mile, in practice the cost is likely to be nearer £10,000. Still, allowing for a great deal of extravagance, the receipts guaranteed by the Sultan's irade should secure the payment of from 4 to 5 per cent. on the capital invested.

That the German syndicate is alive to the situation is shown by the cleverness with which it has traced the railway. Granted that the best route for the northern portion of the line was to cross the Anatolian peninsula diagonally by way of Konia to Adana, and then to proceed by the easiest route over the Giaour Dagh and Kurt Dagh into the valley of the Euphrates, the alignment after that should, from a commercial point of view, have followed the foot hills of the mountains in a semi-circular sweep by Urfa and Diarbekir to Mosul. Then the line should have crossed the Tigris, and made another arc through the grain-growing district of Erbil and Kerkuk down to Bagdad, and so on across the two rivers again to Kerbela and Nejef and the Gulf. In this way the most populous and prosperous—the terms are merely relative—portions of Mesopotamia would have been served by the railway, and there would have been a not too remote chance of paying expenses. But what has happened is this. The *tracé*, after crossing the Kurt Dagh, halts for a moment at a spot called Tel Habesh, ten kilomètres south of Klis, in order to throw off a branch to Aleppo, and then makes almost a bee-line across the desert by Ras-al-Ain to Mosul, leaving the agricultural district of the foot hills to the north severely alone. Then, again, at Mosul it does not cross the

Tigris to take in the well-watered Kerkuk region, but turns due south in a straight line to Bagdad, keeping always on the right bank of the Tigris. It does, however, throw off branches across the Tigris to Erbil, Kifri, and Khanikin.

A good many critics have blamed the syndicate for preferring a long desert route to a rather longer but much more hopeful sweep through the agricultural belt, which lies at the foot of the great amphitheatre of the Taurus and Zagros Mountains. On the surface it does seem foolish to make a direct line from Mosul to Bagdad, with a number of branches across the river into the Kerkuk district, instead of allowing the main line to include Erbil and Kerkuk and Kifri. But a little consideration will show that there is a great deal of method in this apparent madness. Seeing that in any case the receipts on this portion of the railway will not for years reach the amount guaranteed by the Sultan's irade, it is a matter of perfect indifference to the railway company whether the line passes through a populous district or over a desert. The company takes in exactly the same amount of money in either case; it is only the Turkish Government that is affected one way or the other. The company is bound down to make a permanent way of sufficient strength, however, to run trains at the rate of seventy-five kilomètres an hour, inclusive reckoning. In order, therefore, to save capital outlay, it is better to run the line over the floor of the desert than to take it up and down among the foot hills of the Taurus. In other words, since the receipts will always be the



BRIDGE AT MOSUL OVER THE TIGRIS

same, a line which costs, say £6000 a mile, is a much more profitable undertaking than one which costs £8000 or £9000, and a clear half-million or so is saved by not crossing the Tigris by a bridge at Mosul.

Having fixed on the shortest and cheapest route for the main line, it was a simple matter to arrange branches to various spots away from the trunk railway by which the grain-growing districts might be tapped, and the right to develop the petroleum fields of Mesopotamia secured. It will be remarked that branches will eventually go to Erbil and Kifri, east of the Tigris, and to Hit on the Euphrates, all places where the surface indications of petroleum are most pronounced, while the branch to Khanikin gives the syndicate control over the Bagdad end of the great trade route of Western Persia. Too much importance can hardly be attached to this point, for it is plain that if oil can be produced in large quantities in Mesopotamia, where it can be led along the level floor of the great Mesopotamian valley to the Persian Gulf, or carried in tanks down the Tigris River, the possibilities in store for the German syndicate are enormous. And the expense of the exploitation is comparatively small. The various branches of the railway running to the oil centres can be constructed very cheaply because the conditions concerning the gauge and strength of the railway apply to the main line alone. In fact, the branches need not be built at all unless oil is first proved to exist in paying quantities. The mere tracing of the line on paper secures the mining rights to the syndicate.

The plan, therefore, is to make the cheapest and quickest main line from Adana to the Persian Gulf, in which the only serious difficulties will be the crossing of Mount Amanus, the bridging of the Euphrates in two places, and a long embankment, amounting practically to a viaduct across the narrow bit of inundated country between Bagdad and the Euphrates, where the spring floods often turn the desert into an open sea. Interest to the amount of 4 or 5 per cent. being secured on this undertaking there still remains to the syndicate the chance of developing an enormous oil traffic, to say nothing of other mineral resources, all of which have been thrown in, so to speak, with the railway concession and have cost the syndicate nothing whatever.

The next question that arises is whether the Turkish Government or Turkey as a whole is likely to gain any advantage from the granting of so rich a concession to a foreign syndicate. It is hardly possible to hold two opinions on this subject. The material change which has come over Asia Minor since railways were introduced into the coast fringe is pronounced and indisputable. The British Railway, called the Smyrna-Aidin line, during the later years of the nineteenth century turned the famous valley of the Meander into a smilling garden, and the Kassaba line, originally British also, but now a French concern, has developed similar agricultural riches a little to the north, and has now joined the Anatolian plateau to the seaboard. Smyrna, the outlet of both railways, brings back to life the long

dead prosperity of the Greek towns of Asia Minor. Further inland the line of the Anatolian Railway Company from Haidar Pasha to Angora earns a handsome profit, and is no longer a burden on the Sultan's exchequer, while the later extension, from Eski Shehr to Konia, though still dependent on the Government guarantee for the payment of interest on the capital outlay, is fast emancipating itself, so that in a few years it will be entirely self-supporting. Thanks to the Anatolian railway system, the Anatolian plateau is becoming the great granary which it ought always to have been. Every year fresh land is brought under cultivation, and between Eregli and Konia I passed through miles of standing wheat in a district which a year or two ago was as innocent of the plough as the Sahara.

The German company, acting with much energy and foresight, has not confined its attentions to simple railway construction, but has forced the almost uncivilised natives of the plateau to accept the latest types of farm machinery with excellent results. Away in the deserted village of Karabunar, where a short time since even a foreign missionary was as rare a sight as a comet, I found attractive advertisements of American reapers wherein stalwart Asiatics garbed in the rich colours which Western people always associate in their minds with the East, are seen blithely following the binder in a landscape distinctly reminiscent of Indiana. The point is, however, that not only the advertisements, but the machinery, were there, and the grain traffic of the railway is rapidly increasing.

The moral influence of the foreigner is also widely felt. I have already referred to the benevolent rule of Ferid Pasha at Konia. Some of the roads in his vilayet could hardly be surpassed in Europe. The capital of his province is almost a model city, and only lately he opened a school for higher education in Konia, the like of which has not been seen in Asia Minor apart from the efforts of foreign missions. I shall not say that Ferid Pasha was Wali of Konia because the German company willed it so. But it is quite certain that the extension of foreign railways and foreign influence will secure the appointment of similar officials elsewhere. A power like the German syndicate can effect things which our consuls with only the backing of our Government—and very little of that—cannot hope to carry out. It may still be argued, however, that granted the advantages arising out of the Bagdad Railway, it would be far better in the interests of the country that the alignment should follow the foot-hills of the mountains guarding Mesopotamia on two sides, where there is an agricultural population, instead of striking across the barren desert. I have shown that the desert route is distinctly advantageous to the syndicate, but it is possible to maintain also that in the long run Turkey, too, will profit by it.

It must be remembered that all Mesopotamia, or at least the greater part of it, is capable of cultivation under proper auspices, and has in fact flourished in past centuries. The great wave of the Mohammedan invasion, however, swept over the basin of the twin rivers, carrying its hordes of devastating

Arabs right up to the base of the mountains. Whatever can be done to recover lost territory is to the advantage of Turkey and the world at large. And a railway thrust out across the desert, away from the mountain marge, may be likened to a breakwater built out by engineers to protect the work of reclaiming land inside. In other words, the railway will push back the uncivilised scourge of the nomad tribes and produce once more a settled population in Northern Mesopotamia, while the portion of the line between Bagdad and the Gulf will perform a similar service for the lower part of the basin. If it cost the Government £1,000,000 a year to pay the guarantee on the railway—and that is a very liberal estimate—it is impossible to say that the money is not well spent in the interests of both Eastern Europe and Western Asia. That the Turkish Government will also derive great military and strategical benefits from the railway is too obvious a fact to require demonstration.

It only remains to say a word about the question of guarantee. It is generally supposed, if one may judge from the various comments from time to time in British papers and periodicals, that the only way to secure the necessary guarantee is to raise the tariffs on foreign commerce at the ports, and the question is pertinently asked, why should Great Britain, which is responsible for the bulk of the foreign trade of the Turkish Empire, consent to the further taxation of that trade? There is a simple answer to this question, even if it were the only one to be asked. Our trade with Turkey amounted

in 1899 to roughly £10,500,000 sterling. In 1895 it was over £11,000,000, and in 1897 it even passed £13,000,000. It seems to be, therefore, a fairly valuable asset to the commerce of Great Britain, though it is for the moment on the downward grade. It is almost certain that the extension of the railway systems of Asia Minor will double the trade of the Sultan's Asiatic dominions in the course of the next ten or fifteen years, provided the extension is allowed to go on. In this increase of trade we are not likely to obtain a share proportionate to our present predominance, because the great trunk railway will be in German hands, and because both German and American firms are showing greater activity in the field than their British rivals, and agricultural development is especially favourable, of course, to American specialties, such as reapers and farm machinery generally. But in any case we must have a very considerable increase of the trade of a country where we are so much interested, and it would be ridiculous to be obstructionists to a policy of railway development in order to save a paltry 5 per cent. tax on our trade, which will surely diminish year by year until it is hardly worth considering if we continue to exhibit the same callous indifference to the political and commercial affairs of Asia Minor which has so long been characteristic of our attitude towards that part of the Sultan's dominions.

There is only one thing possible to be done if funds are to be raised for railway purposes. Some of the proceeds of indirect taxation must be got

away from the Public Debt, and that is obviously impossible without the consent of the creditors.

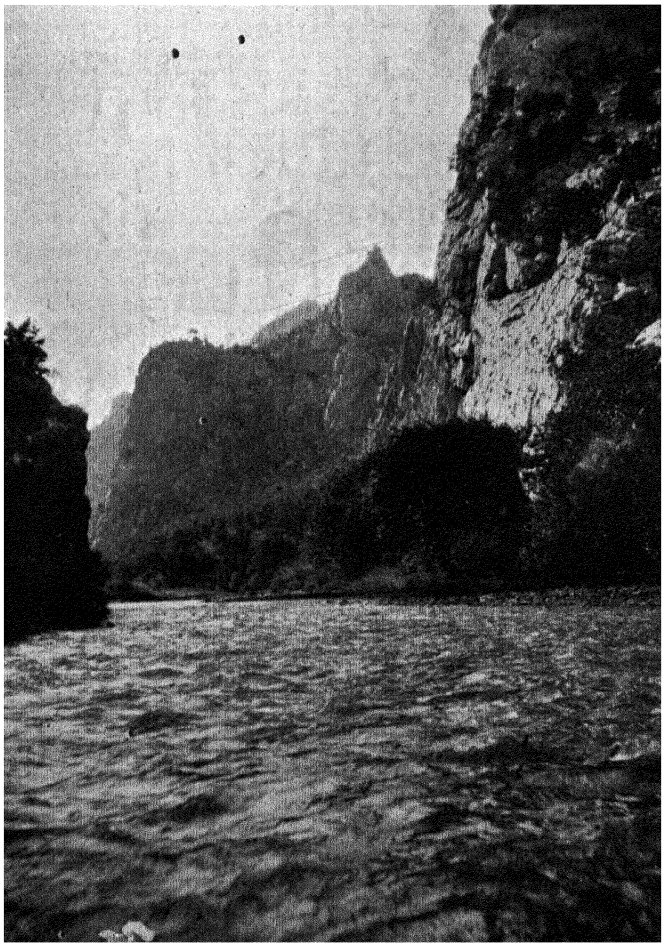
I cannot here go into the intricate question of the unification and conversion of the Ottoman Debt. It will be sufficient to point out that if a scheme such as M. Rouvier's could be adopted whereby the creditors, instead of the bonds they already possess expiring at different times between now and 1945, should be given new bonds in exchange, redeemable in, say, fifty or sixty years, bearing a fixed rate of interest at 4 per cent., then the Turkish Government would be free to use as it pleased any proceeds of indirect taxation accruing to it after interest and sinking fund were paid.

At present, any increase in taxation simply goes into the pockets of the bondholders, provided that the increase is great enough to add ¼ per cent. to the interest. It is evident that the Turkish Government is directly interested in keeping down its revenue; for not only does any increase in revenue go straight to its foreign creditors, but should the increase be sufficient to add ¼ per cent. to the interest, the price for the amortisement of the bonds automatically jumps to a much higher figure, so that the Government is in the peculiar position of being a direct loser by any substantial increase of its revenue. But under the unification scheme, the rate of interest would be fixed, and then the Government would be directly interested in obtaining a larger revenue from the assigned sources, and would be able to use the surplus in any way it pleased.

The question that next arises is whether or not

the revenue can be increased to any large extent. In the opinion of experts in Constantinople it can. If, for instance, we take the taxes on tobacco, salt, and stamps, we find that while they amount in Roumania to 12.37 fr. a head, in Servia to 7.50 fr., and in Bulgaria to 5 fr. a head of the population, they amount in Turkey to only 2.10 fr. a head. Or take another example. In Roumania, the Government derives an income of £720,000 a year from its tax on spirits and liquor. In Turkey, with its infinitely greater population and no less liking for liquor, the tax only contributes £260,000 to the exchequer. It is quite possible, therefore, that if the Turkish Government had any interest in securing a larger revenue from indirect taxation, it could produce £1,000,000 sterling each year from various sources without touching the tariff at all.

The difficulty is to get the bondholders to agree on the subject. At present they do not get 4 per cent., but they stand to get that or more if ever the commercial treaties are revised, and the other sources of revenue, like spirits, stamps, tobacco, and salt are more heavily taxed. On the other hand, they are refusing a certain 4 per cent. for a problematical increase which is never likely to occur. For why should the Turkish Government increase its taxes and raise its tariff for the purpose of putting money into the pockets of foreign creditors? Such altruism is hardly to be expected. I believe the German and French bondholders would agree to the unification scheme, but the holders of Group B Bonds, which fall due for amortisement in 1910, and which are



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mostly held in England, object to the surrender of what they consider an advantage over the C and D Groups, which are not to be redeemed until 1935 and 1945 respectively. Priorities fall due in 1932.

There, then, is the gist of the whole matter. The tariff question is purely a side issue. The main fact is that the guarantee for the Bagdad Railway cannot be procured without the partial release of revenues which are assigned to the Public Debt. This release is impossible without the consent of all the bondholders to some scheme of unification and conversion. And so far the consent of the British bondholders has not been obtained. England, therefore, appears in the light of an obstructionist to a great scheme for the regeneration of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, even if it be only in the persons of private bondholders. At the same time, it must be admitted that we hold a trump card or two, and we should be foolish to throw them away. If our Government took an intelligent interest in the matter instead of being thoroughly and unfailingly bored with the politics of the nearer East, it might bring such influence to bear on the bondholders as would secure their co-operation in the conversion scheme in return for a very definite arrangement for the share of Great Britain in the control of the railway. At present, the German share will be 60 per cent., or enough to secure the entire management of affairs. There the matter must be left for the present. But something will have been gained if the fact is grasped that the building of the railway is not to be paid for by means of increased taxes

on British commerce. It is impossible to have a clear view of the issues at stake until it is seen by the general public, who in the long run decide our foreign policy, that this is only a very small and one-sided aspect of the whole business.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OIL-FIELDS OF PERSIA

THE traveller from the east or south has a choice of four routes by which he may go from the Persian Gulf to the capital of Persia. He may go by Bunder Abbas and Kerman, the longest and most tedious journey of all. He may also land at Bushire and pursue his way over a series of desperate kotals to Shiraz and Isfahan, thus following the Indo-European telegraph line and the mail-bags. That is by far the most frequented route and the most often described. A third way is to leave the mail steamer at Mohammerah, forty miles up the Shat-al-Arab, embark on the Karun river steamer for Bunder Nasri, close to Ahwaz, and then utilise the mule track opened by the enterprise of Messrs. Lynch Brothers between Bunder Nasri and Isfahan. The fourth route entails a river journey from Basra to Bagdad of four or five days, and thereafter a march of twenty-three or twenty-five days from Bagdad to Teheran by way of Kermanshah. A fifth way, and perhaps the most expeditious of all, would be found in a road from Ahwaz or Shuster on the Karun to Dizful, Khoremabad, Burujird, Sultanabad and so by Kum to the capital. This route was supposed to be one of the advantages to be gained by the opening of

the Karun to foreign trade. But more than a decade has elapsed and the new road is still in the hypothetical stage, while for the present the country along the route is closed to all traffic by the unruly disposition of the Luristan tribes. For practical purposes, therefore, that means of entering the country may be disregarded.

Of the four routes mentioned, the first is by far the longest, and it ceased to be the avenue of trade for Central and Northern Persia when the British East India Company moved its Gulf depôt to Bushire 140 years ago. Since that time the stream of travellers who have gone from the Gulf to Teheran or *vice versâ*, by way of Bushire, Shiraz, and Isfahan, has left an enormous deposit of literature which has been carefully collated by Lord Curzon, who reached the sea by this route, and has left nothing further to be said on this subject. The Mohammerah-Bunder Nasri-Isfahan journey can now be made with comparative ease owing to the efforts of Messrs. Lynch, who have opened up a passage for mules through the Baktiari country, and have thus shortened the overland part of the journey by 250 miles or thereabouts as compared with the Bushire route. As far as the capital is concerned the land journey from Bunder Nasri to Teheran is almost equivalent in point of distance to that between Bagdad and Teheran, the distance in both cases being, roughly, 550 miles. But while the Bunder Nasri route is, at present at least, only a variant of the Bushire-Isfahan route, the Bagdad-Kermanshah track opens up entirely different questions of trade, traffic, and markets,

to say nothing of politics. The Bagdad-Kermanshah way is not so popular with travellers who traverse Persia in their passage from Europe to the East as is the Bushire route, in spite of its being 250 miles shorter, chiefly because it is less endowed with historical and archæological interest. Kermanshah and Hamadan (Ecbatana) are not to be compared with Isfahan and Persepolis. Moreover, there is no "chapar" service on the road, and the traveller must go most of the way by caravan—a more comfortable but infinitely more tedious method of progression. Still there are, besides ordinary tourists, a number of foreign merchants in Bagdad who find it sometimes convenient to return to Europe *vid* Teheran, and there is already a considerable literature in existence dealing with Kurdistan and Luristan, between which the Kermanshah road forms almost a dividing line. Mrs. Bishop, twelve or thirteen years ago, gave a minute description of the main routes in this part of the world. None the less the importance of this trade channel from a British point of view, has been to a certain extent overlooked, nor is Lord Curzon so satisfying in regard to this portion of his subject as he is elsewhere, partly because he did not visit the western provinces himself, but more especially because statistics are available which were not in existence twelve years ago, and two new factors have been introduced very recently by the advent of the German railway, which may now at last be said to have entered the sphere of practical politics, and the effort just set on foot by a British capitalist to exploit the rich petroleum belt which runs from

the confines of Kurdistan to the coast of the Persian Gulf.

No apology is necessary for giving a general account of the present condition of this trade-route, though fortunately a detailed description of its physical aspects would, thanks to Mrs. Bishop, be an act of supererogation.

For the resident merchant of Bagdad it is a simple matter to get a few mules together, and start on the road with a sufficient knowledge of Arabic and Persian to meet the ordinary requirements of travel. The visitor is not so fortunate. He must first provide himself with a servant who can act as interpreter in two or three different languages, and as every Bagdadi who can speak a phrase or two of English regards himself as a highly-trained courier this is not merely a difficult matter but one involving considerable expense. One is, in short, reduced to a choice between two or three professional travelling servants whose demands are increasingly exorbitant in inverse proportion to the amount of work they condescend to perform. I was fortunate enough to secure the services of the most honest and hardworking of the lot, a Chaldean Christian who considers it his special privilege to attend on their journeys all British travellers who come to Bagdad. I found him an excellent road companion, honest, ready witted, and a demon for work, with almost too great a predilection for early hours in the morning. But when it is considered that he must be paid at the rate of four rupees a day, both while he is with you and for every day of his return journey—so that the expense

of a native servant for a journey of 550 miles is not less than £20—it will be seen that travelling in this part of Persia is not a cheap amusement.

The hiring of mules is another difficulty. Five animals is about the minimum required for a single person. If a tent is carried, six will be necessary, though I should hasten to add that for travelling over the beaten tracks in Persia a tent is a useless encumbrance. Most travellers will prefer to buy a horse for personal use, though this is not the most economical plan. To begin with, horseflesh is expensive in Bagdad, where the demand for the Bombay market is keenly felt; secondly there is an export duty of £T5 on all horses leaving the country; and, thirdly, it is impossible to prevent your muleteer from appropriating for the use of his own animals the food which of right belongs to your horse. Besides quantities of chopped straw, my horse was supposed to devour twelve pounds of barley a day, and yet he lost flesh and was in a chronic state of ravenous hunger. After several days of bargaining I managed to secure four mules for the journey at the rate of fifteen tomans (rather less than £3) per mule from Bagdad to Teheran, and I was told that this was an extremely moderate price. Altogether, leaving out the price of my own horse, I found that a journey of 550 miles, which in Great Britain would occupy twelve or fourteen hours by rail, and could not possibly cost more than £5, necessitated in Persia an expenditure of more than £50, and occupied twenty-one days of actual travelling. I mention these sordid details in order to

show what vast obstacles are put in the way of a country's progress when it possesses no modern means of communication.

For an uncivilised country Persia is well adapted to road travel. It is quite unnecessary to carry any provisions for man or beast unless you insist upon luxuries. Eggs, rice, chickens and mutton are always to be had in the poorest village, and in the western provinces are ridiculously cheap. Milk and tea are generally procurable, and enormous pancakes of unleavened bread form the chief article of local consumption. When freshly baked the bread is quite palatable, but when more than half a day old it resembles in size, appearance, and consistency the flap of a leather saddle that has been left out in the rain; but it is always edible. Your horse lives well —when his food is not stolen—on chopped straw and barley, both of which in Western Persia are plentiful and cheap. What more could the most fastidious taste desire? The night's lodging is not always all that could be wished, especially between the Turko-Persian boundary and Kermanshah. Here there are no caravanserais with "bala khaneh," or rooms on the roof for travellers who want something better than a stable-yard in which to sleep. A mud hovel is generally all that can be expected, with or without a door, and a hole in the wall for a window through which the snows in winter and the wet winds in spring find easy access. Still with a camp bed, a folding table, a cheap carpet bought on the road for two or three shillings, and a wood fire you can make yourself fairly comfortable.

My contracts at last signed with my muleteers and servant, I left Bagdad within twenty-four hours of the advertised time of starting, which may be regarded as a triumph of punctuality for this part of the world. I soon discovered that the latter end of March was by no means too late for travelling over the Bagdad-Kermanshah route. Right up to Teheran the nights were bitterly cold, the sun at midday was never overpowering, and, considering the reputation of Persia for dryness, I was astonished to find that a waterproof was the most useful article in my baggage. On the road to Kermanshah the rain fell literally in torrents, and thereafter heavy thunderstorms with showers of hailstones as large sometimes as pigeons' eggs were of frequent occurrence, so that the road was often a quagmire through which the patient mules could hardly struggle at the rate of one mile per hour. On the whole, the weather during my passage through the mountains of Kurdistan was not at all different from what one would expect to experience in England at the time of year mentioned. What the bounty of heaven vouchsafed to the thirsty cornlands, the traveller could hardly take amiss, especially as the discomforts entailed thereby were more than counterbalanced by the welcome smell of wet earth, and the intense green of the young crops so grateful to the eye that has grown accustomed to the barren landscape of the Gulf, and the dreary khaki plains of Mesopotamia.

For ninety miles or so the caravan route runs in a north-easterly direction to Khanikin, which is just short of the accepted Turko-Persian boundary, the

Diala River being always a little to the left after it is crossed at Bakuba, and affording a pleasant framework of palm groves to the general picture. Bakuba, Shahreban, and Kizil-Robat are three considerable villages on the way, each being the centre of an agricultural district, which grows richer as one draws near to the hills of Kurdistan, and comes within the sphere of the spring rains. From Bakuba the Zagros Mountains, picked out with snow, can be seen on a clear day a hundred miles away, but it is only after passing Shahreban that the dead level of the plain is relieved by a long low ridge averaging 400 or 500 feet above the flat, running at right angles with the route, and constituting the first ripple of the mountain surges, which break with crest succeeding crest on the Mesopotamian valley as regularly and as majestically as the Atlantic rollers on a western shore. Between Kizil-Robat and Khanikin a second and more pronounced ripple must be crossed, and at Kasr-i-Shirin, the next halting-place on the Persian side of the boundary, one is already in the trough of the big waves. The Diala River breaks at right angles through these ridges, it being a feature of rivers in Persia that they seldom stick to the valleys made for them by nature, but ingeniously work their way across the grain through flaws left in the ranges when the earth's crust hardened after her old primæval commotions. And fortunately what rivers have been able to do, roads and railways may accomplish for themselves in the future. At first sight it would seem to be something like madness

to dream of constructing a railway across such a series of gigantic ranges as lies between Mesopotamia and Central Persia. In reality the task, though difficult, is quite within the scope of ordinary enterprise, because nature has never left a single ridge in this part of the world without its "port" or its "nek." For the moment, however, we are only concerned with the existing Anatolian Railway scheme, which includes a branch to the Turko-Persian frontier at Khanikin in connection with the Mesopotamian main line. As far as this part of the project is concerned there are no engineering difficulties whatever beyond what might be encountered in any county in England. What a future is awaiting this branch one gathers from the constant stream of traffic encountered on the road. Each night every caravanserai is packed with tired mules, and on the road one is hardly ever out of hearing of the musical bells of the caravan leaders. These droves of packed mules, intermingled with a stream of pilgrims, are almost the only incidents of monotonous days.

At Shahreban, it is true, we found the whole population afield, mounted for the most part on prancing Arab horses, caracoling and plunging as their riders fired their rifles at random in the air. This was the great festival of Korban, when every one makes holiday and in a playful way endeavours to pay off all old scores by shooting his enemy in an apparently accidental manner. The casualty list at the close of the day is usually as great as that reported in the American papers on the morning after

the firework celebrations of the Fourth of July. Needless to say the Turkish police force makes only a sort of perfunctory appearance, which in no way interferes with the amenities of the occasion. The advantage to the Turkish Government of this festival is that it not only keeps green the feuds of yester year, but it opens new quarrels for the future, so that among the Arabs every man's hand may be against his neighbour and not against the Government.

At Khanikin, which is prettily situated on both banks of the Holwan, a tributary of the Diala, spanned by a substantial stone bridge, one passes the Turkish customs barrier, generally an amicable proceeding. The question of my horse arose, but the Turkish official who came and smoked my cigarettes while I sat at tiffin was willing to regard him as a beast of burden, and therefore not liable to the export duty. What arguments my servant had used to produce this decision it was not my business to know. The real frontier is crossed five or six miles beyond Khanikin, or rather, I should say, the temporary frontier which was fixed by the Turko-Persian agreement of forty years ago recognising the existing *status quo*. On the main route between the territories of the Sultan and the Shah the military strength of the Sultan is represented by a round mud tower about the size of one of the Spanish blockhouses in Cuba, made to accommodate about sixteen persons. Of fortifications there are none at all. A little further along, on the Persian side of the boundary, a square mud building in a

Kurdish village by the wayside, houses some twenty soldiers of the Shah. Where European nations defend themselves from attack by the strength of their fortifications, the Turks and the Persians arrive at the same result by a mutual exposure to attack which makes a war equally dreaded by both Powers. One cannot help reflecting, however, that the advent of a railway from Scutari to Khanikin will effectually disturb the delicate equilibrium of a common weakness, and Persia will be forced either to undertake a similar enterprise within her own borders, or become even more dependent on the support of certain European Powers than she is at present.

Here, as it has often happened before, strategic necessity may prove an economic boon. The strategic question, moreover, takes on a new importance as one arrives at Kasr-i-Shirin and finds oneself confronted with perhaps the most important attempt that has yet been made to develop the underground resources of the Persian kingdom.

I have not forgotten the three or four abortive endeavours already made by foreign capitalists to exploit the naphtha belt which runs north-west and south-east from Kurdistan to the Persian Gulf and beyond to Beluchistan and India, roughly speaking, parallel to the rich Caucasian oil-bed. Nor have I overlooked the operations of the Persian Mining Corporation, which, twelve years ago, with a capital of a million sterling, light-heartedly undertook to develop the entire mineral wealth of Persia. The complete want of success of that corporation, though it was backed by so large a capital and by such an

army of experts, by no means demonstrated the futility of all future operations in Persia. The reasons for the lack of success were manifold, but two deserve special mention here. The efforts of the corporation were diffused over so large an area, and the individual operations were of so varying a nature as almost to preclude success from the very start. In the second place the cost of transport, which is always the prime difficulty in Persia, seems to have been entirely overlooked. So much so that it was not until expensive machinery had been imported at enormous freight-rates, and work had begun on the rich manganese ore of the Kerman district that the fatal discovery was made that it cost from £9 to £10 to transport from Kerman to the coast at Bunder Abbas the ore which in London was selling at £4 per ton. Mines and machinery alike were abandoned to their fate, and similar discoveries having been made in other parts of Persia the Mining Corporation soon became a thing of the past.

Mr. D'Arcy, who bought the oil concession two years ago, has, at all events, avoided these initial errors. He has confined himself to one district and one class of mining, and has considered first, and above everything else, the question of transport. The dearth of fuel, which was also a frequent obstacle in other cases, does not affect the present enterprise where naphtha is the quarry. On the other hand, to exploit the oil-beds of Luristan and Kurdistan is a task that would frighten any but the most determined capitalist. The machinery for the purpose has to be transported at enormous cost and with the most irritating

delays *viâ* the Suez Canal and the Tigris River, and is subjected during its passage through Turkish territory to all the dangers and difficulties of the Turkish Custom House. With no desire to malign that well-meaning institution it may be said that its employés neither understand nor reverence machinery, and I believe that some of the oil plant has been dumped down in Bagdad in such a condition as to make the strongest engineer weep. But this, after all, is only a small item in the total sum of difficulties. The susceptibilities of the Kurdish chiefs cannot be overcome in a day. It required many months of mingled tact and firmness to win over an intractable chief named Aziz Khan, who had special orders from the Governor of Kermanshah to give all assistance in his power to the superintending engineer of the new company; and now the whole district of Kasr-i-Shirin has been thrown into a state of civil war by a feud between Aziz Khan and his nephew, in the course of which the chief has already lost two sons killed—a fine pair of striplings too young for so violent a death—and several tribesmen. The sympathy of the Englishmen in a calamity brought on through no fault of his own, but originating in a scandalous intrigue on the part of a recent Governor of Kermanshah, has perhaps been more instrumental than anything else in establishing a good feeling between the chief and the oil company. But it will be admitted that to carry on mining operations in a country where your best friend among the natives and your most influential supporter may be shot by a relative at

any moment, and where civil war is rampant, is not an easy task.

But the most important point of all is the transport of the oil if or when it is procured. The scheme of Mr. D'Arcy is not lacking in boldness of conception. Boring is to begin in the naphtha beds a little to the north of Kasr-i-Shirin, and thence a pipe line is to be laid through Kurdistan and Luristan to Dizful, and then across the torrid plains of Arabistan to Mohammerah. There tank steamers belonging to the company will await the oil and transport it to the markets of the world. The 360 miles of pipe line must cross several high passes, 5000 and 6000 feet above the sea, and then pursue its way down the rugged Kerkah Valley through a country which, despite its proximity to Bagdad and the British steamers on the Tigris on the one hand, and to the often travelled Dizful-Khoremabad-Burujird route on the other, is still unknown and unexplored territory indicated merely by a blank in the map of the world. At the present moment even the Dizful-Khoremabad route is closed to traffic by the disorderly state of the Luristan tribes, so much so that the two French explorers, engaged in excavating the ruins of Susa, whom I met in Kermanshah, had been obliged to make their way north by following the line of the Pusht-i-kuh close to the Turkish frontier, a very roundabout journey and one not free from danger unless you are on good terms with the Vali of the Pusht-i-kuh, whose allegiance to the Shah is of the slenderest nature imaginable. On the whole, I did not altogether envy the lot of the three English engineers

who were about to start on the survey tour for the pipe-line just after I passed Kasr-i-Shirin. With a large caravan, a Persian escort—for show more than efficiency—and money in the purse, the Lurs may be overawed or conciliated, but the difficulties of the Arabistan plains are great. I have since heard, however, that the survey proved entirely successful as far as it went.

It may be a cause of wonder that the oil should not have been carried down the simple and safe incline to Bagdad and thence to the sea through a more or less settled country. Two reasons probably weighed against a solution so obvious. In the first place the pipe is to be utilised, not for the Kasr-i-Shirin district alone, but for the whole stretch of oil country at least as far as Ahwaz on the Karun. Secondly, apart from other considerations, to have dealings with one Oriental Power is quite sufficient without multiplying complications by entering Turkish territory. There is nothing, however, to prevent a subsidiary line from being laid to Bagdad if the enterprise prove successful. There, indeed, lies the whole crux of the matter. Will the exploiters strike oil or not? The surface indications are wonderful. Bitumen abounds, and oil is collected already in small quantities by the natives. Yet three companies at least have already fallen victims to these deceptive signs of wealth. So uniform and marked has been the failure to make anything out of this oil belt that certain experts go so far as to maintain that it contains no important oil-wells at all, and that where oil really is abundant, as in the

Caucasus and in Pennsylvania, there are very few surface indications indeed, while in this case the wealth, such as it is, lies entirely on the surface. On the other hand, Mr. D'Arcy's advisers are exceedingly sanguine ; so that where experts differ the outsider may well afford to await results. It is sincerely to be hoped, however, that this latest and most ambitious attempt to open up the resources of Western Persia will prove successful : for the consequences of success will be various and far-reaching.

I cannot here do more than indicate the importance to the Anatolian Railway Company of having a supply of cheap fuel so close at hand for their Mesopotamian line. Nor is it necessary to enlarge on the great profits to be made if all goes well. What is far more important to the outsider, both to the Persian and to the foreigner, is the civilising influence which the enterprise will have on this hitherto uncivilised portion of the globe. In order to lay a line down the Kerkah valley British overseers will have to be employed and British workers will have to superintend the pumping-stations, money will be brought into the country, and the Kurds and Lurs, who formerly lived on the fruits of pastoral pursuit largely eked out by brigandage, will be themselves tamed and brought into the fold. In a word, civilisation may some day reign in Luristan as it does in other regions where British influence and enterprise have made their way. The whole of Persia cannot fail to be affected by so important an addition to the country's assets and the good example may be followed in other directions.

It may seem surprising that Russia should have acquiesced so quietly in a scheme which at one and the same moment threatens to hurt her oil-trade in the East, and gives Great Britain a considerable stake in Western Persia just about the debatable line between the Russian and British spheres of influence. Possibly the Russians are not greatly alarmed by the resuscitation of a project which has so often proved abortive. But in point of fact, the Russian Government did not acquiesce without attempting a countermove. Years ago the Nobels and Rothschilds had a plan for connecting the naphtha beds of the Caucasus with the Persian Gulf by a pipe-line running north and south through Persia. This scheme was again brought to the front recently when Russia tried to include among the conditions of the new loan to Persia a clause authorising the laying of this pipe, and was only hindered from gaining her point by the intervention of the British Minister. It would have been the height of folly for Persia to have granted a concession which would have prejudiced the exploitation of her own resources. On other grounds, too, it would be inconvenient to have a Russian oil-pipe running from the north to the south of Persia, which could never be kept intact without a large protecting force of Cossacks along the route. A British pipe-line will not require a great display of military force, any more than does at present the Indo-European telegraph line. It is too early yet to predict any measure of success for an undertaking of this sort in Persia, where a month's sojourn is apt to turn the most sanguine to pessimism. I can only say that I found

Mr. Reynolds, the superintending engineer at Kasr-i-Shirin in a most hopeful state of mind after six months intercourse with the natives, and this was the more wonderful seeing that he was still waiting for his machinery to arrive, and was living with his companion, Mr. Holland, in a bleak, uncivilised country, where, as he plaintively remarked, there was not a large enough tree on which to hang oneself within a hundred miles.

For my own part, I found Kasr-i-Shirin by no means devoid of beauty. The town of mud huts is dominated by a modern castle, picturesquely situated on a hill, round whose base the swollen waters of the Holwan River rushed in spate. Across the stream were orchards, varied by a few date-trees, the last to be met with on the road to Kermanshah. Beyond lie the green distorted slopes of a high ridge of hills from which oil is soon to gush forth, and beyond that again rises an immense snow-covered range ending to the north in an abrupt headland, like Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags on a gigantic scale. That range is the main support of the great Persian plateau which is still two days' march away, and which is reached by the famous Tak-i-Girra Pass, or the Gates of Zagros, which has seen as many armies on the march to conquest as the Cilician Gates of the Taurus. At the Tak-i-Girra (which means apparently the arch of the loop or winding pass, and has reference to an ancient archway to the left of the track as one makes the ascent) the traveller, who has been rising very gradually to higher levels ever since he left Shahreban, makes a sudden leap as it were

from the footstool to the table, and finds himself after an hour's steep climb nearly 6000 feet above the sea, and in March at least in the region of snow.

After making the ascent the track turns from east to south along a valley almost narrow enough to be called a defile, with dark forbidding mountains on either side, and many miles of stones and boulders under foot. The wretched pack-animals flounder painfully from boulder to boulder, slipping from time to time into a slough of mud, with the constant danger of a broken limb. Along the route lie the bones of hundreds of mules and horses, which have been sacrificed to the gross incompetency of a government which leaves its main routes in this disgraceful state, for the want of a small expenditure which the Shah would not hesitate to incur during half a day in some European capital.

And yet the Tak-i-Girra pass is supposed to be the easiest approach to the plateau for any merchandise coming by way of the Gulf, and such heavy articles as pianos or stoves are generally sent this way to Teheran. Personally I cannot imagine anything much worse, especially in the early spring, when the snows are melting; and the only thing that can be said for it is that there is only one serious pass or "kotal," whereas on the Bushire-Shiraz route there are many.

After getting through the long defile at the top of the pass the route runs easily along to Kermanshah, through wider valleys and across several ranges which, however, have always an easy "nek" or "port," and present no difficulty to the road-maker

or railway constructor. The valleys are fertile, and in March beautifully green with the winter wheat which has lately been released from its covering of snow; but it is a monotonous landscape of barren hills and treeless valleys, and I was glad, on the tenth day from Bagdad to come upon the orchards of Kermanshah and to find myself in the hospitable quarters of Baron Wedel, the Director of Customs under the Belgian administration for the Kermanshah district. He has with him a European assistant, and there is now a branch of the Imperial Bank of Persia at Kermanshah, with young Mr. Rabino, son of the manager of the bank in Teheran, in charge. So that when, on the second day after my arrival, two French explorers from Susa came in on their way to Paris we had such a European gathering as probably had never been seen in Kermanshah before. For my own part I was only too glad to extend my visit to the fifth day, and left my kind hosts with much regret when the time came for departure.

CHAPTER XIX

KERMANSHAH

KERMANSHAH is a town of some 50,000 inhabitants, situated on the main caravan route from Mesopotamia to Persia, at a distance of 220 miles from Bagdad, and 330 miles from Teheran. The number of inhabitants given is merely an approximation, since there is no census in Persia, and only the vaguest idea of accuracy with regard to figures exists among the natives. A Persian in Kermanshah will generally put the total at 100,000, because that is a figure which is easily remembered and appeals to his imagination. Mr. Brown, who made a report for the Bank of Persia two years ago, reckoned the fixed population at 30,000, but he was on the cautious side in all his estimates. The director of customs, who is in the best position to arrive at the true figures, puts the fixed population at 50,000, with a large floating population of pilgrims, which, during half the year, may increase the total by more than 10 per cent. The town is remarkable for no conspicuous buildings nor outward signs of wealth. It is, as usual, a collection of single storied mud-bricked houses, with narrow winding streets and a commodious bazaar, but relieved from utter insignificance by its situation on the eastern

slope of one of the low spurs of a great mountain range that extends far into Luristan on the south. Four miles to the east across the valley of the Kara-su River, the Bisitun range rises up sheer and rugged to a height of 3000 or 4000 feet above the level of the town, which is itself nearly 5000 feet above the sea. The climate is exceedingly cold in winter, not unlike that of England in spring, and unpleasantly hot for only two months in the summer, when the inhabitants retire as much as possible to the pretty gardens and orchards which lie a little further up the slope to the south of the town.

Kermanshah has been peculiarly favoured by nature in many ways. Yet plague and cholera in the past, combined with the very backward state of the natives of Kurdistan and Luristan have left it still a mean-looking town of small dimensions, about which the best that can be said is that it contains fewer ruined and unoccupied houses than most other towns in Persia. It stands in the very centre of the richest grain-country of Persia, and perhaps of the whole East, for the simple reason that among the mountains of Kurdistan the winter snows and spring rains are so plentiful as to preclude in most years the necessity of irrigation, which is a *sine qua non* in most parts of Mesopotamia and Persia. At the same time the mountains are not a hindrance to agriculture, because they form well-defined ridges between which the valleys are broad, level, and exceedingly fertile. Where nature has been so liberal, man has done nothing to reap the benefit, and communications are so deficient in Persia that

it is impossible to get an abundance of grain even to the comparatively local markets of Teheran on the one hand or Bagdad on the other. When I was in Kermanshah the prospects of the coming harvest were so good that wheat was actually selling for 8 krans the kharvar, and barley for 10 krans. A kran is at present worth about $4\frac{1}{2}d.$, and a kharvar is equivalent to 650 lbs. A simple calculation, therefore, will show that the price of wheat was a little over $7d.$ per cwt., and of barley just $9d.$ per cwt. These figures are not unique, though they are certainly unusually low. At the same time the prices in Bagdad, only 220 miles away, were six times as great. At Sultanabad I found already a considerable difference, wheat fetching about $2s.\ 6d.$ per cwt., while at Teheran the price was multiplied twelve times, that is to say, wheat and barley were standing at 12 tomans a kharvar, or $9s.$ a cwt.

Though Teheran is but 330 miles from Kermanshah, it costs at least twelve times what the grain is worth on the spot to transport it over that distance, for which the railway freight could not be more than $7d.$ per cwt., or the equivalent of the local price, and might easily be a good deal less. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that during the great famine in Teheran, when wheat had to be imported from Russia at enormous cost, the grain was actually lying rotting in the fields of Kurdistan. To add to the absurdity of the situation, an embargo has been placed on the export of cereals, so that up to last year the Kermanshah farmers might not send their surplus to Bagdad, to which the trans-

port charges, though large enough, are comparatively speaking favourable. It is thanks to the efforts of Baron Wedel, the Director of Customs, that merchants are now allowed to export grain on this route subject to the discretion of Baron Wedel himself, whose business it is to see that the food-supply of the country is not impoverished. Still at best Western Persia can never make any adequate use of her enormous agricultural wealth until railways are built to facilitate transport.

The other staple product of the Kurdistan and Luristan hills ought to be wool; so enormous are the flocks of sheep for which the mountain slopes afford abundant pasturage. Unfortunately the tribes do nothing to improve the breed of sheep; there is not a single press in the country, and the industry is in no kind of way organised. Hence the whole export of wool for last year, *viâ* Kermanshah, did not exceed £5000. Opium forms the chief article of export, and accounts for £70,000 out of a total of £187,000. Gum tragacanth and gum bring in £40,000. The £15,000 which appear in the export list as the value of carpets is almost entirely accounted for by the bales sent from Sultanabad by the Persian Carpet Manufacturing Company. There are no carpets of any value made in Kermanshah, nor is there any manufacturing industry of any sort, and the raw products which do leave the country by this route are only a small fraction of the potential abundance which would be produced by an industrious population under a decent form of government.

But in other respects Kermanshah holds a strong

commercial position as the focus at once of the outgoing traffic and of the incoming tide of foreign commerce. Every year from 100,000 to 125,000 shiahs pass through the Tak-i-Girra Pass to the shrine of Kerbela and Nejef, and every year not less than 8000 dead Persians are carried over this route to their last resting-place by the tombs of Hussein and Ali. These pilgrims come from every part of Persia north of Shiraz, and they are drawn from all ranks of life, so that they leave a considerable deposit of wealth by the way. In the opposite direction comes a constant stream of caravans from Bagdad, bringing to the village and towns of the north-west Manchester cottons, French sugar, Indian spices, and occasionally English pianos, as well as all those luxuries of life which, being almost necessities, can stand the cost of transport through the Bay of Biscay, the Suez Canal, the Persian Gulf, and over the shallow bed of the Tigris and the desperate mountain tract of Kurdistan. As a port of entry Kermanshah hardly enters into competition with the Gulf ports, because it supplies a totally different area. It is only in Teheran that the Bagdad route clashes with the Bushire and Shiraz track, and there Bushire has matters practically its own way as far as ordinary goods are concerned. When it comes to pianos or other heavy articles, then the shorter land journey from Bagdad is preferred. The Kermanshah route in turn has its own way in the whole of the north and central west until the Tabriz influence is felt and the two streams clash at Hamadan, where about 75 per cent. of the foreign goods are manu-

factures of Western Europe, which have come *vid* Bagdad.

South of Hamadan, Tabriz has no influence whatever, though in the "Gazetteer of Persia," published several years ago by the Indian Government, and not brought up to date, the amazing statement is made that Kermanshah is supplied with foreign goods from Tabriz.

As far then as British cottons and French sugar are concerned, Kermanshah is an immensely rich field—rich, that is to say, for Persia—supplying as it does a great number of agricultural villages and small towns with Khoremabad, Burujird, Sultanabad, Daolatabad and Hamadan as chief clients. Though the other British routes are not represented in this sphere, Russia is making considerable inroads not into Kermanshah itself but into what may be called the sphere of the Bagdad-Kermanshah route. Russian sugar imported from Resht makes its way down to Daolatabad and Sultanabad, where it competes seriously with Marseilles sugar, which is of finer quality but more expensive. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Franco-Russian Alliance does not preclude a keen rivalry in trade. Of course Russian piece-goods are sold in Hamadan, which is a great distributing centre, absorbing the greater part of the trade of the Bagdad route; and Russian trade penetrates even to Sultanabad and Burujird. Russian candles, lamps, and samovars are supreme in the whole district; but what surprised me considerably was to find, in a town like Sultanabad, which is well within the

Kermanshah sphere of influence, nothing but Russian tea in the bazaar. This tea, I discovered, is grown by a Russian firm in Ceylon, transported to Odessa, and there made up in nicely decorated tins for the Persian market, which it reaches by way of Resht. It surely shows something lacking on the part of the British Indian tea-growers' enterprise that tea can be shipped by a Russian firm in Ceylon by such a roundabout way and still compete successfully with tea coming directly from India.

On the whole there can be no doubt that the Russian trade in this part of Persia is not merely growing but it is growing at the expense of British Indian trade or at least it is growing proportionately more rapidly. This is due not merely to the enormous efforts made by the Russian Government to establish Russian trade in Persia by means of a commercial bank and roads built at Government expense and rebates on exports and other means of the same kind which our Government would never be induced to employ but also because the improvement of the Bagdad and Kermanshah route has been sadly neglected by the British authorities. If half the exertions had been made to improve that route, which have been made over the Karun Concession, I believe British trade in Northern Persia might be in a better position to-day than it is. For instance pressure might have been brought on the Turkish Government to improve the Tigris river service which at present is a quite unnecessary obstacle in the way of the development of the Bagdad route. And then it would have been of infinitely greater

service to make a decent road from Bagdad to Hamadan than from Ahwaz to Isfahan. Unfortunately a German company got the concession for the Bagdad-Teheran road and the German Government having but very slender interest in the trade of the route, the concession proved as, abortive as most other concessions in Persia, and has now lapsed.

Quite unintentionally Lord Curzon himself was to blame for the neglect of this trade channel. In his chapter on Persian trade he dismisses the trade on the Bagdad route in a summary manner, because he enormously under-estimated the volume of goods imported. At that time there was no means of arriving at the true figures because we had no consul in Kermanshah and the returns of the customs which Lord Curzon used as his chief basis of calculation were notoriously false. Not only was the duty exacted less than the regulation 5 per cent., but under the farming system only a small portion of the real trade was likely to appear in any official estimate. Calculations based on Bagdad returns are equally erroneous because the Bagdad trade reports only take cognisance of the goods carried by the steamers of Messrs. Lynch, and the information given by British merchants cannot cover the foreign goods brought in by the Jewish merchants of Bagdad, who have their own agents in Manchester and do an exceedingly brisk business. At all events, the figures obtained by Lord Curzon in 1889 must have been a long way below the real totals. He estimated the imports of piece goods *via* Kermanshah from India and Manchester combined at £T170,000. Eight

years later the merchants of Kermanshah who were tendering for the customs put the average import since 1894 at £530,000 sterling—a discrepancy not to be accounted for by a lapse of six years. Similarly the sugar imported from Marseilles to Kermanshah was valued by Lord Curzon at £T30,000. The value last year was £70,000 and it has been decreasing rather than otherwise in the past two or three years.

Altogether, taking the figures of the customs house, Lord Curzon estimated the imports at £232,530 and the exports at £95,266. Now eight years later when there was a consular report drawn up by a British consular official who visited Kermanshah, the figures of the foreign trade were taken first from the actual returns of the customs house (which was farmed out for 86,000 tomans or roughly £17,200) and also from an estimate made by a syndicate of merchants who were tendering for the customs on the basis of the average of the previous three years. It is almost impossible that this last-mentioned estimate should have been above the mark since it was made by a syndicate of merchants who hoped to make a profit on that basis. The totals, according to computation—taking the average of the years 1894, 1895, 1896—were as follows: imports, £812,304; exports £138,600. There is an immense difference between these totals and those given by Lord Curzon. Fortunately there is now no reason to resort to guess-work. The customs are properly administered by the Belgian officials under Mr. Naus and the twelve months, 1901–1902, was the

first year that the *régime* was really in proper working order and the full duty of 5 per cent. was exacted on foreign goods entering and leaving the country. The difference between the results of last year and those that had gone before is astonishing and at the same time gratifying to the Shah of Persia. Instead of 86,000 tomans in 1897, Baron Wedel collected last year exactly 300,000 tomans (about £60,000) and remitted the net sum of 296,000 tomans to Teheran when all expenses were paid.

The value of goods imported was as follows: imports 4,680,000 tomans and exports 1,000,000 tomans. At the present rate of exchange these figures are equivalent to £866,000 for imports and £187,000 for exports. These totals which are as correct as any statistics to be found in Persia, and far more so than most, show that the syndicate in 1897 had left themselves only a modest leeway for profit in collecting the customs. They also show that in the past five years in spite of the vastly enhanced revenue the volume of imports for the route referred to has increased very little, if indeed it has increased at all, which I very much doubt. The fact is as I have endeavoured to point out in a previous chapter that the trade of this route is practically limited by the carrying-power of the Tigris steamers, which in turn are limited by the caprice of the Turkish Government. Nor is it possible for the trade to increase to any great extent until the German railway from the Gulf to Khanikin introduces an entirely new element into the case.

The figures I have furnished also demonstrate that Lord Curzon's estimates in 1889 were far too low, and they go to prove that the Bagdad route is only a little inferior in importance to the Bushire route itself. I have not the customs returns for the year 1901–1902 as far as Bushire is concerned, but the consular reports for the three previous years give an average total of almost exactly £1,000,000, so that as a port of entry Kermanshah is not 20 per cent. behind Bushire.

As a port of entry for British and Indian goods Kermanshah is hardly behind Bushire at all, since of the £866,000 worth of goods brought to Persia *viâ* Bagdad almost the whole amount is of British or Indian manufacture with the exception of £70,000 worth of French sugar. That is to say, the British and Indian imports amount to something over £700,000 in value. Now the average of the last three years at Bushire gives us only £775,000 worth of British and Indian goods, so that the difference is very small. As a port for export Kermanshah cannot compare with Bushire, but the potentialities are infinitely greater. Here again the transport on the Tigris is an obstacle. The Persian Manufacturing Company sends all its carpets to Europe by way of Bagdad, but Messrs. Ziegler, who send no less than £60,000 worth of carpets to Europe in ordinary years, have now decided, because the goods are not subjected to the irritating delays of the Tigris river service, to export solely by Resht and the Caucasus, though that route is at least 20 per cent. more expensive than the Bagdad route.

Enough perhaps has been said to show that the Bagdad-Kermanshah route is of the greatest importance to British trade in Persia. Possibly the statesman may be inclined to despise a paltry sum like £700,000 a year of purely British and Indian trade. If so his attitude is at all events comprehensible and we may let British trade in Persia go to the dogs in its own way. But if we believe that the trade of Persia is worth capturing, not so much for what it is to-day as for what it may become to-morrow, then we must demand of the British Government that it should be up and doing.

Unfortunately the Karun River Concession has exercised too strong an influence over even such practical men as Lord Curzon. He has gone as far as to state that the proposed Dizful-Burujird road would bring Kermanshah and Hamadan into the scope of the Gulf and so enrich the cotton-spinners and Manchester. The Dizful-Burujird road I must deal with in a separate chapter; suffice it for the present to point out that it is still a thing of the future and even if it were made it would not affect the import trade of Kermanshah or Hamadan in the slightest degree. Kermanshah is only 220 miles from Bagdad by road. It would be at the very least 450 by road from Ahwaz supposing the direct route were opened up across the empty Luristan hills between Khoremabad and Kermanshah. The distance *vid* Burujird would be considerably over 500 miles. The same argument applies to Hamadan. Neither of these two centres would be affected at all by developing such a long

land route when they are already served by Bagdad. Recently the Isfahan branch of Messrs. Hotz has considered the advisability of forwarding carpets from Sultanabad to Europe *vid* Isfahan and the new Ahwaz road made by Messrs. Lynch. But the freight of this route would be 30 per cent. dearer than it would be *vid* Bagdad and the duration of the journey would be very little reduced. So that even for Sultanabad and Burujird the Karun Concession has so far provided no new conditions.

The Kermanshah route will always continue to supply the richest agricultural part of Persia, and I have very little doubt that if the German railway scheme is realised it will bring Manchester goods much nearer to Teheran, and much more expeditiously than is at present possible. Yet the British Government has taken no interest in this route, and has done nothing at all to develop it. A continued pressure on Turkey might have rendered the Tigris river service a boon instead of an obstacle to trade and the money spent in joining Ahwaz to Isfahan would have been used to much greater advantage in improving the Tak-i-Girra Pass. A consular agent should have been appointed to Kermanshah in order that the Government should have had at least sound information about this route. Two years ago the post was offered to the Imperial Bank of Persia when that institution had no branch at Kermanshah. Now that a branch has been opened there the offer is withdrawn so that we have no official representative at Kermanshah, though we keep a consul-general at Meshed, where our trade is much smaller.

Lastly, if Lord Curzon and, through him, the British public, which relies almost entirely on his book for its knowledge of Persia, had been more accurately informed about the trade of Kermanshah, both would have considered the prospects of railway development in that part of the world in a more hopeful light. As far as we are concerned the opportunity is past. If the German railway comes to Khanikin it is not at all likely that facilities will be put in the way of any British company for continuing the line into Persia, and the old German road concession is likely to be revived and converted into a railway franchise. I can hardly imagine that any one who has travelled over this route can hold such despondent views of railway developments in this direction as most writers on Persia seem to do. The railway question cannot be fully discussed at this point. I can only regret the lack of interest shown by our Government in Persia which has almost put the control of a Bagdad-Kermanshah-Isfahan railway beyond the reach of British enterprise.

CHAPTER XX

PERSIAN CARPETS

FROM Kermanshah, which stands sentinel over the main route from the Persian plateau to the plains of Mesopotamia, the various routes branch out like the ribs of a fan, from a northerly to a south-easterly direction. One goes due north by Sena to Tabriz, another skirts the Bisitun promontory, and then turns in the same direction with the same final objective. The main channel of traffic points just a little north of east to Kangawar and Hamadan, which it must reach by making a *détour* to the north in order to circumvent the great unwieldy bulk of the Elvend range, thereafter proceeding in a more or less straight line to Teheran. There is a shorter but less frequented track from Kangawar to Teheran, which passes by Toisarkan and the southern slopes of the Elvend; but the usual alternative to the Hamadan route is to branch off from Kangawar to Sultanabad and Kum, and so join the Isfahan Road, ninety or ninety-five miles south of the capital. Another trade channel follows the course of the Gamasiab River, really the upper stream of the Kerkah, and, skirting the great eastern rampart of the Luristan uplands, passes the picturesque Nahavand, and supplies the considerable

town of Burujird, as well as gives roundabout access to Khoremabad, the capital of Luristan. Finally, there is a more direct route to Khoremabad from Kermanshah, running straight over the Luristan hills (which correspond to the high veldt in South Africa), but very little used because in the whole 144 miles there is hardly a single village after the Gamasiab Valley is left. The simplest route from Kermanshah to the capital, and that followed by the caravans and post-carriers, is by Hamadan. For travellers the way by Sultanabad is rather more attractive, because it embraces the chief centre of the carpet industry, passes the celebrated shrine of Fatima at Kum, and, though longer in point of actual measurement, may be made shorter in point of time by hiring a wheeled vehicle either at Sultanabad or at Kum.

Hamadan, as the modern successor of the ancient Ecbatana, would have great historical interest if there were any remains of the ancient capital to be seen. Unfortunately, the habitations of the Achæmenian Kings were as ephemeral as their rock sculptures are ineffaceable. The name remains under a slightly altered form, and the industrious natives of the place peg out claims in the neighbourhood of the town, from which, by a simple washing process, they retrieve so many pieces of gold, among other relics, that Hamadan is described by the Indian Government's "Gazetteer of Persia," with its usual inaccuracy, as a gold-bearing district. The visitor may go out into the fields any day, where the washing is going on by means of streams of water

turned into trenches like irrigation works, may buy a square yard or so of soil, see it thrown into the runlet, and take his chance of the result. In this way a spice of Monte Carlo excitement is mingled with the legitimate interest of archæological research. Otherwise Hamadan is only remarkable as being a distributing-centre for the whole of north-western Persia. It absorbs, perhaps, 60 per cent. of the imports by the Bagdad route, which here meet the streams of the Tabriz, and the Resht trade channels. That coming by Tabriz has diminished in volume, as the influence of the Suez Canal has taken full effect, until Tabriz, which once supplied Kermanshah with foreign goods, has sunk to a position of merely local importance. The Resht trade, thanks to the fostering care of the Russian Government, is making rapid inroads on the proper sphere of the Bagdad route. There is also at Hamadan a considerable tanning industry, and manufacture in a small way of leather goods. Industries are so scarce and so backward in Persia that this one deserves special mention.

Sultanabad is more worthy of a visit, though a smaller trade-centre than Hamadan, because the carpet manufacture for which it is famous is not only an industry but an art, which for centuries has been specially connected with the name of Persia. The town, which contains some 25,000 inhabitants, lies 160 miles east of Kermanshah, on the road to Kum, a caravan journey of from six to eight days. The general features of the journey may be disposed of very briefly. The mountain ranges are as lofty

as they are immediately to the west of Kermanshah, and at this time of the year, when they are covered with snow, exceedingly picturesque. On a bright day the landscape, as one comes on the triangular plain of Kangawar, is to the distant view almost like an Italian scene in winter. The little town, built compactly on low hills, is surrounded with orchards and poplars; the plain, just beginning when I was there to show green signs of the coming crops of barley and wheat, is studded with villages, most of them raised above the general level like small fortresses. Eastwards the way to Teheran is barred by the massive bulk of the glistening Elvend, while to the south a long range of snows, shading gradually into the blue distance, gives a definite boundary on the east to the highlands of Luristan. The little village citadels, generally nothing more than mud ruins, but in some cases, as at Nahavand, retaining the dignity of a fortress, with moat and drawbridge, are eloquent of the days when Persia was even more unsettled, and the tribes were much more warlike, than they are at present. Generally speaking, the plains between the mountains grow wider as one gets farther east of Kermanshah, the villages are more numerous, more prosperous, and a shade more civilised; the orchards are more frequent and more extensive, and the habitations are less like pigstyes and more like human dwellings. Daolatabad, which is half way between Kangawar and Sultanabad, is the centre of a smiling valley well watered by the Kulwan River, which afterwards, near Nahavand, becomes the Gamasiab, which in turn becomes the

Kerkah. It was here that I first met Russian sugar and a few Russian prints in a clean and well-stocked bazaar.

Only as one gets east from Kermanshah the rainfall decreases and cultivation becomes more and more dependent on irrigation, until the wide plain of Sultanabad is reached, where there are practically no purely rain-fed crops at all. The price of grain consequently rises appreciably with every day's march, and in Sultanabad it was three times as great as in Kermanshah. Still, in this part of Persia, at all events, the peasantry, though wretchedly housed and ignorant of all modern appliances for facilitating agriculture, seem at least to be industrious, to judge from the extent and ingenuity of their irrigation ditches. The caravan route is easy and the gradients long but not arduous. There is one nek to be crossed before reaching Kangawar, where cuttings and a heavy gradient would be necessary for a railway. From Kangawar, which is lower than Kermanshah, that is to say, about 4500 feet above the sea level, the route ascends gradually and without much visible effort, to a height of 7000 feet, a day's march from Daolatabad. Thereafter it falls again, passing a high range by a most convenient natural port by the village of Tuda, and then, rising slightly past the village of Namdakoh, it has to make a sudden drop of nearly 1000 feet to the pretty little Karrarut valley, at the mouth of which, on the verge of a great plain, stands Sultanabad. It is possible to drive the whole way from Teheran to Kermanshah

by this route, and I actually met a waggon at a village near Daolatabad. As far as railway construction goes the only difficulties to be overcome are the nek between Bisitun and Kangawar, and the sudden descent just before reaching Sultanabad, and even these are of a very insignificant nature.

At Sultanabad I was very speedily haled forth from my caravanserai by Mr. Lombaers, the manager of the Persian Manufacturing Company, and found myself in the middle of a charming little European community, Mr. Lombaers and his wife being natives of Holland, and the four Europeans, two of whom are married, in Messrs. Ziegler's firm being either German or Swiss. The Persian Manufacturing Company was originally a branch of the firm of Messrs. Hotz and Co., and is still closely connected with it, though the capital is divided, while Messrs. Ziegler and Co. still control their Sultanabad branch, of which Mr. Strauss is the manager. Messrs. Ziegler's firm, which does about three times as much in the way of exporting carpets as the Persian Manufacturing Company, possesses a considerable property on the outskirts of Sultanabad, with enclosed gardens and compound and buildings on a European scale of style and comfort only surpassed in all Persia by the British Legation in Teheran. The two firms have exported in recent years carpets to the value of £75,000, while the native dealers in the district who send their wares *viâ* Tabriz to Constantinople, have brought the total of foreign export from Sultanabad and the neighbouring villages to £100,000. Last year, however, the

market in Great Britain had become overstocked, and the pressure put on the producers had tended to lower the quality, with the result that they do not expect to net more than £60,000 this year. The war, too, must have had a certain baleful influence on the sale of expensive carpets in Great Britain. But on the whole £75,000 may be taken as a conservative estimate of the value (before exportation) of the carpets sent abroad from the district of Sultanabad, which includes nearly two hundred villages within a radius of twenty-five miles of the town. Ten or eleven years ago Mr. Joseph Rabino, the manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia, in an interesting pamphlet on banking in Persia, put the total export of carpets from Persia as £136,000. It is not difficult, therefore, to see what an important share of this business is claimed by Sultanabad, and how much of the two foreign firms which are supreme in the country have done to develop this useful and interesting industry. For this reason, and also because very erroneous ideas are entertained about Sultanabad carpets, I am tempted to give a short account of the work done by Messrs. Ziegler and the Persian Manufacturing Company.

Lord Curzon, in his chapter on Persian resources and manufactures, dismisses the Sultanabad industry in a brief and almost contemptuous manner, which leaves it to be implied that the introduction, not of European methods so much as European supervision, is responsible for the present lack of originality in carpet manufacture and the use of aniline dyes. His example has been followed by nearly every one

who speaks or writes about Persian carpets, and indeed more rubbish is talked and believed about them than is even the case with antique porcelain or Chinese *cloisonné*. Dr. Wills, for instance, who certainly ought to have known better, warns his readers to beware of carpéts with dyed cotton borders, which he regards as a sure sign that they are "made for the market." This, indeed, is the phrase that is constantly used as a token of disparagement when speaking of modern work, and especially of the Sultanabad products, just as if ninety-nine out of every hundred carpets had not always been "made for the market." The result is that the slightly sophisticated traveller who turns up his nose at a Sultanabad carpet which, it is quite true, he could buy equally well in London, spends enormous sums on the veriest trash, which has been hawked for ages about the bazaars of Teheran and Isfahan, just because it is dirty and worn out, and, in a word, an antique. Of course, he desires something which he cannot buy in Europe, something characteristic of the country, and herein doubtless he has reason, for if he wants something really characteristic of Persia he will do well to buy anything you please that is worn out, faded, and generally speaking worthless. This at least will be Persian. Or again, there are still in the country a few really valuable old carpets, made at enormous expense as offerings for some shrine or as gifts for kings or ministers. These are not in the market, however, can seldom be come by or bought, and then only at prohibitive prices.

The ordinary purchaser, who is not intent on mere age and dirt, and who wants a carpet because it is either useful, beautiful, or valuable, must buy modern wares, and it would hardly be going too far to say that he must patronise one of the foreign firms. To blame these firms for lack of originality or the use of inferior dyes is grossly unfair. Originality in artistic work has long been dead in Persia. This is apparent to the most casual observer who glances at the modern tile work or silver work, or the carpets sold by natives. In carpets particularly there is not the slightest tendency to diverge from the same old designs which stamp the products of Beluchistan, of Kerman, of Yezd, of Khorasan, and of Kurdistan. The rawest amateur in looking at a native carpet can proclaim its origin in a moment, or can, at all events, give the original locality of the design and style of workmanship from which it is copied. The design is more or less badly executed, and the colours are more or less pleasing or the reverse, generally the reverse—and that is all. The die was made long ago, and has not been broken or renewed, but merely worn out. The most characteristic, perhaps, though not the most beautiful, are the designs peculiar to certain tribes—designs such as are found in the Baluchi carpets, or the Kurdish, or the Turkoman. The most beautiful, to European ways of thinking, are those more or less floral designs with large medallions in the centre of a square ground, and a broad and ornate border. Such flowing lines are found, for instance, in the Kerman carpets, and are quite different from the

angular figures which are generally regarded as characteristic of Persia or Arabia. The Herati figure and the Turkoman pattern are not angular, though they are thoroughly native, but they belong to a lower state of artistic development than the more organised, and yet more liberal curves of the really floral designs. But, then, these beautiful patterns which occur also on the old tile work are not Persian at all in their origin any more than are the mural decorations of the Diwan-i-khas at Delhi, or the Taj Mahal at Agra, which have formed the basis of so much art work that is now associated with India.

The patterns came from Europe in the days when Persia was still capable of appreciating European art, and the Persians have preserved them intact in some of their best carpets, with just the addition of a few birds and beasts, and fishes, which, as long as they are not too conspicuous, do not spoil the purity of the original conceptions. But in Persian hands even these designs have by now become stereotyped and stale, besides gradually losing their pristine freedom of line. It is only in European museums that they can be seen at their best. Among the natives carpet-making has settled down into certain grooves, into which new ideas are introduced only through the vitiating medium of Manchester prints. But this is not entirely true of the carpets made under the supervision of the two European firms of Sultanabad. Here, if anywhere in Persia, variety, and occasionally originality of design is to be found. It must be understood that these firms do not super-

intend factories run on European lines. Their carpets are made in Sultanabad and the surrounding villages exactly as they are anywhere else in Persia. It is the business of the firms to supply the wools and the dyes and to dictate the patterns and to receive the work when finished. Sometimes they buy up carpets that are brought in to them by villagers who have made them with their own material according to their own ideas, but generally speaking each carpet is made according to instructions and subject to a contract price. They have hundreds of designs collected from all sources, copies of ancient patterns, designs from European firms or inventions of their own, while they have specially retained Persian designers who are paid to do nothing else but invent. I have looked through folios in the office of the Persian Manufacturing Company, which contain exact copies with the true colouring of the renowned Persian carpets in the mansions and museums of Europe; nor is there a famous carpet in existence which cannot be copied for you exactly by one of the two firms, provided always that you are prepared to pay the price. They are, in fact, reinforced by all the ancient examples, and they introduce at the same time whatever there is of individuality or originality in carpet painting today in either Europe, America, or Persia. If it is argued that the old masterpieces are the best, that is only equivalent to maintaining that the well of invention in this direction has run dry, and that there is a natural limit to the decorative patterns which are proper for carpets. At all events, if you

cannot find originality here you will find it nowhere else in Persia.

It is equally false and even more unfair to suggest that the two firms I have named are responsible in any way for the introduction of cheap aniline dyes, which has done so much to ruin the carpet industry in Persia. On the contrary, it is almost necessary to go to Sultanabad to avoid the pernicious influence of chemical preparation. Both the foreign firms have dyeing experts, and as they dye their own wool, and for the most part export carpets that are made with their own wool, one may be reasonably sure that the colours will not fade or run. Indigo is used for blue, madder for red, and grape skins prepared with alum for yellow. The greens and browns and all the different shades are made from mixtures or dilutions of these vegetable substances. The result is not only seen in the durability of the colours but in the richness and softness of hue. It is not in Sultanabad, but in nearly all the other districts of Persia, that the use of aniline dyes—in spite of the embargo on their importation—combined with a natural crudeness of taste, produces such distressing results. In other respects, also, such as the quality of the material, Sultanabad carpets are generally found to be superior and, as they are made for European or American use, their size and shape are adapted to European houses, which is a considerable advantage except in the eyes of those who consider that a carpet is more beautiful because it is made long and narrow to fit the general style of a Persian dwelling. It must, of course, be remembered that carpet-making in Sul-

tanabad, as elsewhere in Persia, is a commercial undertaking, and the vast majority of carpets sent to market are of moderate price and therefore articles of utility first and of beauty only so far as the price admits. My contention is simply this, that if you want a really fine Persian carpet of good design and excellent colour and are willing to pay for it you can get it from either of the two firms to which I have referred. Since this is the case, it may be asked why are not similar carpets made in Europe or America, where the enormous cost of transport would be saved? The best designs are to be found in European museums, and for new designs European artists are infinitely superior to Persians. The colouring matter is certainly not peculiar to Persia; indeed, the indigo is imported from India, while the wool and cotton employed are, if anything, of a distinctly inferior quality, and the same may be said of the silk. Is it that the Persian women and boys who make the carpets have a peculiar aptitude for the work? Certainly not. Their work is so slovenly that it is almost impossible to find a carpet in Persia where the design is perfectly carried out or the colour scheme is without fault.

Why is it, then, that carpets are made in Persia and transported at great expense to Europe? The answer is very simple. It is a question of the price of labour. The process of carpet-making is somewhat as follows. The warp is strung up on a loom in a small village hut, hardly large enough as a rule to hold the contrivance. In all the Sultanabad carpets, and most of the fine carpets of Persia, the warp and

woof forming the ground work are of cotton. Four or five women—according to the size of the piece—then sit down to work, each taking a width of about two feet. They have no small boys, as in India, on the other side of the loom to read out the number of stitches of each colour in the pattern, but trust to memory and good luck; hence the usual imperfection of the design. Each stitch is made by tying the front and back thread of the warp together with a piece of coloured wool, whose ends are then broken off, leaving a double end hanging from the knot of perhaps three-quarters of a inch. This forms one stitch and the double ends constitute the nap. The process is repeated along the line with the proper colours according to pattern, and when a whole line is finished the shuttle is run through by hand with a cotton thread to form the woof of the ground work. Then the whole line is beaten down with a sort of hammer with blunt steel prongs fixed close together so as to insert themselves between the threads of the warp, and usually furnished with little bells so that the women may have music at their work. Then the hanging threads, thus beaten close to the line below, must be sheared off to an even length in order that the surface of the carpet may be level and compact. The nap is thus reduced to about a quarter of an inch. It is here that many faults are made. Mr. Lombaers had a special pair of scissors made for his own amusement, which, by a very simple contrivance, secures a perfect evenness of length and so produces a fine surface with a sheen as of velvet. The Persians have no idea either of

making or using such contrivances: they shear away with enormous scissors in haphazard fashion, so that the nap is often irregular and the general effect spoiled. If the lines of stitches are well beaten down the warp and the woof ought to contain exactly the same number of stitches to the inch. Generally they do not; either the beating is insufficient and the design becomes elongated or the warp has not been properly stretched, the threads grow too far apart in the working, and the design is spread out horizontally as when one stretches a piece of elastic with a pattern on it. Either fault when exaggerated becomes a fatal defect in a carpet. It will be seen that the work is tedious but not difficult; yet the Persian women have to be trained to it from their childhood. One of the foreign ladies of Sultanabad took lessons from a headworker among the Persian women, and in ten days surpassed her teacher, who had been at it since she was three years old, and who, having been beaten by her pupil, ran away in disgust.

European women could certainly do the work more conscientiously and efficiently, and the employment of a few simple devices, such, for instance, as Mr. Lombaers's scissors, would ensure a better result. But then, consider the cost of labour. A woman working at a piece two feet wide can finish one line of stitches in half an hour. If the carpet is to be of moderate quality there must be ten lines of stitches to the inch, that is to say, she finishes a piece of carpet two feet wide by one inch in length in five hours; in other words a square foot in thirty

hours. By resorting to the rule of three we find that it would take one woman 3600 hours to make a carpet twelve feet by ten. As four or five women would work at once on a carpet of this size, the final result works out at 900 hours, which in Persia, with its many high days and holidays, means the best part of a year. I saw one large carpet on the loom in Sultanabad—six yards by four I think it was—which had already reached the end of its second year, and was a month or two short of completion. If the carpet is to be of finer quality the stitches must be closer together, and the labour expended will be doubled or trebled.

By far the greatest item, therefore, in the cost of a carpet is the expenditure of labour. In Persia all the carpets, except at Kerman and perhaps Yezd, where boys are employed, are made by women, who, being at best little more than slaves in the Mussulman household, are paid the veriest starvation wages, if, indeed, they are paid at all. In the Sultanabad district they get half a kran a day, which is equivalent to $2\frac{1}{4}d.$, with an occasional cup of tea thrown in. Machinery—even if it could obtain the same results, which it cannot—would still be more expensive, and even female labour in Europe would be fifteen times as costly. Hence a moderately good Persian carpet of 120 square feet, which fetches £12 in London, could, I believe, be made much better in Europe as far as workmanship goes, but it would cost £120, and no one would buy such an article at such a price. Or, again, the really fine pieces of work, which fetch as much as five shillings

per square foot when exported, would, if made by hand in Europe, cost something like £1000 each, which, as Euclid would say, is absurd.

That, then, is why carpets are made in Persia under European supervision and transported, at a cost of 30 per cent. of their original value, to Europe instead of being made in Birmingham. That there exists any special faculty for the industry or the art in Persia cannot be believed by any one who examines the method or its results. Fortunately for the British and American householder, the Persian woman is still a slave. If ever she is emancipated or raised out of the Mohammedan abyss to a higher level in the scale of existence Persian carpets will become a thing of the past. As it is a good carpet is exceedingly rare. Be the designer never so artistic, the weaver will make mistakes if she possibly can.

It is customary among amateurs to look first at the back of a carpet and count the stitches, but this is the least criterion of a carpet's quality. In the first place the design must be beautiful, and this is hard to come by; while secondly, it must be truly worked out. Generally it is not properly divided, or it is executed in a slovenly manner, or it is elongated or stretched horizontally as described above, producing a sort of grimace like a countenance reflected in the hollow of a spoon; in the third place, the colours must be good and fast and comely, a thing seldom to be attained by the Persian, even if you give her the colours. She is almost sure to put them in the wrong places, and is especially fond of changing the shade

of the background of the design two or three times in the course of one carpet. Where the shades are really distinct the carpet loses greatly in value. If those three conditions are given, then it is time to count the stitches in order to estimate the amount of labour expended. A large carpet, in order to come within the means of the average purchaser, will contain about ninety stitches to the quarter zar, which is ten and a half inches—roughly, nine to the inch. A well-made carpet of this quality should be sold for about 1*s.* 8*d.* per square foot in London. Small rugs such as those that are made at Shiraz and Kerman may be much finer, and contain fifteen or sixteen stitches to the inch. These fine carpets are not really intended for the floor, but in Persia are hung on the walls like tapestry. Silk carpets, which are sometimes very beautiful, are costly, not because they are made of silk, for the difference in material is a small matter, but because the number of stitches to the inch is greater and the labour expended enormous. At Karcheun, a little village near Sultanabad, there is an old landed proprietor, a rich man, who has the most beautiful silk carpets woven for himself on a ground of gold thread. The ground is left bare of silk and the pattern only put in with the silk nap, giving a relief to the design which on the rich gold ground produces the most charming effect. The old man would never sell to a feringhi; he reserves his wares for presents to Shahs and Ministers. It is, however, almost a misuse of terms to call such works of art carpets. They are really mural decorations.

But even the more homely woollen article is a fascinating fabric which fortunately can still be made in Persia. I have seen carpets on the walls of houses in Sultanabad which the connoisseur would rave over if he were only convinced that they were a hundred years old. Doubtless many of them will live to be valuable antiques. Only it should be said to the credit of the foreign trading-houses, that they, and they alone, keep alive the spark of art in this waning Persian industry. They also do a good deal in this and in other directions to bring a little of the wealth back to Persia which is constantly being drained away to pay for foreign goods. Whatever tends to increase the total of exports from Persia is to be welcomed if the country is to be saved from the utter financial degradation to which it is at present hastening.

CHAPTER XXI

ROUTES IN WESTERN PERSIA

I CANNOT leave the country between Bagdad and Teheran without endeavouring to arrive at some definite idea of the extent of British interests in this part of Persia, and the share taken by the British Government in developing these interests. In Persia, as in China, one cannot move anywhere without hearing woeful tales of the decline of British influence and prestige, and the dangerous competition which is threatening to overwhelm British trade. But in Persia and China alike, though the dirge is repeated *ad nauseam*, it is difficult to find any one who can put his finger on the seat of the disease, or suggest a possible remedy. The British Government is invariably held up to scorn, yet it is not often that even a possible course of action is suggested, and the practical result of the whole jeremiad is *nil*. I wish to follow a rather different course, to deal with a few concrete facts which may demonstrate the lethargy of the Home Government, and to suggest possible means of counteracting the evil results of that lethargy.

The area under discussion is a small one, but in no other part of Persia has the neglect of the British Government been more conspicuous, and nowhere

might the exerting of a little energy prove more beneficial to our legitimate interests. I have already pointed out that the import trade of Great Britain and British possessions with Persia *viâ* the Kermanshah route is not less than £700,000 per annum. This, it may be argued, is a ridiculously small item of the great bulk of British commerce, and not worth making any fuss about. In return it is only necessary to point out that it comes very near the total reached by Bushire, which is the main port of entry for British commerce, and exceeds the returns of all other ports where British trade is concerned, including Tabriz. Yet we have no consul at Kermanshah, not even a consular agent. There is, it is true, a Consul-General at Bagdad; but one may look in vain through the consular reports of Bagdad for anything more than the most perfunctory notice of the transit trade with Persia. So little, indeed, was known in the past of this trade-route that, as I have already shown, even Lord Curzon, who left no stone unturned in his search for accurate information, estimated the import trade of Kermanshah at a little more than a quarter of its present value, which there is good reason to believe has increased very little in the last ten years. Other errors have since been rife.

Despite a carefully compiled consular report in 1897, which gives a very fair idea of the existing trade of the route based on the calculations of a syndicate which was about to tender for the farming of the customs—calculations which obviously would not err on the side of exaggeration—another report

was made a year or two later for the Imperial Bank of Persia. It seems to ignore the existence of the consular report, and returns to old miscalculations which have been triumphantly refuted by the net customs revenue collected last year. In the "Statesman's Year-book" for 1902 Kermanshah is not mentioned among the important towns of Persia, though five or six towns are given whose populations are smaller, and whose trade is, comparatively speaking, insignificant. Lastly, I find in the report made for the Imperial Bank of Persia a suggestion that the Bagdad-Kermanshah route might suffer by the opening of the Ahwaz-Isfahan road, which is about as likely to compete with it as the Quetta-Nushki route. Even Lord Curzon fell into the mistake of supposing that the opening up of the much-talked-of Ahwaz or Shushter-Burujird road would cause Kermanshah and Hamadan to draw their supplies from Mohammerah. Kermanshah is 220 miles from Bagdad. The Burujird road would bring it within 460 miles of Ahwaz. Hamadan, which is a still more important centre than Kermanshah, is about 350 miles from Bagdad, that is to say, 100 miles less than its distance from Ahwaz. The difference between the river carriage from Mohammerah to Ahwaz, and that from Basra to Bagdad, would not make up the loss on the increased road transport. It is quite true, on the other hand, that a large amount of the present Kermanshah trade which at present goes to Burujird and Sultanabad would be deflected to the Ahwaz-Burujird road, if it was ever made.

But there is still left a great grain-producing district between Kermanshah and Hamadan, which has a potential wealth that has never yet been duly appreciated, and which will always be supplied with foreign goods from Bagdad, the opportunities being equal. It is even possible that the best route from the Gulf to Teheran might be found to be *viâ* Bagdad. As it is, heavy articles from Europe, such as pianos and stoves, come this way owing to the comparative shortness and smoothness of the track. The smoothness is, perhaps, exaggerated by most writers. The bad part of the road, near the Tak-i-Girra Pass, cannot be much better than the Bushire-Kotals, especially in winter and spring, when snow and rain add to the horrible state of the stony portion of the track. Only the extent of the bad ground is not so great. It is impossible to give exact figures of the cost of transport in Persia, which varies according to the season and the price of grain. Roughly it amounts to £14 per ton to carry goods from Bagdad to Teheran, whereas it costs £18 to £20 from Bushire to the capital. It would seem, then, that the Kermanshah route is more advantageous than the Bushire-Isfahan route, and yet, with a few exceptions, all the European goods imported to Teheran—exclusive of Russian manufactures—come by way of Bushire or Tabriz. The reason is not far to seek. For goods coming by way of Bagdad an extra £2 per ton must be allowed by river freight and break of bulk. Then there is a transit duty of 1 per cent. through Turkish territory and an enhanced duty at Kermanshah, owing to

the extra cost of transport, which is taxed by the customs in addition to the cost value of the goods. So that the actual charges per ton come to nearly, if not quite, as much as the freight from Bushire to Teheran.

These things being about equal, there is this great disadvantage of the Bagdad route, that the carrying capacity of the river steamers is strictly limited, and the congestion of goods at Basra so great, that six months is frittered away in what are at present unavoidable delays, which are further increased by the absurd quarantine regulations at Basra. The result is that the time of transit between London and Teheran *viâ* Bagdad is almost double what it is between the two capitals *viâ* Bushire, though *viâ* Bagdad the land journey is at least 200 miles shorter. I saw the other day two stoves in Teheran which had been exactly one year on the journey by way of Bagdad, and even then had arrived in a worthless condition. Goods coming by way of Bushire take, as a rule, about six months to complete the journey. Yet there is nothing in the nature of things to prevent the Bagdad route being both quicker and cheaper. As regards Teheran the matter may not be of great importance, but things are different when we come to the whole Kermanshah and Hamadan districts, which in respect of their wealth have been but little appreciated, and which are now being gradually invaded by Russian goods from the north. In the whole of Southern Persia, from British Beluchistan to Luristan, there is no country to compare with the more favoured west,

where the rainfall, if not always abundant, is at least sufficient to support a large agricultural and pastoral population living in countless villages, with a congeries of smaller towns like Burujird, Khoremabad, Sultanabad, Daolatabad, Kangawar, Nahawand, Sena, and many others, all within a circle, whose centre lies between Kermanshah and Hamadan. and whose radius is about a hundred miles. This is a country well worth developing.

The question is: What has the British Government done, or left undone, to develop the trade of this region, and what can it do? Thirteen years ago, when the Karun River had been opened with such sanguine hopes to the trade of the world, it was intended to build a road from either Ahwaz or Shushter to the capital, passing on its way the towns of Dizful, Khoremabad, Burujird, Sultanabad, and Kum. Enterprises in Persia were then "booming" and with a little encouragement from the British Government almost anything could have been undertaken. The British Government, however, preferred to rest on its laurels. A small subsidy was granted to Messrs. Lynch for the steamer which they ran between Ahwaz and Mohammerah, but the making of the road to Isfahan through the wild country of the Bakhtiaris—a task which might have daunted the most enterprising of firms—was accomplished without the smallest assistance on the part of our Government, and without eliciting as much as a word of thanks. In the meantime there came the affair of the Mining Corporation, the unpleasant incidents of the Lottery Concession, the

unsatisfactory result of the Tobacco Monopoly, and the name of Persia became anathema to the London Stock Exchange. Consequently the road scheme has languished and faded out of sight. Messrs. Lynch, with notable enterprise, have succeeded in opening up the Ahwaz-Isfahan route to traffic, the Bakhtiari Chiefs are thoroughly well disposed towards us, having seen the pecuniary advantage to be gained thereby, and last year all the material for building the new British telegraph line through Central Persia was carried over the Lynch road. But the Ahwaz-Isfahan route hardly comes within the scope of the present inquiry.

The two routes which are of special importance to Western Persia are the Bagdad-Kermanshah route and the long-talked-of Ahwaz-Burujird route. For most purposes the Bagdad-Kermanshah way could always maintain its position as the great trade channel of Western Persia. It has been the highway of armies and caravans as long as history goes back, and might still serve most commercial ends if a few improvements were made. It is not necessary to build a macadamised road from Bagdad to Teheran, nor is it possible to attempt anything of the sort, since the expense would be very great and the profits *nil*. Besides, macadamised roads do not necessarily decrease the cost of transport. On the Russian road between Resht and Teheran the freight charges are rather greater now that the road is built than they were before—amounting to the large sum of ninepence per ton mile—and the traffic is still carried on chiefly by means of mules and other pack-

animals. All that need be done on the Bagdad-Kermanshah road is to spend a little money on improving the passage through the Zagros Mountains, so that the route might be made available and safe at all periods of the year. Unfortunately no one is likely to spend a penny on the Tak-i-Girra Pass. The Persian authorities do not care about it; no private company could make any money out of it; and the British Government would be horrified at the bare notion of spending a sixpence to improve a trade-route in Persia, especially one about which no person in the Foreign Office knows anything. Then there is the great crux of the river navigation. Unless the British firm which navigates the Tigris is allowed to put on extra boats on the run from Basra to Bagdad the trade on the Bagdad-Kermanshah route must always be strictly limited to the carrying capacity of the present river steamers. A year or two ago Messrs. Lynch secured the right to attach a barge to each steamer as a temporary measure. The permission has now become more or less permanent, and there has been a considerable increase in the trade of Bagdad in consequence. But there the expansion ceases. There will always be a congestion at Basra, a delay on all goods carried, and unnecessarily high rates as long as the present state of things lasts. It can hardly be believed that the resources of British diplomacy have been exhausted in the endeavour to remove this most important restriction.

A German syndicate can obtain a concession to run a railway line over the length and breadth of

Asiatic Turkey, and yet a British company of long standing, with the whole force of the British Embassy behind it, cannot secure the right to run another steamer between Basra and Bagdad. It seems incredible, yet I have been told on the best authority, not once but many times, that this is actually the case. Since Turkey is thus obdurate, and refuses to develop her own natural lines of communication, we are driven to a new route, and the only alternative to the Bagdad-Kermanshah road is the Ahwaz-Burujird-Teheran road, for which a concession has been held by the Imperial Bank of Persia for more than ten years. If the road were ever opened up to traffic it would have this advantage over the Bagdad route that it lies entirely within Persian territory and is therefore subject to no transit duty, and to none of the vagaries of the Turkish quarantine regulations. The Imperial Bank of Persia has retained the concession and worked at the beginning of it from Teheran in a fitful though useful way. But obviously road-making is not banking business, nor would the directors of any bank sanction the raising by the bank of money to embark on so speculative a venture as road-making in Persia. So far an excellent road—excellent, that is for Persia—has been made at considerable expense as far as Kum. Beyond Kum the mule track has been improved and in a few places metalled, so that it is possible to drive as far as Sultanabad, though as yet there are no tolls on that portion of the road and no relays of horses. The bank has, I believe, written off about £85,000 on account of the road, and is not prepared to go any

farther in the matter. In fact the concession and the going concern will very soon be sold. If £85,000 has been spent on making one-third of the road—and that by far the easiest third—what sum is likely to be required in order to carry on the original scheme right down to the Karun? The Russians, be it remembered, have spent just half a million sterling on their Resht-Teheran road, a distance of 200 miles as compared with the 350 still remaining between Sultanabad and Ahwaz.

No one in his senses would recommend the spending of any such sum on any road in Persia, especially over a route which ought at no distant date to be used for a railway. Besides, metalled roads do not materially help transport in Persia, and certainly do not cheapen it. Still, something must be done, and must be done quickly, about the Teheran-Ahwaz route. Unless the British Government or some British firm moves in the matter the bank will have to sell back the concession and the road, as far as it is made, to the Persian Government, which is exactly the same thing as giving it to Russia. Nothing could conceivably hurt our reputation so much in Persia as the giving up of the Teheran-Kum road, which for more than a decade has been managed by Englishmen and has been known as the British road. Moreover, this portion of the Teheran-Ahwaz route has a double value as being a portion also of the regular trade-route between Teheran and Isfahan, the highway *par excellence* of Persia. How, then, can the existing concession be taken over without the expenditure of a sum of money which would

frighten a British Chancellor of the Exchequer out of his wits? It can be done by exercising only a moderate amount of common sense. The Russian road was costly, partly because half the money went into the wrong pockets, and partly because the folly of building a metalled road for mules to travel over was not appreciated. Similarly the £85,000 written off against the Kum road in the books of the bank does not all represent money spent on the road. The amount of mismanagement, too, which was lavished on the road was worthy of the traditions of foreign enterprise in Persia. Now at last the Kum road pays its way, so that if the British Government were to buy the concession cheap there could be no great loss on the transaction.

As for the extension, the main thing to remember —and it is a most important point—is that for trade purposes in a country like Persia a made road is quite unnecessary. The difference beween the cost of a road and the cost of a mule-track is enormous. Between Sultanabad and Ahwaz an improved mule-track could be made with all the bridges needful for a sum not exceeding £20,000. It is an easier undertaking than the Ahwaz-Isfahan route, which did not cost much more than a quarter of that sum. Only, the Luri chiefs must be "squared." A suggestion was made to me by an authority on such matters in Teheran, which seems very feasible. The chiefs should be paid a lump sum down for the right to make a road through their country, and this sum should be deposited for them in the Bank of Persia, which will always give 6 per cent. interest on

deposits. Then if the chiefs do not carry out their part of the bargain they can easily be fined, or their whole interest for a year might be forfeited. If the British Government were to deal with the question of the chiefs and were further to grant a small guarantee on the opening up of the route, or perhaps if the Government were to buy up the existing concession and hand it over to a company to work it, then not only a great step would be taken towards developing Western Persia, but a great danger would be removed. For if our Government does not act very soon in the matter the bank will sell the concession and it will inevitably fall into the hands of Russia. The sum to be expended is a trifling matter compared with the interests involved. At the outside £15,000 or £20,000 should purchase the concession, and half the sum again would settle the Luri chiefs. If the Government was willing to sink an amount then the route to Ahwaz could be profitably opened up by a private company, and what is also important, the Teheran-Shiraz route could be improved and come more under British influence. That such a move would strengthen our position in Persia enormously is shown by the activity with which Russian agents have of late been stirring up the Luri chiefs to oppose us, and have even been tampering with our friends the Bakhtiaris. If, on the other hand, our Government is lukewarm in the matter, and grudges this small expense, Russia will eventually come down to Isfahan, we shall suffer disgrace in the eyes of the Persians, and another nail will be driven into the coffin of British prestige.

One has no scruples in advocating most strongly the effective opening up of the Ahwaz-Teheran route—by a mule-track, be it clearly understood—because at a small expense it would help to prepare the way for the railway which we shall soon be forced to build from the Gulf to Teheran. The question of railways cannot, however, be discussed in this chapter. It is sufficient to point out what can easily be done, and what must be done unless our trade and political influence are to go steadily back in Persia. There should also be an increase in our consular service for Western Persia. It is hardly less than scandalous that we have not even a consular agent in Kermanshah or anywhere in all Luristan. As usual the outside critic maintains that the British merchant is quite able to take care of himself, just as if a private merchant were able to press reforms on the Turkish or Persian Government. One often wonders why the British nation, and in this case the people of India, are forced to keep up the most expensive diplomatic and consular services in the world, only to be told that it is not the business of those services or of the Government to foster or coddle British trade, which should long ago have learned to walk by itself. If we were to change the metaphor, and regard our competitors in trade as soldiers in a war of commerce, who fight under cover of heavy artillery against the British manufacturer with no guns at all, we should arrive at a much more truthful picture of the great struggle which is ceaselessly raging around us.

CHAPTER XXII

TEHERAN

WHATEVER may be one's opinion of the pleasures of road travel in Persia, it will always be found enjoyable after nearly a month of caravaning to come on an oasis like Kum, where, instead of a battered caravanserai or a filthy mud hovel, the traveller finds almost luxurious lodging at the rest-house of the Road Company, which, in point of size and comfort, might almost vie with an inferior up-country hotel in India. If he comes from the West he sees also for the first time the various conveniences of a post-house on a main route in Persia. He can at a few minutes' notice order a relay of horses to take him on to Teheran, or, better still, he can engage a phaeton, and so cover the last ninety miles of his journey in the incredibly short space of twenty hours with comparative ease and little fatigue. The phaeton is a species of tarantass with low wheels and no facilities for carrying baggage: in fact, a vehicle singularly ill-adapted to the requirements of Persian travel. It is also rather costly, the fare from Kum to Teherán, including the minimum tip for the driver on each stage, amounting to just £8. Yet to drive ninety odd miles in less than twenty-four hours is in Persia so much like putting on seven-leagued boots

in any other country that one would gladly pay treble the price to be relieved from the monotony of caravan pace.

It was pleasant to wake up as we changed horses at Aliabad just before sunrise, and to see for the first time the beautiful white cone of Demavend, the Fujiyama of Persia, which is visible by day to the traveller long before he reaches Kum on his way from the Gulf, and serves as a mark to sailors on the Caspian from a little east of Enzeli to Bunder-i-Gez. When I saw it first in the early morning—storm-clouds having obscured it from view the night before—it was looking its best at a distance of seventy miles or so, which was sufficient to separate the great sugar cone from the rough mass of the Elburz range, and yet not too great to rob the mountain of its imposing grandeur. The saffron rays of the morning lighted on 7000 feet of pure snow, while the mountain billows below were still in shadow and nothing could be distinguished on the intervening desert except the glimmer of the great salt lake to the right of the road.

As the fresh horses tore down the slopes of the ridges towards Teheran—encouraged by both the brisk air of the desert and the promise of bakshish to the driver—we came on a great cavalcade of horsemen stretched for miles along the road, and followed at length by two closed victorias and a few phaetons. The new Governor of Shiraz was on his way from the capital to his post. After crossing the fine stone bridge which is one of the achievements of the English Road Company we mounted the last

ridge which separated us from the Plain of Teheran, and saw at length the green mass, larger than the other oases in the desert, which indicates the capital. Situated at the foot of the great Elburz rampart, which at the time of my visit was still covered for 1000 feet with snow, in a plain thirty miles wide at least, on which the irrigated fields stood out at this season like green squares on a chessboard, with Demavend standing sentinel among the clouds to the north-east, Teheran might be made a fitting capital for a great empire. As it is, being possessed of not a single building of note, and surrounded by insignificant walls of mud brick, enlivened at the gateways with the most deplorable tile-work, the city of the King of Kings has nothing beyond its natural surroundings to recommend it to the view of the approaching traveller.

From the summit of the last ridge the one feature added by human effort to the landscape which strikes the eye is the gleaming dome of the mosque of Shah Abdul Azim, which flashes like a heliograph from the heart of a large grove a few miles to the south of the city. One notices, also, as one draws nearer to the capital, a large building on the road with an iron roof painted red, which turns out to be the sugar factory erected by Belgian capital, but, like every other enterprise of the sort in Persia, abandoned and useless. The little railway which runs parallel with the road from Shah Abdul Azim to the south gate of Teheran—a distance of about six miles—is an exception to the rule: it is positively in working order, and the receipts exceed the expenses.

Inside the city there is a tram line with cars drawn by horses, which is managed by the railway company —now a Russian concern—and this, too, pays its way. Driving through the dusty streets and across the uneven cobbles of the principal square to the street of the Legations I came to the signboard of the English hotel, one of the few foreign designations in Teheran which are not printed in Russian, and found comfortable quarters in a picturesque little courtyard full of trees and flowers.

Teheran is still out of the track of the regular globe-trotter, and will continue to be so until it is connected by rail with Europe and India. In spite of the bracing climate and the brilliant sunshine of Persia it may be safely asserted that, apart from archæological interests, there are few countries in the world which are not a great deal more attractive to the traveller. Nevertheless, political or commercial considerations have drawn so many Europeans in recent years to the Shah's capital that a description of the city at this time of day would be altogether out of place. I shall only, before plunging into the bewildering vortex of Persian statistics, indulge in the respite of a little orientation in order to fix the point of view from which the progress of affairs must be judged at the present moment. Strange to say, to talk of the progress of affairs in Persia, that most sedentary of countries, is for the moment no abuse of terms. In travelling through the country you may be surprised to find how fresh and up-to-date is every paragraph in Lord Curzon's standard work begun, laboured at, and finished more than ten years ago;

or for the matter of that the immortal "Haji Baba of Isfahan" seems to live to-day in half the Persians you meet, with the self-same surroundings and local colouring which greeted Morier on his way from Bushire to Teheran close on a century back. But at Teheran, the focus of foreign influence and intrigue, events are succeeding one another at such a rapid rate that even Lord Curzon's summing up of the political and commercial situation is fast becoming obsolete.

The departure of the Shah and the long Moharram holiday, which practically puts a stop to business for a fortnight, had made Teheran quieter than usual when I arrived. The foreign Ministers were resting from their labours, and many of them were not in the capital. Mr. Griscom, the United States representative, who is, perhaps, the youngest minister in the service of any Foreign Office, was on a tour to Isfahan and Hamadan. The German Minister was in Europe, leaving the affairs of the nation in the hands of another very young man, Baron Kühlmann, who, being well on the right side of thirty, may claim to be the youngest *chargè d'affaires* at present in existence. I was fortunate to catch our own Minister just before he started on a flying trip to Isfahan. The foreign merchants were for the most part waiting for the Moharram festivities to close, and speculating in the meantime on the probable result of the extraordinary efforts being made to push Russian trade in Persia. Even the concession-hunters had ceased to trouble, having migrated with the spring to Europe to sell their concessions and to start syndicates,

leaving behind them only a jetsam of unsuccessful promoters of foreign industry in Persia. For the searcher after knowledge such a season as this is perhaps the most advantageous, since it is just at the quietest moments that real schemes have time to mature and the essential features of the situation become less obscure. Moreover, the men who are really powers in Persia have leisure to converse.

Outside the Legations there are four men of commanding position in the foreign element of Teheran to-day. First, in virtue of his long service in Persia, extending over thirty-five years, and his wonderful knowledge of the country and its capabilities, stands General Houtum-Schindler, who has filled almost every post which it has been possible for a foreigner to fill in the service of the Shah from the time that he left the department of the Indian Government Telegraph. There is hardly an article on Persia in any encyclopædia or official publication or year-book which has not been written by General Schindler, or at least with his assistance. Latterly he has not been in the best of health, and he seldom goes outside the walls of his compound, but he is still the source of information to which all travellers instinctively turn, and from which no one has ever been sent empty away. If he is now a trifle pessimistic about the future of Persia, and especially about the future of British interests in Persia, that is no more than might be expected in one who has seen what he has seen during the whole of his career. It is still a liberal education in all things Persian to go and sit in his study in the afternoon where he is surrounded

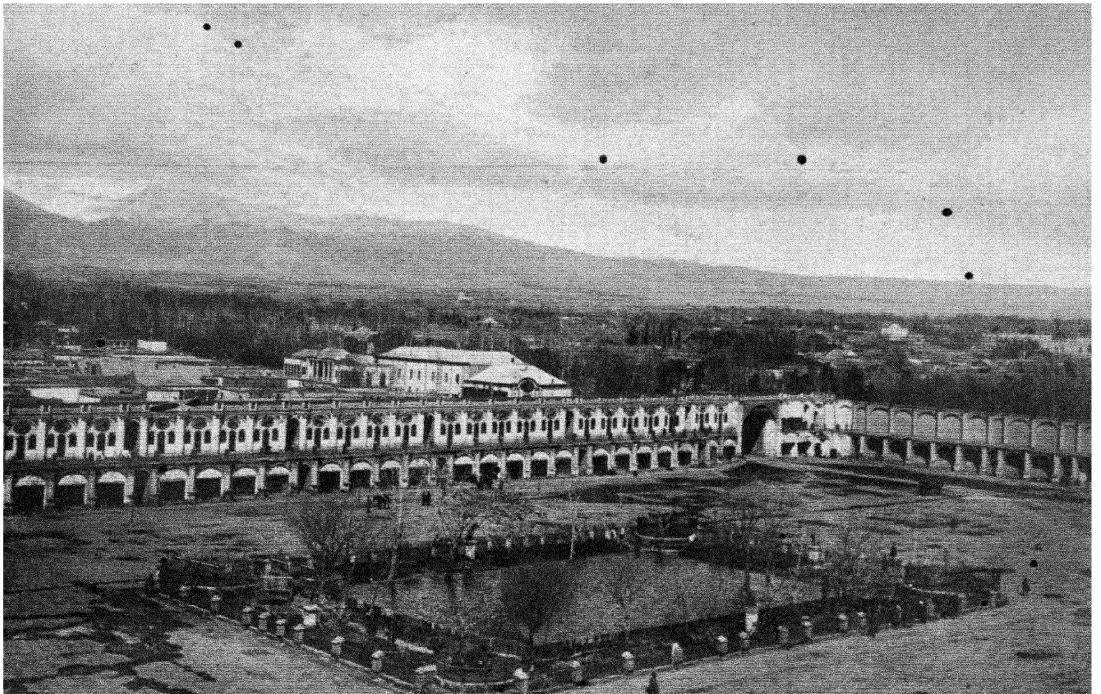
by newspapers and magazines in every European tongue, all of which he diligently reads, and to hear him discourse on a subject about which it may truly be said that he has forgotten more than most people have ever known.

Next to him as regards seniority of service in Persia comes Mr. Joseph Rabino, the manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia. Mr. Rabino has been in Persia as long as the bank itself, that is to say, about thirteen years, and has brought an acute mind to bear on the desperate intricacies of Persian finance. He combines the effects of an early training in that great school of banking, the Crédit Lyonnais, with a knowledge of Eastern ways and Eastern finance gained by a long service in Egypt, and certainly, as far as the English language goes, he may be said to be the only authority on the monetary system of Persia. His pamphlet written for the Institute of Bankers very soon after he came to Persia, is practically as true now as it was ten years ago, while a more recent paper read before the Statistical Society only last year gives an admirable summary of the economical situation in Persia to-day.

It is characteristic of the British Government, at all events where the politics of the East are concerned, that while it possesses a wealth of such trained men as Mr. Rabino ready to render it every service, it rarely asks their advice, and still more rarely follows the advice when given. The Russian Government acts in a very different way. It also possesses in the manager of the Russian bank—originally the Banque de Prêts, now the Banque d'Escompte and really a branch of the Russian State

Bank—an exceedingly able financier, who plays in Persia a part similar to that filled by Mr. Pokotilov, the manager of the Russo-Chinese Bank in China. Indeed, since he is the *protégé* of M. Witte, it is not certain that he does not indirectly wield a greater power than the present occupant of the Russian Legation. At all events the head of the Russian Bank in Teheran, being not only a financier but a trusted agent of his own Government and also an important factor in the commercial undertakings which the bank fosters, may be regarded as one at least of the most powerful men in the Persian capital.

Last, but not least, of the four predominant figures is Mr. Naus, the Director-General of Customs for Persia. In most other countries the controller of customs is merely a paid official of the Government, entrusted with certain routine work which has no political significance. In a country like Persia, however, where the customs have been placed in the hands of a foreign staff, and where the money collected at the ports is almost the only available security for the raising of foreign loans, the controller may, if he likes, become a political factor of importance. There is nothing, for example, to prevent Mr. Naus filling in Persia the place which in China has for so many years been occupied by Sir Robert Hart. Indeed, the possibilities in the case of Mr. Naus are even greater; for while the famous "I.G." has always shown what is perhaps a constitutional disinclination to invest his office with a political significance, his Belgian counterpart in



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Persia strikes one as being of a different and more ambitious character. Mr. Naus is a large powerful man of the fair Flemish type, with a big head on his broad shoulders, and a strong, not to say cruel, jaw. His utterance, sharp, incisive, and slightly guttural, with an almost ferocious rolling of the "r's," leaves no doubt on the mind of the hearer as to the intention of the speaker. To converse with him for five minutes is to be convinced of his executive ability, and his power to control his subordinates.

Mr. Naus' record speaks for itself. Brought out to Persia from the Customs Department of Belgium, in 1898, he first of all undertook the collecting of duties at Tabriz and Kermanshah. So successful was the first attempt to do away with the pernicious system of farming the customs, that the experiment was soon extended, until in 1900 nearly all the ports of entry were included in the new *régime*. By the end of the twelvemonth, March 1900 to March 1901, the customs revenue had increased 50 per cent., though the full 5 per cent. duty was not yet exacted at all the ports. The year 1901–1902 was even more successful. The full duty was collected at every barrier except at Mohammerah, where the Sheikh still farmed the customs, with the result that the total sum collected (of which the figures are not yet published) was just about double what the Persian Government used to obtain when Mr. Naus first arrived from Europe. That the new *régime* should have been inaugurated without mistakes was not to be expected. I have in a former chapter pointed out the errors of judgment

which have been committed in the Gulf, where the subordinates are a long way from headquarters. Nor are we here concerned with the question whether the establishment of foreign control over the customs under Belgian direction has been beneficial or otherwise to British interests in Persia.

As a means of collecting revenue the new *régime* has been entirely successful, and as such it may be duly admired as one of the very few instances of foreign management in Persia which have not proved total failures. Moreover, lest there should be any misconception, it is only fair to point out that the control of the customs is in no sort of way in the hands of Russia. Not long ago an Anglo-Indian traveller, who had returned to Europe by way of the Seistan route, remarked in a public address that the Belgian customs were simply Russian under another name, or words of like effect. Whether this is so remains to be seen; one can only say that in view of the present facts the remark is wholly unjustified. There is not a single Russian in the Customs Department, nor have the Russians any interest at all in the collection of the customs, save in so far as the greater part of the revenue so collected is hypothecated as security for the Russian loans, and this might equally have been the case if Mr. Naus and all his subordinates had been British. That the controller of customs is pro-Russian rather than pro-British may very well be the case—he would hardly be a Belgian if he were not—and anyhow, as an ambitious man, with expansive ideas, he would

naturally side with the Power that has a far-sighted and constructive policy in Persia.

For that reason it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Great Britain is likely to be handicapped in the future by the presence of the Belgians as a factor in Persian politics. But to state that Russia, through the Belgians, has even now the control of the Persian customs is neither just nor true, nor is it right to withhold from Mr. Naus the credit that is already due to him as an exceedingly able administrator. In a wonderfully short space of time he has presented the Shah with a new and tangible asset which that monarch has already mortgaged. In the meantime Mr. Naus has been preparing a new set of commercial treaties, which may produce a still greater customs revenue, and are believed by many to be framed for the special advantage of Russia. That we shall know when the new commercial treaty with Russia is promulgated. One thing is quite certain—that we shall hear a good deal more of Mr. Naus before we have done with the Persian question.

These, then, are the four great men of Teheran, leaving aside the Diplomatic Corps, which may be said to be in Teheran, but not of it—the members of the various legations being little more than transient visitors, whose actions are controlled by foreign cabinets or Ministers for Foreign Affairs and dictated by political emergencies altogether outside of Persia. Down below, on a quite different level, are the numerous concession hunters and those whose concessions have actually crystallised into industries which are for the most part complete and unmitigated

failures. These may be divided into two classes—the optimists and the pessimists. To the first class belong those whose schemes are still on paper and who, therefore, still entertain hopes of extracting capital from the more gullible investors of Europe. To the second class belong those whose schemes have materialised and failed and who, therefore, have little more to hope for in either Europe or Persia. As it happened the optimists had mostly departed for Europe when I reached Teheran. Their name is not legion. Indeed, the class which is rapidly becoming extinct, would seem to be represented almost entirely by two famous and inveterate concessionists. Their trump card is still a great railway concession, which was obtained from the Persian Government, about twenty years ago, and has never yet reached even the syndicate stage. It is registered in the French Legation,' which will have none of it since the Franco-Russian Alliance bound the interests of France to those of Russia in the East. Naturally no other legation is likely to take it up, so that, for all the optimism of the sanguine owners, it is likely to remain a concession and nothing more.

On the other hand, the Belgians—it always seems to be the Belgians who start these schemes—have left their monuments in and about Teheran, still tended by a dwindling staff of managers and workers whose ill success has jaundiced their view of foreign enterprise in Persia. There is, for instance, the sugar factory—a fine building with plenty of foreign machinery, which was to have done wonders for Persian industry. Unfortunately the originators of the

enterprise had forgotten to calculate the amount of beetroot available for the manufacture of sugar, and it was not until the capital had been spent and the work started that the total supply was found to be just sufficient to keep the factory going for six months in every three years. The gas works have suffered a similar fate. There is nothing wrong with the works or the number of lamps which were put up in a few of the streets of Teheran. There are also large coal mines within forty miles of the city. But the simple fact had been overlooked that owing to the abnormal cost of transport in Persia the coal could not be delivered in Teheran at a price much below £5 a ton. Hence the experience of the gas works. The sanguine management had entered into a three years' contract to supply a Persian dealer with the refuse coke—so that the gas works must go on making coke at a heavy loss though they have ceased to make gas. Another company—Belgian, of course—started a glass factory in Teheran, but the result was disappointing.

Then an attempt has been made to improve farming in Persia by starting a model village with fresh stock, good seeds, and a dairy regulated according to the experience of Europe and America. The manager arrived, a Belgian, but one with a wide knowledge of farming in the Western States of America. He was given a village on the south side of Teheran, which was inhabited by notoriously bad characters; the good European seed which he distributed was readily absorbed, but never reappeared in the shape of crops His prize cattle from Russia were unable to breed

with the Persian cow; his dairy, from which much was hoped, was the least successful of all because in the first place everything he bought, whether it was fodder or cattle or milk, was sold to the "feringhi" at prohibitive prices; and secondly, not a single Persian would touch cream or butter or cheese which was polluted by the management of an infidel. In a word, the Persians ensured his discomfiture before he had so much as started work. He is now longing for the time when his contract will close and he may return to what his adopted countrymen call "God's own country."

In going to Teheran at the season at which I was there one is confronted almost entirely with the pessimist view of foreign enterprise in Persia. I was hardly surprised to find that this pessimism was particularly marked where the interests of Great Britain were concerned. Russian trade has been making rapid strides lately in the north, and is even penetrating to Isfahan and the south, to the detriment, it is said, of British trade—and as for Russian prestige and influence they are now supreme throughout Persia. This view, which seems to be held by every one in Teheran, has also been expressed by many writers in Europe, but by none so vigorously as a certain Dr. Rohrbach, who, after a rapid journey through Persia in 1901, contributed an article on the country to the "Prussian Year-book," in which he states, and endeavours to prove, that the future of Great Britain, as far as Persia is concerned, is absolutely *nil.* "*England's zukunft im Lande vorbei ist, vorbei vom Golf bis an der Kaspi, von den Alpen*

Kurdistans bis zur pforte von Indien" ("England's future in the land is past, from the Gulf to the Caspian, from the mountains of Kurdistan to the gates of India)". If this were really true it would be a very serious matter. If it' is not actually true to-day but may become so to-morrow, it is still more serious, just as sickness must cause more anxiety than death. There is such a strong feeling among those who ought to know something about Persian affairs that if it is not true now it is a state of things which can only be averted by means of a strong and determined effort that I feel induced to examine the facts of the case as far as they can be ascertained in a country like Persia—and this in spite of the copious magazine literature already devoted to the subject, which seems always to miss the essential points and is seldom well informed.

CHAPTER XXIII

GREAT BRITAIN *VERSUS* RUSSIA

THE general opinion in Teheran is that Russia is driving Great Britain out of the field in Persia. I have already quoted the sweeping statement made on this subject in the pages of the "Prussian Year-book" by a German traveller. He merely expressed in writing what every one, of whatever nationality, constantly repeats in conversation in Persia. The cry is not a new one, but it has grown in volume in recent years, and there are many facts which seem to justify it. Nothing can conduce more effectually to the carrying out of a wise British policy in Persia than a clear understanding of these facts.

For the sake of convenience I shall divide the discussion of the whole question into three parts. First and foremost, we have to decide whether it is true, as is frequently asserted, that Russia is capturing the trade in Persia, which once was so largely British; secondly, it is important to know what has been done by either Power to advance its trade, and whether it is true that Russia has a great advantage in the matter of communications; thirdly, it remains to deal with the constant assertion that while Russian political influence has grown to enormous proportions at the capital of the Shah, the prestige

of Great Britain has not only waned but has ceased to exist.

The trade question may be regarded as by far the most important, because for a Power like Great Britain, whose policy is almost entirely directed by commercial motives, it is necessary above all things to know whether we have real trade interests in Persia, and whether those interests are increasing or decreasing.

There is the initial difficulty in dealing with this portion of the subject that there are no trustworthy figures to be obtained in Persia. There is, indeed, no other country in the world where it is easier, by a little statistical juggling, to prove that of two contradictory propositions both may be true. The only possible means of escaping a *reductio ad absurdum* lies in appraising each set of figures at its true value, or, to put it more forcibly, to extract the modicum of truth from each tissue of falsehood. To be completely successful in the task is practically impossible. I shall be content if I can modify the sweeping statements which have been made by those who have glanced only at one set of figures, and that perhaps the least trustworthy, without taking the trouble to discriminate or compare.

Two landmarks may be chosen at the outset in order to keep the discussion within reasonable bounds. The first of these is the admirable summing up of the commercial situation in Persia about the year 1890 by Lord Curzon, which offers an excellent standard of comparison, and the second is the set of figures which emanated from the office

of the new Customs Administration for the year 1900–1901, the Persian year beginning on March 21, according to our calendar.

The author of the standard work on Persia, after a minute and laborious research, estimated the total foreign trade of Persia about the year 1890 at from £7,000,000 to £7,500,000 sterling, divided between imports and exports in the ratio of two to one—*i.e.*, £5,000,000 imports, and £2,500,000 exports. He also gives a lower estimate, based on another series of facts or so-called facts, but he evidently prefers the higher total. Of this trade England and all British possessions absorbed about £3,000,000, of which £2,000,000 might be imports into Persia, and £1,000,000 exports from Persia. Russia, on the other hand, even on her own showing, could not claim more than £881,920 of the imports, and £1,164,968 of the exports, a total of a little over £2,000,000.

In those days, therefore—not much more than ten years ago—of the whole trade of Persia, amounting to £7,500,000 sterling, Great Britain and her dependencies accounted for 40 per cent. and Russia for 26 or 27 per cent. But if we confine our attention to the imports, which for our commerce are of far greater importance than the exports, the comparison was even more favourable to us. Our share was still 40 per cent., while that of Russia was only 17.6 per cent.

It may be argued that these figures are at best only approximations, and very rough approximations; and, indeed, it would be easy enough to take excep-

tion to many of Lord Curzon's computations. But to do so would lead to hopeless confusion, while on the other hand it must be remembered that since any calculation in Persia partakes of the nature of guesswork, we can only come to any conclusion at all by accepting the results of the most painstaking research that has yet been devoted to the subject.

Then let us look for a moment towards the other landmark. The figures given out by Mr. Naus, and published in the "Statesman's Year-book" for 1902, refer to the year March 21, 1900, to March 21, 1901, and they have been quoted by almost every writer who has dealt with the subject in the newspapers and magazines of the last few months. Moreover, as emanating from the bureau of the Belgian Administration, they command a respect which is not accorded to most Persian statistics, not even to consular reports. When compared with Lord Curzon's figures of ten years before, they exhibit a most remarkable and melancholy decline in British trade, and a corresponding advance on the part of Russia, quite sufficient to justify the most pessimistic predictions. The total trade of Persia is given as £8,000,000, an increase of only £500,000 over Lord Curzon's estimate for 1889. Of this sum Russia claims £4,501,000, or 56.3 per cent., and Great Britain £1,920,000, or 24 per cent.

If we turn to the column of imports, the disparity is not quite so striking, but is still great enough to be exceedingly discouraging. Russian goods, according to the table, amounted in value to £28,58,000, or 55.9 per cent. of the total, while

the British and British Indian imports were valued at only £1,400,000, or 27.4 per cent. The sum total of imports is entered as £5,107,000, or only £107,000 above the round sum given by Lord Curzon ten years before.

Now, the melancholy thing about this table of figures is not so much the relative advance made by Russia as the actual—not comparative—falling off in British imports. It should be here explained that throughout the discussion I regard British trade as embracing the trade of India and other British possessions. Instead of the £2,000,000 of 1889–1890, we find only £1,400,000 in 1900–1901. The exports to British possessions have also fallen off woefully, though that is a matter which does not so directly concern our manufacturing prosperity.

It is curious that so extraordinary a change in the commercial conditions of Persia should have been accepted by British writers without any further inquiry. And this is not entirely due to the general apathy in England with regard to Persian affairs, for I find the same calm acceptance of these sad figures in an article in the January number of the *Quarterly Review* for 1902 which is not only an eloquent demand for a clearer understanding of the Persian and Mesopotamian questions, but is evidently written by some one who is in close touch with the passing events of the Persian capital.

His apparent knowledge of Persian affairs should have warned this writer not to take as accurate the testimony of any statistics that ever came out of Teheran without at least some attempt to check



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them. In reality this Customs House report is unreliable and is, in fact, not a Customs House report at all. That is where the author of the article in the *Quarterly* has been misled.

The year in question was the first in which the Belgian Administration took more or less complete charge of the various ports of entry into Persia, the only place of any importance still omitted from their jurisdiction being Mohammerah. Still, as it was only the first year, and it was impossible all at once to impose the full duties and to abolish all the old abuses which had grown up under the farming system, Mr. Naus, the Controller of Customs, published no report whatever; nor has there been, as yet, any customs report for a year's trade in Persia.

It is only fair, then, to state that Mr. Naus is not responsible for the publication of figures in the "Statesman's Year-book" or elsewhere. He did, however, give what figures he had to one or two people in Teheran, with permission to use the information for publication if they so desired, and it is perfectly correct to state, as did the writer of the article in the "Statesman's Year-book" that the figures given were kindly furnished by the Customs Administration. But this is a very different thing from a customs report for which the Controller of Customs would be directly reponsible.

It remains, then, to consider how far these figures, informally given out to a few individuals in Teheran, expressed the actual facts of the case. For my own part I regard them as quite untrustworthy. On the

face of the matter it must be evident to any one who knows anything about the trade of Persia that the imports into the country must have increased more than £107,000 in the last ten years.

For not only do consular reports show an increase, but, if they are not to be taken seriously, one has only to look at the increase of shipping in the Gulf on the one hand, and the enormous efforts being made by Russia in the north to monopolise the trade of Persia, to be convinced that the volume of trade and to a less extent the sterling value of trade must have increased more than 2 per cent. in ten years. It is equally obvious that British trade, which still has almost a monopoly of the Gulf routes and the Bagdad route, which is predominant as far north as Isfahan, and still competes on rather more than equal terms with the trade of Russia in Tabriz and Hamadan, and which is by no means extinct in Teheran and Meshed, can hardly have fallen to less than half the value of its rival, which ten years ago it so far outstripped.

These superficial reflections, which are, nevertheless, confirmed by observation on the spot, are sufficient to cast a good deal of doubt on the so-called customs returns. But when we come down to figures the doubts are changed to certainties.

The Administration reports of the Persian Gulf for the year 1900 show a total trade in British and British-Indian goods with the Gulf ports of £1,500,000. If we add to this total £295,154 for the import of British goods into Mohammerah and £700,000 on account of the Kermanshah route,

which I have discussed at length in a previous chapter, and £260,000 for the transit trade by way of Trebizond—and this is a minimum figure—we arrive at a total of not less than £2,750,000 for the value of British and British-Indian imports into Persia.

This estimate could be further enlarged by a few other items such as the small trade on the Seistan route, and the imports into one or two insignificant ports like Chahhar. But how can it be reconciled with the £1,400,000 of the customs figures? It is a common practice to sneer at consular returns, especially in a country like Persia, where there are very few consuls *de carrière* in the service of the British Government. But the figures I have quoted are not entirely taken from consular reports.

I have compared a number of independent authorities on the subject of the Tabriz trade, and the lowest estimate that can be given of British trade coming into Tabriz (including the import of Indian tea) is £260,000. As regards Kermanshah we have the consular report of 1897 with the estimate made by the syndicate of merchants who wished to tender for the customs, and the actual returns of last year in the books of the custom house which at least furnishes us with a minimum figure, and £700,000 is likely to be under rather than over the true amount.

As for the Administration reports of the Gulf furnished by the Indian Government Press, their trade statistics are based almost entirely on the manifests of British steamers which practically

monopolise the trade of the Gulf, aided by the invoices of the foreign trading firms which certainly would not overstate the value of imports that have to pass through a customs house. No account is taken of the desultory commerce with India, which is served by the native sailing-craft. I see no reason at all, therefore, why the British officials in the Gulf should be supposed to have given exaggerated reports of the British trade with the Gulf ports.

Two facts should be borne in mind in attempting to account for the extraordinary discrepancy between the total I have arrived at and the total given by the Customs Administration. In the first place, Mohammerah, which is responsible for £295,154, was not under the jurisdiction of Mr. Naus, and, in the second place, the Administration reports of the Gulf deal with the year reckoned from the 1st of January to the 1st of January following, while the customs year is reckoned from the 21st of March—and it is possible that the Bushire and Lingah and Bunder Abbas merchants endeavoured to avoid the enhanced duties which came in force with the new *régime* on March 21, 1900, by getting in the bulk of the goods for the year before that date. But even these considerations will not account for the difference between £2,750,000 and £1,400,000.

Must we, then, impugn the figures given in the "Statesman's Year-book" and elsewhere? I am convinced of the absolute straightforwardness of the authority on Persia who gave these figures to the world. There cannot be a shadow of doubt that he received them from Mr. Naus, who undoubtedly gave

the totals as he got them from the various branches of his department. But, as it is hardly necessary to point out, customs returns, while they fix a minimum figure, may still give an inaccurate idea of the volume of trade. The new *régime* was hardly in working order, and it seems to have been particularly irregular in those places which were farthest removed from the eye of the controller. There is no doubt that the revenue was not properly collected at Kermanshah until Baron Wedel, the present director, was sent to the post. I do not for an instant mean to say that the late director of customs of Bushire, who met with an untimely death last year, was not strictly honest in his dealings. It is only sufficient to suppose that coming to the Gulf, where the revenue collected under the old farming system had been ridiculously inadequate, and where the new system had not been tentatively begun previously as in the north, he was unable in the first year to exact proper duties or to arrive at the true value of the trade. He did not, in fact, collect more than 3 per cent. at the outside as an average rate, and it may very well be that in adding up totals in Teheran the customs revenue of the Gulf was taken as a criterion of the trade of the Gulf ports on a basis of 5 per cent., the legal duty, which would result in under-estimating the true volume of trade by two-fifths.

It may be argued at this point that if British trade was undervalued the same may be true of Russian trade. All we can say on that point is that we have the very best indications from independent sources that British trade was undervalued, while all the

estimates that can be got of Russian imports from merchants themselves and other independent sources such as the great Russian transport company (the Caucase Mercure) seem to show that the customs estimate is quite high enough. Nor is it at all unlikely that the new administration was more effective in the north within easy reach of Teheran than in the distant south. I have, moreover, a rather curious means of confirming this view, which is not conclusive, but is, nevertheless, of sufficient interest to set down here.

The Customs Administration has promised its first real report for the trade of the year 1901–1902. In the meantime Mr. Naus was good enough to furnish me with the figures for the first six months of the year as well as those of the first six months of the previous year with which they are compared. There was no distinction made between nationalities or ports of entry in the lists he gave me, but he volunteered the information that the increase in the value of the trade was almost entirely in favour of Great Britain and her dependencies. On examining the figures I discovered that there was an increase of 26 per cent. in the imports for the first six months. If this average were to be kept up for the rest of the year the total increase in imports for the year 1901–1902 over the previous year would be £1,327,820, and if the increase were to continue to be in favour of Great Britain and India the share of the imports for the whole year held by British and Indian manufacturers would be £2,727,820.

These are two big assumptions, it is true, yet it is

curious that the sum arrived at corresponds with the £2,750,000 which I gave as the more correct estimate of British trade. If we allow for a small proportion of the increase in the customs figures falling to other nations, it must also be remembered that the customs returns still omit Mohammerah with its £295,154 of British and Indian imports. I would not be at all surprised, then, judging from what Mr. Naus himself told me, to find that the customs returns for 1901–1902 attribute to Great Britain almost as large a share of the imports as I have given for 1900–1901 ; that is to say, the amount in the customs books will be almost doubled.

But can it really be a fact that the value of British imports has increased 100 per cent. in one year? Most decidedly not. Last year's Administration reports for the Gulf have not yet reached Teheran, but I know from personal inquiry that British trade in the Gulf increased very little, if at all, last year. It may have risen a little at Bunder Abbas, but it probably fell at Bushire, so that the total is hardly altered. At Bagdad it varied very little, and at Tabriz, if it increased at all—which I cannot discover—the amount must have been insignificant. If, therefore, the customs returns show an increase in the value of British imports of from 90 to 100 per cent. over the previous year, one can only conclude that the returns of the previous year were quite wrong as regards this portion of the trade.

On the whole I am firmly convinced by personal inquiry and by published reports of our own consuls, which I would not regard as conclusive if they were

not backed by abundant local evidence, that while the value of Russian imports, as given in the table furnished in the "Statesman's Year-book," is more or less correct, the value of British imports is tremendously underrated to the extend of nearly 100 per cent., and that the true estimate should not be short of £2,750,000. Then it follows that Russia, instead of possessing 55.9 per cent. of the import trade has not more than 44.4 per cent., while Great Britain and her dependencies still hold 42.4 per cent.

If one is inclined to be particularly scrupulous, one may reckon that about 2 per cent. should be knocked off the British total, because British goods coming from a greater distance have an enhanced value at the port of entry, which the manufacturer does not receive. It is impossible to calculate the difference exactly, but I doubt whether it amounts to very much, since both Indian and British goods arrive at the port of Bushire much more cheaply than Russian goods at the port of Resht. It is only at Tabriz and Kermanshah that we are at a disadvantage in this respect.

Roughly, then, the position to-day amounts to this. Greater Britain's share of Persian trade, as far as imports are concerned, has, if anything, increased in the last ten years (from 40 per cent. to 42.4 per cent.), while in absolute value the increase has been even more marked. We now import goods to the value of £2,750,000, instead of £2,000,000, which means an increase of about 37 per cent.

I know that there is a good deal that is hypo-

thetical about these figures, yet such as they are, they are much more reliable than the table given by the "Statesman's Year-book," which has been responsible for a great deal of unnecessary lamentation. If any one took the trouble to examine and compare the statistics given in that book of reference alone, he would immediately have his surprise excited. For instance, without a word of explanation the figures of the Persian Gulf Administration reports are printed on the very next page to the customs table which they so emphatically contradict. A little below will be found the following remarkable statement: "Persia has a large trade with Russia, amounting for imports to about £850,000, and exports to £350,000." It is impossible to say where these figures come from. Probably from some ancient consular reports of fifteen years ago.

After so much contradiction it is not surprising to find on one page the information that Persia exports carpets each year to the value of £140,000, and on another page that carpets to the value of £143,000 were exported by way of Trebizond in 1900, and to the value of £22,610 from Meshed to Russia. If we add exports of carpets by way of Resht and Bagdad and the Gulf we shall soon get up to a total of at least £250,000.

In reality, considering the absence of decent communications in Persia, we have little cause to be dissatisfied with the progress of British trade in Persia. It is only when we begin to compare our progress with that made by Russia in the same

time that we find serious grounds for apprehension. Russia has more than trebled her imports in ten years, while we have only increased ours by 37 per cent., and even on the basis of the calculation made above she has now a slightly larger share of the import trade into Persia than her rival who, ten years ago, so easily surpassed her. That is to say, while we have rather more than held our own, Russia has driven all other competitors into a very far corner of the field, and threatens to encroach even on our territory very soon.

The situation is quite serious enough—though I must postpone the discussion of the rise of Russian trade to another chapter. What I hope to have established is this: That Great Britain and India have still a large share of the import trade of Persia, larger, in fact, than they had ten years ago, and almost, if not quite, as large as that of Russia, in spite of the erroneous figures which have lately been accepted as true. It is of great importance to see this clearly. Since there is a danger lest the opinion should arise that British trade in Persia is on the decline, is doomed to fall away altogether, and is therefore not worth fighting for even on the bloodless fields of diplomacy.

CHAPTER XXIV

RUSSIA'S POLICY

THAT there is no reason as yet to despair of British trade in Persia has been sufficiently demonstrated. We still hold over 40 per cent. of the import trade, and our commerce is on the increase. If we kept our eyes on this side of the question, there would be no apparent cause for lamentation. It is only when we turn to the Russian side, and see the great advance made in recent years by our rival, that we begin to show signs of alarm varying in degree according to our different temperaments. The volume of imports from Russia into Persia has more than trebled in ten years, and the volume of Persian exports to Russian territory has been multiplied at the same rate. The question that arises is: Where is this rapid advance going to stop, and what chance have our manufacturers of competing against it?

Many people, especially in Teheran, regard the north as already gone as far as we are concerned—the north including Tabriz, Teheran, and Meshed—and serious inroads are being made on Isfahan and the central district generally, to say nothing of the recent raids on the south carried out by means of the newly subsidised steamers from Odessa. The pressure brought to bear on our commercial forces

is so insistent that there is a danger of panic spreading in the ranks, ending in defeat and utter rout. In order to avert such a disaster a serious effort is required on our side, such an effort as perhaps only the Government, or private individuals backed up by the Government, can make. But before we move in the matter it would be as well to know first if the danger is as imminent as is generally supposed; and secondly, what means the Russians are employing to ensure success, and whether these means are of a sort to make that success permanent.

When you come to examine the existing condition of trade in Northern Persia, you will, as an outsider, be struck not so much with the overwhelming predominance of Russian trade as with the very respectable "show" still made by the British manufacturer. To talk of the north being given over to Russia is pure moonshine. With the exception of the small towns on the northern slope of the Elburz range which are supplied with foreign goods by way of the Caspian, there is not a single centre of any importance where British manufactures are not very well represented. It must be remembered that a few miles to north or south, or east or west makes a great difference in a country like Persia, where transport is so abnormally expensive—amounting generally to 8*d.* or 9*d.* per ton a mile. Hence curious conditions arise. Teheran, for instance, is more given over to Russian trade than Tabriz, which is much nearer to the Russian border, the reason being that at Tabriz the effect of the Trebizond route is strongly felt, while at Teheran it is not felt at all. Meshed

is even nearer to a Russian railway, yet the Transcaspian route is still so expensive that it has by no means overpowered the import trade with Manchester and Bombay by way of Tabriz and the long Bunder-Abbas-Kerman caravan route. It is quite true that the British imports into Tabriz have dwindled sadly from the magnificent totals of the early part of the last century—supposing these totals to have been correct. They only amount to about half of the imports of ten years ago ; indeed, the figures for 1900, which show not much more than a value of £260,000 for British and Indian goods, are rather insignificant. But one reason for this decrease has been the opening of the Suez Canal, which has turned traffic to new routes. Hamadan, for example, which not long ago drew almost entirely on Tabriz for its foreign supplies, is now served by the Bagdad-Kermanshah route. Tabriz, therefore, is really a local market in a comparatively speaking rich district, and no longer presumes to feed Teheran. It is rather difficult to obtain even approximately correct figures regarding the trade of Tabriz, since the information gleaned from the customs returns of Trebizond, and from the foreign houses here, do not always tally with the consular reports which the British representative at Tabriz draws up based on information given by the local merchants. Without any pretensions, therefore, to exactness where exactness is impossible, it may be stated that the annual import trade of Tabriz amounts to about £750,000, of which a third part belongs to Greater Britain, a third to Russia, and a third to other European nations. It

is probable that the Russian trade will increase as the Tiflis-Erivan railway nears the Persian border at Julfa. Yet it is interesting to note that Russia's present share of the trade consists chiefly of articles such as sugar and petroleum, in which we do not compete. In cotton goods and woollens the proportion of Russian imports is doubtless growing, but is still insignificant—perhaps not more than 10 per cent. of the whole. It was a wise move on the part of the part of Messrs. Ziegler to organise the carpet industry at Tabriz just as they had done already at Sultanabad. Through this means a large number of carpets, valued at £143,000, go from Tabriz to Europe by way of Trebizond, and their value returns in the shape of manufactures from Western Europe.

When we come to Teheran it is extremely difficult to arrive at any definite conclusions at all regarding the predominance of Russian trade. For the last two years the Russian Government has been straining every nerve to push its wares over the new Resht-Teheran road, which was built at such cost with money to a large extent supplied by the Government itself. The imports by way of Resht amounted to nearly £1,500,000 in value, while there is still a considerable trade done with Teheran by the more difficult but cheaper track to Meshed-i-Ser on the Caspian. A good deal of the trade of the Resht route stops at Kasvin, or is diverted from there to Hamadan, from where it filters slowly down to Sultanabad, and even Burujird. But about two-thirds comes on to Teheran, and supplies not only the capital itself, but Kum and Kashan, and now,

to a certain extent, Isfahan. It is quite obvious that no such volume of British manufactures ever reaches Teheran—indeed, it is only in piece-goods that we can compete at all with the Russian manufacturer. How far we maintain a footing in this respect it is difficult to say. There is only one foreign wholesale firm in Teheran which sells British goods at all, and that is the firm of Messrs. Groeneweg, Dunlop, and Co., the agents of the Dutch firm of Hotz and Co. Messrs. Groeneweg, Dunlop, and Co. import piece-goods from Great Britain and Russia in about equal quantities; all the other Manchester wares that reach Teheran are brought up from Isfahan by native merchants. A very large amount of cotton goods is imported from Moscow by the Russian Banque d'Escompte and sold at low rates on credit to the Persian merchants. On the whole it is probable that the Moscow manufacturers, who ten years ago could hardly compete against Manchester in Teheran, have now captured about two-thirds of the market.

At Meshed, curiously enough, Russia, in spite of her railway and road, has not yet monopolised the trade. Where Russia imports goods to the value of £180,000 Great Britain and India still contribute about £150,000. The whole trade in cotton goods is not much more than £80,000, of which Russia sends £50,000 and Great Britain the rest. India, of course, profits by the demand for tea, which is worth some £60,000 to her annually, in spite of the doing away of the transit trade by way of Persia to Central Asia.

Is it really true, then, that our trade interests in

Northern Persia are gone? Surely not, since at Tabriz we hold our own up to the present, at Hamadan we have an advantage over our rivals, at Meshed we should at least preserve the monopoly of the tea trade, and only at Teheran do we appear to be fatally losing ground. The Russians have made great strides with the aid of rather big stilts, but it is hardly time to abandon the field entirely.

There are two reasons generally assigned for Russian predominance in the trade of the north—first the advantage of her position, and secondly her bounty system. I am inclined to think that the second reason has more to do with the matter than the first, and if this should prove to be the case her present success might turn out to be of an artificial sort, apt to collapse at any moment. Moscow is certainly nearer to Teheran than Manchester is. But for trade purposes distances must not always be measured by miles. As far as Teheran goes, the advantage held by Russia is far more apparent than real. The present freight-charges from Moscow to Teheran average not less than £18 a ton—about three roubles per pood. Prices vary in summer and winter, the railway charges in Russia being lowered in summer to compete with the river navigation. The cost of transport on the road from Resht to Teheran also varies according to the season of the year. I am assured, however, by the agent of the Kavkaz Merkur (the Caspian Steamship Company) that three roubles per pood is rather under than over the average—and the price from Moscow to Enzeli, on the Caspian, is exactly equivalent to transport

from Enzeli to Teheran, that is, 1.50 roubles per pood. Turning to the Bushire route, which is almost the only one which now supplies Teheran with European goods, we find that the cost of freight by steamer from Manchester to Bushire is about 45*s.* per ton for piece-goods—that is, for a ton of 20 cwt. —steamer freights being regulated according to cubic feet for the most part. From Bushire to Teheran the transport by caravan costs on an average nearly £20. Hence the transport for piece-goods from Manchester to Teheran may be set down as costing about £22 per ton on the average as against £18 per ton from Moscow to Teheran—the time occupied on the former journey being considerably the longer, and often exceeding nine months.

It is important to point out here that the Resht-Teheran road, which has cost Russian capitalists and the Russian Government together close on half a million pounds, has in no way diminished the cost of transport by that route; on the contrary, the charges, owing to the heavy tolls levied, are at least 10 per cent. higher than they were when there was nothing but a mule-track over the Elburz range; and so it comes about that merchants in fine weather often use the old Meshed-i-Ser route, which is nothing but a bad mountain path, in preference to the new and expensive carriage road. I shall have to enlarge on this fact later on in discussing communications in Persia. For the present it is sufficient to explain that, contrary to the assertions so often made by writers on this subject, the Resht-Teheran road has in no way conferred a benefit on Russian trade by lowering

the cost of transport. It has only made communication with the Caspian possible at all seasons of the year, and so quickened the carriage of goods and rendered breakable wares more secure from damage.

Now the difference between £18 and £22 in the cost of transporting a ton of piece-goods, though it cannot be altogether disregarded, is not sufficient to make the Manchester manufacturer succumb before the comparative neophyte in Russia.

It is a much more serious matter when we come to the bounty system. The Russian Government allows a drawback of 5.40 roubles per pood on all cotton goods exported into Persia. That is to say, the merchant is relieved of that amount, supposed to be paid in duty on the raw material. This premium amounts to the enormous sum of £35 on every ton of cotton goods sent from Russia to Persia. It may be argued that as the Manchester manufacturer imports his raw cotton free of duty this export premium, being only a rebate of duty, merely puts the Russian manufacturer on an equal footing with his rival. This argument might hold good if the 5.40 roubles per pood really represented the duty already paid on raw cotton; but in point of fact it can only represent the very highest duty that can be paid, since the tariff varies and Persian cotton can be imported to Russia with only a 5 per cent. duty. A great deal of raw cotton also comes from Transcaspia on which the manufacturer pays no duty at all. In any case, the manufacturer is relieved in this way of a certain amount of taxation which his Manchester colleague has to pay in the shape of income tax. In

view of this huge premium, the advantage of £4 or even £5 a ton in transport expenses appears insignificant. Indeed, it is quite certain that Moscow could hardly compete at all with Manchester if the export premium were removed.

The result for the moment is that the volume of Russian imports is swollen in an artificial manner, which may flatter the pride of the Government or the manufacturer, but in the meantime it has so flooded the far from capacious market with cheap Russian piece-goods, that the dealers have no need to import fresh wares for another twelvemonth and a depression in trade is almost sure to follow. Still the policy undoubtedly hurts the Manchester manufacturer, who not unnaturally wants to know why his Government cannot do something to help him in turn. But what can the Government do? Obviously no party in British politics would ever dream of imitating the elaborate system of premiums on exports which is of such assistance to Russian trade. There only remains to devise some means of cutting down the transport expenses in Persia so as to enable the British merchant to sell his goods in Northern Persia at a lower price. I have pointed out that the existing advantage which Russia possesses in this respect is not very great; but it will gradually become greater if no steps are taken on our side. The extension of the Tiflis-Erivan railway to Julfa will deal a serious blow to our trade with Tabriz by way of Trebizond, and, of course, when that line is prolonged, as it must eventually be, to Tabriz and Kasvin and Hamadan, with a

branch to Teheran, it will be high time for the British manufacturer to fall back and entrench himself somewhere about Shiraz unless—and it is a big reservation—our Government has done something in the way of a counter-move.

Short of taking the bull by the horns and building railways ourselves we can really effect very little as far as Northern Persia goes. Let us suppose for the sake of argument that the Ahwaz-Isfahan route secures the trade for the north which at present goes by way of Bushire. At the very best a saving of from £3 to £4 might be effected on the whole cost of carriage from the Gulf to the capital; but then the route is closed in winter. Or again, the Ahwaz-Dizful-Burujird route may be opened by the company which is at present being formed to take over the concession from the Imperial Bank of Persia. The saving in this case would not be greater, but the road would be available all the year round. The question is whether such a small reduction in the cost of transport will produce any change in the markets of Teheran. Against a rival working on a thoroughly sound basis the saving of £3 or £4 a ton might not avail much. Yet against Russia I believe it might prove efficacious for the moment as a means of bringing the present strain on the Government's resources to a breaking-point—as far as Persia is concerned. The Russian manufacturer, thanks to his Government, can sell his piece-goods in Teheran at a cheaper rate than he can in Moscow itself, in spite of the heavy cost of transport. To bring this about the Government must disburse at least half a

million roubles per annum in hard cash, and, including the export premium on sugar and losses in connection with certain trade enterprises, the total sum expended per annum on fostering trade in Persia cannot be less than 1,000,000 roubles. Even if the lowering of our transport rates has little immediate effect, it will tend to increase this lavish expenditure on our rival's side. And it still remains to be seen whether the result of this expenditure will justify the means. Already the game has been pushed rather far, and when I was in Teheran, a number of Persians have refused to take delivery of goods ordered by them from Russia because they find it impossible to get rid of their old stock. The Persian, in accordance with the Mohammedan law, has no scruples about refusing to carry out a contract which intervening circumstances have turned to his disadvantage.

It will not do, however, to count too much on the failure of a system which we have always been taught to regard as economically unsound. To begin with, the Russian Bank, which means simply the Russian Government, has now issued loans to the extent of 32,500,000 roubles to Persia on excellent security at the rate of 5 per cent. These loans were contracted for at a discount of 15 per cent., so that the Russian Government pockets a commission of no less than 4,850,000 roubles, and still has an excellent investment at 5 per cent. There is, therefore, a sum very little short of £500,000 sterling to cover the expenses of pushing Russian trade in Persia. In this way it comes about that

the wretched Persia, and not Russia, pays the Moscow manufacturer to undersell his Manchester competitor.

There is still a question whether or not the game in Persia is worth the candle. What, after all, is a trade that only amounts altogether in exports and imports to £9,000,000 or £10,000,000 per annum? Russia evidently thinks it is worth capturing. And, indeed, it is only in her dealings with Russia that Persia can be considered to be on a sound commercial basis. For several years, whatever trade reports may say, the exports from Persia to Russia have just about balanced the imports from Russia, and they have been carefully and wisely fostered by Russia, so that they have kept pace with the imports. With the exception of opium, gum, and carpets, all the raw products of Persia, find by far their readiest market in Russia, or at least are exported by way of Resht and the Caucasus. In recent years rice, cotton, silk, wool, and dried fruits have been produced in larger quantities than ever before in Persia, and the bulk of the export goes to Russian territory, where it is dealt with very tenderly by the customs. In the southern or British zone, the reverse is the case. The exports have by no means kept pace with the imports, and the only product which has really gone up in volume is opium. The considerable export trade in grain, on which the prosperity of Southern Persia largely depends, has been almost ruined by the embargo put on the export, which has now become a permanent condition of affairs. It stands to reason that a country is apt to buy in the market where it sells; hence an

enormous advantage accrues to Russia through the export to the Caucasus. It also requires little argument to prove that a country which imports more than it exports must be living to a certain degree on its capital, and so is becoming gradually impoverished. I have found many people in Persia who maintain that it is quite impossible for such a state of things to have existed for twenty years, and that the statistics which have so long declared the balance of trade to be against Persia in the ratio generally of two to one must be hopelessly inaccurate. They argue that if the balance of trade were against Persia, money would be leaving the country, currency would be scarce, and prices would fall; whereas, in reality, prices have risen and gold drafts on London are cheap. This is just the sort of argument that leads to nothing in Persia, because in a country so devoid of communications, no general statements are possible, nor are the same economic conditions to be found throughout the land.

For instance, it is impossible to prove that prices have risen as a whole in Persia. Silver prices have, of course, been doubled in the last twenty years owing to the depreciation of silver. Land, and food, and labour has become intrinsically dearer in Teheran, where there is a steady increase of the foreign element, and it is here, perhaps, that observations are most frequently made. Yet throughout Western Persia the price of grain is lower to-day than it has ever been in the memory of living man as far as I can discover—and that is a weighty fact which upsets the belief in rising prices.

The cheapness of gold drafts on London is easily enough accounted for by the scarcity of currency, which gives the kran a fictitious value. As to the scarcity of currency, there can be no doubt at all. It is for this reason that the kran, which has an intrinsic value at present of rather less than 4*d.*, circulates at the rate of about 4½*d.* The scarcity is partly attributed to the rottenness of the mint, which cannot turn out more than 3,000,000 tomans annually (*i.e.*, less than £600,000), so that a result is obtained similar to that which was obtained in India by the closing of the mints. But also it is necessary to believe that a good deal of money does leave the country, for the fresh krans that every year go out from Teheran never come back again, and they cannot all be hoarded. Unfortunately trade reports are useless as far as throwing light on the export of specie goes. All one can say with certainty is that there are millions of krans in Mesopotamia; that they used to go in such quantities to Transcaspia that the Russian Government forbade their circulation, and is even now taking measures to prevent them coming in, and that there is constantly a scarcity of them in Persia itself which gives them a fictitious value.

Finally, all the gold which not many years ago was quite common in the bazaars of the north, especially in Tabriz, has almost entirely disappeared, even from the Shah's treasury, and that is distinctly a bad sign. And really it is difficult to see why one should disbelieve the evidence of statistics such as they are in Persia, which, however inaccurate they

may be, never vary in this one respect, that they always show a balance of trade against Persia. It is argued sometimes that a good deal of merchandise or raw produce finds its way across the border where there is no customs house. But this argument tells both ways. A good deal comes in by the same unrecognised channels, and one illicit traffic of this sort, the import of arms along the Gulf coast, is of considerable importance. In the long run we are driven to accept the facts as they appear before us, and to believe that Persia is partly living on her capital, but this only in the southern or British zone. If this is so it stands to reason that our trade with Persia will soon cease to expand, unless we also do our utmost to increase the total of the exports, and since the exports must largely consist of raw products, which will not stand heavy transport charges, we must improve the means of communication in Persia.

So we always come round to the same conclusion —to combat Russian progress in the north, where we have no reason as yet to give up the fight, we must lower the transport charges. Our economic ideas forbid us to use other weapons, but this at least must be done by the Government or with the Government's assistance. Roads as a commercial speculation have been proved to be hopeless in Persia. Therefore, if we can only build roads or open mule-tracks the British Government must find the money or guarantee the interest on the capital expended. And even this step will not save us when Russia brings her railway across the Persian border.

As for our own sphere in the south, that also can be only be developed by improving communications so as to encourage exports, and by forcing the Persian Governors to abolish the disastrous embargo on the export of grain. We have a double reason, therefore, for beginning work in earnest. We have to meet Russia on her own ground, which I shall endeavour hereafter to show is only hers on sufferance, and we have to prevent our own sphere from going to complete rack and ruin. The question of communications then must be considered.

CHAPTER XXV

RUSSIA'S POLICY—(*Continued*)

SINCE it is clear that we can only meet the advance of Russian trade in Persia by improving communications south of Teheran to the Gulf, it is as well to understand the possible nature of such improvements. Beyond paying a subsidy to the company that runs a single steamer between Mohammerah and Ahwaz, the British Government has done absolutely nothing at all to further the interests of its merchants in Mesopotamia or Persia. The Indian Government, after many years, has spent a little money in opening the Nushki-Seistan route, which may tend to facilitate the transport of tea to Khorasan; but this is in the main a strategical measure. Russia, on the other hand, has acted differently. On the north-west side she is pushing her Caucasian railway down to the frontier, which will be reached in two years more at the very outside. Railhead was already at Erivan in 1901. On the direct route to Teheran the Resht-Teheran road has been made at enormous expense. On the Khorasan side Meshed has been joined with the railway at Askabad by a good road.

On our side private enterprise without any Government aid has built the road from Teheran

to Kum, and extended it in a sort of way to Sultanabad, thereby doing a service to Russian rather than British trade, and another private company has opened a track with two bridges between Ahwaz and Isfahan, which will be of considerable use when merchants and muleteers can be persuaded to use it. A suggestion that seems to meet with general approval is that the long-talked-of Burujird-Ahwaz road, of which the Kum road is the first portion (beginning from Teheran), should at last be taken properly in hand. I have in a previous chapter dealt with the advantages to be gained by opening up this means of communication.

If the route is to be opened—and the attempt is certainly worth making—I believe a mule track to be better for practical purposes than a carriageable road (*route carrossable*). It is a great mistake to think that carriage roads make transport cheaper. In Persia, at all events, they do not, and Russia has found this out to her cost, after spending enormous sums on her Resht road. She has made the journey much more comfortable for travellers—and we are all truly grateful—but her merchandise pays higher transport charges than it did before the road was built.

If the scheme is seriously entertained, it ought to be attempted with Government assistance and a Government guarantee. If the British Government were to undertake this task, not a very great one, were at the same time to give a little assistance to the Ahwaz-Isfahan route, and finally were to insist on the extension of navigation on the Tigris so as to

improve the Bagdad-Kermanshah route, our trade would certainly gain some small advantage, at least in Southern and Western Persia. It only remains for the British Government to find the means. We should then be able to meet Russian trade in the north on equal terms as far as transport charges are concerned, though we should still have the premium difficulty to face.

But the real difficulty which stands in the way of the development of Persian trade and Persian prosperity would hardly be affected by these small undertakings. The increase of commerce in this country depends so largely on the moving of raw products that it is impossible to make any headway without railways.

Here, for example, is a list of prices for grain, which is a lesson in itself. Wheat sells for 105 krans per kharvar (650 lbs.) in Teheran, 40 krans per kharvar in Sultanabad, and 10 krans per kharvar in Kermanshah. Barley costs 90 krans in Teheran, 20 krans in Sultanabad, and 5 krans in Kermanshah. The finest road in the world between Teheran and Sultanabad and Kermanshah would only to a very small degree modify these glaring disparities. As long as we depend on road transport alone it will cost ten times at least what the grain is worth to bring the abundant food-supply of Western Persia to the capital, which is only 300 miles away. And as long as the present conditions last the kindly fruits of the earth in Persia must rot on the ground in districts where the population is far too small to consume its own supplies.

Take another example. The Persian Mining Corporation, which was liquidated eight years ago, found rich mines of manganese ore in the Kerman district. Though the mines were only 300 miles from the Gulf it cost £9 or £10 per ton to carry the ore to the shore at Bunder Abbas. Naturally the mines had to be abandoned. A railway could have furnished transport at the rate of 10*s.* a ton and left a handsome margin for profit. Within forty miles of Teheran there are coal mines sufficient in capacity to supply the whole of Persia. Yet the cost of coal in Teheran varies from £4 to £5 a ton. So one might go on *ad infinitum*. It is impossible to develop the resources of Persia without railways, and it is impossible to increase our imports to any large extent unless these native resources are developed—on the contrary, the tendency will be in the opposite direction.

Against the building of railways on our side there are two hindrances. First of all there is a general belief that railways in Persia can never pay, and secondly, there is the Russo-Persian secret protocol which put off the building of railways in Persia until 1900, and is said to have been renewed, though no one here seems to know exactly for what period. As regards the first objection, it is difficult to see on what precise grounds it has been raised. There are many parts of Persia in which the movement of grain would be very great, the minerals are only waiting to be worked, and the foreign goods traffic is considerable. At least, there is no comparison between a country like Uganda and a country like

Persia, whose trade is already formed and whose agricultural industry is already very great. Yet the Uganda Railway is expected to pay in ten years time. As for the difficulties of construction, they are far from being insuperable. Persia in conformation is so exactly like South Africa that railway building in Cape Colony may be taken as a useful model from which to draw conclusions. The same plan would have to be followed of building lines from the shore up to the plateau, through and over great mountain barriers. In South Africa the average cost, including rolling stock, was only a little over £10,000 per mile. In Persia, with its cheap labour and cheap food, and the abundant supplies of labour close by in India, the cost might be considerably lessened, especially if the South African gauge were adopted. The trade centres and cultivated area are infinitely greater than they were in Cape Colony when railways were started there. There is no reason in the world why the right railways should not pay their way from the very start.

The question is what are the right routes for us. Time was when this might have been a difficult matter to decide, but circumstances have changed, and in changing have contracted our sphere of action. The line which most people consider to be the most serviceable in Persia is that which would run from Bagdad to Kermanshah, and so on by Sultanabad or Burujird, Isfahan, Yezd, Kerman, and on to Beluchistan. I cannot help thinking that the idea of such a railway is to a certain extent

fostered by the old longing for an overland route to India. A very short calculation would suffice to show that such a railway would never land one in either Bombay or Calcutta more quickly than the infinitely more comfortable steamer. But in any case we are not concerned with that question here, for the very simple reason that the Bagdad-Beluchistan alignment, though it may be kept as an ideal, is beyond our power to construct. Thanks to our own blindness, we have allowed the concession for a Mesopotamian Railway as far as Khanikin to fall to a foreign syndicate, and even if the syndicate does not build it immediately we cannot do anything on that side of the Persian border. And it is obvious that to start building a railway at Khanikin or Kermanshah would be as sensible as to start in the planet of Mars. We must begin where we have a base of supplies, and that brings us at once either to the Karun or the Gulf. It is generally supposed that it would be hopeless to attempt an ascent from Bushire—though it must be remembered that until last January the country between Bushire and Shiraz had never been surveyed, and all opinions on the subject are vague and rather worthless. Some day it is to be hoped that Shiraz will be connected with Bushire by rail.

But for the present we must look elsewhere, and Bunder Abbas and Mohammerah are the only starting-points that suggest themselves. Of these two the first to be chosen is Mohammerah, owing to the attractiveness of the Burujird-Teneran route, with branches to Kermanshah and Hamadan on the



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west side, and to Isfahan and Shiraz on the east. It would be perfectly safe to start this line with a capital of £5,000,000, but the £5,000,000 could not be raised without the guarantee of our Government. Will or can our Government act in the matter? There is the crux. A low guarantee of 2½ per cent. for ten years would, I believe, be quite sufficient to attract the capital, and it must be remembered that the whole capital would not be expended until the greater part of the time was expired, so that at the very worst the Government would not have to find more than £100,000 a year. Russia is spending that amount, and more, on pushing her trade, with this difference, that she is spending it on premiums which only prop up the fabric of commerce in a temporary manner. A guarantee on a railway has a more permanent value, and is less opposed to the accepted principles of political economy. This railway, which would be followed as soon as possible by a similar line from the coast, at Bunder Abbas to Kerman, and Yezd, and Isfahan or Kashan, would form an advanced base for the ideal line across Persia, which cannot be built until branches are first pushed up from the coast to carry material. It would develop trade in Southern and Western Persia at a rapid rate, and, above all, it would give us a tangible advantage over Russia in the markets of the north. This is a most important fact, which seems to have been entirely overlooked on our side, though it doubtless has received due consideration in Russia.

Whenever Teheran is connected by railway with

the Gulf, or, rather, with the Karun, the cost of transport will not exceed 30*s.* per ton. Add to this the 45*s.* for piece-goods from Manchester and we get a total of £3 15*s.* per ton from England to Teheran. Against this rate, which is a wonderful reduction from the existing £22, what can Russia do? By building her railway on from Erivan to Tabriz, Hamadan, and Teheran, the very best she could hope to do would be to reduce the cost of transport from Moscow to Teheran to half its present amount—*i.e.*, 1.50 roubles per pood. It costs 1.50 roubles at present to carry a pood from Moscow to Enzeli. This, I may say, is an average reckoning. In summer when the Volga is open the freight either by rail or river is lower—in winter it is higher—but according to the agent of the Kavkaz Merkur 1.50 roubles from Moscow to Enzeli is an average price per pood (36 lbs.). All the differential freight-rates in the world cannot make it cheaper to Teheran It would still, therefore cost £9 a ton to bring piece-goods by rail from Moscow to Hamadan or Teheran, as against the existing £18, and the English piece-goods would have an advantage of £5 5*s.* in the transport. No wonder Russia has determined to prevent us from building railways in Persia. So far from the North of Persia being naturally the Russian sphere, the reverse is the case. With a proper system of railways in Persia it would be impossible for Russia to compete with us in Teheran and perhaps even in Tabriz and Meshed without resorting to an increased bounty on exports, which is almost out of the question.

Surely, if our statesmen had recognised this simple

fact we should never have allowed the Russian Government to conclude its railway agreement with Persia in 1890, or, at least, we should have refused to recognise it from the very first. Unfortunately we have recognised it from the outset, and we seem to go on consenting to its renewal without a murmur. Yet what, after all, is this famous protocol? Simply a private agreement between the two Governments which has never been communicated to any other Power, and which, in point of fact, does not officially exist for us at all. And yet, if you mention railways to any one in Teheran, you are at once ruled out of court on the score of this agreement which has never been published, and concerning which no one outside the Russian Legation and the Persian Foreign Office seems to know whether it has been renewed for five or for ten years. Surely, it is a monstrous thing that Great Britain, the Power that has done so much for Persia, and still commands her entire seaboard on the south, should submit to such a condition of affairs. Our tobacco monopoly which failed was bad enough in its way, but not to be compared with an agreement which delivers over the whole question of railway building in Persia to the Russian Government. It may be argued that Russia is equally bound with ourselves. So she is at present. But if we recall the events of 1889 we shall remember that the original protocol gave to Russia the entire monopoly of railways in Persia as a sort of counterblast to the Imperial Bank concession and the mining concession to Great Britain. When it was discovered that the Mining Corporation was not such

a formidable affair as had been supposed at first, and it was seen, perhaps, that the time was hardly ripe for a coup which could hardly fail to arouse antagonism even in England, the terms of the protocol were altered and the monopoly was changed to a sort of option on railways in Persia by the agreement signed in 1890.

But why in the world should Great Britain be bound by this agreement? We know nothing about it officially, and even our officials do not seem to know for how many years it has been renewed. And supposing there were a secret agreement between Russia and Persia whereby Persia ceded to Russia all the ports on the Gulf, would we quietly fold our hands and say that we could do nothing as long as the agreement was in force? Yet the one is not more important than the other. Briefly the building of railways with British capital from the Gulf to Teheran would dash to the ground the whole card castle of Russian predominance in Northern Persia by dealing a death-blow to her trade. On the other hand, the building of Russian railways south would be almost as disastrous for our trade, for we do not imagine that the system of differential rates which obtains in Russia would fail to exercise its full force against British goods coming in by way of the Gulf. And Russia let the cat out of the bag when she applied for the monopoly of railways in 1889. What she wants is still the monopoly and her method of securing it is fairly simple. She is fast getting the Shah and his Government as much into her power that in another year or two he will

be unable to refuse Russia anything. In the meantime she is bringing her lines up to the frontier so as to be ready for the railway attack. Not that she means to come to the point too soon. I do not believe that there will be any railway built into Persian territory by Russia for several years to come; at least, I know that the Russian Government has given assurances to the Caspian Steamship Company, "the Kavkaz Merkur," that there was no clause in the recent loan agreement granting a railway concession from Julfa to Tabriz and Teheran. This railway would seriously hurt the steamer trade on the Caspian and it would also render useless all the money spent on the Resht-Teheran road.

It is still too soon to advance a rail into Persia which might give the British a chance of building on their side. The Shah must be rendered so subservient that he will refuse all railway concessions to Great Britain. For it must be always remembered that unless Russia can secure the monopoly of railways in Persia, she will lose rather than gain ground by the introduction of the iron road.

It is interesting, in this connection, to read the paragraph headed "The Ineptitude of Russian Policy" in Lord Curzon's chapter on railways in Persia. It seemed to Lord Curzon ten or twelve years ago that Russia could merely lose by her selfish policy of postponing railway construction. In the interval of ten years, commercial and industrial enterprises were to be steadfastly and tranquilly pursued; roads, the natural precursors and feeders of railways, were to be constructed through the

country; European systems of business and management were to become familiar to the people. Above all, the Power most likely to profit by the respite was not to be Russia but Great Britain, by whose capital the natural resources of the country were to be developed in the interim, and it was on more reliable data that Great Britain was ultimately to take up the question of railroad extension in Persia.

No forecast of events could possibly have been more dismally belied. Lord Curzon wrote the paragraph when the Mining Corporation and the Tobacco Concession were in the heyday of their youth, when the Imperial Bank of Persia seemed destined to reform the monetary system of Persia under British auspices, when a great trunk road was to be built from the capital to the Karun with British money. Yet, though it is always easy to be wise after the event, it is difficult to see how it could ever have escaped the notice of those who were in Persia when the Mining Corporation came into existence, that to attempt mining operations in a country without railways or rivers—unless indeed gold or diamonds were the quarry—must end in total disaster. And it passes the wit of man to understand how industrial enterprises were to be steadfastly pursued without machinery, which could not be imported except at a prohibitive cost.

The British capital that was tranquilly to foster these enterprises has either been withdrawn or sunk beyond hope of recovery. The roads which were to be the precursors of railways are conspicuous by their

absence, and if the railways are to wait until they can use the roads as feeders, there is no need for any Russian agreements to keep railways out of Persia. As for our trustworthy data, on the strength of which we were ultimately to build railways, we stand exactly where we were ten years ago, save, perhaps, that our chance of building the railways is rather more remote than ever. In the meantime, Russia who would have been handicapped immensely by a forward move on our part, has kept us at bay while she has been bringing her own railway system up to the Persian frontier. The commercial route for a Russian railway is undoubtedly by way of the Caucasus and Tabriz; yet even to-day, she is not ready to start work in Persia because her railhead is still a year or two from the border. We, on the other hand, can never be more prepared than we are to-day, and to-day we are no more prepared than we were ten years ago. Our base is waiting for us on the Karun or the Gulf; we can begin working at a moment's notice; our material can be laid down at a much lower cost than is possible at Erivan or Askabad; and the climb from sea level to the plateau will not grow less arduous if we sit and look at it. What people mean when they say that Persia is not ready for railways it is difficult to comprehend. Being without waterways she can only develop her internal resources by means of railways, and railways alone can add to her present rather slender stock of wealth.

Historically, it is true, roads are the precursors of railways, but so are bows and arrows the pre-

cursors of rifles, yet we do not offer to equip the Persian soldiers as archers. If instead of saying that Persia is not ready for railways we were to transfer the remark to Russia, there would be a good deal of truth in it. Russia is not yet ready to build railways in Persia, so she has "bluffed" us into postponing railway exploitation *sine die*, and we who are ready, or at least as ready as we shall ever be, have been weak enough to be "bluffed." Barring the Russian protocol, the field is singularly open to us. The only concession still in existence belongs, I believe, to M. Boital, who has sold an interest in the concern to M. Kolischer. Both are noted concession-hunters, but unfortunately neither has a Government behind him. The concession is for a line from the Caspian Sea to the Gulf, and was granted some nineteen years ago. As it contains no time-limit, there is some doubt about its legality—provided there is any legality at all in such matters—and if it were to prove an obstacle it could probably be bought up very cheap. We had a verbal understanding with the late Shah that no railway should be built south of Teheran until we were first consulted, but no such agreement could be binding on his successor unless it were at least committed to writing. What we want now is a written assurance on this point, and a definite understanding as to the time for expiration of the Russian protocol, which we should absolutely refuse to recognise beyond the year 1905. Then by 1905 we ought to have capital and material ready to commence operations at once. If we do not, we

shall wake up some morning to find our opportunity gone, and some other Power in our place. We shall raise objections, as we have done, to the Mesopotamian Railway, and play the dog in the manger, and make things unpleasant for everybody, especially ourselves, simply because some other Power wants to step in to undertake work which we will not do ourselves.

If we had begun quietly with a line from the Gulf to Bagdad twenty years ago, instead of worrying about an overland route to India, there would have been no Koweit question to-day, and our influence would have been supreme from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. Now that that chance is gone, the next best thing we can do is to build a line without more ado from Mohammerah to Teheran. If we keep beating about the bush with talk of roads and mule-tracks and other antiquated devices for wasting time, we shall presently find a Russian railway on its way to Isfahan and the Gulf, and the dog in the manger will be barking loudly again.

CHAPTER XXVI

WANTED, A BRITISH POLICY IN PERSIA

If it is true, as I have endeavoured to show, that the great advance made by Russian trade in Persia in the past four or five years is mainly the result of her system of premiums, and based on no permanent economic or geographical conditions; if, furthermore, it has been demonstrated that with proper communications between the Gulf and Northern Persia—by which I mean not mule-tracks nor roads, but railways—the British manufacturer would be placed at an advantage over his Russian competitor, which even the premium system could hardly overcome without serious loss to the Russian Exchequer, then all the talk which one hears in Teheran about the effacement of British interests in Persia must be taken with a large grain of salt. The effacement may come if Russia is allowed to continue on her hitherto victorious career; but the remedy still lies in our own hands. Since trade is to-day the pivot on which all politics turn, we have only to push our trade interests in Persia in order to restore the old balance of prestige and influence.

That the balance has been rudely disturbed, the most optimistic subject of the King can hardly deny. One event in itself has given Russia a lead, which

we shall find great difficulty in reducing. That was, of course, the Persian Loan of 1900. Before that time it was difficult to point to any concrete fact which proclaimed the predominance of Russia. Dr. Rohrbach, whose pamphlet I have already quoted, and who found last year, evidently to his great satisfaction, that our *zukunft* was altogether *vorbei*, attributes our fall to our failure to support the Zil-es-Sultan as a candidate for the throne of Persia. The present Shah, he says, was the Russian nominee, and the Zil was the pronounced friend of Great Britain. In leaving the Zil to his fate when the old Shah clipped his wings in 1888, we lost, so this Dr. Rohrbach thinks, our great chance. This little theory must have been furnished straight from the imagination of the German writer. There never was the slightest inclination on the part of Great Britain either to support the eldest son of the old Shah in his high estate at Isfahan, or to suggest that Nasr-ed-din should desert the custom of the Kajars and nominate as his successor a son who was not of royal birth on his mother's side. The actual successor, the present Shah, had the support as much of Great Britain as of Russia, nor could we possibly have interfered to alter the succession, even if we had desired to do so. The story is pure fiction, and is worth mentioning here only in order to show what far-fetched reasons a German Anglophobe can produce in order to account for a state of things which he would like to prove to be in existence.

When we come to speak of the loan we are on very different ground. The great advantage which the

Russians have reaped through it might have been ours. The extraordinary foolishness of the British Government in allowing the chance to slip can be palliated only on the grounds that we were at the moment in the throes of the South African War, and could think of nothing else. It is important, however, to point out that Sir Mortimer Durand, then Minister at Teheran, did his utmost to save the day, but his efforts and those of Mr. Rabino, the manager of the Imperial Bank, were unavailing against the rancour of the London Stock Exchange on the one hand—which had old grievances against Persia—and the preoccupation of the Foreign Office. Our Ministers have often to bear the odium of an error which they have worked hard to avoid, and the Foreign Office is not sorry to let the blame rest where the public sees fit to put it. To make things even the Minister gets a decoration and promotion. But would not the public be better served if the Minister were allowed freer play to his judgment in the first place?

Things being as they are in Persia, the Russian Loan of 1900 has only been the beginning of a snowball which increases in size as it rolls on. Those who have a knowledge of Persian affairs foresaw at an early date that the first loan would not go very far, and their apprehensions have been fulfilled by the issue of a new loan of 10,000,000 roubles early in 1902. Financially, the conditions of the new loan were identical with those of the first, but what private concessions were at the same time extracted we cannot tell. We only know that Russia does not grant

favours for nothing. In the meantime Persia is as helpless as a fly in a spider's web. She cannot redeem the original loan of £2,250,000 for ten years, and meanwhile she can borrow from no Power but Russia. In her recent financial straits the Imperial Bank came forward to assist her, but could not, of course, advance a £1,000,000 on its own responsibility. The British Government might have done it through the Bank, but the Shah could hardly have availed himself of that course without getting into trouble with Russia, and in any case the British Government showed no signs of coming to his aid. So the Shah is now in a position where he cannot possibly pay off the loan without borrowing from another Government, and he cannot borrow from another Government until the loan is paid off.

Still, on the surface, the situation does not appear so serious. The service of the double loan amounts to less than £200,000 a year, which is paid out of the customs receipts. But as the customs receipts now amount to about £430,000 under the Belgian administration in place of £230,000, the Shah can pay the interest and instalments of the loans, and still enjoy as large a revenue as he did four years ago. Unfortunately the borrowing has not stopped. Of the 10,000,000 roubles received from Russia some months ago there are not 1,000,000 left. All the rest has gone in paying off arrears and in the expenses of the trip to Europe. Consequently, when the Shah returned from Europe, he was exactly as badly off as he was before he borrowed the 10,000,000 roubles, and he will have to go to Russia once more.

Then comes another loan, fresh conditions, more of the customs revenue absorbed until the limit will be reached, the interest and instalments will not be forthcoming, and Russia will take over the administration of the customs, the Gulf ports being excluded.

Whence, it may be asked, comes this constant inability to meet expenses on the part of a Government which until ten years ago had never borrowed money outside its own dominions? The answer is very simple. These deficiencies have been going on for several years, and have been met by accepting loans from the banks which were paid back out of the Shah's treasury until that source was emptied and a new method of raising money had to be found. The lack of funds is the direct result of the fall in the price of silver. The inland revenue of Persia is drawn mainly from the land tax, and the land tax, though assessed in various ways in various parts of Persia, has for years been fixed locally at certain rates. Consequently as the price of silver fell the revenue decreased at a rate which could not be counterbalanced by increased exactions. The result is that the sterling value of the revenue, which amounts now to about £1,500,000 all told, is much less than it was fifty years ago, though the population has increased and the public expenses are much greater. It may be remarked in parenthesis, however, that the fall in revenue has not been a relief to the labouring class, on whom almost the entire burden of taxation has finally rested, by a method of devolution characteristic of Persia. Nothing now can

save Persia from financial ruin but a drastic overhauling of the revenue system, by means of which taxes would be readjusted to existing values, and a due share of the taxation would fall on the shoulders of the well-to-do. Such an overhauling will never be undertaken by Persian officials, and a joint commission is not likely to be appointed to the task by Great Britain and Russia, so we return to the original proposition, that financial ruin must be the result.

Financial ruin for Persia means Russia's opportunity, as she is the only Power to whom the Shah can turn in his extremity. What we can do to avert the impending doom it is not easy to say. We had our chance and refused it. The only relic that we saved was the revenue of the Gulf ports. The Province of Fars was excluded from the hypothecation of the Persian customs to the Russian loan. At present the Gulf ports bring in less than a third of the whole customs revenue, and perhaps they will never bring in more. But there is one port which is still in doubt, and that is Mohammerah. Mohammerah is not, seriously speaking, a Gulf port, and it is certainly not in the Province of Fars. No one consequently seems to know whether Mohammerah was excluded or not from the conditions of the Russian loan. Two years before the first Russian loan was made, the British *chargé d'affaires* in Teheran secured a document from the Shah in which a distinct promise was made that the customs of the ports of *Southern* Persia should never be hypothecated to any foreign Power except Great Britain. In spite

of this document, which certainly includes Mohammerah in its scope, the Russian agreement of 1900 excludes only the Gulf ports and the Province of Fars, and there is always a question whether Mohammerah is, strictly speaking, a "Gulf port." At the time the loan was arranged, and even at the present moment, the Karun port was not regarded as being of much importance, especially as the revenue was not collected by the Belgians, but was farmed out for a few tomans to Sheikh Khazal. Still, Mohammerah has great potentialities, for at least three different reasons. First of all, the attempt is being made to supply Isfahan by the Ahwaz route, and the whole west of Persia up to Teheran by the proposed Burujird route. These routes have effected nothing of importance as yet, but they may do something in the future. Secondly, Mohammerah is to be at the end of the pipe line which is to be laid by the new English oil company through Luristan. This also is a purely speculative matter, but the possibilities are great. Thirdly, if ever we build railways in Persia —unfortunately a very big "if"—Mohammerah is almost sure to be the port of the first route adopted. This is the most important reason of the three, for if a Mohammerah-Burujird-Teheran railway were ever built it would absorb a large part of the Bushire trade and almost all the transit trade for Persia through Bagdad.

Without any stretch of the imagination one can foresee a future when Mohammerah will contribute a larger share of the customs revenue than any other port in Persia. It is sincerely to be hoped, there-

fore, that our Government will insist on the exclusion of Mohammerah from the terms of the Russian Loan Agreement.

We ought, of course, to have excluded Kermanshah as well, since that is distinctly in our commercial sphere. Even Tabriz should not be liable to the establishment of a Russian customs house. But these ports of entry are certainly mortgaged, and it is useless to cry over spilt milk, otherwise we should never be done lamenting the folly which has given Russia such a hold over the finances of Persia, and, at the same time, allowed her to push her trade against ours with money taken out of Persian pockets. I have already pointed out that the commission on the two loans, together amounting to close on half a million sterling, has afforded to the Russian Government a nice little reserve from which to pay export premiums on Russian manufactures going into Persia. It is curious to notice in this connection how our methods differ from those of the Russians. On our side, we are constantly paying money into the Shah's treasury. We give him a subsidy, for example, for the Indo-European telegraph line, and we pay half the cost of the line from Teheran to Meshed, which we do not use except for the messages to the Consulate at Meshed. The Imperial Bank of Persia pays a royalty to the Throne which must never fall below £5000 per annum. The Russians, on their side, do just the reverse. They establish a bank in Teheran, which is now nothing more than a branch of the Russian State Bank, which not only pays no royalty, but does its best to cut out the Imperial Bank of

Persia. They push their trade in Persia with the proceeds of their large profits on the Persian loan; and they actually have the use of the Teheran-Meshed line for all their telegraphic messages from Teheran to Moscow or St. Petersburg, though Great Britain and Persia pay for the upkeep of the line. It really seems that in the little intrigues which are drawing Persia closer to Russia, Great Britain is playing the unenviable part of the *mari complaisant*.

The evil effects of the Russian loan would not be so great if we could in any way restore the financial equilibrium in Persia. But it must be clearly understood that there is no time to lose. Another Russian loan will be called for in all probability this year, so certain are the prospects of a deficit. That a deficit could be changed into a surplus with the greatest ease under a proper administration of the Revenue Department is obvious to any one who has any knowledge of the iniquitous system of tax collecting in Persia. But Great Britain cannot offer men to handle the revenue, since Persia is debarred from employing the services of Englishmen and Russians alike. Equally impossible is it for us to agree with Russia on the subject, since the refusal of Russia to co-operate with us in the matter of the loan has shown the hopelessness of such an arrangement. To bring in other foreign administrators, such, for instance, as Germans, is a possible course, but one that does not exactly commend itself to us. However pleasant Germans and Frenchmen and Russians may be as individuals, there is a bias against Great Britain which cannot be concealed. The Austrians

and the Americans, whom we may regard as our friends, and who at least would be impartial, have too small an interest in Persia to make their intervention at all probable. That the Germans or the French or the Belgians should prefer to assist Russia in her Persian policy, which is directly opposed to the trade interests of these nations, is sufficient proof of the lengths to which Anglophobia will carry even the sanest nations. French sugar is being pushed slowly out of Persia by the Russian bounty system, while German trade has not a ghost of a chance in Persia against Russian competition, yet France and Germany find the money for the carrying out of Russian policy, and German writers go so far as to talk indignantly about the British monopoly of the Gulf trade, just as if we had closed the Gulf to foreigners as Russia has closed the Caucasus and the Caspian.

The Dutch are naturally against us, and it is not surprising to find the firm of Hotz and Co. (which Lord Curzon indignantly declares to be a British firm) assisting the advance of Russian trade. That it should import Russian goods, and act as the agents of Russian manufacturers in Persia, merely shows that it is composed of good men of business. But it is certainly curious to find a so-called English firm acting as agents in the Gulf of the new Russian line of steamers. We have, for the moment, most of Europe against us, and one could not regard with anything but misgiving a pendant to the Belgian customs in the shape of a foreign administration of the inland revenue of Persia. Yet the inland revenue

must be taken in hand. So here we have a problem for British statesmanship.

Next to the Loan Agreement, Russia has a great advantage over us by means of the secret Railway Protocol. At the time the protocol was drawn up in 1890 it was not apparently looked on with apprehension by any British critics. It came in answer to the Karun concession, the Imperial Bank concession, and the Mining Corporation, and one can understand how even an astute observer like Lord Curzon might have been taken in by the apparent superiority of the British plums. But in the course of twelve years the situation has changed. The Railway Protocol now stands out clearly as a most important factor in Persian politics, and as a refutation of the slighting remarks made by Lord Curzon about the ineptitude of Russian policy. The Russians learned some time ago what we have not yet grasped—the supreme political importance of railway control in the East. Her expansion during the last generation has been by means of railways and railway concessions, and she could very well afford to laugh at mining concessions in Persia as long as she had the means of communication, without which mining operations are impossible, in her powerful hands.

But this secret protocol has been sometimes misunderstood. Dr. Rohrbach, for instance, thinks that Russia has the right to settle when and how and where railways shall be built in Persia. This is a very liberal interpretation to put on an agreement which simply postpones all railway building in Persia for a certain number of years. As soon as the period

stated elapses Russia is on exactly the same footing as Great Britain. The time of the original protocol was up in 1900. As part of the loan conditions it was extended, some say until 1905, others until 1910. But whatever may be the exact term, the object of the extension must be to give Russia time to exact a much greater concession. In the meantime she is getting her railway system brought up to the Persian border, and the respite has been of the greatest advantage to her. For where would Russian trade be in Persia to-day if we had begun railway building ten years ago? But it is quite obvious that respite alone is not all she wants, nor is it likely that the loan of the year was procured by the Shah without some further concession. I have been told, on fairly good authority in Teheran, that one of the conditions of the last loan was nothing less than the monopoly of railways in Persia, which Russia nearly obtained in 1889—in fact, did obtain for the moment. Even if this is an exaggeration, we do not know what conditions the next loan will bring forth, or the next loan will bring forth, or the next again, or the one after that. Nothing, therefore, is more essential than that we should find out exactly when this protocol expires and then come to a definite agreement with the Shah about railways south of Teheran. And we want the agreement in writing.

This railway question, I take to be of far the greatest importance in Persia. All the suggestions about understandings with Russia, or spheres of influence, or partition, or integrity, are airy vapourings which leads us nowhere. We have already an under-

standing with Russia about the integrity of Persia, dating back to the year 1834 and renewed again many times since. In 1888 notes were actually exchanged on the subject and verbal assurances given. If we were to try until 'Doomsday' to come to agreement with Russia about Persia we could get nothing out of her more valuable than this understanding, to which Lord Cranborne has recently referred and which is worth as much as all similar understandings with Russia. Some writers have suggested as a panacea the recognising of our different spheres of influence. One would have thought that we had had enough of spheres of influence in our recent Chinese experience. Besides, there are at least two parties to such a policy, and there is not the slightest reason to suppose that Russia would ever put her signature to any spheres of influence agreement. In reality there is nothing at all to be gained by proclaiming our sphere of influence, because if we have not already got a sphere of influence in Persia writing words down on paper will not give us one. Above all, we should guard against a policy which, even if Russia should fall in with it, would result in handing over the north to our rival while we kept the south open for the rest of the world, including Russia.

As for a partition of Persia that is just one of those things which must never be mentioned, but yet are likely enough to happen. Since, however, it must not be mentioned, it is not much use discussing it here. Still, there is a trend of events which is often contrary to the trend of opinion—a sage remark for which I have to thank a Shanghai friend—and

when we are protesting most loudly our adherence to the *status quo* we may be secretly convinced of the inevitableness of a *débâcle*. In China we cannot disguise from ourselves that what may be called partial partition has gone a long way, and has been arrested only by the Anglo-Japanese Treaty—a singularly heroic remedy. In Persia we have no other Power to rely on except ourselves. The only other Power which has even an adjacent interest in the matter is Germany, and we have had enough of Anglo-German agreements. On the other hand, the chances of saving Persia from the consequences of her own folly are exceedingly small. Any one who at a distance has formed ideas of raising up a Mohammedan rampart between ourselves and Russia has only to stay a month in the country to have all such ideas rudely dispelled. Islam buried its talent in the ground some centuries ago, and has never taken the trouble even to dig it up. As for Persia, you will search the East in vain for a people or a Government more doomed to decay.

In China and Corea we admire many characteristics of the people while we condemn the corrupt systems of government. In Persia—apart from the lawless tribes, who have their rude qualities—we are face to face with a people at least as corrupt as its Government, and nothing worse could be said than that. Such a people and such a Government cannot much longer escape the salutary rod of foreign control. It is merely a question as to whether the rulers will be many or single. But in the meantime we must talk about the integrity of Persia. No Under

Secretary for Foreign Affairs would be recognisable unless he had the word integrity or the phrase *status quo* on his lips. But while we talk of integrity we should not be idle. If we have a sphere of influence in Persia we should do well to develop it before some one else steps in to assist us, and personally I should prefer to regard the whole of Persia as our sphere of influence. That is the Russian way, and it generally ends in the important part falling to her share while she still has a fighting chance of the rest. In actual fact the whole of Persia would be, commercially speaking, in our net—as far as textile manufactures go—if our railway was only pushed as far north as Hamadan and Teheran. The whole aim and object of our policy in Persia first and last should be, railways. Russia may have all the political prestige she wants as long as we control the railways from the Gulf to Teheran.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE RUSSIAN ROAD

BEFORE leaving the question of communications in Persia, I should like to add a postscript to a previous letter on the subject. The postscript is suggested by a journey over the Teheran-Resht road, about which we have heard so much. As about 90 per cent. of the foreigners who visit Teheran enter or leave Persia by this road, which has now been open about two years, it is quite unnecessary to describe the route; but it may be useful to correct one or two misstatements which have been freely made with regard to this Russian undertaking, and which have a direct bearing on the whole question of road-making in Persia. The old caravan route from Resht followed the course of the Sefid Rud River, through the wooded gorges of the Elburz range to where that river is joined by the Shah Rud, just about Menjil. It then turned south by the valley of the Shah Rud to Pachinar, where the Shah Rud is joined in turn by the small stream called the Pachinar River, which rises south of the Elburz range, in the downs above Kasvin. The caravan route, however, did not take this opportunity of piercing the range of mountains, but struck straight for Kasvin from Pachinar over the top of the range

by a track to the east of the narrow gorge of the Pachinar stream, and so attained a height of over 7000 feet above the sea.

This old route had the disadvantage of being frequently blocked by snow for many weeks in the winter. The Russians, when they came to build their carriage road, very naturally altered the alignment a little to the west after passing Kasvin, utilising the natural "port" which is afforded by the gorge of the Pachinar stream, and instead of climbing over the Elburz range began descending actually before the range was reached, so that the highest point of the road is on the plateau near Bekende, two stages beyond Kasvin. Here the elevation is about 5000 feet or a little under, and the route can always be kept open in winter. But even the Persians could hardly have overlooked this obvious passage for so many centuries. The fact is that for many miles—from Bekende to Pachinar—the valley is so narrow and rugged that it was on the whole easier to climb the extra 2000 feet even in winter; and the Russians could only utilise the valley by cutting a road out of the precipitous mountain sides at great expense. For about 100 versts from Bekende right down to Siarud within 35 versts of Resht, with only a short break about Menjil, where the Shah Rud joins the Sefid Rud and the valley opens out at the junction, the new road is simply a ledge with a steep wall of rock on one side and a precipice on the other.

From a picturesque point of view the route is delightful. One passes with abrupt transitions from

the open plateau about Kasvin to the bleak rocky gorge of the Pachinar stream, and from the barren gorge to the luxuriant forestry of the Sefid Rud valley. Judged as a means of communication, however, the road makes a very poor show for the amount of money spent on it. It is so narrow—in many places barely 15 feet wide—that two vehicles cannot pass each other, and as the turns and twists round the precipitous contours are both many and sharp, there is no knowing what may be ahead of the reckless Persian driver. In parts of the road there is a low parapet on the precipice side, in other parts there is none, so that a sudden collision may be followed by very serious consequences. It is not surprising that accidents are of frequent occurrence.

During my passage I came across two European travellers who had been upset, fortunately in both cases where there was no precipice, and one of them was seriously injured. Only a short time ago a large waggon went over the side, and was smashed to pieces, horses, passengers, and all, and a little later the carriage of a Russian friend of mine was precipitated into the Sefid Rud, while he himself was luckily on foot. Such minor accidents as broken wheels or springs are of everyday occurrence. You are certain to find soon after starting that some portion of your phaeton or victoria is on the point of giving way and must be tied up with rope or string. Sometimes it is the tyre that is coming off. I have seen a door pulled off its hinges at the post-house and a lamp torn from the wall in order to procure two nails to repair a tyre. In my own case I had to

get out at stated intervals and hammer the nut of my hind axle with a stone to prevent the wheel from coming off. When you know that one of the wheels of your phaeton is dependent on a loose nut it gives you no sense of security to see your Persian Jehu nonchalantly burying his face in his hands to light his pipe with the reins looped loosely over his arm while four badly harnessed horses are tearing along a ledge 18 feet wide with sharp turns at a speed of eight or nine miles an hour, which is strictly prohibited. Nothing seems to upset the equanimity of the driver. At Pachinar, where I found a fellow traveller badly injured through the overturning of his carriage, the driver came up smiling for the usual tip of two krans for the stage, though the accident was due entirely to his careless driving. It may be a matter of wonder that the Russians who built the road do not organise the carriage service. This is exactly where the unsurpassed talent for boycotting exercised by the Persians prevents all improvements. A Russian contractor did attempt to organise a caravan service for goods, but after finding that his mules and donkeys either died of starvation or fell over the precipice he gave the business up as a bad job. And so the carriage service is in the hands of a Persian, and the results are only too plainly to be seen.

Apart from the evils of the carriage service, the road is far from being a satisfactory piece of work, and compares most unfavourably with the fine metalled ways of the Caucasus. Nominally the road from Pir-i-Bazar to Teheran (Pir-i-Bazar being the port of

Resht) is 337 versts, but of that distance 141 versts (about 100 miles) between Kasvin and Teheran can be left out of account, since the road had existed between these points for years, and of the rest it was only 100 versts between Bekende and Sia Rud that presented real difficulties. These included a new bridge over the Sefid Rud near Menjil, and a great deal of blasting. The Russian company started with a capital of 1,000,000 roubles, which was afterwards increased until the Government had to step in with further capital to the amount of about 3,000,000 roubles and a guarantee of 5 per cent on the capital invested by the company. The total amount expended was about £480,000, and the result is not a *chaussée*, but a narrow road badly metalled, which requires constant repairs. In spite of the high tolls levied by the Russian Government, it is difficult to collect enough money to pay the guaranteed interest to the private company, and at the same time to keep the road in proper condition. The large sum of money sunk by the Government, amounting roughly to 3,000,000 roubles, brings in no return whatever. Trade between Teheran and Russia has certainly been facilitated in winter time by the new road, but the cost of transport, so far from being made cheaper, is now at least 10 per cent. dearer than it was before the road was made. Even the traveller who can sit more or less at his ease in his phaeton or landau all the way to Resht from Teheran, must pay liberally for the luxury, and many people regret the cheaper though more tiring days of chapar riding. That Russian trade owes its recent advance to this new

means of communication is more than doubtful. As I have before endeavoured to show, the real causes for the increase of the import of Russian piece-goods and Russian sugar are to be found in the large premiums paid by the Government to the exporters of these articles, and the great efforts made by the Russian Bank in Teheran to push Russian wares.

The Teheran-Resht road is not even a military asset of great importance, since it is not made to accommodate the passage of an army; though in this connection it may be worth while to point out that the road is not, as many critics have asserted, impracticable for artillery. A road along which a waggon with four horses abreast can be driven can surely accommodate even a siege train, to say nothing of field batteries. But the military question is not really important. If Persia were in a mood to defend herself against Russia, which she never will be, the passage of the Elburz could easily be rendered impossible, however good the road might be. Russia will never need to approach Persia in a warlike way from the shores of the Caspian when she has a clean run into Tabriz by way of Erivan, and an equally simple task before her in Khorasan. It may well be asked, then, what Russia has got out of her lavish expenditure on the Resht-Teheran road. The answer is: Nothing at all beyond the privilege of having Russian toll gates and Russian toll-collectors right up to the capital of Persia, which adds something to her prestige. According to our ideas the Emperor of Russia is hardly getting his money's worth, but, as he has no House of Commons to inquire into the

matter, that is not likely to disturb his peace of mind. When we consider that this very route is marked out as one of the railway lines of the future the waste of money on the road seems all the greater, and speaks eloquently of the strong desire of the Russian Government to push its political influence in Persia at all costs. £500,000 would have gone a long way in constructing a railway over this short distance, and as far as assistance to trade goes, a tenth of that sum expended on improving the landing facilities at Enzeli would have been of more service than the road. But Russia is not ready to extend her railways into Persia yet, nor would she get any political prestige out of dredging the bar at Enzeli.

Seeing that, in spite of our predominance in the Gulf, we have done nothing in all these years to improve the wretched landing at Bushire, it hardly becomes a British traveller to complain about Enzeli. Yet the difficulty of getting from Resht to the steamer is a sore trial to the temper. There is first a drive of six miles to Pir-i-bazar, then a boat carries the passenger a few miles down the river of Resht to the lagoon, where he must wait for the arrival of a steam launch to take him across the lagoon to Enzeli. At Enzeli he gets into another boat which conveys him and his luggage to the custom house, where, if he has satisfied the custom house officials, he may embark in a sea-going boat strong enough to carry him through the surf on the bar to the steamer, which is lying in the worst roadstead in the Caspian. Having, after a day's hard work and multitudinous arguments with coolies and boatmen, reached the

not too comfortable refuge of the Russian steamer, he will probably have to wait many hours a victim to sea-sickness while the steamer rolls helplessly about at the mercy of the inhospitable Caspian Sea.

It is not to be wondered at if on arriving at Baku, where the steamer comes up to the wharf and he finds himsef in a town with wide streets and substantial stone buildings, among which is a moderately good hotel, he imagines that at last he has returned to the haunts of civilised people. Yet travellers coming in the opposite direction and leaving Europe behind them, when they come on the barren, treeless Baku with its forest of oil-pumps and smell of petroleum, think that they have reached the very jumping-off place of the world.

Before leaving Resht I had ascertained the rather curious fact that British cotton goods are still sold in fairly large quantities in Resht, where they have proportionately a larger hold on the market than they have in Teheran. They come to Resht by way of Bagdad and Kermanshah and Hamadan, the last-named place being the distributing centre for North-Western Persia. But now the Manchester goods are gradually being driven out of Resht by Russian wares, and particularly as far as white piece-goods are concerned, by the manufactures of a Baku cotton mill recently set up by a great Caucasian millionaire named Takieff.

M. Takieff, who is a Tartar, was only a few years ago a stonemason in Baku. Having got possession of some landed property, he was lucky enough to strike oil to such an extent that he was able to sell out to

a British company for 5,000,000 roubles. He is now said to be worth 20,000,000 roubles, and yet, I have been told, he can neither read nor write. About a quarter of this huge fortune he has invested in a brand-new cotton mill put up in the outskirts of Baku, partly for philanthropic reasons, since M. Takieff is a lover of his own race and would like to increase the industrial prosperity of the Caucasian Tartars. In many ways Baku is splendidly adapted to be a great manufacturing centre. Cotton grows close at hand in Mazanderan, round about Erivan, north of Baku at Derbent, and a little farther afield in the rich Ferghana district of Central Asia. With the exception of the Persian cotton these are all excellent staples, and it costs much less to bring them to Baku than to take them all the way to Moscow. Baku possesses, moreover, a good harbour, and is close to the extensive markets of Persia and Asia Minor. Of course, fuel is cheap and abundant. The Moscow manufacturers looked on M. Takieff's enterprise with disfavour, and so strong was the pressure they brought to bear on the Goverement that for eight or nine months the Caucasian millionaire was forbidden to carry out his undertaking. The iniquitous prohibition was at last removed, however, and the mill is now in full swing. Eighteen thousand spindles were at work when I visited the factory and 650 looms, but the machinery has since been exactly doubled, and now there will be 36,000 spindles and 1300 looms in motion. The chief difficulty is the want of water. Baku with nearly 250,000 inhabitants, is still dependent on condensed sea water—a

fact which is characteristic of Russian enterprise. Labour is also more expensive than one would expect. partly because Tartar women cannot be employed, and partly because such good wages are obtained in the oil-works.

Hence it comes about that the Persian who works for 4½*d.* a day in his native land wants 2*s.* in Baku. The lack of water for dyeing purposes has as yet prevented M. Takieff's factory from turning out coloured goods, but his white material has already secured a good market in Persia. The mill is managed by Englishmen schooled to their work in Manchester, and the whole establishment is wonderfully complete and well found even to the extent of providing education for the boys employed at the spindles. It may console the Manchester manufacturer to reflect that as soon as the factory is working at a profit there will be a move made to get rid of the foreigners, and then deterioration will set in. But if Baku were, let us suppose, in American hands, what a future would be in store for that murky, oily spot! Backed by regions of extraordinary fertility, with cotton, silk, wool, and every kind of mineral in abundance in the Caucasus, with cheap fuel and a good harbour, and all Asia for a market, there is hardly any limit to the potentialities of the situation. Under the Russian Government these potentialities are far from being realised. The Russians are neither a commercial nor an industrial people, and, strange as it may seem, there is hardly a penny of Russian capital invested in the rich portion of the Russian dominions. The oil-fields are either in the

hands of Caucasians or of foreigners. The capital is mostly foreign. The minerals over towards Batum are being worked by British and German companies. The magnificent pastoral and agricultural riches of the country are only half exploited by the natives with no assistance from the Government. Russia herself only owns the railway, and the much-talked-of pipe line which is to conduct the oil from Baku to Batum, a distance of 560 miles. The line has so far reached Michaelovo, which is only about 120 miles from Batum. The remaining 440 miles have still to be laid.

At present there is a serious depression in Baku. Out of 2500 wells 1000 were not working when I was there, and the price of oil has sunk to a desperately low figure. The prices recently were 5 kopeks per pood for refined oil and 7 kopeks for crude—that is to say, about one farthing and a third of a penny respectively per gallon. The refined oil is cheaper than crude oil owing to the demand for liquid fuel. At such prices the smaller producers are being ruined, especially in cases where land has been bought at auction from the Russian Government at the rate of 8 or 10 kopeks per pood royalty, or more than the oil fetches in the market. Though the prices are so low the Russian Government charges no less than 60 kopeks per pood excise duty on the domestic article, or 1200 per cent. *ad valorem*, so that Baku oil can be sold cheaper in Great Britain than it can in Russia. The result is detrimental to Baku industry. Another reason for the depression in trade at Baku is the want of combination among

the producers, who are entirely in the hands of the distributors, who keep down prices and make enormous profits. This is a difficulty which in America would certainly be removed. Another obstacle lies in the cost of transport. The railway charges 14 kopeks per pood for freight to Batoum, so that oil which costs from 5 to 7 kopeks a pood in Baku costs 26 kopeks by the time it is put on board the steamer at Batum. Hence it is impossible for Baku to compete with Texas in the sale of liquid fuel even in the east of the Mediterranean. The riots in Baku and Bavaria, which were simultaneous with the movements in Poltava and Kharkof and Moscow, are indications that the Russian Government may carry its present fiscal policy too far. When Russian piece-goods are cheaper in Teheran than in Moscow, when the Government is almost giving away Russian sugar to Persian consumers, when a domestic tax of 1200 per cent. is levied on Russian oil while the foreign consumer escapes the burden, and when royalties have to be paid to the Russian Government which actually exceed the price of the oil that pays the royalty, it takes a good deal of faith to persuade oneself that M. Witte's financial policy is really calculated to benefit the Russian producer, and is not framed rather with other ends in view which are not purely commercial.

On the whole, the passage from Persian to Russian territory inspires two rather contradictory emotions. In the first place one is glad to find that the shadow of Russian predominance in the trade and politics of Persia which grows darker as Teheran is approached

from the south, seeming to lie like a heavy pall especially over the imaginations of British subjects in Persia, is produced by a far more flimsy substance than might have been expected. The road built by Russia to the capital of Persia on closer inspection turns out to be a very poor affair, on which money has been recklessly expended. As for Russian industrial enterprise, a visit to the oil-wells in Baku which are sunk by foreign capital, to the refineries which are the property of foreign companies, to cotton mills, which are managed by Manchester engineers and Manchester master weavers, to the copper and manganese mines which are being exploited by British capital, is sufficient to make one suspicious about the legitimate character of the expansion of Russian trade south of the Caspian. On the other hand, one is mournfully impressed by the fact that in spite of her unbusinesslike and spendthrift methods, Russia is steadily attaining her political ends in Persia and at the same time threatens to deprive our manufacturers of a promising market because our Government will not make up its mind to take the simple steps that are necessary to check Russian advance.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RUSSIA'S ADVANCE ON PERSIA *VIA* THE CAUCASUS

THERE are two possible routes from Russia to Persia on the west side of the Caspian Sea. The first lies along the coast of the Caspian from Baku to Resht and on to Teheran by way of the new Russian road. The second goes from Tiflis to Erivan, and thereafter down the valley of the Aras to Julfa and on to Tabriz. The more direct of the two would naturally appear to be the Baku-Resht route; at least this would reach Teheran by the shortest line. To go away back to Tiflis in order to reach the capital of Persia, which lies in almost the opposite direction, is apparently to adopt a most roundabout method of approach. Yet a glance at the map will reveal the fact that Tiflis, Erivan, and Tabriz are really on the natural line of communication between the industrial centres of Russia and Teheran, provided always that the great Caucasus range can be pierced by the iron road. Vladikavkaz is only 136 miles by the famous military *chaussée* from Tiflis, and one can hardly doubt that this connection will eventually be made, thus saving between 500 or 600 miles of the long *detour* by way of Baku.

In the meantime a railway has been pushed over the Anti-Caucasus to Alexandropol, and from there



MAP SHOWING RELATIVE POSITIONS OF RUSSIA AND PERSIA

Black lines show railways existing. Dotted lines show railways in course of construction

lines run south-west to Kars and south-east to Erivan, and no farther obstacle, except the bridging of the Aras at Julfa, lies between the Russian rail-head at Erivan and Tabriz, while from Tabriz to Teheran the way lies equally open. The Russian Government has evidently chosen this route for the present in preference to the Baku-Resht-Teheran line—which must eventually follow—partly perhaps because it does not come into direct competition with the subsidised steamers of the Kavkaz-Merkur on the Caspian, partly because it is the most direct way of reaching Persia, provided Vladikavkaz can be joined to Tiflis, and partly because the portion of the line from Tiflis to Alexandropol kills, strategically speaking, two birds with one stone, for it enables the Government to establish a railway base at Kars against Turkey on the one hand, and at Erivan against Persia on the other. Before Alexandropol is reached the railway crosses the great mountain range which upholds the Armenian plateau by a pass which is over 7000 feet above the sea, and the Armenian plateau having once been reached, Persia and Asia Minor are both easy of access. There is no way of getting up to the table-land of Persia except by climbing over one at least of the supporting mountain ranges. Russia is able to accomplish this feat inside her own territory, and her railway once over the Anti-Caucasus is from an engineering point of view already in Persia.

There is no intention for the present of reverting to the Baku-Resht route, nor yet to a subsidiary line which has been partially prospected between

Evlakh on the Baku-Tiflis line and Lenkoran, but which could not be more than a branch railway intended to develop the fertile steppes in the lower valley of the Kur and the Aras. On the other hand the continuation of the Tiflis-Alexandropol line to Erivan has been carried out in the last two years with considerable rapidity and success. Trains now run daily from Tiflis to Kars, and twice a week on the new section between Alexandropol and Erivan. In order to travel over the new line I left the Baku-Tiflis express at the station of Akstafa, the old starting-point of the caravans for Tabriz. From here a fine *chaussée* leads due south to Erivan, a distance of 173 versts (about 120 miles). The first fifty miles of the road lie along the beautiful valley of the Akstafa River, gorgeously wooded, up to Delijan, a pretty village 4000 feet above the sea, which is used by the rich Armenians of Baku as a hill-station in summer. By a wonderful succession of zigzags the *chaussée* thereafter reaches the summit of the pass 7420 feet above the sea, and at the same time comes out on the Armenian plateau. There are any number of roads leading in a parallel direction from the Georgian trough over the Anti-Caucasus to the plateau beyond, and all exhibit the same features —the beautiful wooded ascent on the north side of the range and the more gradual slope on the south side to a plateau devoid of trees, and totally different in aspect from the luxuriant Georgian valley.

The special features which are peculiar to the Akstafa-Erivan road are first the great Sevan Lake, which lies just south of the pass at an elevation of

6340 feet above the sea, and secondly, the glorious view of Ararat which unfolds itself to the eye of the traveller soon after he leaves the side of the dreary lake. It is almost worth while undertaking this drive simply to feast on fresh sea-trout from the waters of Sevan; otherwise, to one who has left Persia and all its ills behind at Resht, it seems like a retrograde movement to return to the valley of the Aras and the dry slopes about Erivan, which recall too vividly the landscape of Kermanshah or Hamadan. Yet it is interesting to see what Russia has done for this dependency of hers. But for Russia Erivan would be just such another town as Kasvin or Hamadan, and one is bound to admit that whatever shortcomings Russian civilisation may have it is infinitely superior to that of Persia. The streets of Erivan cannot boast of much in the way of metalling, but they are wide and straight. The buildings are far from beautiful, but they are more or less substantial, while the ruins which generally compose half of a Persian town are here conspicuous by their absence. The town is made picturesque by its circle of gardens, in the midst of which rich Armenians have built pleasant dwellings, which give an air of prosperity to the whole place. Indeed, there can be no doubt that Erivan is prosperous. For many years the town has been on the direct trade-route between Russia and Tabriz, which was rendered more serviceable by the Akstafa-Erivan-Julfa road; and now communications have been improved by the advent of the railway of which Erivan is for the moment the terminus. The result is seen in the enlargement of

the town and the growth of its trade. The exports are mostly raw products of which the most important is cotton. 500,000 poods are sent away from Erivan annually, amounting in value to just £500,000 sterling, which is a large sum for a community of less than 30,000 souls. Wine, too, and excellent brandy are exported to the extent of 6000 barrels each year, and it is just here that the difference between Russian Armenia and Persia is characteristically marked.

Persia grows abundance of wine, which is so badly made that it cannot be kept more than a year, and at best is a despicable beverage. In Trans-Caucasia, with the same quality of grapes, good wine is nearly always made, and once at Edgmiatzin one of the reverend fathers brought out for me a bottle from the inner bin of the famous monastery which would have put most of the Rhine vintages to shame. With cotton the results are similar. In Trans-Caspia and Trans-Caucasia the cultivation of the plant is so well carried out that the product is not much inferior to that of Egypt or America. The Persian cotton, on the other hand, is generally inferior stuff, which is useful only for mixing with the rest.

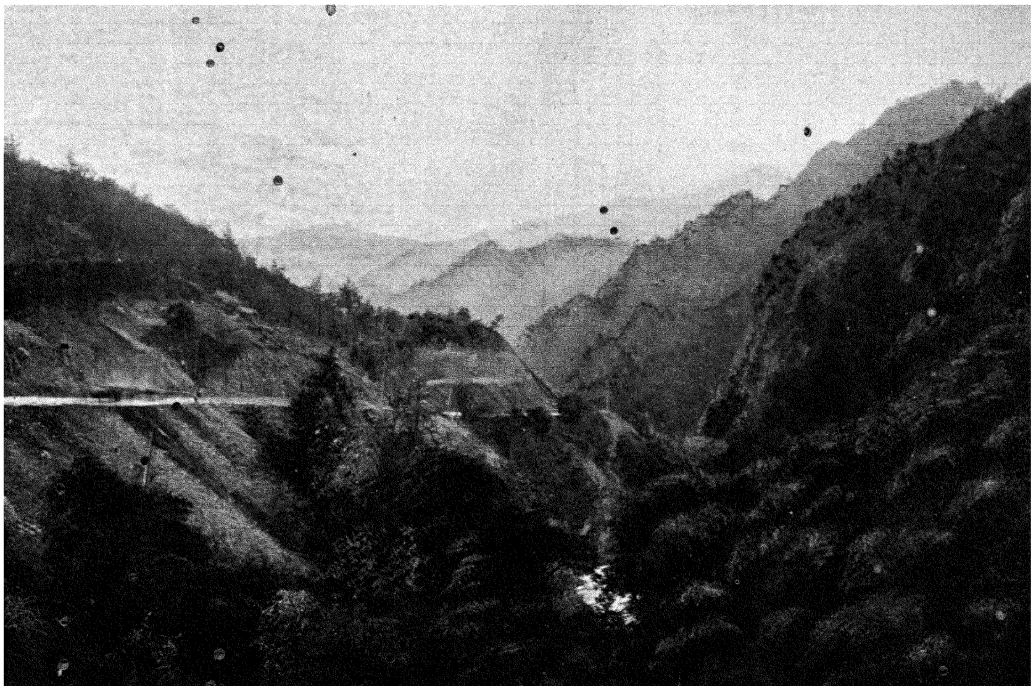
Another source of wealth to Erivan is the increase in the military force and the new military buildings which have followed the coming of the railway; for with the railway extension Alexandropol is ceasing to be the chief base on the south side of the Anti-Caucasus, and is being replaced on the one hand by Kars, and on the other by Erivan. As usual there is the little public park or garden where military

bands discourse music of a kind. On the day of my arrival in Erivan the town was gay with flags in honour of the Emperor of Russia's name-day, and nearly the whole population was congregated in the little square in the centre of the town listening to the band. The Russian element seemed entirely military, or at least official; for there was hardly a Russian to be seen out of uniform. This, indeed, is true of all the country south of the mountains, and in a lesser degree of all Trans-Caucasia, where the official element is very strong. One is thankful to get away to Batum, where uniforms are not quite so universal, and where the humble civilian feels that he has a right to breathe. At Erivan I was bothered half a dozen times a day by inquiries as to my business, my intentions, and my probable destination until I began to feel like an escaped criminal. One may be excused for turning Pharisee and thanking heaven that in this respect at least we are not as other European nations are.

I found that the railway was not yet in complete working order. Still the bulk of the Russian merchandise destined for the Tabriz market is now brought as far as Erivan by rail instead of being sent over the *chaussée* from Akstafa. In this way 120 miles of road carriage is saved, and the extra freight on the railway between Akstafa and Erivan is not worth considering. The result is that Russian textiles and sugar can be delivered at Tabriz much cheaper than goods from Western Europe coming by way of Trebizond. Moscow goods can be conveyed to Erivan at rates varying between 1.20 roubles

(1 rouble and 20 kopeks) in winter and 90 kopeks in summer, the railway charges being reduced in summer to meet the competition of the Volga steamers. From Erivan to Tabriz (a distance of about 200 miles) the transport by waggon as far as Julfa and by caravan between Julfa and Tabriz costs 80 kopeks per pood, so that altogether goods can be conveyed from Moscow to the Tabriz market at rates which do not fall below 1.70 roubles in summer, and never exceed 2.20 roubles in winter. The carriage from Trebizond, on the other hand, varies according to the season between 3 and 4 roubles per pood. In other words, the average freight paid on Russian goods coming into Tabriz amounts to about £12 10s. a ton against £21 a ton paid on merchandise from France, Great Britain, or Germany coming by way of Trebizond.

The advantage in favour of Russia will be further increased when the railway is pushed on to Julfa, and still more so when it reaches Tabriz. Very little can be done to assist our merchants in this field since the improving of the Trebizond route would not affect the price of transport. Already wheeled vehicles can be taken as far as Bayazid, on the Turkish frontier, yet the caravan rates are not cheaper, but rather more expensive than they are on routes in Persia, where wheels are not used at all. The same remark applies to the Erivan-Tabriz route, the greater part of which consists of a made road, practicable for waggons. Since, therefore, transport by way of Trebizond can be made cheaper only by building a railway through Turkish Armenia, and since no



DELIJAN ON THE AKSTAFA-ERIVAN ROAD

one now living is at all likely to witness such a line built, we must be prepared to see the Tabriz market delivered gradually over to Russia unless railways are built through Persia from the south. The astonishing thing is that Manchester goods still hold their own in Tabriz. In spite of their advantage in the matter of freight and the much greater assistance of the large export premium paid on Russian prints and sheetings, Moscow manufactures are sold in the Tabriz market only to a very limited extent. This can be explained only by the fact, pointed out to me by a rich Armenian merchant, that a very cheap selection of goods is sent to Tabriz from Western Europe in order to compete with the growing Russian trade. Hence it is that Russian cottons are often of much higher quality than Manchester goods, as they could well afford to be when they have an advantage of £8 10*s.* a ton in the freight, and are further cheapened by a premium of nearly £35 a ton on export into Persia. In Teheran the better quality of the Russian goods secures them a larger sale, which is further facilitated by the action of the Russian bank, whose chief business seems to consist in pushing Russian commerce. In Tabriz apparently the Russian bank is not quite so active and the provincial population is content with goods of a lower quality.

Dr. Rohrbach, whose writings I have once or twice quoted already, suggests that German textiles might be brought more readily into the Tabriz market if German steamers were to run direct from the North Sea ports to Trebizond, and if the existing carriage

road were extended beyond Bayazid through Persian territory to Tabriz. This suggestion serves only to show how far he, in common with most other writers on the subject, has failed to understand the whole question of communications in this part of the Eastern hemisphere. To begin with, the freight between Western Europe and Trebizond is a matter of no practical importance whatever, since at most it amounts to a few shillings per ton, and a shilling or two more or less on the sea carriage cannot appreciably affect the ultimate price of goods that have to pay £21 per ton for the land journey. In the second place, the extension of the carriage road from Bayazid would seem to be an even more futile remedy in view of the fact that in almost every case where carriage roads have been made in place of the old mule-tracks the cost of transport has been raised rather than lowered. If roads were built by the various Governments concerned for the good of the public, which might use them free of charge, the result might be slightly—but only slightly—different. As it is, where private companies, or foreign Governments, or the Governments of the countries themselves, build roads as a sort of commercial undertaking, and charge high tolls in order to keep the roads in repair, and at the same time to pay if possible some interest on the capital expended, then the advantage gained by using waggons in preference to pack-animals is more than counterbalanced by the tolls. As Russia has grasped, more than any other Power to-day, the simple fact that cheap and rapid railway communication is the most important factor

in Eastern politics, she is likely to overreach us very rapidly as long as we oppose her with road schemes which are to railways what a superannuated donkey is to an automobile.

Russia has also a great faculty for rapid railway construction. The extension from Alexandropol to Erivan was partially open to traffic about a year after it was seriously taken in hand, though the distance is 144 versts—about a hundred miles, and the curves and gradients are difficult.

With us a railway when it is opened to traffic is generally finished in every way, as far as perfection can be predicated. The Russians, on the other hand, aim at getting the rails laid over the whole distance as rapidly as possible, so that trains can run over the line in a sort of fashion years before the permanent way has any kind of real permanency. Between Erivan and Alexandropol, for instance, there are three streams to cross, none of them requiring a bridge of more than one or two short spans. Yet, though passenger trains have been running for months, two out of the three bridges are not complete. Then there is a difference of more than 2000 feet between the valley of the Aras and the plain of Alexandropol. In negotiating the rise the line has to wriggle its way through the spurs of the great Alagöz Mountain. Here there are cuttings still to be made, curves to be readjusted, and embankments in process of construction, so that for a space of twenty miles or so the entire alignment is only temporary. Again, most of the railway stations are not yet built, and the rolling-stock is extremely limited. But still

trains are run somehow or other, and the new section far more than pays its working expenses long before it is really finished. This system of railway building has its advantages and its disadvanages, but the advantages would seem to outweigh the disadvantages. In the long run it is, perhaps, rather expensive, since so much temporary work has to be done only to be abandoned when the permanent alignment is finished, and lives are often lost through derailments and broken bridges. On the other hand communications are opened very rapidly, and the line is already earning a good income long before it is, properly speaking, in existence.

During this semi-construction period the running expenses are very small in comparison with the receipts, for the travelling public, knowing that it is lucky to have a railway at all, puts up with any amount of crowding and discomfort. One prefers, for instance, to pay 8*s.* for a seat in a packed second-class carriage, and so to cover the distance to Alexandropol in eight hours, rather than spend two whole days and a night on the road in a rickety phaeton, for which the charge would be £3 or £4. In most respects the line is well and substantially built. In spite of the difficult work in crossing the Anti-Caucasus between Tiflis and Alexandropol the standard five-foot gauge of Russia is maintained, and the rails are fairly heavy; I think 65 lbs. or 70 lbs. per yard. The line is single, but there are sidings at intervals of six miles so as to facilitate military movements. The alignment between Alexandropol and Erivan follows more or less the course of the

Arpa Chai for sixty versts (forty miles) in a southerly direction past the base of Alagöz, then turning south-east it continues to "serpent" through the spurs of that mountain for twenty versts until it reaches the open valley of the Aras. At 100 versts it passes a mile or so north of the considerable town of Sardara-bad; at 122 versts it crosses the Abaranz stream, and at 130 the Zanga, both tributaries of the Aras. The country here is green and well watered by irri-gation canals, while the towering mass of Ararat across the Aras affords a continual feast for the eye. At 132 versts the main line, which is by this time proceeding east-south-east along the level floor of the Aras valley, comes to a stop, and a branch running almost due north for twelve versts brings one to Erivan, prettily embowered in its gardens several hundred feet above the main level of the valley. No work has been done yet beyond this point on the way to Julfa and Tabriz, but the intention evidently is to carry on the work at no distant date, nor is there the slightest difficulty to be overcome until the Aras has to be bridged at Julfa. Already the line into Russian Armenia is a financial success, and will become more so when the permanent way settles down and the rolling-stock is increased; yet this country is exactly similar to Persia—in fact was less than 100 years ago part of Persia—where we are constantly told railways can never pay.

At the present moment Russia is nearest to Persia at Askabad. From there a railway could be carried through to Meshed at any moment and prolonged, if necessary, to Teheran and to Seistan. Many

people have thought that a line through Khorasan from Askabad is the first railway which Russia will build in Persia, the idea being that the strategical advantages of such a line would naturally commend themselves to the Russian Government.

But the Russian advance on Khorasan and Seistan being almost entirely of a political nature must be made to co-ordinate with the commercial attack by way of the Caucasus. To act prematurely in either direction would be to court ultimate defeat, so that though the Russian Government may be now quite ready to lay a railway from Askabad into Khorasan, that step cannot be taken until they are equally prepared on the side of Tabriz, and certainly not before the time when they have so gained a control over the Shah's purse and the Shah's will that they can construct lines in Persia without leaving the way open to other Powers to do the same thing; that is to say, their monopoly of railway concessions in Persia must be secured.

On the Tabriz side they have, as I have described, got their railway in fairly good working order as far as Erivan, from which the way lies perfectly open before them down the valley of the Aras to Julfa, a distance of a little over 100 miles. That they contemplate an immediate extension cannot be doubted. The alignment of the existing line has been chosen obviously with this end in view, as it leaves Erivan twelve versts on the left and points straight down the Aras valley. Even the numbering on the verst posts stops short at the Zanga crossing and begins afresh for the remaining twelve

versts to Erivan, showing plainly that Erivan is off the main line. To complete the railway to Julfa is now a matter of less than two years, but even then the Russian base on the Persian border will not be quite satisfactory, because the long detour by Baku makes the journey from Moscow to Julfa at least 500 miles more than it might be if there were a short cut through the Caucasus from Vladikavkaz to Tiflis. It is quite possible, therefore, that the Russians will not advance over the border towards Tabriz until this connection is made. The construction of a line of 130 miles or so through the Caucasus range would be extremely expensive, but not at all impracticable, and the receipts on the Baku-Tiflis-Batum line are now so enormous that the Government can well afford to be extravagant. For the year 1901 the net receipts of the Baku-Batum line amounted to £1500 per mile after all expenses were paid. That is to say, the line showed a profit of about 15 per cent. on the capital invested. I suppose there is no other railway of 560 miles in the world which can produce such figures.

This brings us to the final question, which is not yet satisfactorily answered—whether or not Russia is really prepared to carry out the programme which she seems to have set before her in Persia. We are too often in the habit of consoling ourselves for the ground which we have surrendered to Russia in this part of the world by reflecting that the great Northern Power is going ahead too fast, that she is breaking up internally, that she is going bankrupt, and that sooner or later there will be a crash. Such

prophecies may generally be explained on the ground that the wish is father to the thought, and as far as Russian expansion in the Caucasus and Central Asia is concerned our predictions are singularly unfulfilled.

Some writers complain that Russia has done nothing to develop or colonise the Caucasus, and wonders why in the world with so much to do in her own territory she should desire to expand into Persia. To begin with, it would be equally pertinent to ask what we wanted with Rhodesia and the Soudan when we have all Canada and Australia before us. But even the premisses of such an argument are not true. Russia is not naturally a commercial Power, and she has not done for the Caucasus what we should have done if we had been in her place. But she has established peace in a country where for centuries peace has been unknown, she has built roads and railways, and she has left the natural genius of the Armenians and the capital of foreigners to do the rest. The Armenians openly abuse the Russians, but they forget that under Russian Government they enjoy a prosperity which was never dreamed of before. Only compare Erivan with Tabriz or Erzerum, and the difference is at once apparent. Mr. Lynch, who is generally impartial, complains that the Russians have not built enough roads in the country. He would find great advances in this direction if he visited the country to-day. Even the hated Edgmiatzin is joined to Erivan with a fine *chaussée*, and how many metalled roads would he find in South Africa outside of the

towns? In this respect of roads alone the Caucasus is ahead not only of most British colonies, but also of the whole west of the United States of America. As for the colonising question, the critics seem to forget that the Caucasus and Transcaucasia have already a population equal, or nearly equal, to that of Canada, though you might subtract Transcaucasia from Canada and hardly notice the difference. There is no territory for Russian colonists to fill up except land which is either under snow most of the year or totally devoid of rainfall. In a country like Russia, where emigration is managed and controlled by the State, it is impossible to believe that a large portion of the stream which goes to Siberia might not be turned aside to Transcaucasia if the Government so willed it. But there is no pressing need for population in Transcaucasia, while there is in Siberia, and so the Russians do not come in large quantities to the beautiful valleys of Georgia or the uplands of Armenia. Those Russians whom one sees in Armenia are settled on the most unpromising territory, and can hardly be expected to compete on even terms with the natives of the country, who have all the best lands.

In Transcaspia the benefits of Russian rule are apparent from the way in which the desert is becoming fertile, and Ferghana cotton is beginning to capture the Moscow market.

The whole argument based on the supposed backwardness of Russia as an Imperial Power falls to the ground as soon as one visits the countries in question and sees with one's own eyes what Russia

is doing. Nothing could be more fatal to our own policy in Persia than to formulate it on the understanding that Russia has already absorbed more of Asia than she can conveniently digest, or that her colonies are a serious burden to her. Considering that her Trans-Caucasian Railway system is a mine of wealth, it may be gathered that she will have no difficulty in continuing a strong railway policy right into Persia.

When it is argued, as it is by many of our own nationality, that we have no proof that Russia desires to absorb Persia, there is an excellent answer in the existing facts. If Russia does not contemplate a peaceful descent on Persia, why are her railway engineers all over the country? Why did five of them explore the route from Teheran to Bunder-Abbas, disguised in some cases as Armenian merchants or German entomologists, but wearing Russian uniform? Why have two Russian engineers surveyed a line from Tabriz to Kermanshah within the past two years? Why does the Russian Government spend money on export premiums to Persia which she spends in the case of no other country, and why does she endeavour to capture the trade of Persia more than of other much more important markets? There exist already maps of Persia in the Russian Legation at Teheran in which railway systems for the whole of Persia are mapped out, and if it is argued that it is a good deal easier to make railways on paper than over real territory one need only reply that in this respect, at least, Russia has always been

as good as her word. Only two things hinder her advance into Persia at the present moment. First of all, she has not moved her base right up to the Persian border, nor can she do so for a year or two. In the second place, she has not yet got such a hold on the Shah's Government as to obtain a monopoly of railway building in Persia, and until she does that it suits her better to hold on to the existing agreement prohibiting the building of railways altogether.

Our policy, if it is to be successful in Persia, must aim at taking advantage of the two weak points in the Russian armour. We should easily get ahead of her in railway construction, while our base is secured to us in the Gulf, and in order to do this we should aim above all things at putting an end to the Russo-Persian Railway Agreement, to which we have never been a party, and which is opposed to all rules of justice and progress. Now that we have Lord Curzon to direct affairs in India we are taking a few active steps in Persia. We have, for instance, actually surveyed a little of Southern Persia, which before was known accurately only to the Russians. But capital will not flow into Persia without the guarantee of the British and Indian Governments, so we may just as well resign all hopes of doing anything to develop Persia by railways at once, unless the two Governments are prepared to offer a low guarantee to British capitalists. Whether we shall ever take such a step or not is more than doubtful; yet our future in Persia depends on it. Russia

lays her plans beforehand, and spends her money with a definite object in view. We do neither, and yet complain that our prestige is going or gone. The remedy is very simple and lies in our own hands.

THE END