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*Five Hundred Selected Poems from
"Divani Shamsi Tabriz," translated
into English Prose*

SUHAIL

BY
COLERIDGE KENNARD



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To
My Mother
in love gratitude—and admiration

I am indebted for the drawings in this volume to one who desires to remain anonymous, and who will allow me to say here only this: that they are by a friend who shared with me many happy days in Persia.

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*" What a bride is in the soul!
By the reflection of her face the world is coloured."*

" And the West wind and East and the sound of the South."

TEHRAN—ISFAHAN

N6 Ruz.

Once again the season of spring has opened; once again the West Wind has mingled the stars of jasmine in the tresses of the rose; the poet has found yet one more rhyme in praise of pleasure and of wine. Truly it has been said :—

" In the assembly of the joyful the jaundiced face of sorrow should be veiled."

To all, from a different side, the slings of adversity are aimed, yet amid the myriad deceptions of the world this is not least: that the shadow of the cypress, the bank of the stream, hold no trace of our passing.

I said:—" Give me your love as keepsake !"

She answered:—" Are you Farhad ? See! I will give you what you can carry: this kiss from my lips that Nadjeh has placed there, that Arus is waiting to gather."

I said:—" Must Pride lend mockery to Disdain ?"

She answered:—" It is the privilege of Beauty to be proud."

I said:—" But of Sovereignty to give alms. . . ."

She answered :—" When the petition of Merit has been discarded how should the claim of Arrogance be heard ?"

I said:—" O shining Moon, Arrogance asks of Love

the morning to vaunt its prowess; misfortune only the passing hour to dream and to forget."

Why should I finish the story? Has not Anwari said:—

" Short as the space of a breath is joy and
happiness
And many years come after ... "

One day Love asked of Youth:—

" When on the road of adventure you falter
what will you do with my heart ? "

And Youth made answer:—

" I will throw it by the wayside after having
locked in it my soul."

Seasons, meanings, purposes straggle and overlap. Much mastery were needed to curve one line of life and end it smooth. On the branches of spring the leaves of autumn linger; in the evening sky bright morning spaces float. What impulse even of our brief sincerities is wholly true? What hour has held its impetus to the end?

I said "Good-bye" to-day to Mirza Nairn, who taught me Persian. While we were talking the door opened. Gravely the old man rose to welcome and take leave:—

" A thousand thanks this one comes, a thousand
pities that one goes."

... So five years end: their duties, doubts, ad-

ventures, their dreams, their chattering. The final formula alone remains:—"Be peace! Farewell!"

Farewell. . . . Oh, could that word give back all that my greeting gave.

March 29.

Persians on an outward journey spend the first night, a few miles from the city, at the shrine of Shahzade Abdul Azim; to have time and opportunity, say some, to remember and retrieve what has been forgotten; to rob, say others, a few final hours from oblivion and the grave. We have stopped only for a moment. It is an evening, at the gates of the Mosque, like many others.

Unconsciously I wait for the horses to turn, my thoughts mechanically go back along the road into the lighted streets of Tehran, to the sudden darkness of the Legation garden.

A stork is standing motionless in its nest on a minaret. People chant their prayers:—"La ilaha ilia llahu."

Oh, be it so! Surely one can close one's eyes over one complete picture in life and keep it ever thus with no more distance coming in between than two short hours of road.

We pass, far away on the left, the Tower of Silence that stands on a spur of the mountain above Rhages, where, in these last five years, I have spent so many hours.

Inevitably I dream . . .

"Where would you like to be buried?" she asked. Still she thinks me half a poet, so I answered:—

"In a cove of the Egean, rustling with pine and myrtle, where whispering ripples would ruffle the neatness of reflected stars, and tinkle, luminous, on a marble headland. Laughingly they would sparkle too, in the blue morning, whilst the bees hum, and the goat's foot goes scratching and tapping, ever so lightly, as he climbs to browse the riper berries above a mossgrown sepulchre."

Her eyes were full of pity. Perverse, I went on:

"Or rather . . . on a Tower of Silence aloft in the desert, four leagues from the hearthstones of living men. All day long the sunlight would be shrill with the sweeping of birds' wings. Then, after the first touch of a dry talon on my face, would come a pecking and dragging and fluttering until nothing remains but a polished skull, to be rolled at last, by some prying beak, through the grating, out of sight of the silly sky, down to the glimmering heap in comfortable twilight, below. . . .

"No. No. Listen! I have it now:

"To sleep forever in the courtyard of Ali's Mosque at Kerbela. Overhead, the golden dome, the blue tiles; around me, doves, and the splash of water, the murmur of old men's prayers; and, very high and faint, the muezzin's cry. Oh, and the two years before in Persia! Waiting, in a crumbling case of bricks and

mortar, by the roadside, with the dust, and the mule-bells and the camel-bells passing, and the journey ahead. . . . Dear! What a journey! The little coffins bobbing along, piled up together, Ismail's, Ali Akbar's, Mohammed's and mine, the bones packed tight and cool with a present of fruit for the Customs doctor. And, when the loads are thrown off in the caravan-serai, after the long stages of the plain, a dried, forgotten pomegranate rolling, rattling, inside the narrow ribs. . . ."

Midnight.

A row of willows, the desert, and a shepherd who came to stare and seemed enormous against the empty sky.

. . . It is like changing horses on the way between two stars.

Kushki Nusrat.

A mountain torrent pours through tree-dim hollows into open, sparkling ponds. Along the margins figures sit, dipping their hands into the water, raising them to give gesture to some comment, letting them fall again into the stream.

It is a glorious, thoughtless moment; spring on tiptoe; the shining earliness of day that throws

itself to risk with no motive other than the bright mischief of a child.

Clouds have gradually overspread the sun and dust whirls everywhere. When one has been sitting idle for a few moments one finds a heap of grit in one's hand.

Kum.

In the garden of the caravanserai the elm-trees and the judas have burst, but the load of clouds that weighs and is reduplicated on the surrounding house-tops sends its greyness also here, and even those brightest colours, against the background of towers and minarets, are dulled. Only flights of pigeons, that are wont to put the fourth shade of blue above this city of lapis, turquoise and sapphire, flash here and there with a metallic gleam.

From the edge of the verandah I can still look back on the mountains over Tehran. They shine, as through a veil of silk, in a world of their own, where the sky is still unclouded and the sun is bright. I take—a last futility—the bunch of flowers they have brought me and throw it there in the wind. Flights of larks are soaring. I think the spring and larks will be for me always part of this moment.

There is no sunset to-night: no gleam of colour comes behind the greyness. As we lumber over the desert the daylight fades. It is dark and

impossible to find things in the carriage before I realize that the day has gone.

We pass, outside Pasangan, a ghastly relic: a man bricked up in plaster of Paris by the roadside and still keeping, weeks after his death, the semblance of a figure standing in the path of whom it were convenient to ask the way.

Night

A sound of bells is coming from afar, from as far away as are the stars.

We meet the dawn in the Kashan desert. The sky is still heavy with cloud, but it lightens little by little in lines of white and grey. The desolation is complete. There are not here even the "stones of emptiness."

We halt at midday by a small rest-house. A man sits chopping grass by rubbing it up and down against a knife. It smells bitterly green. Donkeys stand about, their heads down, dozing. The larks are still singing.

The road stretches onwards to a long low ridge striped with salt. What is behind? Is that desert wilder, more boundless still than this? We go at walking pace through driving sand and the horses strain and fret. The grey sky of yesterday breaks up into a maze of clouds that are too airy to be called of silver, travelling southwards with us and trailing showers of rain between the sunshine and the shade. Not often enough could one

write that the desert is in these skies no less than upon these plains.

Khaf.

We have come up, just before sunset, into a world of fields and streams enfolded among high peaks. So soft is the air of flowers and verdure that it seems like pulp of fruit against one's cheeks. Villages are scattered everywhere; each more buried in green wheatfields and wild blue iris than the last. Higher up, under the shadow of the mountains, a line of white blossoming fruit-trees lies like snow fallen from above. The *sowar* points to it: "Natanz." Natanz: the name brings back memories of documents and files—a host of "Pro Memoria" and "Aide-Memoire" claiming damages for insults offered to a British subject.

. . . The representative of a well-known English firm had, despite warnings, insisted on travelling to Isfahan in an unruly moment. At Natanz a brigand, Naib Hussein, seized him, and hearing something about drugs demanded an elixir of youth. The portly and dignified old gentleman cannot have prescribed successfully, for the next morning Naib Hussein, scattering tabloid brands to the four winds, had him tied to the back of a post carriage and dragged at full gallop along the road.

Beside this gloomy incident fate wills that I should place another memory. Some eighteen months ago—despite all warnings too—I arrived

one morning, after having spent a night splashing on horseback across the Kum lake, at some fort or other in the Kashan Plain. Without delay we were fired on. The first bullet struck the ground some way behind us, the second one of the mules clean in the chest. We threw our hats into the air, waved scarves and finally dismounted. Satisfied at last as to our pusillanimity, horsemen galloped out and claimed us as prisoners of Naib Hussein. Mash 'Mamat Ali straightway began to sob and cry :—" God is witness that I did not want to come. I said, ' Let us go back.' "

One of the ruffians after a while turned on him :—" Why waste your breath ? To-morrow it will go from your body. Waste it not therefore uselessly to-night."

We were brought into the dilapidated hall of the fort to await the pleasure of Mashallah Khan, who " had gone hunting." The day passed, I know not how, but it is hard to while away many hours in the desert without conversation. The " Head of the Garrison " started it first:

" Is it true that in Europe you can fix a telescope to a rifle ? " and then:

" If your attendant can play, let him play to us."

Djevad started off on his zither without further bidding and the " Bah, bah, bah " of admiration broke around. Someone went off and fetched sweetmeats, a carpet was spread and soon we were drinking *araq* and vowing friendship and esteem. The chatter henceforth never flagged and rendered sleep impossible. Each time my

bemuddled senses drifted off a henna-bearded warrior started afresh:—

"This is a poor and solitary night you pass, O friend. But at Natanz to-morrow I will place by your side a fresh flower."

Horses are changed and as we start the sun sets in a blaze of orange-coloured', light behind the mountains and long shadows are thrown into the sky. The road rises towards a pass. The stillness is absolute. Only from above, as if it were the grinding of the stars, the sound of rivers far away. . . .

The peace of night is broken before it falls upon the plains. Here it drops straight. These high places, mountain summits, are what it touches first.

Natanz. . . . "By your side I will place a fresh flower. . . ."

We have dinner to-night lying on the floor of a shelter amid indescribable filth. It would be intolerable but for the opium smoke which veils and stems the sights and smells. Little by little people come in. The room is not more than twelve feet square and it accommodates, besides ourselves and its frequenters and innumerable mice, a butting ram. Every time I get up the creature takes, with dignity and deliberation, the three accustomed paces before starting to charge. We have to dodge it in every direction and finally to drag it out into the road, where it remains to butt at

regular—and nodoubt traditional—intervals against the door.

We talk about opium:—

"Is there blame to be given? We are accustomed to it."

Someone asks if by drinking alcohol he would be cured. They smoke it three times a day: at dawn, at midday and at night.

An especially bold mouse turns off the conversation and I inquire what other animals they keep here. There is still a pig, I am told, that lives with the horses. It is kept because it breathes the horses' breath, which is "very useful."

"Why . . .?"

And the first question asked they start. Am I going to be a Consul, or have I come here to shoot? There is no game, however, in these mountains, only wolves.

A man who up till then had not spoken asks whether we eat wolves in Europe. I reply no, and several others turn on him:—

"Fool! Know you not that wolves and foxes are of no use in the world?"

A muleteer interrupts:—

"Oh yes, they are. Only hares are useless. It is lucky to see a wolf or a fox in the early morning."

All agree:—

"Yes. He is right. The hare is the only useless animal that God has made: a hare brings bad luck whether you see it in the early morning or towards night."

There is a long pause. Someone groans:—

"It is the time for opium. . . ."

I try to talk to them, to argue.

"If you stay with us we will perhaps be able to learn. . . . But why should you take trouble? The sins of others will not be written against you."

I reply that we are leaving, alas! almost immediately.

Then we must not think ill:—

"Both the good and the bad show their goods. It is for you to accept or to refuse. . . ."

I get up and they leave their tea and pipes and come to try to help.

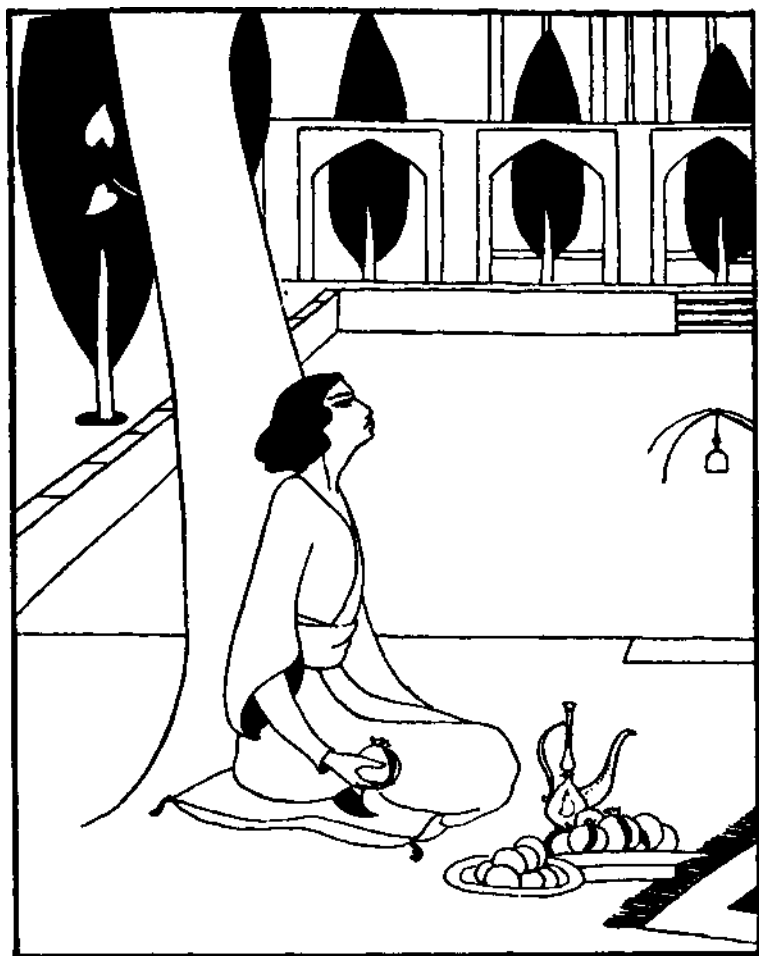
A pale and trembling figure waves his hand:—

"Go forward if you must, O friend, but hold in the bridle of your horse, for at the head of every road there is someone who would ask for aid."

I cannot go till it has been promised that I will spend the whole day here when next we pass. When next we pass. . . . These places where, once in a lifetime, one halts for a few moments, and passes on. . . .

Dawn rises over an open plain where a strong wind is blowing. While the horses are being changed the driver finds he needs a cloth to clean the nostrils of one of the wheelers. He walks across to an old beggar crying for alms by the wayside and pulls off a bit of his rags.

During the inevitable delay I wander out to a



stream that flows towards some distant fields. Every twenty yards or so its course has been narrowed with mud and stones and there it rustles, bringing a tiny voice of springtime and fertility into the soundless waste. The usual group of idlers, even at this early hour, are gathered beside it. I sit down too on the bank and watch bits of red weed swim up, pass, and float away. Charm of loitering beside a stream. . . .

Everywhere in Persia traces of a tradition which brought once the movement and sound of running water into the centre of daily life are visible. In the desert gardens innumerable channels patterned the sky into arabesques beside the feet of those calm dreamers of olden days and filled their ears with a soft and gentle rustling.

It is perhaps, however, in the crumbling palaces around Tehran that this bygone and forgotten art reached its highest development. There, by yet subtler technique, movement was divorced from sound. At Kamaranie, in arbours darkened with shade, are still certain tanks, fed from the Elburz mountains. Though the volume of an unstemmed torrent rises within them, so cunningly is the level of the fountain jet contrived that the uprushing flood never breaks the surface nor hinders the spell of silence. Swelling into smooth curves, into eddies that for ever are on the point of breaking and for ever sink subdued, the massive water, mastered in its moment of greatest turbulence, slides with only a faint whispering as of leaves over the smooth margins and speeds away.

. . . Elaboration of some dumb impulse that stirs in the soul of the East; symbol, perhaps, of its formula of happiness that what each moment brings the same moment should efface. The nightingale sings and leaves the shadow of the tree, the peasant, who has had no other teacher, plays to himself for a while, then puts his flute in his pocket and walks off.

Isfahan. April 1-5.

How to describe again the marvel of Isfahan? The inventory of its art and buildings has been made so often that only presumption or ignorance can add, now, a further word.

Masjid-i-Shah, Ali-Qapi, the Chehel Sutun . . .

The turning of the very first alley one follows takes one straight back to the time of Shah Abbas, to the unreal but infinitely picturesque vision of Persia which, in a moment that suddenly grew still, rose for one long ago from off some ancient miniature or drawing. Who knows if it were after all a false one? A movement of the heart in youth often carries one to where years of documentation and research can never reach.

At the end of three days I found that, neglecting all else, my thoughts led me always to the Madrassah. On to a paved garden where rise a few cypresses, a few green shrubs, that age-long seclusion from nature seem to have rendered almost familiar with man, gives a narrow building composed of little cubicles open to the sky. They are

the exact reality of those alcoves which, in pictures, cover the facades of palaces and stage groups that we fancy lost in meditation and truth. Perhaps not without reason. . . . For the mysteries of the world that lie hidden somewhere behind the written word had found in the twelfth century in Persia strange and mystic expression in Jallaludin Rumi. Little to-day, alas! is comprehensible in the verbal phantasmagorias of the Sufic faith, for who has time to follow allegory by allegory, symbol by symbol, a path which ends in space? Yet from the *Masndvi*, perhaps the most extraordinary book that the thought of man has ever produced, shone on those rapt and captive faces an unfading and dazzling light, and in the pages of the *Divani Shamsi Tabriz* they breathed a poetry of which the West has no conception, something transcendental yet sensual, prodigiously coloured, which, if its phrases to-day have little meaning, still holds the music of heaven in its cadences and rhymes.

Vanished traditions, vanished art! In the triumph of Greece at Marathon who knows what was lost in what was gained? The West sees now in those pictured philosophers of the East only a vague abstraction, a patient resignation to a life which is disdained. Their lips if they could move for us would but murmur a formula which is anathema: "All is vanity: what we most desire is not worth possessing, and in a few years to have had it or not to have had it will be the same"—for we have not the impulse nor leisure to look beyond. The cry of the muleteer upon the road freezes our blood

and braces us to react. Yet the generalization is too easy. The infinite calm of that Sufic philosophy hides no mere paltry fatalism but a wide and reasoned conception of life. Against a background of abstract ideas that dwarf the small realities we live in and render to our superficial and restless vision all endeavour vain, those fixed eyes saw not only man's few proud and isolated achievements find their true* proportion but also the passing moment, worn to whatever unnoticed triviality by routine and repetition, spring to intense significance. Cryptic lives! Perhaps indeed they had every knowledge, every experience, yet they kept always the power of a child's amazement and its emotion. Seated in those niches which a miniature dais and a writing-desk—so low that they were almost on a level with the floor—alone encumbered, with what patient, long-intervalled words must they have talked to their silent circle of disciples. Proved and initiated those selected already were, so that the outline of a symbol carried a total meaning, the shadow of an allusion food for unending reverie. In those byways of casuistry, so beloved of the East, no European ever could find a way, and yet I fancy that if once a stranger had passed the silver door, to shed light and to honour him, they would, out of their teaching, have spoken certain sentences that could not afterwards be forgotten. . . .

Hour after hour this idea haunted me, and one afternoon, when the inner courtyards were deserted, this is the tale I wove. . . .

" In ancient times "—the Persians use the phrase with equal impartiality of Nasr-ed-Din Shah and Rustem—at the beginning of the spring season, I imagine that two brothers, who had journeyed from the West, stayed for a few days in the Palace of the Sun at Isfahan. And because the No Ruz has ever been a time of rejoicing, the Court and notables repaired on the thirteenth day of the festival to a garden, such as Qaiadun, outside the city. The composition of such a cavalcade I cannot picture, but then as now, doubtless, the track bordering the streams was dotted with dervishes who held in one hand buds of the new corn and in the other grains of the old and made pretence at great rejoicing. In the wide Bala-Khaneh, where princes and ministers at length gathered, all too was gaiety, but though the consummate art of the surroundings brought the very soul of springtime into the circle of entertainment, the two travellers, confused by overmuch ceremony, found their chief pleasure in the conversation of some grave and aged priests who stood a little aside. Thus when the falling twilight interrupted the celebration of the *Sizdahum* and the chamberlains spoke of the programme for the morrow, they begged as an especial favour to be allowed to spend a few hours in the Sufic College. By the courtesy of their new-found friends it was accorded.

It is not easy to picture the feelings of the strangers as, passing from the busy avenue of the Chahar Bagh, where youths, bedizened with jewels

and plumed with falcons, paced their horses, they waited in semi-darkness at the entrance to the guarded courts. A white-robed figure came forward at length with words of welcome:—

"Few are those who have the courage to seek beyond their own forms of thought and feeling, but no one took a step towards the Garden to whom the Gardener did not give salute and greeting."

In similar metaphor the interpreter made answer, explaining his presence. The difficulty was waved aside:—

"Many are the languages in this world, but all have the same meaning. The spirit is one though it has entered into bodies innumerable."

. . . Floor by floor, I fancy, they mounted, passing in every room a group of Sufis with whom words of salutation were exchanged. Then, the visit over, the Master himself bade them take place beside him. For a moment, out of courtesy, the teaching of the inner circle was suspended and the Master, to give expression to the humility which is the essence of all mystic teaching, turned towards his guests:—

"We search . . . for light. But our eyes are veiled from Him who gave us sight. We search . . . for the Soul's Desire. But we cannot find Him who put desire within our heart."

Then the younger of the two brothers, secure with the assurance of the West, did not fear to interrupt:—

"O Master! Our moments here are numbered

and there is much that we would learn. To everyone is given the urge of desire; but if our soul can ascend to heaven our body remains bound to earth. Should we strive to read the enigma of the firmament or try to decipher the riddle at our feet ? "

The old man smiled :—

" Friend! You ask guidance of those incompetent to guide. We are not pure enough to worship in the mosque; we are not happy enough to turn towards the tavern."

He ceased for a moment and then, seeing, it may be, the shadow of the rebuff on the simple, complacent features beside him, continued:—

" But if you will have an answer, I would reply: both above and below; here but there also:—

" I said to Love one night: ' Who art Thou ? ' Love answered: ' I am Eternal Life, Gladness Unending. '

I said : ' O wanderer on the earth, where is thy home ? '

Love answered : ' I am the sparkling of the stars ; I am also a buyer of dustbins. ' "

Deep silence followed, and after a while the Master continued his teaching. Soon the daylight sped and against the spacious night domes and minarets rose glinting and unreal. Lulled by the music the two travellers lingered, and only from time to time by a strained or awkward gesture betrayed their presence. Always the Master paused then and, breaking the trend of his discourse, turned to them with explanation:—

" Our words have perhaps no first meaning but there are words within our words. The heart of man is uncertain but in that heart a second heart is hidden like a horseman hidden in the dust."

Towards dawn, at length, a voice, rising like an arrow in the sky, broke the assembly:—

" Expectedly yet unexpectedly He visited us.

The heart asked: 'Who has come?' The soul answered: 'The wondrous Moon.'

He entered the house and we all like madmen Had gone out into the street to seek for Him.

He called aloud from the house: 'I am here!'

We heeded not His cries, crying ourselves too loudly on all sides.

In every midnight people awake crying: 'What has been stolen?'

Even the thief cries: 'The thief is here!'—and he is the thief.

But his cries are drowned in the shouting of the crowd.

He is with thee! Yea! Ho is with thee in this thy searching!

He whom thou seeketh, seek for Him among those who are searching."

After such a night of vigil and tension in which—let us complete the picture—haschish had passed round and round the circle, the mental confusion of the two brothers was complete, so that they were no longer masters of themselves. At that moment, as if by prearrangement, the gates of the court were opened on a garden to which the

mingled magic of night and day added the final quota of unreality. Hand in hand, I imagine, they directed, as somnambulists, their feet towards it. Though but a few yards intervened, the valley that opened flowed on all sides with streams. Down avenues of spreading trees, up arcades of curling shrubs, fountains in the form of flowers and flowers in the form of fountains splashed and bloomed. Where the eye grew tired of lakes and shrubbery a vermilion tower sprang; when the foot wearied of tiled pathways soft sward spread. Nor in this charmed enclosure where a careless word, a misplaced curiosity, could have spread disharmony did any false note sound. The few figures that decorated the daisied grass had, in the wondrous dawn, fallen asleep even as they plunged their knives into the deep Gurgab melons or stretched out a hand towards a scarlet slipper discarded amid the flowers. A languor insuperable but graceful held them immobile, interrupted the gesture discerned but uncompleted, the pleasure tasted but unexplored.

. . . Perhaps, for a second, a movement of surprise held the travellers. Would not that balm-tree arrest the headlong impetus of yonder hunt? No! Horseman and mount pass unscathed and even in that second the arrow pierces the gazelle.

Henceforward all is unreality. Oblivious they follow the guiding figures, stopping only to push the heads of the fishes under the surface of the tanks or to caress a panther or stallion lulled among the ferns,

Who can fix the frontier line between reality and dream? Years after in the silence of an English home the careful narrative suddenly would break and the guests withdraw in perplexity and dismay. . . .

April 6.

A day of springtime lived as only Persians know how to live it—in a way and in surroundings that give one the impression that one has discovered the very heart of the New Year.

. . . Of many stories and anecdotes one only: a poem that the Shikasteh script has turned into a picture:—

"She whom this fountain commemorates was named Shirin Dilaram; an apprentice at the carpet looms of Ali Kerim Kurdistani. Fortune smiled on her. More pearls than this jet scatters were hers—a tribute to her beauty; more emeralds than this tank hides were hers—an acknowledgment of her eloquence; more gold than the sun spreads upon these streams was hers—a reward for her indulgence.

"But if you would know more untie the amulet that binds her heart; in it you will find a small brass nail such as weavers use to knot their strings. Do not ask an explanation, but pause a moment to wonder at the world's strange destinies."

ISFAHAN—YEZD

Caravanserai of Gulnabad.

The court is full of camels. They look as if they had been here since the beginning of the world and were remaining here until its end. An old man eats his bread beside them, then rolls over against a load and goes to sleep. We are long delayed for things have not yet found their places, and the stars grow faint and disappear. Pigeons rise and circle nearer and nearer to the light of dawn till it streams down from them.

The road all day leads across swamps. I could write of a fitful wind that ruffled the shallow water and turned it intensely blue; of a caravan we took hours to overtake and the sound of whose singing followed us afterwards for miles; of innumerable snipe that rose and scattered under the horses—but only sleepily and with attention wandering, returning ever to the gardens of Isfahan.

An hour after sunset we come once more among fields.

Sagze.

The caravan has arrived. There has been a great clamour. But it is over. The loads lie scattered and the mules have strayed. A crowd collects and

we sit in the midst of boxes and idle time away talking of the prowess of this and that outlaw, the dishonesty of this and that Governor. The horses stir and fidget as animals from the fields come in. Somebody lights an open oil wick and stumbles through the confusion of chests and pans.

Mash' Mam'at Ali is talkative and full of stories. The first one he commences—it appeared to be going to be about a blacksmith who put "six pointed nails" into the shoe of "a famous mare"—Djevad interrupts and it tails off into grunts, sighs and *obiter dicta*, such as:—"A sour liver is a poor companion" and "God is judge of all." The second begins more auspiciously and winds from start to finish leisurely and with some applause. And here **it is:**—

"In the village of Murchekehah, which is seven *farsakhs* distant from Isfahan, lived two peasants who gained their livelihood by rearing poultry. It happened that one day they decided to go to the city to see the wonderful things of which they had been told. They left the fifth day of the month of *Ramazán*, before sunrise, and arrived in the afternoon. Wandering through the streets, observing all that there was to be observed, hearing all that was to be heard, they came at length to the famous Mosque of Isfahan—the *Masjidi Shah*. They saw there a great crowd, some entering, some leaving, and, joining it, entered in. Just at that moment a corpulent *Mollah*, dressed in black cloth and bearing on his head an enor-

mous turban made of the finest Isfahan shawl, mounted the pulpit.

— "' We are tired,' said one peasant to the other. ' Why should we not rest here a while and listen to the *Mollah's* sermon ?'

—" What is better than that ?' the other answered. " So they pressed forward among the people and sat down close to the pulpit.

" The *Mollah* read first a verse from the Koran.

" The two peasants did not listen, fascinated as they were by the magnificent turban of the priest that, like some vast cock's-comb, dangled now this way, now that, the while his sleeves waved like the trunks of young elephants.

" At last the *Mollah* cried:

—" O people! Who follows the orders of God will not be neglected. His life will be serene, his affairs will prosper. He will become happy even if he is in sorrow; he will become rich even if he is in poverty. Take an example like that of Abraham, who was poor and unknown. But, as he believed in God, in the end he became very rich and generous. For when he possessed only six sheep—worth a few *tomans*—he was directed from On High to paint the stakes of his sheepfold black and white. When the ewes lambled every lamb born was piebald, and worth double value.'

—" That is something good,' said the two peasants, scratching their heads. ' We must follow what this *Mollah* says, and obey God. But we cannot do it by ourselves.'

"They left the Mosque and took the road homeward to their village. When they arrived they laid their heads together:

— "*Has not a cock twice the value of a hen in the market ?*"

— " ' Certainly it has.' "

" For three days they thought and talked together, and at the end they decided to invite the *Mollah* to the village. But on what pretext? The next day they returned to Isfahan, and waited till the *Mollah* had finished his sermon and descended from the pulpit. They then approached him and, kissing his hands, besought him to come to Murchekhah, to recite prayers over their father, who was dying. The *Mollah* consented and, in due course, magnificent and awe-inspiring, arrived. The two peasants awaited him at the door of their house:

— " Jenabi Akhund ! Our poor father is surrounded by his family. Be gracious and recite your prayers here in the poultry-yard before his humble door.' "

" In the evening, however, the dying man was still alive, and the *Mollah*, touched by the grief of the two brothers, consented to return the following day. For hours in the sunshine, among the chickens and hens, he droned his liturgies, his vast, red turban bobbing to and fro. At last, suspicious, he demanded to see the dying man. The room in front of which he had sat so long was empty !

- "' What is the meaning of this, ray friends ?'
 — "' O Jenabi Akhund! We listened to your sermon in the *Masjidi Shah* last week about Abraham. . . . We too are poor and unknown. We have only a few poultry. The hens, however, are sitting at present. We thought that if they could see your beautiful turban all the chicks, when they are hatched out, would be cocks—and a cock is worth double the price of a hen.'"

Night

A few moments ago a voice shouted outside the barred gate. *Sowars* went up on to the roof to reconnoitre and then opened a side door and let in a file of camels. The moon has risen in the sky. Orion's Belt is in the south. A child's voice calls: "Abbas! Abbas! ! Abbas! ! !" No one answers.

Kuhpaye.

The town, once the seat of a famous cloak-weaving industry, is in ruins. "It became impossible to live in these parts. The people went away. They went, and still they went. . . ."

The houses indeed seem to have been abandoned on the spur of a moment, with the ashes of the fires still lying in the grates.

"Prices"—it is explained—rose so high a few years ago that the inhabitants emigrated to Isfahan and Yezd:—

" Some just went into the desert. . . ."

I climbed up to some forts on a hillock. They seemed to be constructed of the same huge bricks one sees at Rhages. Owls fluttered out of holes and crannies and sat blinded by the sun. An old man guided me and muttered :—

" It belongs to olden times, to olden times. . . ."

The phrase would serve as a motto for Persia.

We are all muddled up to-night, for the space is small. The mules are currycombed in the middle of the cooking arrangements and we eat by the light of the blazing logs under a cauldron. A villager announces that he bought a horse at Resht for sixty *tomans* and sold it at Julfa for one hundred and thirty. Djevad says it is a lie. He goes away and fetches the receipts. Djevad says it is the will of God.

Silence falls. One by one the *sotvars* and mule-teers yawn loudly and crawl under their cloaks. I take a last stroll outside. Walls blending into the sky and stars and, as I am falling asleep, a horse suddenly neighing.

April 8.

After a long day we came, towards evening, over a low pass, to Kerimabad. It is a village—if village it can be called—of two or three houses a little off the track, flanked by a fort and falling towards a garden and orchard that overlook the desert into which the Zendi Rud drains. While we sit waiting

for the caravan the local Khan arrives on a pacing mule from Nain. He is enormously fat, like an incarnation of Magog. Arrived in the village, he dismounts on to a wooden throne outside the fort, over which his bulk spreads and bulges till one wonders what power of cohesion it is that holds such mass together. The peasants make a circle round him, taking his hand in theirs and pressing it to their heads. The picture is out of a 'far, dim past, a past of rock-carvings and old, old tales. One can almost fancy the words:—

" . . . Many are the projects and ambitions of man—but Fate rules all!—and strangely are they divided.

" In the name of God!

" On a day among days, while Ministers and Princes were assembled in Diwan, the Cypress of Beauty, the Shadow of Excellence, the Peacock of Splendour opened the Treasury of Speech:—

" 'It is our will to send an expedition against Cathay.'

" On the right of the throne a hundred youths repeated:—

" 'An army invincible will set forth to dim the splendour of the East.'

" On the left a hundred greybeards echoed:—

" 'Hosts innumerable will march out to shame the Rising Sun.'

"The Source of Wisdom deigned to unseal the lips of Eloquence:—

"'What has been said has been said; what has been determined has been determined.'

" Then the chamberlains dismissed the Diwan, saying to those present:—

" *Go you each your way.'

"And as they went their way it happened that . . ."

I wander out and spoil the story. This Yezdigird of Sovereignty and Power is exclusively occupied with a grievance against a Swedish Gendarmerie Officer who, three weeks before, underpaid three measures of barley. . . .

The bustle of the mules and of unloading is not here to-night. We are not on the road. Djevad, sitting under the fruit-trees, plays a long wild melody that never seems to change and that he says comes from the Hedjaz. Gnats hover in the lowering light, and each blossom of the trees seems a tiny sun swinging against the mountains opposite.

The day lingers endlessly in the sky. Only very slowly does the darkness creep around. I have the impression this evening that the night has come from the garden itself, from the very flowers, and has, little by little, spread upwards. And still a short hour ago the light in the white blossoms was too dazzling for the eyes. . . .

At the village well three women, cloaked in blue as dark as the sky, are crouching. One of them is washing a baby. She goes on rubbing her hands

up and down its face while her head is turned to stare.

I go back to the spot when all have gone. In the moonlight the water is as black as jet. Geese are flying overhead, screaming as they pass.

It is cold, and in an empty room, opening on to a terrace, Djevad lights a fire of twigs and thistle-down. They blaze in a great flame for a moment and then nothing remains. But oh, the scent! It is the same as that which clings to one's fingers when on a burning summer's day, in the mountains, one breaks off a branch by the path.

April 9.

A few scraps of paper and some black ashes alone will show, for a few hours, where we have rested.

The day had started to creep down from the mountains, lighting the white fruit-trees without the stirring of a single petal, before we were ready to leave the garden.

In a blaze of sun outside the mules are set upon the road. While we stand there talking and shouting Hajji Khan comes out of the fort, and mounts upon his throne. We say " Good-bye " and start:—
" Into the hands of God. . . . "

We gallop for the first few miles, dropping through low valleys. There are gardens all the way, full of frosty sunlight, and the horses' hoofs break through thin films of ice. All is still in the

grip of winter, and on the fields where peasants are toiling no trace of green has yet come. They stop and greet us:—

" God give thee strength!"

Gradually we come out above the Nain Plain. If I had not had a map in my hands I could have believed that we were descending towards a lake. All was shining sheets of water, scenery of lagoon and shadow, vague mirage of dream.

Bambiz, which was to have been our stage, turns out not to exist. There is no *serai*, nor even roof where we can find shelter, nor water of any sort to drink. We wait for the mules under some bare trees beside a dried-up pond, and the horses fight. Djevad tries to find a samovar. There is not one in the place. A Kashi *sowar*, who is the only representative of established authority stationed here, says he brought one when he came two years ago but that it has been broken " since about that time." In desperation we go at length to a camel refuge we had passed an hour back on the road, and there bivouac till evening. The place is alive with ticks—black, flat beetles with hooks on either side—that the muleteers call " *kanne* ":

" If they bite a man he dies," adds Djevad, who has never seen one before; but an old man who is found in a corner assures us it is not so, and seems to prove it.

As we were to stop here only to avoid the ill-famed No Gombaz, and it appears worse than the

most coloured descriptions of this latter place, I decide to start again at sunset and go straight through to Aqda, some fifty miles of road. Abdullah falls asleep under a saddle and Djevad works in the opposite corner. They have quarrelled all day long. . . .

A bar of sun from a hole in the roof creeps slowly over the loads and bridles up on to the wall. I fall asleep too, and awake to find myself covered with the straw and dust that the mules have scattered over everything in rolling. The sky has clouded up with a heavy covering of grey. Swallows fly screaming in and out of the roof; the horses snort.

We send the old man we found here to fetch water from a spring in the mountains "two hours away," and he brings back, towards evening, an earthen pot in a sack on his back; but the water is tasteless and heavy. There is in Persia, however, always something that compensates for the vicissitudes of discomfort. Wandering outside, I meet a little girl carrying a bowl of cream almost as big as herself, which I buy from her for three cowrie shells.

By the light of a candle stump, stuck on a box in the doorway against the first stars, the things are packed. Abdullah, somewhere in the darkness among the horses, has a row with the old man about the price of barley:—

"Oh, animal! Now you start to trouble and annoy. You howl indeed so loudly that God Himself is taking fright."

The commotion is finally settled by the arrival of somebody or other who confirms what the old man has been wailing. Appeased Abdullah concludes:—

— "Your coming brought happiness, but now you can go !"

— "May your journey be safe and pleasant!"

— "May your old age be prolonged!"

The moon has come out from the clouds and a cold wind is blowing. Against the open door figures come and go across the blue Eastern night.

The charcoal has been thrown from the last pipe and lies burning on the ground; the packs are fastened. From out of the gloom the mules are led up one by one and loaded. Each has a "*Ya! Shah Neje!*" or a "*Pesar Ali*" or a "*H azrat Abbas!*" Then of their own accord they move away and stand waiting, their ears pointed towards the night.

There is always a moment at starting of pause and hesitation. The horses shake themselves in the keen air; the mules spread out and stray before bunching together on the road. A last voice wails behind:—

"Shabi tarik, rahi barik, o manzeli dur. . . ."

("The night is dark, the road obscure and the stage is far away.")

Then the cries of the muleteers rise round us—

— "Ay *chesmi kur!*"

— "Ay *khiri yar!*"

—as they run in and out of the caravan. Soon the bells beat as one, the loads touch.

Sleepiness goes from one after the first hour as the caravan finds its stride. Everything is luminous, unreal. Mountains far away on the horizon float like iridescent sky. Between them and us is it the earth really that stretches, or but vapour? I do not know, so great is the magic that the silver oil of moonlight drops upon the world.

Little by little, from a low droning to himself, Mash' Mam'at Ali starts to sing. Each couplet wavers for a while then closes in a long drawn-out syllable in "*yar*" At first only the ending words are audible—"yad *besyar*"—but soon the rhythm grows.

It tells the story of a young man, Aziz, who for long had been in love with a girl. At last the time for him to go and claim her comes, and he takes a load of "rice and oil" and sets out across the desert. One night as he is travelling along the road on his black mule, listening to the beat of her hoofs, "forgetful of all the falseness of the world," the sound of a caravan comes out of the darkness. He halts his mule and asks : —

"Oh, my kinsmen, have you any news for me?" and the drivers of the caravan give their tidings to Aziz:—

"In the village where you once dwelt fair Namah is to be married to-morrow to another."

The young man falls by the wayside:—

"Would you had not come, kinsmen, would you had not come, and that I had not met you nor received these tidings. What shall I do henceforward? I have seen this world passing away."

He struggles on, however, and finds the news is true, watches even the wedding procession passing in the village. He asks someone to appeal to the girl's father for him, and the song changes person. The mediator tells how he seeks out the girl's father:—

— "Do you know Aziz?"

— "Aziz? Oh yes! He was a servant here; he was a dog in my house."

Heartbroken, Aziz loads up his mule and rides away to the shore of the sea and sits down "under two fig-trees."

We pass through a stretch where the desert is dotted with bushes and the mules stray out from the track. The *charvadars* run after them shouting and the song is broken. When it starts again it is the girl—no longer Aziz—who is sitting on the seashore under the two fig-trees. A ship has brought back her lover, Aziz, "from Hindustan," and she is besieging him with questions:—

— "My love, what did you do in Hindustan?"

— "O silver moon, I kept the sheep for the people of Hindustan in their mountains."

The wind carries off the beat of the rhythm into the desert and leaves it lingering there. . . .

Somebody's bridle becomes twisted, a load works

loose, and there is another long pause. When the story starts again it tells of the girl alone. She is begging some rich merchants to bring back her lover "from Hindustan":—

"I will give you a hundred stallions, a hundred bridles. . . ."

And thus it wanders on, without order or sense, backwards and forwards, verses from the beginning coming in the middle, pell-mell, anyhow, just as they cross Mash' Mam'at Ali's muddled brain.

So we ride with attention fixed on the desert around. It stretches on all sides endlessly, without a dip, without a rise, and, tired out, the eye turns to the sky, for it is less empty than the earth. Towards midnight we come in sight of No Gombaz—a line of moonlight on the wall of a fort. To avoid being fired at we send a *sowar* ahead, but it is long before the parleying is finished and many rifles go off.

. . . We wait a few minutes, shivering in the open while the guards light a fire of dried grasses; then, fumbling for the stirrups, start off again into the desert, into oblivion—for nothing could come nearer to the impression of moving off beyond all borders, into non-existence. . . .

Sleep starts to overcome me. My eyes shut of their own will and I awake with a start, fancying that my horse is about to make a spring at one of the mules, and finding myself in reality far behind the caravan. Nineteen or twenty-one narrow tracks, made by the mules and camels, run parallel

to each other. I count them again and again, till they seem to spread all over the desert, all over the sky. The wind blows more and more violently. One can hear the dust and grit striking like a whip upon the ground. The horses play with their bits, suddenly jerking down one's arm. Djevad covers himself with a blanket, looks like an Arab, then like a sack, then like a pumpkin. He seems to be able to sleep uninterruptedly.' Dawn comes at last, and the sun, before one thinks of looking for it, rises over the desert in thick white fog.

Aqda.

The first palms—and, for the first time, the sound of the South. . . .

People crowd round. Why have we come here? Have we come just to "Wander here and there"? "Are our wives and children on the road behind?"

News comes in the evening that a few hours after our passage one hundred and fifty brigands descended on No Gombaz. They are reported to be Baharloo tribesmen from Abadeh on their way to rob the Tehran-Meshed road. News also comes that Hajji Khan, the portentous figure of Kerimabad, died there the same morning.

A q da—A rdekan.

A wide mountain range lay ahead, broken by a hundred different ridges and valleys. Silver clouds

hung among them, filled with light and shadow from slanting storms overhead and making of them a world apart from the gloom in which we travelled. Even when we had approached close by they kept their magic. The moods and fantasies of the changeful April sky lead the eye up into the very heart of the range, to where crowns and sceptres lay. . . .

The caravan passes while we are halted at mid-day, Mash' Mam'at Ali standing for a moment in the doorway of a water reservoir like some incarnation of Moses.

Ardehcm.

No wall, no ditch even, divides the fields of barley from the desert sand. In a tall line the harvest stands against it. There is no turn in the track, no depression in the ground, no rise. One passes, suddenly, into a sea of green, in the centre of which a town rises, surrounded by crenelated walls, broken by towers and buttresses, at the foot of which one fancies a group of Crusaders busy with battering ram and sling. . . .

We turn off at the gates and ride on through the same soft sea of waving green, under spreading fig-trees, where men in blue turbans are driving donkeys along the narrow ridges of earth which separate each field. The caravanserai is a magnificent building, the finest of its kind I have ever seen, dim and echoing and lighted only by holes in

the domed roof. All around, half-way up the walls, are open niches. In one of them we camp. The space is small; there is scarcely room for our cumbrous and unnecessary paraphernalia. Something keeps tumbling off the ledge and Djevad has to climb down after it via a trunk and a saddle placed side by side as steps.

Gurbam Ali cooks at the foot of one of the columns: the few candles we have lighted only accentuate the aisles of darkness.

. . . How glorious these vast vaults must have been illuminated and crowded for the departure of a great caravan. To set forth, to start . . . even in our cramped Western lives the words that open on the unknown have magic !

Day.

. . . That day the *hammals* had been at work since dawn. Nevertheless, they had spent many hours of the night listening, outside the walls, to melodies sung by nomads from the Lur country. The bazaar was crowded. The water-carriers and vendors of sweetmeats hastened along the alleys. The donkey trains, loaded with vegetables and fruit, wandered hither and thither. The fires of the ovens shone. At the corner of the Meidan-i-Shah a group of women sat jabbering and disputing. Holding a bright pink rose, the public letter-writer,

Mirza Rahim, balanced his pen-box on his arm and looked at them with indifference:—

— "What day is this which uses twenty clean-pointed reeds ? "

— "O learned Master! One final word: The greeting of Gul-i-Nur to him who sets out."

— "God is great!" the scribe murmured, and cursed once more because neither Mahomet, the vendor of melons, nor Nairn, who sold sweet grapes from Mazanderan, had passed and let him choose from their baskets.

The sun was setting. The stream of persons hurrying to the Peacock Gate grew thinner, almost ceased. Only from time to time, a veiled figure, perched high on a pacing mule behind which servants ran, passed, like an arrow, across the square. His day's work finished, Mirza Rahim sat on, handling his pen-boxes, smiling to himself, lost in a dream. . . .

Evening.

The garden of the Pavilion lay hushed beneath the purple wings of night. A gentle breeze scattered the perfume of lilacs and stirred, above the balustrades and kiosks, the topmost branches of the trees. The musicians had hardly ceased to sing the ode beginning with the well-known line—

" Here will I stay for ever for the Beloved has beckoned to me and is waiting "—

when, drawing aside the crimson curtains, an old woman called shrilly upon the night. Nonchalant, the inmates of the garden seemed still to slumber. Upon soft raiment and deep pillows an unguarded whiteness flashed, an embroidered robe slipped aside like a stream which after a storm carried with it branches, fruit and flowers. . . .

Stifled the lamentations of parting rose:—

— "How shall I find the force to bring you on the way? Better that you should leave me here."

— "Never can I withdraw the hand which pleasure holds."

And softer the muffled whispers of reproach:—

— "Why do you hesitate?"

— "The perfume of your throat so confounds me that I fear to shatter the fragile wonder of your frame."

— "Fear not! My limbs are firmer than the potter's vase."

In the twilight of stars and jasmine the thinnest veils are torn. . . .

Modulating an air of Araq to the verse—

"O cypress, on your branches the nightingales are silent"—

the music breaks to a new strain. Yet, with heads averted behind their deep-hanging sleeves, the minstrels, step by step, retire. Those dark tresses, are they not the standard of Rustem that none may lope upon? That fringed, mysterious grotto, which fearing hands still guard, the source of Kauser :



Who could sacrifice this moment or leave earth's paradise ?

Before the gesture of withdrawal pride throws all reticence aside. Under the dim trees hearts break; passion trembles in those brief cries which send fire through the veins of man:—

— "Do not I give you pleasure ?"

or

— "Am I not young and fresh ?"

or

— "Why did you never before initiate me to these joys?"

Beneath the supreme caress the most intempestive pleasure is hushed and calmed. Silence falls. The rustling of the ponds alone accompanies those secret cadences, those tender mysteries.

Again the Guardian draws aside the curtain:—
"O friends ! The hour is passed !"

Night.

The aisles of the *serai* are lit as with the light of day. In the alcoves of the walls a thousand groups have assembled to set the caravan on its way.

. . . Jewel-coloured are the kneeling figures whose outstretched hands take quittance of their friends, gold-diademed the slaves who stand with

fruit and wine. Upon the dais they surround Love stirs again. Too many times those moon-white limbs have tasted pleasure that they should triumph in this moment too. The arm which languor bends falters half-way, the lips which sleep subdues renounce their service. . . . Yet still Youth lingers, searching in those soft domains a darkness flares and torches are powerless to revoke.

In front, behind, above, below, echo the sounds of parting and farewell. All is din and tumult, haste and shouting, the light and flickering of tapers, the clanging of bells. In the centre of the halls the driver rises and links the train in line. Of those setting out and of those remaining he begs forgiveness and God-speed:—

" . . . O merchants, how can you slumber? O lovers, how can you tarry still? In this moment the spirit sails to eternity, the soul o'ersteps the margent of the world!"

Lips break from lips, hands from hands are severed. Against the pillars chains and bridles clang; the camels rise. One step alone divides the narrow platform from the waiting litter, one moment only separates the present from the past. Oh, haste! The leading camel has passed the gateway and sniffs the evening air. Bewildered, it knows not its head from its tail, the road to Baghdad from the way to China.

. . . The guide-ropes strain. Who is the laggard whose idle story is not yet ended, whose tears would turn the ground into a morass?

— " Out of the way, you idiot!"

— " Stand back! Philanderer and fool!"

Wrenching a trembling figure from a bridle the *sareban* pass by:—

— " Mara halal kun!" (" Extend to us forgiveness.")

— " Be Khoda sapurdem. . . ." (" Into the hands of God.")

For a while those remaining watch from the roof a faint light dwindling and listen to a fading sound of bells. Soon all is darkness, all is silence. . . . In the deserted halls a few old men alone still loiter, scraping up fragments of straw from the ground, scraps of sweetmeat from the alcoves; a few nomads from the desert sit mending pack-saddles, telling stories of the road. One by one they fall asleep. A solitary figure only lingers crouching beside a guttering torch stump.

" Hi! Son of Unrest!"

a Tabbassi calls, returning from the stream:—

— " This is not the moment to copy the Koran!

A second time to-night you bring annoyance "; and, yawning loudly, he stares down:—

— " What are those strange words, O father, you are writing? "

A grief-dimmed voice starts half inaudibly to chant:—

" Ay karavan ahesteh ran karami janam miravad
Von del keh bar khud dashtam bar delsetanam
miravad

Man mandeam majur az u bi chareh o ranjur
 az u
 Gui ker nishi, dur az u, der usteqanan miravad." 1

("O man, haste not thy caravan! My soul's
 desire is borne away,
 In this brief moment all life's span shrinks to
 an inch and ebbs away;
 For I am left bereft of her, broken and sick
 because of her.
 May the cleft sword—oh, far from her!—bear
 my poor spirit far away.")

— "Is that what you are mumbling?"

— "Yes," the thin voice answers—"I mumble for
 the first time what the world will sing for ever."

Morning.

Day breaks. . . .

High overhead golden cloudlets scud through
 the sky. The crested rocks they gild enfold a
 valley patterned with meadows and winding
 streams. There, on tiptoe, the spring wind plays,
 a tuft of daisies dances, a palm-tree sways. Un-
 touched beneath its boughs flasks and dishes stand;
 only the bees plunder the up-piled fruit and sip the
 purple wine. Whence this lethargy? Does some
 mysterious vigil precede this dawn? What white-
 robed priest is bent thus in grief-stricken sleep?

¹ Sa'adi's famous poem.

Hush! Say not: "Where is thy morning prayer?"
What courtesan reclines thus on her side in
slumber? Hush! Say not: "Why are thy jewels
neglected, thy red and blue clothes thrown aside,
the hollow of thy eyes still filled with tears?"

Who knows the meaning of this loitering, this
silence, or what company seek refuge in this
flowery vale?

. . . Yet it grows late. Riding their chestnut
mares youths hunt already among the overhang-
ing crags and from a ridge look down upon the
peaceful scene; a girl sits beside the sweet fresh
water and spreads her hair upon her shoulders and
softly sings:—

"To the gazelle in the desert comes the hunter,
To the flower in the garden comes the bee,
To the seed on the mountain comes the
partridge,
When will love come to me?"

The story breaks unfinished. . . . It is the hour
when the merchant, the last pretext for delay ex-
hausted, hurries to the bazaar; when the traveller,
tired of turning in the saddle, faces the outward
road.

We turn through endless fields where the peasants,
wearing the blue turban of the Yezdi, stand waist-

high amid the wheat and only the packs of the mules are visible above the green. It is chilly.

"Yes," someone answers. "This is the cold God sends to benumb the *sen* insect that otherwise would ravage the harvest in early spring."

The caravan to-day lags along the road. The drivers shout; the beasts move a little out of their places and edge forward, then slowly fall back again and the chain-thongs swing once more. We go through low hillocks where the ground, worn by rain, has been seared and broken by the sun till it resembles the peeling bark of trees. The track is a single one, and we continue to make slow progress, for mules in file will never travel as fast as when two or three are leading together. At a small village Mam'at Ali, who, instead of buying curdled milk or meat for his supper last night, feasted off sugar-candy, wants a drink. He accosts a woman, who stares at him and makes no answer.

—"O ass!" cries Gurbam Ali. "Do you not know a Parsee from a Mussulman?"

Kerimabad.

Djevad arrives perspiring. His donkey, he says, won't go. It has refused food and spends its time 'looking about and grunting urra urra.' He does not think the caravan will reach Tezd. Abdullah says it will:—"Mash' Mam'at Al f s thirst will make them hurry. . . ."

Yezd.

A waste of sand surrounds the city, broken as we approach nearer by ravines and chasms, crumbled walls and vaults, and all the debris and squalors that surround an Eastern town. There seemed to be no gateway. The ruins became thicker and higher, and gradually turned into streets, through which we wandered unguided, and soon lost.

The caravan arrived at midnight. The mules, as soon as they were unloaded, dropped upon the road.

April 13. Yezd.

It is a long and dusty walk from where we are lodged to the town, and a still longer one onward to the bazaars. I had a letter to deliver to a Jewish dealer, and it necessitated our trudging to the farthest end.

The bazaars are squalid but striking, with shafts of sunshine that lead the eye, through many distances, into coloured courts. At every corner girls and women watched us pass. Lovely some were, with that heavy beauty which has never come to its own in our world and of which the appreciation is perhaps lacking among us. And yet those weighted eyelids, those deadened movements that sink so smoothly back to repose, represent an old and honoured form of loveliness on earth. Many

were unveiled and met our glances without timidity, without surprise.

... At the bottom of a blind alley, filthy beyond belief, pursued, surrounded, heralded twenty yards ahead by swarms of children, we are practically carried into Yussuf Ben Ebn's house and brought on to a loggia. With almost royal dignity the Jew spreads a carpet and dismisses his womenfolk.

They take refuge on a neighbouring verandah, and stand and watch us unabashed. There was among them one girl, above all the others lovely, gay with childhood, with sweet pouting lips and rippling laughter. Noticing that she had been singled out, she pushed herself forward, running at length to fetch a plate of sweetmeats. There, while we talked of mediaeval art, of Behzad and Ali Reza, and my thoughts wandered dreadfully, she sat on the edge of the verandah, balancing them on her knees. Were they meant for me? I do not know. As we left I caught her glance for a moment gazing out after us, and then the swarm of children once more surged up and the door was closed—closed before the faintest shadow could fall on the brilliant picture and dim its memory. There, untouched, in these rough notes, just as they were written, it remains. . . .

Practically all the henna in Persia is ground here, for the sort of stone which is needed for the purpose is to be found only in the neighbourhood of Yezd. The mills open off the bazaar at right

angles. Passing, one catches sight of what appears a cavern of strange green phosphorescence.

. . . How to paint the scene? There should be behind these words of description great depths of silence, an impassive immobility. In trying to put them in order inevitably I stir and bring unrest.

. . . One crawls through a low doorway into a narrow vault, lit only by the faintest glimmer from above, which is lost in the dust long before it falls or reaches anything. What light there is below is but that which filters from the dim bazaar. It is long before the eye can guess at, far less ascertain, what is before it. Everything around is covered by the same dull unlit green of the henna. In the centre, on a raised circle, the herb is spread, and over it slowly revolves an upright stone. To the pole it carries a camel is attached, slowly—oh! so slowly—turning. It is hairless, for this place has never known the rays of the sun, and over its eyes two wooden cups are fastened. As everything else, it is green, but of a green one can neither determine nor define. On the opposite side of the vault, seeming one knows not how far away—for the strange thwarted twilight puts immeasurable distance between the few feet that separate us—is a niche where four boys are sitting. Three are asleep and the fourth gazes out vacantly before him. Their faces, hands and clothes are all likewise stained to the same colour, and they hardly detach, beyond the open space where the mill is turning, from the wall in which they sit. Matter and air are here alike. The light confuses

both together. And endlessly the camel—if living animal that strange turning automaton—turns, with a pace slower than any movement in this world. It seems like Time itself—endless, unconscious, cruel. And all is silence. . . . I have never received such an impression of oblivion, of creatures so abstracted from all life. Death must be eliminated in things so close.

April 14.

Ardeshir Mehreban, a prominent Parsee, came to see me. We talked politics at first. Then Professor Browne's name was mentioned. It was in Ardeshir's garden that Browne had lived. I told him how many people had read the delightful accounts given of it in *A Year among the Persians*.

"Yes, then it was beautiful; now it is but stones."

He had no hope for Persia. The culture and social intercourse of the past were no more. He felt the need for visiting India every two or three years:—

"Here the spirit is depressed and cannot rise.

There is no one with whom one can talk with profit. It is a great privation. But in India the mind and heart take courage and advance."

He started to talk of the Zoroastrian faith, emphasizing that the fire, the whole *atesh-parast* (fire-worship), was merely a symbol. They did not reverence fire as such; it was the symbol of interior fire:—

"We respect white, the Mussulmans black; we

respect dogs, the Mussulmans cats. You see, we are an Aryan people: our forefathers were shepherds in the highlands of the Aryana Vaeja. The first compact they struck with nature was through the dog. It became a friend to them. They brought it into the circle of human, life. The Arabs, on the other hand, lived in the desert, where the sand harboured scorpions and snakes. They respected the cat because it killed those reptiles."

I asked him about Tobit and the reference to the dog which occurs in that book of the Apocrypha, but he could give me no information. It was all mythology, all fable:—

"He was born and smiled as a child, and when he grew up he was thrown into the fire and issued from it unscathed. . . . It is all fable."

I remarked on the cleanliness of the Guebre quarter of the town, and he started to explain the Vendidad's injunctions in this regard:—

"All this, when I was young, was incomprehensible, *tarik* (dark); Mr Browne will remember. . . . People laughed at it. But now that I have grown old I see that Zoroaster had foreseen what modern hygiene discovers. All contact with unclean things is forbidden with us. When a rat dies in a Guebre house it must not be touched even with a shovel, be it of iron or wood. You, in Europe, have found at last that the rat is a carrier of plague. All dust, all hair from the head, must be taken up by two pieces of glass and deposited in the

desert. But we cannot here in Persia be as clean as we would wish for fear of persecution. Here, too, the sacred fire is kept buried under ashes—like ourselves," he added, smiling.

The Zoroastrian faith was a creed of light, of educated men who had grown tired of the paradise of Mahomet:—

"It is above all a tolerant creed. We recognize that the essence of all religions is the same. Take a piece of calico forty yards wide, cut it up into seven strips and hand them to the dyer, and cause them to be stained in different colours and hung up in the bazaar. I will choose perhaps this brown one, that man perhaps this black one, you another which catches your fancy, and so on. But whatever the colour of the shirt men wear, the texture is the same. The essence of all religions is one."

I inquired about the Zoroastrian attitude towards life beyond the grave. As in the Islamic faith Nunkir and Munkir, so here also two spirits, four days after death, weigh the acts of the deceased, and, according to their judgment, the path leads on to Heaven or Hell. But what did he understand by Heaven and Hell?

"Words, ideas, pictures: something that is in our hearts."

And after a long pause:—

"Whoever has looked beyond this world possesses 'Heaven.'"

On a future life he also said:—

"We can know nothing. We can but do the best we can with the lives that are given us on earth, and strive to leave it with a peaceful mind. For in all conception of Divinity there must be perfect peace."

Zend and Pehlevi are no longer properly studied. A few men in Yezd knew the languages and taught the boys. But they soon forgot it:—

"It is like Latin with you. We now only mutter the words of the Liturgies. They alone are known."

YEZD—KERMAN

April 15.

We are long delayed, for at the last moment I decide to travel via Bafkh, a desert town that apparently only Sven Hedin has hitherto visited. The Yezdi muleteers who had been engaged refuse to take this road and we finally have no alternative but to persuade the Tehranis, Gurbam Ali and Mam'at Ali, to continue with us to Kerman.

The caravan grumbles all day, and the monotonous sand-wastes through which we steer afford no distraction to the eye. Towards evening, however, the sky cleared and the country opened. Ranges of peaks rose one behind the other towards the south—isolated from us and part of an invisible country beyond Kermanshahan, only their crests rose into ours and on to them the changing lights of pearl and rose played unceasingly.

To-day, for the first time, I have noticed how the villages on the road have changed since we left Tehran. Faraj, when we were close to it, was hardly visible, so low does it lie in the sand, so stunted the few roofs that rise at all. We rode into it under deep arches, over which houses are built, and came to a square. Somebody asked which was the best house in the village. Many voices replied:—"The best house is Ali Akbar's."

In a street a little farther on we meet him, and he takes us to it. Inside we find a sunny courtyard, where a pomegranate-tree and a fig-tree are growing side by side. A family of some twenty persons seem to be living in the place, but they start at once to gather up their belongings and disappear. Where they vanish to, I know not. The same mystery would have to be solved many times travelling in Persia. . But no hint of their presence remained. Only later in the evening a man, back from the fields, ventures in. The servants shout at him :—

—" Hi, what are you doing in this house ? "

—" I am a child of it," he answers, and also hastily disappears.

A sandstorm sweeps down from the west towards sundown. The light is wonderful. Towards the south, where the sun still filters through the dark brown rolling mass, there are shades impossible to describe. A sort of sheen fills the wheat-fields till they glow of themselves, and here and there, along a wall, or on a mound in the desert, the brightest ochre blazes. It is so brilliant, so thick, that it is like grease plastered over everything on which it falls. And there is no rift in the storm visible from whence it can be projected.

In the last moments of daylight I walked out to wait for the mules. The edges of these villages are always ruins, growing nearer and nearer to the ground until they sink in it. I sat down on

a wall and watched the caravan coming up slowly against the western sky. From nearly a mile away the cries of the *charvadars* reached to me. I went out towards them and walked with them. An immense white cloud towered over the village, dwarfing everything. The sand had passed over to the mountains in the east and hung there, a great barrier of storm, seeming as if it had gathered to itself all that there was on earth of darkness and evil, and to have left a lightsome children's world, transparent and refreshed.

There is an indescribable scrimmage of mules unloading and figures running to and fro with lanterns in the narrow street. We have so far found no one who knows the road to Bafkh. Only one villager here is a Bafkhi, and he left it as a child and does not remember the way back. For two days and nights our way leads across uncharted desert, without villages or *serai*. . . . But there will be palm-trees, hundreds and thousands of palm-trees singing in the desert wind. . . .

April 17. Chah Ravar.

We camp in a descending valley. The view is very fine. It seemed at first a wide sea on which sunset vapours were playing, then but rose dust or rose air. The eye wandered on and on till it was lost and then, returning, found, under the dark mountains around us, night already fallen: a few soldiers with rifles slung over their shoulders

stood outlined, with here and there a high-cantled saddle, or a smooth round Kashgai *kola* as a muleteer bent down to ladle water.

A sandstorm burst during the night. Before we were properly awake, tent, bed, table, candles, were whirled into the air, and we were thrown down beneath the scattered debris of an erstwhile peaceful night. In the choking, hissing sand it was almost impossible to breathe, or to know where we had fallen, or to make a shout heard above the roar of wind and lash of grit. When we did manage to get across to the caravan we found the men lying face downwards on the ground, with the mule-cloths over their heads.

April 18. Dawn.

The moon has only just risen, and carries a bright star in its wake. Daylight comes quickly, filling the desert with long streaks of grey. The muleteers crouch half-asleep over a dying fire. With the rising of the sun it grows hot. The muleteers undo their turbans and let them float in the wind. We enter the desert almost at once. A band of white mist lies ahead like a wall to bar our passage. We are to find very soon what it means. At first little streaks of sand fly from the ground with a soft singing sound, and presently the horizons are blotted out. A powder of sand fills the air, driven by the wind with such violence that it is impossible to keep one's eyes open against it. From what we

can see—and it is little—we come, mile by mile, into an even more forlorn waste. The parched surface of the earth has peeled in the sun, and over it columns and streamers of sand whirl and dance. Although a caravan that looms out of the void says there is only " a meadow's distance of road " still remaining, we might be in the middle of the Sahara, in some barren purgatory where death and the winds have home.

But, as between the gusts I strain my eyes ahead, there appears against the blur, quite close, a long dark shadow. The sand thickens again and it is gone, but a dim outline nevertheless remains, and, all at once, for a moment, there shines a palm. We put the horses to the gallop and, floundering, sinking, pass suddenly the last line of the sandhills. Only a few yards away, at our very feet, lies the Bafkh oasis. We come as if by magic to it, escorted by innumerable children who spring out of nowhere. For miles and miles palms stretch, hundreds, thousands, growing without order in clumps of four and five. They sing overhead in a still, blue sky as we ride into the town.

Bafkh.

There is a very fine Mosque with a dark blue and light blue dome that rises out of the sea of palms, and an Imamzadeh, half in ruins, that faces a square in which, sunk like a well, is a garden of cypress and roses. There are still three exquisite tiles remaining in the arch of the Mosque.

Everywhere we go we are surrounded by a swarm of children. Soon, one is a self-chosen guide in our wanderings, keeping his place directly in front, and assuming towards the ever-growing crowd a proprietary, almost patronizing air. When we return at length to the *serai* he lingers on, watching for a glance, a smile—that moment's notice which at first had singled him out.

Another sandstorm breaks over the town towards sunset, turning the sky a chocolate-brown and covering everything with layers of dust. It makes any further attempt at exploration impossible, for we have to sit with sheets over our faces, coughing and choking.

From the fields this evening the women called to us. It is the first oasis after the Lut for those returning from the pilgrimage to Meshed. Here, for the first time, caravans rest when they come out of the East. Sweet in their ears must sound the rustling of the palm groves and the corn, welcome to their eyes those beckoning arms. Little wonder if they linger!

"Az shahr i raftem o tura sir nadidim."

("O desert city! We left thee before our eyes had drunk their fill! We said Good-bye, thy timid greeting still echoing in our ears.")

... To the arches of all the houses little perches of palm are suspended for the swallows to rest on when they arrive.

April 19.

The confusion this morning up the long flight of steps and down the Alice-in-Wonderland-like passages was indescribable, and when tents and bundles had at last been kicked and dragged and shoved outside, the muddle began anew. The street itself was not more than five feet wide, and beside some twenty mules and various camels, mixed up long before they got there, were two hundred Bafkhis jammed together in the way and talking and joking with tiers of white-veiled figures lined up on the roofs. In the middle of all this, somewhere, but invisible, were dogs squealing as they got trampled on.

Noon.

We halt by a well where there is no water, but still the remains of a Shah Abbas stone roof. It is impossible, however, to seek the shade beneath it on account of the scorpions. Even outside, as soon as a fire is lit, a large snake with a spotted back makes its appearance. Snakes terrify Persians, and they fly to neighbouring hillocks and start to throw bits of rock among the cooking things. What the well must be like a month later, when tarantulas are added to scorpions and snakes, I know not. The desert alone holds such places.

I ride ahead of the caravan, ascending a wide valley under rock peaks that taper ever more finely till they appear like spearheads against the sky.

After an hour on the road a herd of camels comes in sight, feeding on the tamarisk which covers the upper part of the valley, and we reach a circle of loads where the *sareban* are sitting plaiting ropes. The camels have been set loose to graze and have wandered far afield. Abdullah asks for a drink and they tell us that they have sent a boy into the mountains to fetch a skin of rain-water from the rocks. We dismount and sit among the sacks of henna. One camel, which has twisted its foot and is lame, moans unceasingly. Beside it they have piled a heap of green grasses. We talk of roads, of the hours at which caravans rest and the hours when they are loaded. Several holes have been dug in the earth around and are filled with smouldering camel dung, which they use as fuel for cooking. The mules catch us up at length and Gurbam Ali and Mam'at Ali come straight to ask for water. Soon the boy returns, carrying on his back a leather skin filled from the secret crevices of the rocks where the wild goat and eagles drink. It is tipped to our mouths in turn and flows out cold as ice through our parched lips and over our burning faces. We ride on with a sensation of life renewed.

As the valley rises the ground gradually becomes covered with a thin grass, almost invisible as one looks down close at hand, but which puts, in the distance, a bright green sheen upon the whole expanse. The track, which throughout has skirted the base of the Turki Domu Range, crosses over

to the east towards three isolated trees. It was there we were to have camped. As we came to it, however, there opened a so lovely valley, full of bright green fields dotted with palms, that led up into the very heart of the rocks, that I turned my horse's head towards it. Round the first corner a village comes in sight, rising on a triangular mound which is crowned by a vast sycamore. We make our way towards it under rocks where no pigeon even could rest, through watercourses, and thickets of pomegranates and green fields. There is no open space anywhere, even in the village itself. The only possible place to pitch the tent seems to be one of the small ledges above which the houses stand. But most of these—although not more than a few feet wide—are filled with crops, and in the apparently empty ones we are assured that tobacco has been planted. There appears nothing to be done but to buy the contents of one of them. While the owner is being sought for I take up my quarters in a grove of pomegranates which grow so low that one has to walk about bent double. In a few minutes the place is crowded, and I start parleying with an old man who acts as spokesman for the village. I can get no idea of the nature of the place a tent requires into their heads :—

— "The only flat place we have here is the roof of the Mosque. Is that not so, Ibrahim Khan? You can, if you so desire, make your bed there."

— "But I am going to put up a canvas house which is held in position by wooden nails, wooden nails—such as you use in your ploughs."

— " Oh, you are interested in ploughs."

And the rumour flies round that I have come here to buy ploughs.

— " By to-morrow we can bring you some; perhaps ten, perhaps twenty, who knows ? "

— " But I am only staying here this one night."

There is dead silence.

— " Only this one night . . . ? But if you are not going to stay why have you come all the long way from Yezd ? It is over a hundred miles."

There arises then the even more difficult task of explaining why I have come all the way from Tehran and who I am:—

— " Tehran! He says he has come from Tehran!!"

Another voice joins in:—

— " But if you are English how do you speak Persian like this ? Is the English language the same as Persian? Do they speak the same Persian in England as they speak at Bafkh? Or is it more like the Kerman dialect ? "

Someone interrupts:—

— " From Tehran how long has it taken you ? "

— " Three weeks."

— " And from England to Tehran, how long did it take you ? "

— " Ten days."

Complete silence falls again, broken at last by a very old man, who, looking round at the circle, says:—

— " You see! You see what a large country Persia is.

" You see it stretches even beyond Tehran for ten days of road. He has said so!"

For a moment I am puzzled:—

—" No. One leaves Persia on the other side of Tehran in two days of road."

—" But why did you say that it took you ten days to come from England to Tehran. What is in between? Other countries? If so, why should you have come through them? Why did you not stop in them?"

I am quite unable to clear the matter up. Here at least there is a whole village that has never heard of Russia.

When Djevad arrives the price of a tobacco field is gone into and a bargain struck for a narrow ledge of ground directly under a pond that forms the centre of the village. There, the entire population turned out to watch, the tent is put up and found to be too wide, so one flap has to rest on the ledge above.

—" You will come back in the autumn to collect and carry away the leaves?"

—" Yes, we will come back to collect them."

The place is so lovely that I throw all calculations of itinerary to the evening wind and decide to spend the next day resting here. It is dark in this mountain fastness long before the camping ground is in order, and the work is impeded by sightseers. Nor will they go away even when the night has fallen and they can see no more. Children are sent

up on to the neighbouring roofs to try to entice their erring parents to return, and up and down shrill voices echo:—

"Father! Come home! Come home!!"

There is one that rises oftener and more plaintively than all the rest and cries at last in desperation:—

"Father! Come home! Father! Run home!"

There is a sound of rushing water everywhere and it is almost cold. The muleteers, back in the mountains, are different men.

April 20. Qudrun.

When I awoke this morning the sun had not yet risen over the rocks, and the narrow valley was filled with mist that separated the trees of each level from those of the level below with soft blue light. I went down to the entrance of the defile that overlooks, between a row of palms, the empty plain; then up again into the ever-narrowing funnel where the cliffs press closer and closer on the thin ribbon of green fields. Everywhere streams were bubbling, birds were singing, butterflies were flitting. I returned to find a crowd of men and women, who had brought up every available plough in the district.

When one has been for long continually on the road the day of halting passes slowly, howsoever pleasing the resting-place. Towards midday I climb

up to the pond and the sycamore where the mules and horses are tethered. The whole village is passing the morning there, sitting about in groups and speaking every ten minutes or so. Abdullah is asleep on the roof of the Mosque, where he has spread his carpet and arranged his things. I sit down, watching the crowd watching me, and the water pouring into the pond, till I too fall asleep. The same people are sitting in the same places when I awake. The afternoon lethargy falls, and gradually the jabbering of the women on the roofs is stilled. Djevad packs and repacks; the mule-teers yawn and yawn, and I fall asleep again, half buried in the deep grass.

How to fill this long, empty day with the scenery and figures that surround and people it?

Towards tea-time Djevad plays, and the village once more collects in tiers eight and ten deep. But it is impossible to distinguish and write down among these countless listening faces :—

" How many friends assembled to hear our story,
How many eyes waited upon our words. . . ."

Nobody had seen a zither before, and when the entertainment is over, and Djevad has gone back to his cooking and packing, they still sit in silence, staring down.

But more wonderful than all has been the coming of night into this hidden valley. As the darkness rose, and before sleep touched them, the village

upon the tiers of roofs, the birds among the trees, awoke, babbling and chattering, to life. For half-an-hour every corner rang, echoing and re-echoing among the rocks. Then sleep fell as suddenly on all—birds and men—and only the voice of the muezzin called and called:—

"Allahu Akbar Menat 'Ullah. . . ."

Between those clear, magnificent syllables the first quaver of the nightingale sounds. . . .

Little village! How I long to mingle my voice this evening in your evening prayer.

April 21.

In the hour before dawn, while the sky lights slowly, the swallows circle between the rocks. The deep green fields make the morning air cool and soft as a collyrium upon the eyes.

From the top of a wall I watch the loading of the caravan on the ledges below, and as I sit there people come to be cured of ailments: some with ophthalmia, others with fever, one with toothache, a man with a little girl in his arms. The rays of sunshine pour through the red shoots of the pomegranates and stream golden from the wings of the flying birds.

We start, and starting still look back:—

"Miravam v'az sar i hasrat be qafa minegaram"

—almost Christina Rossetti's poem :

" . . . I half turn to go yet, turning, stay."

... It would be easy to forget time and country here. People crowd round the horses even after they are on the road, giving the greetings of farewell:—

"And God be with you. . . ."

Turning in the stirrups, we answer:—

"If we have brought trouble extend to us forgiveness!"

We had been told that two tracks led onwards: one through a narrow pass, the other over easier ground but much longer; and it had been arranged that we should take the former. It is soon obvious, however, that we are on the latter, and simultaneously with this discovery we find that our so-called guide has had to give half his money to an old man to point him out the way. He is accused and abused, and starts to talk at the top of his voice:—

"By Ali and the Imam Reza, I swear I have only brought you this way to make your journey safe. I said to myself before we started: 'If we go along the other road it may be that the loaded mules will not pass. And you would be there in the wild mountains, and would say: 'May Allah confound you, Akbar, and destroy your seed! For it is clear that loaded mules do not pass by this route. . . .'"

After an hour of it Abdullah hits him on the head.

The slopes of the mountains are covered with flowers: there are beds of daisies and tiny purple anemones and a tall pink flower like a foxglove. We come out of the mountains in the afternoon and descend into a wide plain. The aspect of the desert here, in the centre of what is a blank on the maps, is different, and almost of another clime. What few fields there are lie invaded by sand, and the village which is to be our stage appears but one unbroken group of low domes, at one corner of which is a clump of trees. A strong wind blows and rain threatens, spreading a grey, dusty haze over the forlorn spot. We steer for the trees. Not a soul is visible and the place seems entirely deserted. The narrow alleys twist and turn, and we take the wrong ones over and over again, till we at last find ourselves in a ruined square where the trees stand. Abdullah wanders about marvelling at the ruins •—

"Who can have destroyed these buildings in such a way?"

A man with a donkey gravely answers .—

—"God."

There is nowhere to pitch the tent save in the stone arcade which runs the length of one side of the square and is used for the Ramazan Passion Play. So there to-night we have to make our home. It is paved, so only iron nails can be used in the cracks; the guide-ropes are tied round the pillars. The rain breaks in torrents, but in spite of it a crowd collects :—

"Har ja jamali diger darad."

("Every place has a beauty of its own,")

... I do not know who it was who turned his face towards me; a figure among figures as they stood filling the open arches; a face among faces bent back for a moment to smile at another as it caught sight of some more than usually incomprehensible Ferangi action or other . . .

The same string of persons arrive to be doctored, followed by a bunch of old women more or less blind, who beg for eye-lotions. I tell Abdullah to explain that all my drugs are exhausted; that I am very sorry, and ask to be excused. He does it in this way:—

"Hi, old women. What business have you with eye-medicines? Proper business of old women is to die."

April 22.

Far out in the uninhabited desert, in the pouring rain, we came to-day upon a nomad family living in a hole in the ground. When we approached they were sitting round an immense cauldron above a fire. They make place for us and we sit down, with the reins thrown over our shoulders, and drink full ladles of hot steaming milk. There is enough in the cauldron to drown a calf, and from time to time a girl comes out from the underground recesses where the flocks are folded with a basin almost as big as herself and empties it splashing in. As far as I could make out the circle consisted of the old grandmother, her son

and his wife, and the wife's sisters, and a crowd of grandsons and grand-daughters. The old woman praises their flocks, but the son's heart is elsewhere and she starts to wail:—

— "He has all this but he dreams only of possessing a horse. He would ride away if he had a horse. . . ."

Staring out into the desert the man mutters:—

— "Yes, that is true. A man is not a man without a horse. What does one see here? Tell me, have you ever been to Kerman? The bazaars stretch for miles, so they say."

Eternal dreams of man. . . .

We go as we had come, giving the desert's formula of parting as we had given its greeting. For many miles after, as I turned in the saddle, I could see a tall dark figure staring in the direction we had gone.

Beyond Mohammadabad.

Two days of rain have damped the ardour of the road. The horses are equally low-spirited, and we drag along behind the caravan at a slow walking pace. The mules, trampling the scrub, scatter the pungent odour of herbs upon the breeze.

There is a wonderful spell of freedom on these desert uplands of Persia, and endlessly they seem to succeed one another. One tops a mountain ridge, after days of travelling, to find the same vast spaces opening again, and, on the far-distant horizon, yet another range. From end to end they

are covered, at this season, by low isolated bushes: *yushun* that the horses eat, *gorkha-grass* that they fancy too, *atun* that cures the mules of colds—all are laden with that biting aromatic scent that seems to contain the very spirit of this country and that clings for hours to one's hands.

. . . We ride along between earth and sky, the muleteers picking up stones and clods of earth to throw at one beast or another. Oh! the smell of the wind, making blue ripples in the rain-water that still stands in puddles by the way. . . . It seems to blow away all that life has made one, and give to one a new purpose. At the bottom of oneself something arises and knows that the business of man is to be about against the wind and rain. The horses turn towards the breeze, their ears pointed, dropping and catching the bits between their teeth.

Half-way to our stage we come to a stone shelter and ask a man who is herding some camels if there is water near. He gazes blankly back:—

— "Do you wish to drink? There is a pond a mile away. It used to contain water. Now there is no water there."

Zarand.

Once again I have come out along the road to wait for the caravan. The sea of green around the oasis swings and tosses in the evening wind, and

along the mud walls, that run hither and thither among it, sit those who an hour before had come to stare at us and who are now our friends. Soon, out of the distance, come the falsetto notes of Gurbam Ali's singing. The white mare is leading, her fringe swinging as she comes. Only for three more days will she be under my loads. Will Kerman be as beautiful as it is painted?—for these wild peasants talk of it as of Paradise itself.

Exploring the house where we are lodged I come, by accident, after dinner into a room where the local agents of the Deputy-Governor of the province are smoking opium. The head-man, an Araqi, from Sultanabad, sits over a square *mangal* (copper dish on raised feet), in the centre of which is a heap of burning charcoal, and at the sides two small teapots half buried in white ashes which he heaps round them from time to time in one feat gesture. Opium seems to give to its votaries these extreme neatnesses.

We sit and talk, and, after every two or three pipes, tea is handed round. I tell them of a storm we experienced last night, and of how we feared the lightning was going to strike the house.

"Oh, there was no danger of that. Lightning seldom comes down to earth, and when it does only on the open desert. Lightning rarely strikes houses or men."

I tell them that it does, anyhow, in Ferangistan, and start vaguely:—

— "There were once two lovers. . . ."

— "In Ferangistan, perhaps, who knows? We have not been there. But here it does not. The only danger is if one is dressed in white. Lightning is very jealous of white. Here, for instance, if such a storm as that you describe were to arise, I would take off my white turban. If a man goes into the desert dressed in white during a storm he will surely be killed, for the lightning will suffer nothing but itself to be white. . . ."

All the assembly nod and agree:—

"Yes, that is so. He is right."

Djevad plays, and the talk turns to music and to Derwish Khan of Tehran.

— "Assad'ullah Khan of Kerman used to be the greatest musician, but we speak the truth, Derwish Khan has made progress. His playing formerly was the night, now it is the day."

The opium pipe, tea and cigarettes go round in turn, and then a boy is sent to fetch wine. Half dreamily we protest:—

— "To-morrow we must start at dawn. . . ."

— "What matters it?"

And somebody in the corner starts to quote Hafiz:—

— "The circling skies know no pause, O haste the circling cup!"

It is taken up all round:—

— "Before this transitory world totters to destruction send us to ruin in a cup of wine."

We talk of haschish, of opium, and of wine; and the Araqi tells this story:—

" Once upon a time, on a day among days, three friends had forgathered in a garden outside the city. One had drunk wine, the second had smoked opium, the third had eaten haschish. And so pleasantly had the time passed that when at length they left the garden to return to their homes they found that the evening had turned to night, and the gates of the city were closed and barred. Said he who had been drinking wine:—'Curses and curses! Come along, my friends! We will batter down the door and enter by force.' But the merchant who had been smoking opium demurred:— 'Why make all this fuss, this uproar? Surely it were more seemly for us to wait till dawn. See! There is a soft heap of dust by the wayside. We can seek repose and sleep there till the daylight breaks.' The third friend, however, who had eaten haschish, would have none of it:—'No, my friends, I have a better scheme than either of those I have heard. Listen! We will make ourselves quite small, quite tiny, thus we will be able to slip through the keyhole of the gate and gain our homes.' "

Djevad plays on in broken, wilder snatches. The candles gutter and go out; the only light remaining is a wick soaked in oil and lying in an earthenware saucer.

That steadfast groundwork of values which the West carries, be it ever so unconsciously, into its

furthest pilgrimages, makes us argue, urges us to contrast a life of action and of dream:—

Action . . . ?

Out of the darkness and smoke someone answers:—

— "What has man succeeded in doing in this world that you should have hopes of accomplishing anything?"

Yes! What does it matter? Castles tower and crumble, gardens float upon the air. O friends! O friends!

"Birun ze sabab boshad az razi ajeb'ra."

("Behind outward appearances wondrous things are hid.")

April 24.

We have come out of the desert into a wide, cultivated valley. Groups of peasants, seeming infinitely small, are working in the fields; the tops of far distant mountains rise above their stooping figures and the green.

We reach our stage at midday. It is a village, like many we have passed on the way, with sycamores towering above a group of low roofs. At the bottom of an alley which leads nowhere a donkey, covered with sores, is standing motionless staring at the ground. By a pool of muddy water some children are making a string ball. Two hens run about in a heap of rubbish.

. . . Into this quiet life we fall like a bomb, pitching the tent on a raised platform under the biggest trees. A crowd collects round Djevad's playing, a poorer, more decrepit crowd than any we have yet seen. The village indeed seems fit only for sheep pens. One can wander in and through and out of the crumbling houses at will.

In the evening women come down to fetch water at the stream beside our camp and remain for a while talking together, the long thin-waisted jugs dribbling at their feet; then get up and go their way. One small girl remains behind and stands for hours, her chin resting on the top of a low wall, watching nothing, but with her eyes fixed on the candle by my side. Wandering about, I come upon a great illumination, and find the muleteers, Mam'at Ali and Gurbam Ali, sitting over a fire, which the former is fanning with his skirts. On it a baby lamb is being roasted. As soon as they see me Mam'at Ali begins:—

— "On the faith of God, in a sandstorm this morning this lamb became lost upon the desert. And God said:—'These men surely have worked hard and walked far, let them cross the path where this lamb has fallen. . . "'

According to Abdullah it is the third lamb Mam'at Ali has stolen on the road.

A baby starts to wail somewhere and very softly its mother croons it back to sleep :—

" Hushaby! Flower of the plum-tree,
My darling is tired and drowsy.
Hushaby! Flower of the grape-vine,
Sleep has come behind thine eyes. . . ."

The night is a disturbed one; every half-hour or so the jackals come quite close and scream. One utters a yell, others answer far away, then come closer and the chorus proper starts. The village dogs answer in unison, the village asses start to bray, the baby once more cries.

We have a slight shock of earthquake, which, however, suffices to arouse everybody and to send the birds out of the trees. Allahu Akbar! And then it rains. . . .

April 25. Zangiabad.

The quails were singing when I awoke, and Djevad, with net and whistle, hastens into the fields. He returns, however, empty-handed. A female quail, he explains, has "made everything upside down."

While the tent is being struck a dispute arises between two peasants because somebody's donkey has strayed during the night into somebody else's barley. Everybody, as usual, talks at once, and one man stands, like a Greek chorus, a little on one side, repeating endlessly and quite irrespective of any progress the discussion is making:—

" If I had not seen it I had not said it."

I try in vain to get somebody to act as arbiter:—

— "Where is that old man who was here?"

— "Which old man do you want? Our old man or your old man?"

which utterance so incenses Mam'at Ali, who takes it for himself, that, although he has not previously listened to the dispute, he throws himself into it and takes somebody's side with vigour, though it is not clear whose.

Abdullah attempts to smooth things down:—

— "It has happened. The barley is eaten. All this talk has no use."

The man with the offending donkey looks round hopelessly, and then, as a last resource, declares that it was the earthquake which drove the animal which "was sleeping peacefully" into the barley—and the quarrel starts off afresh. The loading of the caravan somewhat interrupts things, but they climb on to the walls and revile each other over the tops of the boxes. In the midst of the cross-fire there swings a trunk labelled:—

"Hotel Bristol, Rome."

Several people eventually get kicked by the mules and the knot of disputants moves away, leaving a residue who have throughout paid no attention whatever, but to whom the man continues to declaim:—

"If I had not seen it I had not said it."

The shouting of the muleteers finally drowns him. The group of children re-forms and they sit gazing at the making of the string ball. The donkey still stands at the bottom of the lane,

staring at the ground. Two hens still rummage in the dust and dirt.

. . . And so we leave, and, in that lethargy, not a trace behind.

The valley is more barren as we go southward and the villages scarcer. Perhaps that is why the fields we passed, shimmering in the sunlight and skimmed by swallows, seemed so incomparably, so uniquely green. It is not, however, only the contrast of the desert, not only one's tired eyes that make their green so bright. Like everything else in this country, where the period of maturity is so short, Nature strikes for the brief period of spring-time a higher, shriller note. For all its overladen sweetness, Persian poetry is not exaggerated. There is no gradation as in England and in France of those more lovely days that prepare for the fulfilment of spring. It is compressed, packed here into one sudden burst, one rocket of colour. Nothing really can describe the brilliance of these oases which rise from out the desert. One would have to lower expression to some dead level and then put over it one single, scintillating jet of words. . . .

We come, at Zangiabad, to a garden belonging to Nemat' Ullah Khan, gay with banks of yellow roses and jasmine. There is a pavilion in the centre—a large open hall through which swallows fly. The gardeners spread rugs and bring bowls of cream.

This being our last day out from Kerman,

Abdullah doffs a pair of pink pyjamas, which he declares belonged to Sir Mortimer Durand, and washes the horses. Their tails are combed out and all sorts of amulets tied round their necks.

I think there live in this garden the laziest people I have ever seen. We wanted charcoal for cooking purposes. Nobody would go to fetch it, but at last a small boy is sent. After an hour he comes back to say that there is only charcoal made from the desert scrub to be had. He is sent to fetch that and does not return at all. As the evening draws in we attempt to make a fire with some bits of wood Gurbam Ali picked up on the desert. After endless delay another small boy is found to go and break down dead branches in the garden, and then a man sits for another hour in front of them trying to light them by holding under them a single match. Nothing happens, and one by one the matches go out. He goes away to fetch more and we never see him again.

The zither echoes wonderfully this evening through the open hall and attracts after a while Nemat 'Ullah, the headman of the village. He is a magnificent figure, another Yezdigird the Third, on a grander scale. His enormous bulk is swathed in white and encircled by a yellow scarf. He wears a black *kola*, from under which pours down, over his unshaven face, a mass of unkempt, oily hair. His gait is ponderous, and a small boy precedes him to lay a rug in our circle. On to it, by a series

of vast bulges, he subsides, taking off his socks and tucking under him fat, fleshy feet. He folds his hands across his paunch and sits, his toes twitching, snorting as he breathes, like some uncouth animal lulled by the music. After an hour or so he announces that he will spend the night with us. Djevad asks if he has not a home and family.

—"No. Only my wife, who is an old and ugly woman."

—"But in town then?"

—"No. No one."

How is Persia fallen! He should have at least a hundred wives and be sitting, not here among European cooking pots, but in a marble courtyard, starred with fountains, or prancing on a black and vermilion stallion against an azure sky. . . .

To-morrow we come back to officialdom. Already a mounted escort has arrived, and when I went out at the close of night I found Abdullah being shaved by the local barber.

Kerman.

The *istiqbal* arrives early but we have a long wait for the Governor, who is "transacting business." He arrives towards nine and we drink creme de menthe and Curacao. Then, surrounded by clattering horsemen, who fire rifles at the sky, we set out towards Kerman. All the way along people come up with "petitions" and press round the Governor's horse. This man has had twenty-five sheep stolen

by the villagers of a neighbouring valley; that one has never recovered his son who was carried off three years ago by Kuhgilui raiders. The last to be heard have to accompany us some ten miles before their turn comes. They run and skip beside the track and the horses bite them. To everyone some answer is given. All the way the headman of Zangiabad, our host of the previous evening, follows us. The Governor dismisses him several times, but, obsequious, he replies that he must escort us "to the limit of his lands." Once more the Governor turns round and catches sight of him:—

— "In future the lands of your jurisdiction will end at this spot. Go! What is beyond I confiscate."

The situation of Kerman is beautiful. It nestles beneath mountains in the east, and in the south another snow-clad range rises over it. Ceremony makes it necessary for us to go from the Northern, where we arrived, round to the Western gate, to enable the cavalcade, now a hundred strong, to pass through the town and the bazaars. The Consulate lies three miles east of the town, so we prance and caper about for hours.

Lorimer meets me on the verandah of his Consulate and we go out into the garden. Through it are scattered houses and outhouses as in all these Indo-Persian Consulate compounds. The living-rooms are in one, the bedrooms in another, the kitchens in still another. They are all quite close,

but such is the luxuriance of the vegetation that they are hardly visible one from another. The main building is extended by a domed loggia giving on to a paved walk along which stand four splendid cypresses, almost perfect in form and uniformity, smooth as velvet to the touch, and tapering to a pin's-head fineness against the sky. Well did Persian poetry choose the cypress as the symbol and simile of grace. They are surely the most beautiful things that grow on earth.

It is quite impossible to describe the roses. They are of that small pink variety (*mahmudi*), not unlike the English dog-rose, heavy with scent, out of which the *attar* is made; not growing here and there where planted as in Europe, but banking up into walls, into castles; spreading out into tangles; climbing up and hanging garlands, waves, cascades, over the houses and trees, unfettered and untrimmed.

. . . How lovely it all was as I paced up and down the roof in the evening. Bullet-headed hawks were swooping through the air and every flower of all those millions was pouring out its scent. In this laden air, a short hour afterwards, the nightingales are singing.

April 27.

This morning I hired a donkey, sat upon it, and rode into the town to arrange for transport onwards to Seistan. After several weary hours a bargain is struck and it is arranged that ten camels shall take me across the Lut desert to the Indian

frontier in twenty-five days, travelling by night. This accomplished, I leave the donkey in charge of a stray soldier and proceed on foot. The bazaars begin at the very gates of the city and lead right across its entire length. They are in better repair than those of Yezd, but less picturesque. Several fine *serais* open on to the main arcade, ablaze with sunlight and dazzling as one looks from the semi-darkness down to them.

The most striking feature of Kerman is, after the black shrouds of the North, the white-cloaked figures of the women. Soiled and dirty they may be, near at hand, but they put a touch of light and contrast on every side. Somehow one fancies the faces they veil prettier, the figures they hide more lithesome. The women are no longer spectres to bring the colour of mourning into spring's opening life; they strike a note of joy. One we passed, standing at a corner, dressed from head to toe in white, baggy white trousers joining shoes of white, and holding a bundle of white silk in her hands—Little sisters of Lucifer! Those black, fathomless eyes are oh, so lovely amidst this snow. . . .

Spring is spread now over the town and, in every open space we come to, swallows twitter in the air. Even the dark, central arcade echoes with bird-song, for the Kermanis keep nightingales in cages in front of their booths and listen to them so absorbedly that when one approaches to examine their wares they pay no attention whatsoever. Nearly everyone, walking or sitting, carried a bunch of green foliage round which roses and rose-

buds were tied. The mules, donkeys and horses are similarly decorated. And the people all seem friendly. One old man, with a red henna-dyed beard, left his booth as we passed and followed us for several minutes, desiring to know whether we did not need cooking stews. He had heard, he said, that we were going on a long and difficult journey:—

— " Towards those countries you will not find these things, and you may fall into difficulties. . . . "

As soon as one leaves the principal arcade one enters a labyrinth of narrow alleys. The colouring is striking. There are stalls in front of which are enormous baskets of dates, each of a different kind—from the squashed mass bulging out of its goat-skin covering to piles of single dates, sun-dried and hard as stones, and piles of others still moist and oozing forth treacle. Each is a different shade of brown, but in the distance all merge together in one indescribable splash of ruby, of amber, and of gold. Round another turning are the *mast* and *dug* shops flanked with high pewter basins. In some are cheese, in some cream, in rows of others a curdled milk, the surface of which is ridged like sand on the seashore; and they are all blended together in a wash of silver and grey.

We sit down in a square where there are spreading trees that shelter dim arcades. Some appear to be devoted to fruit-sellers, others are full of mules, others of flocks that have been driven in from the mountains. A Seyyid comes out of the crowd and we linger there talking. Of countless people, of

donkeys, of melons, of loads of straw bound in nets, of blue cloaks and camels—all this in movement—is the scene formed. . . . We pass along twisting alleys at the ends of which, as we turn, the figures of women are crouched, washing copper vessels in the streams. There are niches on the sides of each doorway and this is the children's place. The smallest ones are propped up in them, the older ones play on the ground below.

How many corners did we pass where the distant mountains led down to the trees and the branches to the end of an ascending street bathed in sun, and this blaze of light again to the figure of some little girl, her oval face encircled with black hair and tied with a red handkerchief, standing in the middle of our road amid the debris of fireworks.

The bottom of your streets, Kerman, is lovely beyond compare. . . .

April 29.

Accompanied by an escort of Indian cavalry from the Consulate, of Bakhtiari Irregulars from the Governor, and a detachment of mounted police from the Swedish Gendarmerie, which made us look like an army setting out to invade India, we visited this morning the carpet looms of Mirza Mah'met Reza Sarhang. He awaited the coming of this dust-raising procession on his threshold, and brought us into a courtyard shaded from the sun by awnings, under which tables, covered with sherbets, had been set. On to it gave the various

rooms which contained the looms, and whence the chanting of the weavers floated as they repeated the sing-song dirge called out to them. In each room there is only one pair of carpets, the two—the *juft*—being made on opposite looms simultaneously. A line of small boys sit behind the webs with the bobbins of coloured wool fixed on pegs in the wall behind them, while a man crouches on the floor between the two looms with the MS. of the design on his lap. Following this with a pencil he sings backwards and forwards along the line of design and the many baby voices echo his words.

We visited several rooms and were shown many carpets. The texture was invariably fine, but in nearly every case the design was ruined by the introduction of some European ornamentation or medallion; a French chateau; a band of troubadours playing at love. . . .

The boys work with extraordinary rapidity, and it seems to the untrained eye that the tying of the knots and the cutting of the strings are accomplished in one movement. In fact, so swiftly do the children's thin hands work that one's glance catches but a swift wave and fall. And still how complicated in reality is every gesture! The wool is passed by the second finger and the thumb round the nearest thread, then the thread at the back is somehow caught, brought forward and slipped into the first loop. The two ends of the wool are then pulled sharply down and shaved off with a flat knife. When the line is completed an iron hammer

with teeth, that fit through the threads, is inserted and forced down to bring the stitches together.

April 29.

Djevad has been very cross for the last two days, but this morning I discovered the reason: he has bought a *seghia* (a temporary wife) for fifteen shillings.

I spend the morning in the Baghi Nasserieh, talking politics to the Governor. Instead of the customary coffee, that announces that the visit can, with discretion, be brought to a close, Savory & Moore's peptonized cocoa was served. The tin had come from the Rue de la Faix.

In the afternoon the entire European colony visited the Consulate. They arrived breathless and dusty and drank countless cups of tea.

In the evening I go with Lorimer into the rocks behind the Consulate, past an octagonal temple-like building, the history of which is unknown, and remained veiled even to Sir Percy Sykes. After some scrambling we find a ledge and sit and gaze over the plain towards the Juhpa mountains. Below, buried in the bright green of spring, lay the old ruined city of Kerman, some two miles east of the present site. In the labyrinth of broken walls and houses an infinity of shadows and golden sunbeams

In the thin glasses of amber wine we drink to his return, and to my last days in Kerman.

. . . And the evening falling this evening, as softly as the scent of the roses is falling, upon a lightsome, lovesome world.

We had gone, following an irrepressible mania, to talk Sufism to the house of X, but a sort of facetiousness had frustrated the evening, and as we sauntered home he, who had not ceased to jest, turned aside suddenly towards a tavern and left us standing in the bazaar, the butt of water-carriers and mules.

Who was protesting there clumsily when the Persian idiom—perhaps the first words available—swept our every scruple aside ?

"Sheikh! be not angry with me if I salute the wine-seller; you only make a promise but he fulfils it."

The tavern—*jenabi piri mughan*—forms the theme of much Persian poetry, but its threshold is ever veiled. Were it then for me or you to note here or to describe ?

. . . Smiling and courteous, the vintner came forward, and the capricious companion of the evening, taking both his hands, turned towards our host.

Sweet were the latter's words of welcome :—

"O Source of Light! you have the tree of knowledge; we the figure of Love.

The thought of each man is the measure of his aspirations."

Soon around the re-formed circle the wine-cup sped, and every tongue was loosed; Kashgai harangued Mazanderani, Tabassi argued with Baluch, Khorassani wandered to and fro.

Swaying in his stride the old man descended into the cellar and brought back a vintage that no gold could buy. The shining goblet passed from hand to hand. Now it was quaffed and extended, now tasted and retained. The crimson bubbles rose and burst, but still within its ruby depths swam an unrivalled dream, and still the tribesmen argued, and still the tumult grew.

A student first stepped forward:—

"If my heart comes out from its hiding-place be tolerant!

It can linger no longer behind the curtain of doubt."

The circle opened, and once again, amidst the ribaldry and scorn of life, Youth told its dream. There were some who smiled and some who bent the head, and one who, slamming the door, went out into the night.

. . . Who knows how long the story lasted or where the vintner found at last words so apt to chide yet to console? We all were drunk, unmindful of our demeanour, or of how lavishly the wine was poured. This one had stumbled, that one lay already on the floor, the soberest among us, waving his sleeves, started to climb on to the roof. There was no one to ponder the greybeard's words.

"Whence comes this odour of hypocrisy?"

cried one.

"The vintner knew that I needed the final draught and sent me not the cup."

another lamented.

Then the companion of our evening, taking off his coat, pawned it for another flask of wine:

"Friends! there is here a philosopher drunk upon the floor; there is here a scavenger talking reason. Is it for me or you to decide between the two; to say that this is so, that that is otherwise?"

Silence fell, and, for an instant sobered, we waited while the vintner strode around the room:—

"Poet, you hear! come, take the this and that and make for us a story."

Was it of Leili and Majnun that the figure which,

as out of a dream, emerged from the background, told? I know only that the enthusiasm grew, that the roof of the hovel where we sat rose into the sky:—

"Your heart, OLeili!"

As one the tavern rose :—

"Your words, O Poet!"

In the breaking dawn the last candle guttered and went out, so that no one knew the place where he had been sitting, or whose hand henceforward was outstretched to guide. Furtive and pale, the light of day crept through the window and shed a pallor on the benches where, with feet wounded by the broken glass, we lay.

Ah! too surely then, seeing us intoxicated the vintner fulfilled his word. . . .

I fancy that no one saw the image that each one held take, without sign, place beside him. Yet at the same moment, with the same movement, all looked up. In the twinkling of an eye the room was turned topsy-turvy: "it is" became "it isn't"; "it isn't" became "it is"; the well-digger beating on the floor touched the stars, the philosopher gazing at the heavens bruised himself against the earth. Yet there remained a few who stretched out their hands into the void. What wavered

there ? A presence that made perhaps every refusal in this world reasonable. . . .

A voice, of all the most veiled by sorrow and deception, gathered our distraught desire:—

" O Love, now that we have found You, why should we seek further? In Your eyes shine the seven oceans and in Your gait is reflected the harmony of worlds."

As if wafted from afar the answer came :—

" Can a mirror hold the breath of a sigh ? "

Who paid for them I know not—the vintner had collected many robes of honour behind his stall—but there floated gradually on the whispering wind of dawn the sound of flutes and viols. Oblivion had fallen on the tavern; hardly a figure stirred, hardly a head was raised, and yet the striving heart of man still pleaded:—

" You have closed your eyes, O Love! Is it time for sleep ?

No! it is not sleep it is the sign for us to leave.

You knew already that we would not tarry long
Yet there is impatience in Your half-closed eyes."

Out of the sky it seemed that an answer sounded, that very softly the magic words found form:—

" Oh, friends! the mystery of beauty is greater than the meaning of beauty, and no one can penetrate its veil."

The voice continued; on lipless lips the answer to the riddle was made; when, of a sudden, flinging open the door upon the street, the vintner seized a broom and started vigorously to sweep the floor.

KERMAN—BAM

May 5.

The camels were brought up to the Consulate at midday, and all the afternoon they have lain in circle eating grass outside the gates.

At tea-time I took leave of Mash' Mam'at Ali and Gurbam Ali, who are returning to Tehran. Though they had been paid off the day before, they walked all the way in from the town to say " Good-bye."

Little now remains. It is hard to part from friends without a regret, a hesitation. I have fixed a meeting in the future with the Lorimers. What will it be? We shall perhaps come together in a London club and talk of these short days and say :—

" It has been nice to meet again. . . ."

We start this time for a further, more mysterious country, and a fluid of magic bathes our little waiting group. The camel train has been loaded and formed up in line. We walk down to the litter which is travelling second on the string. The camel is made to lie down and I climb in. With a slight touch on his neck the beast rises; Karam goes to the head of the train, takes the guiding rope in his hand and, almost without movement, we start to move.

For a little while the voices of friends echo, the hoofs of the mules and donkeys, on which they have ridden out to put us on the way, sound. Then slowly we drift beyond. Soon there is nothing but the clanging of the bells in front, behind, in the enchanted world we are leaving, in the unknown world to which we go.

Dreamland, and Kerman too a dream! For every place which we leave is a dream.

We move slowly among dim houses, crossing the cemetery, where groups of women sit wailing by the graves, and then, little by little, bear towards the south. As we leave the town for its encircling cornfields the soft night air rises and stars break through the clouds. For hours I lay watching the mountains shimmering in that wizard light. They seemed all crystal and silver, all ridges in the moon. In the intervals of the night I sleep and wake to watch and lose and watch again that same unchanging scene. There were moments of half consciousness, half dream, when we were moving surely in mists as far remote from this mapped world as those ethereal outlines of the sky. Sometimes a *sareban* gave a low guttural cry; sometimes a camel turned and sniffed the air.

May 6.

"Z'in charkhi dulabi tura amad ajab khabi tura."

("From out the wheeling skies to thee came a wondrous sleep, to thee.")

The sun was already above the horizon when I awoke, and we were nearing the stage's end. In front as behind, to the right as to the left, stretched dazzling white poppyfields, and over them, filling the eye, rose the Mosque of Mahun, a fabric of gossamer and gauze. The domes and minarets, ethereal in the distance, rest, even when an hour later we stand below them, no heavier on the spring air than pollen or perfume of flowers.

The caravan makes its way rejoicing, for it is the Shrine of Shah Nemat 'Ullah, the head of the Derwishes, and halts in the caravanserai beside another *kafila* which belongs—Djevad and Abdullah discover with misgiving—to a party of Baluchis going also to Seistan :

— " They are most surely gun-runners and will give much trouble, "

I hear the latter murmuring.

The guardian of the Mosque (Muhtevali Bashi) desires that I should take up my quarters in the Mosque itself:—

— " This is a poor room for you to lodge in. "

— " No; rather it is a palace. "

" Beheshti ruyi zamin ast giti Mahun. "

(" Paradise upon earth are even the precincts of Mahun. ")

He starts, while my thoughts wander, to talk of the Mosque—to the traveller. The main building was constructed by Ahmed Shah; the small building was added much later by Shah Abbas; the doors

and woodwork of the shrine were brought by Ahmed Shah as loot from India. . . . The inventory into which he was launching was interrupted by Djevad with untidily served tea. I try to apologize:—

— "It is our first day on the road after Kerman.

Things have not yet got into order. . . ."

— "Your words put order everywhere."

We sit talking for awhile and, for no reason at all, a man brings in a plate of herbs, arranged in a square on the plate: *tarkhur*, *tartizeh*, *nana*.

Then he takes me to visit the Shrine. We pass a low gateway and enter the forecourt of the Mosque. The centre of it is filled by a beautifully shaped tank into which streams of crystal water are flowing down open, blue-tiled channels. The place is densely shaded by lofty cypresses, which spring out of the porcelain paths. We stand, infinitely dwarfed beneath them, beside the eddying tank.

From open windows on one side, which my guide explains is the Madrasseh, come the confused babble of children's voices repeating verses of the Koran under the direction of a white-turbanned *mollah*. As we pass he rises and gravely greets us.

There is but little to see in the Mosque itself: a few brilliant tiles, a few accessories. The old carpet which had previously covered the floor has been sold and eight new and gaudy Kerman rugs lie in its place.

The son of Shah Nemat 'Ullah is buried in an indifferent alabaster tomb, and the graves of former guardians of the Shrine surround it. A quantity

of fine Korans lay upon them all. After performing the ceremony of the *Ziarat* we climb the minarets.

In the afternoon the Muhtevali Bashi returns to the caravanserai bringing with him an old man whom he introduces as a poet:

— "You are interested in our poetry. He will read you from Jallal'ed Din and Shahze Hassan Ali Morteza."

Five other Derwishes accompany them, and we sit on the floor of the balcony overlooking the town square. After a while the talk comes to Shah Nemat 'Ullah:

— "Here in this assembly, he must be present":

—and small boys are sent to fetch his book, and the poems of I know not how many other mystics who in the last hour had come to mention. The Derwishes become more and more excited with the words they read:

— "When thou art sober and in possession of thyself clouds of sorrow surround thee,
When thou are fevered and lost to thyself the moon lieth in thy arms."

— "Why cannot I stay? A year? If that is not possible a month?"

I try to explain my gratitude and my regret:

— "I had stretched out my hand with timidity to grasp the robes of happiness,
And now the hand of happiness is outstretched to hold my robes."

—"Well, to-night at least we must spend in converse. We will not complain of 'It isn't'; we will think only of 'it is.'"

They take their leave one by one, carrying armfuls of books. Only one Derwish remains, wandering about among the packs and loads of the caravan below, chanting:—

" Der ayineh vojude adam
 Didem jamaLe esm a'zam
 Maniyye Mohammadi bedidim
 Der surate nazenine adam
 Didem keh ust qayre u nist
 Var hast kheyale ust an ham
 Adam be vojude ust mojud
 Alam be jamaLe ust khorram
 Mashuqeye aftabe eshqin
 Ham jame jam ast o ham mu' ajam
 Mast'im o kharab der kharabat
 Ba jame sharabe eshq hamdam
 Durdi keshe kuye may ferusham
 Ne ghusehye bish ne ggame kam
 Ay aql buruw be khayr o khubi
 Ay eshq beyar khayri maqdam
 Ma'im harif Nemat 'Ullah
 May Namet o saqi ust afham."

People pass into the Mosque for prayer. It grows dark. The muezzins call. Soon only the spearlike heads of the cypresses stand out against the sky.

Djevad talks about Mirza Hassan Safavi and food for the stage to-morrow in the same breath.

Apparently, without saying anything about it, he has brought five hens and a cock from Kerman in pails. The mere mention of them raises his enthusiasm:—

"They will lay eggs every night, in every stage."

May 7. In the desert: Iskanderabad.

The day passes slowly. The camels have wandered off alone down a track which, I am told, leads to Shiraz, and the *sareban* sit mending pack-saddles. Now and then from under a bundle of clothes a Baluch appears and goes to fetch water, then returns and crawls back under them. Crows stride about around the circle of the loads. A shadow drifts over the desert. It is long before one can catch sight of the vulture hovering overhead.

When at last one has caught the habit of falling asleep immediately the loads are dropped and can be tilted together overhead as a protection against the sun, one has lost that of being able to spend the hours of the day's halt profitably.

It is the good fortune of some, I suppose, to pass on their travels with curiosity alert and memory stocked with notes and questions to be collated and answered at leisure as the *sareban* sing along the roads. But to those haphazard travellers who greet the dawn with nothing probably in their heads but a passing grudge against this or that camel, there remains perforce nothing but to idle the time away, centring, alas! everything that

comes to hand round their poor, paltry selves. So I sat and smoked, and Ali Karem, having talked a little of the murder of Seyyid Abdullah and the capture of Husseinzade and the price of barley at Mahun, yawned and rolled over and went to sleep.

Gradually the heat spread a drowsiness over the desert, and mist hid, or rather dissolved into itself, every feature around, so that the actual ground where we lay seemed to lengthen and drift out quite close at hand into infinite space. Little else do I remember but this, and that tired of kicking the sand away from an overturned box I came, by many disjointed thoughts, back to the name of our halting-place, "The Camp of Alexander. . . ."

Iskanderabad: in a study or a lecture hall the word has magic in it, but here under these open skies it is shorn by repetition too quickly of its import.

Between Iskanderabad and Iskanderabad as the hours pass and the camels doze and, falling asleep, break their stride, awake, and start again to doze, and the caravan seems never to make any progress upon the plain, perhaps one dreams, but if so, confusedly, fitting in figures and events to suit the whim of the moment and always with attention a little strained towards the horizon till one loses all sense of reality and the muddle which history has made of the past.

That easy conviction, born perhaps of this free world, that one can do what one likes with facts must, I fancy, assail even bona-fide historians

sur place. And when all is weighed, of what actual value are facts and accuracy? When the story is told for the first time mirage has already intervened. Ill-conditioned rabble must have been those marching armies of long ago, straggling at every well-head, robbing in every village, flinging stones at the mules, quarrelling and cursing. But was that all? Between the clouds of dust the few nomads, standing unnoticed in those square cloaks, which, heavy as rock, must be as old, saw the flashing of gold. . . .

Evening falls. The camels slowly come into sight, grazing in the golden sunlight homewards. The Baluchi awake and light a pile of dry brushwood to cook their evening bread. In the gathering twilight it is glorious out here on the wide rolling plateau. We sit inside the circle of the loads, talking: of different kinds of pack-saddles, of different kinds of grasses that are noxious to camels. One is very plentiful here. The Baluchi call it *kalarej*, but Abdullah says he knows it well and it is called something quite different. It has a bitter, pungent taste between one's teeth. The bread is dug out of the ashes in the ground and handed round and eaten, and a bustle slowly comes into the camp. The cords of the loads are retied, a strap here and there is mended, a few last nails are hammered into the litters. The day fades quickly. Abdullah takes a copper bowl and goes off across the open desert, where far away in the twilight a flock is moving, to fetch milk.

9 P.M.

A little distance off the *charvadars* of a donkey-caravan, which has come in from Bam and is halting here to-night, have heaped up brushwood opposite to the line of their loads and sit kneading the dough for their evening bread. In a few moments they too set a light to the pile, and it blazes out high and broad in the breeze. The white-clad figures kneeling are outlined for a second, then the flames fall, and the red ashes, scraped together to heat the primitive oven, scatter over the plain.

The Baluchi caravan starts first to-night, but we overtake it very soon and the ropes are tied. For the first hour, slung with rifles and bandoleers, they stalk along below the litters; then, one by one, climb up on to the camels, hunch themselves together and fall asleep.

The last puffs of wind cease, the last sound of someone's singing ends. Only the bells clang. The stars come and go before my eyes as the litter sways. The camel behind puts down its head to sniff at the strange load its fellow is bearing, then once more falls back into its place, making the slack chain knock against the litter.

During the night Djevad starts to talk of Baba Taher, who, born an illiterate Luristani peasant, became finally a famous priest:—

" The merit of Baba Taher was so great that God gave him permission, during his lifetime, to visit heaven.

" From the fourth circle of the skies Baba Taher,

looking down, sees on earth, near the gates of a town, a dustman with his donkey. In his right hand the dustman carries a piece of rye-bread and a spike to urge on his beast. The donkey's blood mingles with the crust in his hand, yet he eats it and continues happily on his way. At the same time Baba Taher sees a rich man in a sumptuous room, dressed in furs although it is summer, before whom is set a table spread with forty or fifty dishes between which he is unable to choose.

"Nonplussed, Baba Taher says to himself (in Luristan dialect):—

"'Eger dastom rasad bar charkhi gardun
Az'esh pursan keh un chun ast in chin
Yeki ra midahi sad guneh nemat
Yeki ra gorsi jo aludeh bar khun.'

("If my hands ever reach to sublime heaven
I will ask of Him, 'What is that and what is this?'
You give to one a hundred forms of luxury
To the other a single crust of rye-bread mixed
with blood.")

"As this thought crossed Baba Taher's mind the orders of the Almighty thundered forth:—

"Let him be sent back to earth, for he has wished to mingle in Our work."

May 8. *Nehbeed.*

I woke up twice during the night. The first time we were descending into a wide *nullah*. The

moon had passed across the heavens and was sinking slowly into the west. No one else was awake. I sat up in the litter for a few moments and then once more fell asleep. The second time I awoke to find that we had arrived at our stage. It was still quite dark and nothing was visible around save a long grey wall in the distance. The loads are dropped by the light of lanterns. As we work, stumbling and falling among the ropes and boxes, the first faint line of dawn comes into the Eastern sky, and from behind, the bells of the Baluchi caravan, which somehow had got separated in the night, strike on our ears. One by one the long train approaches and halts beside us, outlined 'twixt the moonlight and the dawn. Voices call:

— "Ay, Seistuni!" — "Ay!"

White figures pass like phantoms, the tall forms of the camels drop, leaving once more nothing between us and the sky. Oh, all enchantment! Into what mysterious world have we come, in what land has the circle of the loads this night been set up. . . .

I awake towards midday under a blazing sun, to find the same drowsiness fallen upon the camp. The camels have long since gone off into the desert to graze and the *sareban* lie under the loads with cloths over their faces, sleeping. We are halted beside an old river-bed filled with salt on absolutely barren ground where no brushwood nor thorn grows. Some low sandhills lead up behind, pulverized in the sunlight, and far away to the south

a low line of blue mountains floats against the sky.

In the afternoon the *sareban* get up and tilt the loads in twos and twos together, then crawl back under them and go to sleep again.

About a mile away on the desert a donkey stands motionless, its head hanging down. It is the only speck on the waste around. From here to it there is nothing; from behind it to the horizon there is nothing either.

The camels return at five and the camp awakes. They have been, it appears, more than ten miles in search of food and found none. A discussion arises, for one of the Baluchi who has been collecting dry twigs and bits of straw for the baking of the evening bread declares that "towards the east" are some hillocks covered with *filgushi* shrub. So the animals are driven off again to find it. Only three sickly camels of the Baluchi train are kept behind and fed. The cocks and hens wander aimlessly about, looking for a home. To-night the cock has to have his legs tied, for in the early morning he flaps his wings so vigorously to get into voice for crowing that he falls off the camel. Karam addresses him:

—"It is not meet to sing on the camel's back; wait, O fowl, till you alight on the ground. . . ."

The camels come back, still hungry, towards sunset, and there is a stampede towards the cloth

of *ard*. The first beast which catches sight of it starts to run, and its ungainly legs and neck sprawl right and left. They all flop down so hurriedly and so closely that the nine heads appear to belong to one animal. The mess is eaten up in a few moments and we have nothing more to give them. They seem to understand and sit unmoving around the empty cloth, turning their heads from time to time to watch Djevad cooking.

The air freshens with the coming of night and the Baluchis put on enormous white square felt cloaks which make them look like detached bits of wall shining in the twilight. We load up to-night by the last rays of the sinking sun.

The night is all moonshine. We are in high country among wasted sandhills and crumbling black *nullahs* where no plant grows. For the first hour figures pass up and down the camel train, and Yar Mahomet, the Baluchi Khan, strides along singing to himself. It is a tale of unhappy love, sometimes in Baluchi, sometimes in Persian, and classical Persian, for I catch the words, apparently addressed by the lover to his mistress: "Of the blood that beats in your heart you give no drop, O fair one, to colour the cheeks of love. , . ."

May 9. *Tahrud. Dawn.*

The Khan is in high spirits this morning and very warlike. It appears that during the night we passed a river-bed where two years ago his

caravan was held up by robbers and three of his men were killed. Sleepily I remark that it did not seem to have bothered him much the night before, as when I fell asleep he was singing of love. He unwinds slowly the endless shawls around his head:

—"Why grieve? The way of the world is thus.

We are a caravan, some behind and some in front. We must all die sooner or later."

This philosophizing at dawn is broken by a fox which bolts out of a mound beside the road, and at which he discharges an arsenal of ammunition. We go on, after this incident, talking of robbers and rifles and shooting till the sun rises over the mountains and we enter the fields of Tahrud. Then Djevad suddenly hears quails calling, and curses camels, and camel travelling in general, because he cannot get down and run after them.

We pass through a miserable village, in ruins, and enter fields again beyond. There is all at once a deep stream running below a line of sweet willows which is too lovely to pass, and we pitch camp there. While I am bathing in the stream a tent is put up and the birds, released, promptly take refuge in it. One hen, after fussing about over boxes and tables, lays an egg in the canvas camp-chair, to the admiration of Abdullah, who fusses around nearly as much as the hen itself:

—"O well done and bravo, bird!"

In the afternoon Djevad starts after the quails he heard on arrival and Yar Mahomet comes over

from the caravanserai, where the Baluchis have taken up their quarters. We sit together beside the stream and he tells me endless stories of brigands and ambushes.

Here is one:—

"We started from Bunder Abbas. We arrived at Bampur. We came to Basman. There we saw fourteen robbers who had come down from the Sarhad. The name of their leader was Hussein Khan. He said: 'Yar Mahomet Khan, when are you loading?' I said: 'In two days I am loading.' He said: 'Let us go together.' I said: 'You a robber and I a caravan, how can we travel the road together?' He said: 'We will not strike against you. Why are you afraid?' I said: 'I am not afraid. We will go together.'

"We had fourteen camels: one traveller we had too. Merchandise was in our loads. We came eight *farsakhs*. We halted. From another road robbers came and joined Hussein Khan. We said to Hussein Khan: 'Hussein Khan, either you lead the way or we will fight. In the name of God!' Hussein Khan said: 'Let us go onwards. Do not let your heart grow sick. We will go onwards.'

"We started. In the middle of the night when we were leading two men came on to the road. We were in a defile. We sent ahead to ask: 'Where are you going?' They were gone. We halted where we were. We sent on a camel-driver. We said: 'Go and look

about you. See if those two have comrades or not : The camel-driver for a while climbed the mountains. Then he saw that the two men had become one with their friends—twenty-six there were in all. They had given each other the news that a caravan was come. They said: ' Let us go and rob it.' They came and blocked the entrance to the defile. The camel-driver brought us the news: ' The robbers have come. They have seized the road.'

" I said: ' How many are there?' He said: ' Twenty-six.' I said: ' It is not a great number. Let us go forward.'

" We went forward: two under the rocks, two this way to gain a high mountain, two that way to gain another high mountain. The two of our men who went under the rocks said: ' O sons of burnt fathers ! If a robber appears we will blow out his liver!' Two of the robbers came down from the mountain. Then they went back among the stones. When they went back twenty-six rifles were all emptied together. One of our men was killed. Then we joined battle: five of us, twenty-six of them. We fought from dawn till midday. The robbers were defeated. We returned to the caravan. We said: ' These robbers have not yet departed They will remain the night here.' When night fell we saw that some robbers had again come down from the mountains. We fired at them. We said: ' Let the road be free!' They left the road. We

went forward. They ran away. We followed them for an hour. We said: 'If it had been day you would not have escaped us alive. Now it is night so you are able to hide. If you are men, however, you will come in the morning and close the road and we will load up our caravan and meet you and fight with you. God will give the victory either to you or to us.' They did not return. We passed on our way."

What happened to Hussein Khan, who seemed to be going to be the centre of the story, I do not know. Persian stories are ever thus.

We part company with Yar Mahomet on the road to-night, for his caravan is avoiding Bam. We are to meet, however, again at Shurgez, the first stage on the Lut desert:—

— "If I have to halt my caravan for a whole month, I shall nevertheless await you at the well-head."

Two chickens are bought after a long discussion; the four owners adjourn to the middle of a field to continue it there. To pass the time I go out with Abdullah after bustard, which are said to abound. We wander about for an hour and see nothing. A peasant who joins the shooting party says it is still too early, and that "at sunset the *duraj* come out of the fields and sit on the edge of the crops and sing." It is useless to start "hunting" till their song is heard. So we lie down on a hill in the sun. The air is full of bird-song and the cries of men with donkeys building a fort below. On the way



back we suddenly come on a *duraj*, but as it is sitting, as announced, on the edge of a field singing, I cannot attempt to shoot at it. The only sensible thing to do in the divine evening around us is to sing too. Flowering willows scent the valley.

We have trouble at once after starting. The bridge across a narrow stream in the fields having collapsed under the weight of the caravan, this morning, Ali Karem starts off to pick up the track farther down the valley. We soon come into *kavir* (salt marsh) and the camels subside, three of them sinking up to their bellies. Two hours are lost extricating them and the loads which, having been unfastened, sink slowly into the morass whilst we are struggling with the animals. Happily the night is almost as bright as day. More by good luck than skill, we finally succeed in getting free and picking up the track, where we find the Baluchi caravan which had just started from the caravanserai. They are very upset that they did not come to our rescue:

—"We had no news. If we had come we would have helped you."

Yar Mahomet Khan has bought a donkey at Tahrud and rides along on it, his legs dangling and his feet scraping the ground. Our ways part at the second ford of the river that is ahead, for his *kafila* turns to the north. The caravans are joined up and we form one long string of twenty-two camels.

—"It is not many," says Yar Mahomet. "In the big caravans behind Basman the driver of the leading camel can descend and lie down and sleep for four hours by the roadside. The driver of the last camel on the same string will awake him."

Yar Mahomet has *la folie des grandeurs*.

The mountains in the full moonlight are lovely beyond words, with deep hollows of velvet shadow and long ridges of shimmering light. In front all is darkness, for the moon has not yet risen high enough to illuminate the depths of the valley, and as we proceed the mountains gradually close in till we enter a deep ravine. A line of moving silver appears on the left, the main current of the river seeming high raised above the rest of the stream. The camels are brought up and herded on the bank, and an old man on a donkey, the advance-guard of the Baluchi party, goes forward to find the ford. We form up and wait beside the caravans, rifles shining in the moonlight, each calling out something or other to the donkey-man:

—"A little lower down!"

—"No! A little higher up!"

—"Hei! Hei! Hei! Just there!"

—"No! Not there. There!"

—"Garniche!"

—"Ayjanam!"

The first camel takes the water and halts; then with shouting, curses and sticks the whole *kafila* is got into motion. We have little trouble at this first ford as the river is split up into three streams.

About a mile farther down the defile, however, we come to the second passage. The scene is a fine one, for the mountains tower up on either side and echo every sound. The same procedure is followed, but the water this time, after the first two or three halting steps, half submerges the camels, bubbling and rushing over their necks. There follow a few indescribable moments of shouting, splashing and plunging. We all land somehow without mishap on the farther bank, and there, before forming up again, we take leave of Yar Mahomet. Rifles are fired, oaths are sworn, and then, the camels still dripping with water, we move slowly off on our separate ways.

Below the litter, Karam, who had been very scared by the last ford, tells Abdullah about the passage of some river in Bakhtiaristan:

—"The rafts made several trips across and back.

The last trip the headman's wife fell into the water. The water carried away his wife and two boys and a daughter and their property. They got hold of his wife and one of his sons, the rest the water carried away so that they were not recovered. The headman was greatly distressed. Morteza Khan came up to him and said: 'Oh, father, the thing has happened. Let us get up and collect our things, load up and start off from the riverside and make for the road. Whatever property the river has carried away it has carried away. We shall recover nothing. Let us load up and move on.

This starts Djevad off into some story that

happened to Sir Mortimer Durand, and they all talk at once. It is in any case impossible to sleep, for the track is broken up by dry torrent beds, the descent into and ascent out of which are so steep that it seems impossible that the litter should stay in its place. One moment I am standing on my feet, another on my head.

—"YaKhoda!"

Djevad concludes and falls asleep and snores.

May 10. Darzin.

We have come right out of the mountains into a wide undulating plain, on which lies, in the distance, a small isolated patch of green fields and trees, which turns out to be Darzin. It is a pretty spot, with a wide stream and a line of very old willows running down the centre. We halt under the largest and Djevad lights a fire of strange pieces of wood, which he explains are door lintels he "brought from" Tahrud. The only living souls in the place appear to be six men from Fahrej who are constructing a fort. There is nothing whatever to be obtained save great dishes of white mulberries. The Baluchis in their last raid appear to have carried off everything, inhabitants included. At midday the men building the fort disappear and we are left alone.

In the middle of the afternoon a caravan of mules arrives from Bam, and the animals roll about in the dust and make life impossible. The

muleteers tell us how the new Bakhtiari Governor caught yesterday two Baluchis who are to be blown from the gun to-day. I begin to feel relieved that Yar Mahomet has taken another road. . . .

The day wears on and the shadow creeps from the willow where we have our circle, so that we have to move across to the shelter of a neighbouring wall. The jangle of bells from the feeding, rolling mules never ceases.

There are no children's voices here to awaken at sunset with the birds and bring a stirring into the evening breeze. Only the harsh cries of a few old women, whom even the Baluchi raiders found too unlovely for their use. In all the place and its fields I saw indeed only one child. Like her sisters the world over she was standing making mud-pies, in the middle of a stream, with an infinity of grace and no sense of decorum. The water, heavy with fresh earth and frothy with bubbles, splashed round, and then poured on into the green fields.

. . . The evening colours here are softer than those on the plateau. The day, all motion gone, seems to hang suspended above the trees and around the swallows, even around the circle of our transient camp. Here and there lights are brought up on to roofs, and groups of figures sit huddled against the blue night. To pass the time till the hour for starting Djevad plays. A group of men go by and one comes up to get some charcoal for his pipe. A flute sticks out of his pocket and we try to induce him to play, but he

says he has business elsewhere and cannot leave his companions.

—" We go to cut a handful or two of grass up there at the head of the watercourse."

Suddenly out of the darkness a voice rises, like an arrow into the night, singing:

—" The bride of the world is lovely beyond all dreaming, but the measure of her beauty is the measure of her deceit."

The figure of a Derwish appears. He strays to and fro on the edge of the circle of the camp's light, swaying and drunk with haschish, yet throwing out each word with such force and clearness that it seems to have body and shape:

" O thou who knoweth naught of Love—sleep on!
Love and suffering are our portion as thine is
sleep—sleep on!

We are rent and torn by passion.

O thou in whose calm heart desire has never
stirred—sleep on!

Restless as running water we haste toward the
sea.

Thou who hast no thought to seek beyond this
world's futilities—sleep on!

By the alchemy of Love we are melted like
copper.

Thou who has no care save of thy bed, thy
bedfellow—sleep on!

We are in the hands of Love, captive and
helpless.

Thou who art free turn over and—sleep on!

I have rent asunder the garments of speech
and spoken.

That thou mayst not lie naked put on my
words, O sleeper! and—sleep on!"

An hour passes and still he strides to and fro waving his hands and singing. The *sareban* crowd round to listen, and the camels twist back their snakelike necks and stare. Three hours after sunset we load up. The Derwish wanders round and round the litters in a trance. Rising, I turn to him:

— "O friend! Tell me before we leave this happy ground what is the meaning of the riddle. What power drives us hence?"

— "It is Love alone that drives the world. Seek it and you will see His face."

We mount and start in this fantastic mood.
Ya Ali!

May 11. *Bam.*

We arrived here at daybreak. The town lies flat on the plain beyond and outside the mountains. In these desert cities there are no straggling outposts of crumbling houses and ruins as in other parts of Persia. The walled gardens rise straight out of the sand. We waste a long time wandering about and finally take up quarters in the garden of the telegraph station where the Armenian signaller lies snoring in the sun. When he awakes he shakes himself, searches in the grass for a

checked English cap, puts it on and says several times:

— "Sir, I am the only white man here."

Save for this phrase he seems to know neither English nor Persian and nobody appears to pay the least attention to his orders.

It turns out to be nearly two miles from the garden to the "town"; and I have to pay a ceremonial call on the new Bakhtiari Governor, A donkey, a camel and a lame horse are finally produced, however, and we set forth.

Except for the palm-trees and the pomegranates, which overtop every wall and festoon every narrow lane with brilliant scarlet flowers, there is nothing to see in Bam except the fort. The bazaars are poor, the houses poorer: the "palace" in which the Governor had taken up his abode was indeed more ruin than home. We were received by his *pishkar*, who was dressed in the usual heterogeneous garb that Bakhtiari notables affect, with the addition of patent-leather boots with brown calf top-leathers and no laces. The Governor himself is but a youth.

While we were there news came that Bakhtiari *sowars* had held up Yar Mahomet Khan on the north of the town, on instructions from Kerman stating that he was carrying rifles for Afghanistan concealed in bales of cotton. I fear I thought as much, but I do what I can for him and incidentally tell a lot of lies.

We go from there to visit the famous Bam fort. One enters it by a kind of a drawbridge and finds oneself amid the ruins of the old city of Bam, which

was entirely compressed in the past within the walls of the fort. The whole place now is in the last stage of decay; walls and arches still stand, indeed, but they are no longer identifiable with houses.

At one end of this desolation the fortress proper rises. Built on the top of a hill it commands an immense view. On the first level are the stables and wells, containing room for two hundred and fifty animals; on the next is the "gun square" another vast court with halls, where cannon once stood. In them now beasts of burden are stabled, and wheels from the broken guns had been placed against what remained of the doors to keep the donkeys in; on the next level is a double platform in which are sunk the rooms and loggias of the "Lord of the Fort." Each one opens on to its own small courtyard; above again a watch-tower rises. From the top of it one looks down on to a maze of crenellated walls that rise and fall, sometimes almost vertically, on all sides around. Along the top of each and sheltered by a parapet run little paths, joining up fort to fort and level to level. One could walk for miles and never be exposed. The place is abandoned and fast falling to ruin, but there remains enough to convey a vivid idea of what it once had been. Those warriors of old, as they sat in their fastness watching fountains play and strolling in gardens, could indeed afford to laugh at the pygmy armies gathered below. Try as I might, I could get no first-hand information as to the date of its construction :

— "It was built by Bahram, son of Isfandiar."

— "Perhaps the Sultan of the Fort could tell you what you want to know."

That was all.

I climbed about, and finally found a perch on the lower, outer wall, and sat for hours looking at nothing.

. . . Sometimes on the desert below a line of sheep, their heads glued to the ground, their heavy tails swinging, crossed blindly from one gully to another, or a kid suddenly, and for no apparent reason, stopped feeding, and leaping on to a stone stood turning its head from side to side. And all the while the rams perched on mounds lay motionless and staring out with as much unconcern as would the stones themselves had they eyes. Fortress, ruins, the broken tumuli out of which here and there lumps of age-old masonry protruded — "Build thou for all time"—were obliterated in the burning light. All was so quiet that one could hear the sheep coughing and now and then pebbles slipping from the buttresses and walls above. The flock rested at length and fell asleep, and nothing moved save the solitary figure of an old man driving a donkey laden with dry brushwood and looking, so wide did the loads balloon on either side, more like an enormous burr than living animal.

I was awakened by the shouting of a gesticulating figure on a galloping mule, who turned out to be the "Sultan of the Fort" in person. He had only half-an-hour ago heard of our coming and had been asleep in his *anderun* at the other end of the

town. I felt inclined to tell him not to make excuses.

Sultan of the Fort of Bam. . . . 0 Persia!

On the way back to the town we pass a great concourse of people gathered round the selling of a donkey. The transaction had got as far as the donkey's age when we arrived:

—"What can I say? If this beast is five years old, or seven, or eight, or twenty—what do I know about it? God knows."

In spite of this vagueness a tribesman will buy it for fourteen *tomans* if the pack-saddle is included in the bargain, but the owner will not hear of this and the negotiations break down, and the crowd turns to stare at us instead. The owner of the donkey goes away grumbling and grunting and pulling the beast after him by the ear.

May 12.

We are halted here for two nights as the camels have to be painted with oil as a protection against the flies of the Lut. After the next stage (Fahrej) we strike no village till Nushki, in British Baluchistan, more than five weeks' journey ahead, so there is a great getting together of supplies. Most of the things needed are, however, unprocurable. Karam wanders about saying:

—"May God arrange that these things be found in Fahrej."

No wonder God does not manifest Himself any

longer among the peoples of the West. His entire time must be occupied in doing tasks for the Persians.

Djevad returns from the bazaars having bought—we can carry only the minimum of necessities—six bottles of orange juice and twelve bags of pistachio nuts!

There is nothing to do, nothing to see, I sit, hour after hour, under the shelter of a narrow tent in the heat.

THE LUT DESERT

May 13.

We start at four P.M. It is a novelty setting out in broad daylight, but the camels do not keep their even pace of the night march.

Outside the walled palm groves the desert begins immediately, though the Bam fort remains visible for many hours. We crawl along a ravine filled with grey sand and closed in by high walls, and come out beyond to a small village buried in palms. The sun sets in a yellow fog on a level with the ground behind us. We wander on and on towards a line of stunted palms that follow a narrow stream.

We stop with the last of the daylight for a hurried meal beside the watercourse. The low palm scrub and tamarisk that border it stretch like a thread across the open desert and are visible for miles.

Only a few gleams of light still remain in the western sky, and we seem here, in outline against it, to be on a kind of pier reaching outside the world. Two feet away on either side of the stream lies the open desert, unbroken by even a pebble, and with only the filmlike outline of the mountains behind Bam in the west. The water rushes

onwards, splashing and tumbling between its rounded, grassy banks as if just loosed from rocks, and bringing with it, when one puts one's face in the darkness close to the water's edge, the freshness of mountain air. It has only some twenty miles to tumble and splash on and then must flow into the salt waste to stagnate and end. But what does it matter? A tremendous force lies in its rushing momentum. So should we live our lives. . . .

This is one of the halting-places on the road to India that will ever remain in my memory. The water under the stars, the narrow line of scrub above us, the fringe of camel-thorn through which we stumble to and fro: that is all that remains of the world.

A few yards away the caravan waits in space; some of the camels are lying down, some have remained standing; the light of a pipe gleams and then the trail of glowing embers thrown from it into the night. We bend down beside the load and light matches to arrange the litters.

There is no moon to-night. The shapeless figures in front and behind sway against the stars alone, unearthly, unreal. The din of the bells breaks around us; the *noqus* beating unevenly; not often, but from time to time, with a great clang, echoing on and on, above which the small bells chatter and shiver. There is nothing remaining but the small platform of the litter in which I lie, in which I drift into space. Below, the earth seems but

a faint line of mist. No track is visible in the darkness. One by one the *sareban* fall asleep:—

" O caravan of the night, what news bring you of the dawn ? "

Who has steered into those regions beyond the confines of the world, be his final goal howsoever dimmed by incompleteness, can never lose the faith of that hour. O fools who pretend that every mystery of night upon the earth is solved. There is in the darkness between the span of your hands a world as yet unknown, unguessed at!

May 14.

We enter at dawn the labyrinth of clay bluffs that are known as the Cities of Lot. As far as the eye can reach the formation stretches; here and there the simulacrum of entire streets leading away into the distance, here and there isolated walls towering up unsupported. The illusion of some vast prehistoric city is complete, rents and cracks zigzag in the blocks and pinnacles as if following the course of bricks. It seems a place constructed once for men's inhabiting over which an everlasting curse now broods. It extends for nearly a hundred miles in different directions and is large enough for the spirits of all those who have died since the creation of the world to find a dwelling in.

Perhaps it is indeed Purgatory. . . . To this

ruinous place those who are dead with the most final death alone could come. Fire could not have made it thus, nor earthquake, nor even time; some power of annihilation beyond our knowledge here has passed.

Close on the edge of this valley of death lies the oasis of Fahrej, filling an empty ravine with fields and rising above it in clusters of palms and pomegranates. We pitch camp in a small field, but a discussion promptly arises about it. I offer to pay for the grass it contains, but the "White Beard" who owns it invokes Allah to witness his plight and then puts his three wives on one donkey and drives them away, saying he will never return. Abdullah goes to parley with his son, who remains behind, and they squat on the top of a narrow wall and talk for hours.

When the evening breeze arises I go to explore the valley, which turns out to be all reed swamp. How much fever there must be there I know not, but as I splashed through the marsh there rose that scent of hot stagnant water and rotting vegetation which is like wine in the nostrils. Climbing up the mud bluffs beyond I walked on some two miles to the edge of the oasis, to where the Lut begins. A few low palms, a clump or two of tamarisk reddening the ground with its needles, and here and there a stunted gez-tree—and then the boundless desert. The wind blowing through the tamarisk was softer than the babyest zephyr playing in the birches of the North.

On the way back I pass a long procession of

women and children and tame goats on their way to a funeral. I could get no information save that an ox and three sheep had been killed and the whole village was to be regaled.

A large crowd has gathered round our camp, and I arrive to find the owner of the field returned and reconciled and with a proposal to organize a bull-fight for my entertainment.

Djevad, when he sees me hesitating, gravely says:—"A bull-fight is much better than being angry with each other."

And so a bull-fight it has to be.

The two animals which are to provide the spectacle seem to be, with his three wives, the sole worldly possessions of the "White Beard," and live in two rooms, one on either side of his own. We all climb on to a neighbouring roof, and the bulls are dragged out of their rooms by the tail. As soon as they see each other they start to snort and dig up the ground.

They are finally led with great difficulty on to the desert about forty yards away, so that we all have to climb down from the roof and follow them. They ram and butt and roar at one another, and raise such clouds of dust that it is impossible to see anything. The returning funeral procession, however, rush in and out of the *melee* and give us news of how the battle progresses. It is soon announced that the bull which is hungry is getting the better of the one which has had its dinner. The task of separating them is by no means easy,

as only one has a halter round its neck and when this beast is pulled away the other seizes the opportunity to get in a series of side-thrusts. The damage is not serious, although the bull which had had its dinner was gashed in several places in the neck. It is bandaged with one of the onlookers' turbans.

The show over, the crowd disperses, well content with its day, for it has had a funeral and a bull-fight and is going to have a dinner.

In the evening, among the palm trunks and dragonflies, Djevad starts to play. A voice in the distance shouts: "Oh, come!" and he takes it for the assembling of his usual audience. A few minutes later, however, a young man comes running out of the darkness to ask him not to play, and tells this strange story:—

"A month ago some friends came from a neighbouring village and his wife baked for them a pound of fresh bread. Towards evening it was all eaten and the young woman went out into the fields to gather firewood to bake another loaf after the guests had fallen asleep so that they should not go empty away on the morrow. She did not return and he went out to look for her and found her lying unconscious on the ground with a *djinn* (devil) standing beside her. Only after two *Mollahs* and an Akhund had read prayers over her for twelve hours did she revive a little. When she had been carried home she told that as she had been bending down

picking up sticks a *djinn* had struck at her suddenly from out of the darkness: 'It happened now thirty-four days ago and ever since she has been possessed of the devil.' The *djinn*, he goes on to explain, attacks her usually four times a day, but if she catches sight of blood — 'if a sheep has been killed'—she has as many as seven seizures in one day. Suddenly, while she is sitting baking, the evil spirit seizes her. 'Just now when you heard a shout it was I calling for help to hold her down. At the sound of the music the *djinn* had seized her.'"

Such are the stories one gathers on the edge of the desert. Djevad shakes his head and says he knows what it is, it is "hamleh," and tells the unfortunate man that she will only live a few days more :

—" You must pray to God to take her away from you or she may cast spells."

In such a fog of witches and spirits what can avail the few drugs I have—even if I knew how to apply them ?

The evening seems one of magical diseases and strange appearances, for Karam tells how last night in the Cities of Lot a snake rose out of the ground and spat at him " and fire came out of its mouth." The belief that a snake spits fire appears general here. Even from Djevad the greatest concession towards enlightenment I can get is that " perhaps it is not fire but it is a glow like red sparks."

May 15.

Djevad and Abdullah have a row and declare they will never speak to each other again. So I hire a story-teller for the day and he sits at the tent door telling a long, rambling tale that is interrupted by digressions and by countless people who come, some to offer themselves as guides for the Lut, some to ask to be cured of impotency or blindness:

. . . On a day among days the King was sitting in his palace when he saw a Derwish crossing the square below and prostrating himself. He sent out a chamberlain to inquire the Derwish's petition, who replied that his only desire was to be accorded for a few moments the honour of converse with the King. When the Derwish was brought into the palace the King was occupied with the affairs of state: "It is thus that we Derwishes know the story."

After this introduction the story proper begins: The King is sending out an envoy to Hussein ebn Homayun, the King of India, to collect taxes and to bring back a "daughter of Persia" whom that monarch had stolen. The King gives the envoy a hat, a flask of wine, and a cup of sherbet, and wishes him God-speed. Now the envoy is not at all willing to start, and when he falls in with some friends, the first evening on the road, "who were roasting a young lamb," he feels more than ever inclined

to turn back. The following day another temptation assails him, for he comes to a cross-road where one track leads up into the mountains and the other "to India."

"They have pleasant pastures, the mountains of my home," he says to himself, but he nevertheless struggles on towards the East. The next evening as he overtops a high hill a "Shams i Emaret" (palace of light) rises before his eyes. "We can rest and sleep there," he says to his servants—and appears to evince no surprise whatever at the Eldorado-like structure that, for no reason at all, has risen against the sky. In time they come to the gardens that stretch round the Shams i Emaret, and having "drunk a little wine and eaten a little bread" they fall asleep. From the top of a tower the "daughter of Persia" espies them and creeps down and strikes the sleeping envoy with the plaited strings of her hair. He, awakening, thinks it is a *djiniv* and recites prayers. The same thing happens again and he declaims all sorts of exorcizing formula}, from "Almighty Abbas! Thou who possesseth a thousand wisdoms!" onwards. Then suddenly he catches sight of the lovely girl framed in the rose-trees: ". . . And when the old woman came in the morning they were lying in each other's arms."

The envoy swears he will never leave her: "The glories of Heaven could not equal the rapture of covering your limbs with kisses."

But the soldiers of the King of India arrive and shut him up in an iron chest. The King of Persia, not to be outdone, sends an army after his envoy, and they rescue him from the chest. The "daughter of Persia" has, however, in the meanwhile, disappeared. Nothing daunted, the envoy and the army journey on, "into the heart of India—twenty, thirty, even forty days or more."

One morning as they are caracoling along the road the sound of a great concourse of people comes through the air with the playing of drums and flutes. The envoy dismounts from his chestnut stallion, throws the reins over his arm and makes his way through the crowd. He is gazed at in amazement.

"Of what land are you?"

"I am not of this land."

Hussein ebn Homayun is collecting taxes, and in his dominions taxes are raised in this manner: A band of skilled musicians play to the country people for two days and nights and a "daughter of Persia" dances for them. The money is collected from the audience and is given to the King of India as taxes. The envoy—and "the army"—sit down and witness the performance and at the psychological moment rescue the "daughter of Persia." Then they march against Hussein ebn Homayun and the "daughter of Persia" puts on her bridal dress and rides by the envoy's side. The battle rages for three days and three

nights, at the end of which the King of India is slain and "his whole country sacked."

The story seemed to be going on far beyond this point, for somebody called "a son of Amun," who played the flute very beautifully, turns up in another castle by the roadside; only I was called away to arrange a reconciliation between Djevad and Abdullah. By the time I get back the thread appears to have got broken and the Derwish, without any further mention of kings or "daughters of Persia," starts to tell me the story of the destruction of the Cities of the Plain:

The forty angels took forty years to destroy the cities and to spread salt and stones above them. Nor is it a long time when you consider that the houses were not merely thrown down. They were turned upside down. It is the foundations you see emerging now from the earth; the tops of the houses are buried deep below.

We finally talk of poets and poetry and he produces, in the same dull, monotonous voice, this magnificent version of the symbol of the nightingale and the rose:

If you seek at dawn under the rose-tree you will find always a few grey feathers. The poets have said that the nightingale is in love with the rose, that it presses its breast, in love's despair, against the cruel thorn. Ah, no! The nightingale has but one desire: to see the rosebud open. And so all night it sings, to keep itself awake; and when it can sing no more it seeks the point of the thorn to stave

off sleep. But always there comes a time when the nightingale grows tired and for a moments lumbers, and always in that moment the rosebud opens to the rose.

We start two hours before sunset, a strange company indeed. Around the caravan, sitting in bundles far back on their pacing camels, their white cloaks streaming in the wind, the Baluchi *sowars* come and go. With yells and screams, and swinging to each stride as if of one flesh with their mounts, they cluster together for a moment, then spread out like birds on the wing turning in wider and wider circles, hardly touching—and then with but a finger—the guiding string which serves as rein. Mixed up amongst them and swarming in and out of the caravan go those on foot: a mason and two brick-makers, a story-teller, ten well-cleaners, three telegraph linesmen and many others. As, step by step, and ever so slowly, we leave the last vestige of the inhabited world, and fall into stride, they drift ahead, gesticulating and eating bread as they go along. Passing a fort on the top of a hillock we come into a wide stretch of tamarisk jungle broken by sandhills. A few gez-trees stand about half buried. The air is breathless and heavy.

We have come out on to the open Lut. The horizon is straight and more clean than the horizon over the sea could ever be. Not a pebble nor shrub breaks the dead level that leads to it in waste of small grey shingle.

We halt at nightfall for the evening prayer. A rug is spread beside the narrow camel-track and the camels remain standing, their gums up-turned towards the breeze. Twenty yards away the Baluchi *sowars* have also halted, slipped down on to the ground and spread their prayer carpets. The sky is dark to-night and heavy with cloud, save low in the east, where one star shines. The Baluchi call it "Tirband." We are to steer by it, they say. We linger only a few moments and the clustered groups once more spread out in a thin wavering line.

Was it because of the utter desolation in which that night we moved, and because nowhere was there discernible any point or obstacle, nor imaginable any goal or end, and because our way seemed less on the earth than in the sky, and our mere form was something isolated and unique, that I shall never forget the verses which, in long pauses, hour after hour of that night in which we moved towards the star Tirband, a voice cried upon the wind?

" N'ashayad az tu chandin jowr kerdan
N'ashayad khune mazluman be gardan
Ma'he badri tu bayad zendehgani
Egar ne sahl boshad jan sapurdan
Az on ruzi keh name tu shenidam
Shudam ajez man az chabha shamurdan

Rava boshad keh az chun tu karimi
 Nasibe man bovad anduh khordan
 Khodavanda az in khushtar cheh bashad
 Bedidan ruye tu o pishi tu murdan."

• • • • • • •

(" It befits thee not to be so cruel.
 It were ill that my blood should stain Thy hands.
 I live for Thee alone.
 Were it not for Thee it would be easy to escape
 from life.
 From the day I heard Thy name
 Broken and helpless I have counted the nights.
 Is the reward from one as merciful as Thee
 That my portion should only be suffering and
 despair?
 O God, what could be sweeter than this:
 To see Thy face, to die beside Thee ? ")

May 16. Shurgez Well.

We pass the so-called Mil i Nadiri (Pillar of Nadir) towards dawn. It is a lofty tower, one of two that served as landmarks and that local legend has connected with the name of Nadir Shah, though they date, obviously, from a far remoter past. The bricks are magnificent, dark red in colour and seemingly composed of ground stone, dust and small pebbles. In size the pinnacle is rather disappointing. What is most striking is its absolute isolation in the midst of a waste as empty as space itself. At this early hour it cast an immense shadow across the desert. I do not

suppose anybody has looked upon it in more gruesome circumstances. It literally rose out of a necropolis, for strewn about in hundreds—donkeys, sheep, goats, kids—were the corpses of the animals that the Baluchis had driven off from Bam during their last raid and that had died of thirst by the way. No jackals nor vultures had touched them. They lay just where, finally out-done, they had fallen; some in couples, some in clusters with their heads against each other still seeking protection against the sun. Their forms and skins were quite intact and had one not seen the empty eye-sockets one could have imagined them merely asleep. These ghastly relics strewed all the onward road. Each telegraph post had its heap of dead lying extended where the thin edge of shadow must have been falling when last they moved.

The sun rises directly in front of us, half hidden in a white heat fog and spreading a kind of glassy light over everything. Towards midday a line of gez-trees appear in mirage ahead, to which we wend our way, as it seems everlastingly. Hours pass and every time one looks up they float on the horizon always as far away.

Evening.

We are camped on the open desert in the centre of a ring of tamarisk. The so-called well is a hole in the ground about three feet wide, at the bottom

of which is a pool of muddy, brackish water which is ladled up in a skin.

Yar Mahomet Khan arrived yesterday and has been waiting for us. I have nowhere seen a man so grateful. It seems, according to his story, that the Bakhtiari were about to loot everything that he had when orders arrived from the Governor at Bam. He will now, he says, follow me to India, or to the end of the world. All his men come round and tell the tale over and over again to Djevad.

The heat has come at last, the thermometer marking 106° at five P.M. Earth and sky are incandescent; the horizons are blurred in fog and the telegraph posts float about in bits in the sky. Mirage, indeed, begins a few yards away on all sides. I discard all clothing but a shirt, but have to keep boots on against the heat of the ground. According to Abdullah, if one's feet get too hot "one goes blind."

The camels keep returning to drink. Each time a man gets down into the well and ladles up the water in a goatskin while another prepares above a kind of miniature pond in the wet mud to hold it. They drink greedily and long, and then, lifting up their heads and shaking the water from the loose skin round their mouths, turn away once more into the desert to search for food.

As the twilight falls faint mountain outlines rise in the misty sky. All are so far away and cut off by so many drifts of shadow and mirage that they seem but cloud forms.

The Baluchis, headed by Yar Mahomet, organize games. We have first a long jump across a filled-in well, then wrestling matches, then a mimicry of a battle. One man lies flat on the ground and pretends to be shot, and Yar Mahomet, running past and making pretence to fire at an encircling enemy, drops down beside him wailing with grief: "O man of Kerbela, what has happened to thee, what has happened!" and in one motion slings the corpse over his back. He then proceeds to take the dead man back to his mother. This scene appears to be a stock farce of the wilds and every word that is uttered convulses the audience with laughter. The mother tears her breast and wails. Her lamentations are untranslatable:

—"Khub pesar bud, besyar khub . . . dasht."

—"Mader khamush kun! Sedah i tu hala az zir miayad."

The sun sinks abruptly. Serene, soundless, the night falls. Just before dinner there is an alarm and the *sowars* announce that a rifle-shot has been heard towards the south. Three are sent out and Yar Mahomet insists on accompanying them.

Everybody comes up before going to sleep and holds assembly outside the tents: Haider, the Kerbelai, Karem Ali, Abdullah the well-digger, Ali Shah, Murad Khan, Rahim the mason, Kuli Beg, Seif 'Ullah.

Yar Mahomet soon returns covered with bandoleers of cartridges. He has been "to the river-bed"

and seen nothing. Singing is started, but he is out of tune, his chest, as he explains it, having got stuck together by the heat of sleep.

With rifles between their legs and their left hand held against their cheek each man adds his quota. Abdullah, the well-digger, excels and excites great admiration, which is expressed in these terms: "Abdullah's noise comes out well to-night, thanks be to God!" He breaks into a long Afghan ballad. The logs sink into a red glow and the candles go out, but the ballad goes on, gathering swing. All sorts of noises float into it from outside, now the grunting of a camel, now a loud snore from someone who has fallen asleep, now a gunshot from the watch.

May 17.

A cool air comes at dawn which is like water in the nostrils and would give life almost to the sand around. When God made man it was surely this breath, which moves over the desert at daybreak, that He breathed into the still clay. A band of blue forms in the eastern sky, over which runs horizontally a narrow bar of rose. The colours grow brighter and brighter, till they seem about to break into flame, then, suddenly, fade and a white mist takes their place, like shimmering silk, out of which the sun rises. Thus day comes over the desert.

The heat increases quickly. Nobody moves. The camels come back from grazing nearly every hour for water. A man has to sit constantly at the well-

head to ladle it up. Even the ground quite near seems to be drifting sideways in mirage like liquid gelatine.

The preparation of the loads is begun at two P.M. We have a very trying wait in the sun after the tent is struck and while the packs are being tied. In such heat every little speck of shade is of value. One pulls boxes near to be able to put one's feet in their shadow. Once we are started, up on the camel, a cooler air comes, but one still can hardly breathe.

Yar Mahomet waits till we start and then forms up behind. His leading camel has been adorned with string after string of tasselled ornaments and cowrie shells and looks like something out of a pageant. We pass through the narrow fringe of tamarisk and enter a waste of moving sandhills. They lie on the hard gravel surface of the Lut like soles or plaice, with lines so soft that the eye loses its power among them. I think they ought to prove that when lines are soft enough and curves smoothed down beyond a certain point they cease to be discernible to human sight. There are some quite baby ones about three feet long and a foot deep journeying over the waste.

Yar Mahomet rides along beside my camel on his diminutive donkey. On it, besides himself, he has piled his Afghan prayer carpet and several bundles, and to it he has tied a brass jug on one side and a water-skin on the other. He talks and talks: Where will he be able to get news of us

after we part? He will never, for remembrance sake, take his hand out of mine. "Say but the word and I will send on my caravan to Seistan and come with you. It does not matter where you are going."

Shir Mahomet Khan says he will come, too, if I will take him:

— "But what will you do with your new donkey, Yar Mahomet; and you, Shir Mahomet, with your pacing camel, when we come to the sea over which I must sail to Europe?"

They hesitate a moment and then reply:

— "We will sit down on the shore and watch what you do; then we will do the same."

As the sun drops the light becomes almost spring-like, and I stop the camel and walk on ahead, stopping after an hour on the top of the final rise before the long descent towards the Gurg well. There stretched around the most wonderful view I suppose I shall ever see. As far as the eye could reach on all sides, some fifty miles to the north and east and west, and a hundred at least dropping towards the south, not the smallest speck or object broke the desert sweep.

The sun was setting and sending a flood of golden light through the air. One by one the well-diggers and linesmen and guides came up and dropped into groups, their figures, clustered together, casting black shadows far across the waste, almost out of sight. Then, slowly, while we were waiting for the caravan, the west lighted up with an immense incandescence. There were

no clouds in the sky to catch it and it seemed to fall unbroken upon us. And, suddenly, the first flood of greyness that precedes the afterglow fell. Far away in the south faint summer clouds, rose-tipped, their lower forms mere waving drifts of blue, rose gradually against the sky, and overhead stretched down with vast extended wings. For the first time since Fahrej a bird appeared in the air, and swooped in a circle close to us. A great excitement arose among the *sowars* and *sareban* and a babble of voices broke forth. It is, without doubt, they declare, the "haffash," the mythical bird that eats no food and drinks no water but exists on air. Once every few years, they say, it appears, bringing good fortune and happiness. So from the towers of Eldorado, from the Naimakan, a messenger was sent. . . .

We stop at the second Mil i Nadiri at nightfall. Low down against the Lut the western sky is still bright green, and through those aerial fields *Suha'il* is sinking. The Mil here is in ruins, but even in its fall it has held together. Great blocks of masonry, undamaged still in form, lie piled one above the other on the ground. I climbed and tumbled through them by the light of the first stars.

Yar Mahomet's caravan passes while we are halted, the dim outlines of the camels towering up out of the darkness behind and swinging by us, in absolute silence, into the darkness beyond. The *sowars* spread their rugs and in that stillest air the eternal rhythm rises: "*Bismillah rahmane*

rahim. . . ." In a few moments we start again; the small bells jangling alone until the movement spreads down the train to the last camel which carries the *noqus*.

For hours and hours as we travel two Baluchis drone a chant, telling of some warfare in Afghanistan. It seemed that armies were being prepared to march against some place called Ruzgan to fight the people of Saman. Camels were being dispatched, elephants prepared for the road. The Hazare were to be exterminated. It drifts into the night and into drowsy sleep, and when I search for it again it has gone. We descend from level to level and the litter pitches and sways. In one deeper gully than usual Abdullah falls out and is nearly left behind.

Towards dawn the waning moon rises over some low rocks like the golden horn of a gazelle.

May 18. Gurg Well

We come at midday to a low-lying salt swamp filled with reeds, and halt on a bare piece of ground worn smooth by loads. The heat affects everyone, and two men crawl under the shelter made by two loads uptilted and sleep, goodness knows how. The reverberation of the ground is worse almost than the direct rays of the sun, and the air is full of monster mosquitoes. Abdullah alone does not seem to suffer, and from my tent I hear him holding forth to such of the well-diggers and guides as are awake. He finally appears to give one of them

a whip. There follow these remarks addressed at him point blank:

— "Abdullah is a fine man. A fine, fine man."

And, after a pause:

— "I wish it had been Djevad Khan who had fallen off the camel last night and not he."

The only thing that breaks the monotony of the scorching hours is the baking of the bread. It comes out from under the ashes in a slab about two inches thick, and as hard as one of the bricks of the Mil i Nadiri. When it has cooled down sufficiently it is broken into large lumps, which are put in a bowl. A thick green oil made from the tails of sheep is poured then into the bowl and the "bread" is kneaded—and by many hands—till it is soft enough to eat.

The sky in the west grows very black and a big sandstorm is seen rolling down in the direction of Shurgez. Bits of it are detached and pass quite near, blotting out everything and leaving the sky a dark brown colour. It appears to travel at great speed, sagging and spreading as it goes.

The Baluchis awake gradually, and kneel down to drink from the water-skins. At sunset the tail of another sandstorm swoops over us as the packs are being loaded, and carries the tent in a spiral up into the air, depositing it fifty yards away. The air is thick and heavy.

The last memory I have of Gurg is the sound of the mosquitoes humming over the poisonous

swamps. They are so ferocious, I am told, that they drive even the wild asses in springtime northwards into the heart of the Lut.

About a mile after starting we pass the Afghan arms-running caravan-track from the Mekran coast. Yar Mahomet, throwing further pretence to the winds:—" Only God saved us from being lost in a sandstorm this day!"—starts to talk about it, in fact he talks all night, till the rising of the star they call Akrab (The Scorpion) in the East, which appears two hours before dawn.

—" We will sleep well to-morrow for there are mountains ahead,"

he announces. He has crossed the Lut from east to west and north to south twenty-two times:

—" We set out, we set out: if we return or not is in the hands of God."

The Afghan arms-running caravans are composed of from two hundred to two thousand camels, accompanied by forty to five hundred men. The custom is one man to every ten camels, but they often take more. The last one Yar Mahomet accompanied had fourteen drums on which the signals for halting and starting were given along the string.

He journeys on, past stage after stage, through adventure after adventure, till:

—" In the region of Qadah in Afghanistan is a well. It is written that on that spot there will some day be a big battle, a battle so big that one hundred thousand piebald horses will remain without masters. (The piebald is rare

in the East.) All the people of the world will be gathered there. This will happen."

May 19. *Konarek.*

I awoke at dawn to find ourselves in the mountains. The world had completely changed. Instead of the intolerable heat breaking on us, almost immediately with the appearance of the sun, a cool air was blowing. One must have been in the desert and have drunk for many days from salt wells to know what the sight of spring water can mean. One drops on one's hands and knees and puts one's face to it with a movement as instinctive as that of any animal.

I was there all dripping and soaked when a stifled tumult arose ahead among the *sowars* and one came running back to say that a herd of ibex were on the bank fifty yards away. By the time I reached the spot the game, alarmed by the bells of the caravan, had headed up and over the ridge beside the track; by the time we had laboriously climbed it they had disappeared over the next. The maze of narrow gullies and ravines seemed too endless to make pursuit worth while, the more so as the wind was against us.

We turned up instead along the first ridge and spent two hours scrambling among the mountains. Nothing more came in sight, but was the time, I wonder, wasted? It is here, when I look back to Persia, that I shall place the memory of many clear and idle days. Happy, indeed, must be the lot of

an ibex in these wilds. The range lies isolated in the Lut, a hundred miles from all human habitation, and, I suppose, from the beginning of time the goats have lived here undisturbed save for such incidents as Alexander the Great's and Nadir Shah's passage into India and the construction of the Indo-European Telegraph Line by King-Wood.

The range seems a labyrinth of small valleys and ridges running in all directions, high up in which we found pools of rain-water cold as ice, and crannies opening on to ledges where the ibex had dug their sleeping-places.

All, to-day, were deserted. We lay in those corners and ledges with the scent of aromatics and thyme thick in the air, doing nothing perhaps but watching the sun beat down on the slope opposite, and tufts of grass wave against the sky.

We dropped and scrambled down at last, to leave those mountains to their life; to rainstorms no one ever hears of, to years that pass, to the young kids that are born and grow up and play and fight on those ledges, to the old rams that lie there day in day out looking at the slopes opposite and nibbling at the tufts of grass that wave round their heads.

The camp has been pitched in the river-bed, beside some small gez-trees and a thicket of some plant of which the flower—or fruit—resembles little bags of inflated pink paper. Djevad announces that he has found two flute-players. A circle is formed and the Baluchis gather round, their white clothes

ballooning in the breeze, the fringes of the coloured handkerchiefs, which they tie—in lieu of hat—like a fillet round their trailing black hair, flapping over their eyes. The two performers sit a little apart, and leaning close together produce what must be the autochthonic form of Baluchi music. One plays the flute and the other, holding his head in his hands and bending over the flute-player, starts a kind of burring accompaniment. The sound appears to be produced low down in the throat and to be maintained on a single note. It hovers on the syllables, "Neh nevi nevi neh; neh nehye nehye neh," indefinitely, and is moulded on the sound of caravan bells at night.

While this concert is in progress Shir Mahomet Khan comes down from the mountains, blood-stained and carrying an ibex he has shot. It is thrown on the ground in the middle of the circle and lies shapeless and ruined like an inflated water-skin. I spend most of the afternoon trying, in vain, to play a flute; and then towards evening go back into the mountains. The air was absolutely still, and even after we had climbed upwards for an hour, when I turned my cheek to the valley the sound of the stream below was audible. Partridges were clucking everywhere and the sun moved very gently up the ridges.

Two Baluchi chiefs, who are subsidized by the Government, have arrived from Nasratabad, and it is arranged that we shall start at three in the morning on pacing camels to shoot in the mountains.

The caravan can only start towards dawn as the track half-way between here and the next stage passes through a narrow defile—one of the gates of India.

May 20.

It was still dark when we set out. I found my *jambaz* ready saddled a few yards away from the tent. It rose the instant it felt my leg in the saddle. Then, as if conjured up out of the night, some twenty-five other dim forms rose also, and without a word we broke into stride. Stride, it would be hard to call it; we seemed to skim over the ground. Now four or five figures would circle out to the left or right and then return again a hundred yards farther on, just as birds flighting will sometimes break and then reshape their formation; now the advance-guard would spread out, rippling and fluctuating, but keeping always a swiftly advancing line. Not a sound rose anywhere, though we crossed and recrossed a stony river-bed; hardly a movement there was to show we were riding at all. It was really only when the false dawn broke and the ground became visible that I grew conscious of my mount. Like birds still, after two or three wide sweeps, we alighted high up in the mountains beside some ruins, the camels dropping, just as a bird drops on the ground, with movements as gentle and as easy. Then, tying them in train, we struck into the mountains on foot, ascending westwards and

working through successive valleys on to the edge of a wide plain.

We shoot three rams, and then, tired out, I remain beside some tamarisk bushes to sleep, while the Baluchis go careering after gazelle.

Noon having returned when I awake I go, to pass the time, scraping and poking among the ruins and mounds which stretch on all sides. Who knows from what dim age they come? Five hundred feet below is the famous defile, in places only eight feet wide, through which, since dream first stirred the heart of man, peoples, armies, tribes have passed; and of them all no cut upon the rocks, no faintest sign remains, and the place is nameless.

The hours pass and, tired of dreaming, I watch a nomad shepherd and his flock. Working down from the ridges behind, they move, half obliterated in the sunlight, so that their outline is only a little trembling haze, towards the plain. With a heap of broken bits of pottery tied in a handkerchief—does not the West teach that something can be accomplished even in an hour!—I follow them and join company with the old white-bearded man. He is deaf and hardly hears me, and when he hears me he makes no sign of understanding, so we stroll on in silence among the wild thyme and *yushun*, and shout, "Ur-ra, Ur-ra," from time to time.

At the edge of the plain where the last ridge sloped down and ended, a larger mound than the others barred the way, and below it several blocks

of masonry protruded. The shepherd stood aside to let the flock move over them in single file, bringing down his stick now and then on their backs as if counting them by twenties or thirties. Then, when they had all passed, before striking into the desert, and as if remembering my oft-repeated question, he raised his arm:

" There are some who say that money is buried here. We, we do not know. We do not know. Perhaps you know. God knows."

Amid those mounds, shapeless and inform, but that yet mark to the eye the extreme end of that long perspective at the bottom of which civilizations calmer, simpler, than our own, flowered and died, the gaunt figure seemed for a moment to take his place—the last of the legend, the dream faded and deformed till but one single point capable of comprehension to-day remained, but yet the dream. . . .

Nasratabad Sipi.

The stage consists of a line of mud shelters that lie at the bottom of a rift in the desert and is quite as desolate as Gurg or Shurgez. The well on which our life depends is the worst I have seen yet. The *sowars* have been working on it since midday and have dredged out masses of black mud. One can at last see now at the bottom a glimpse of water. Happily one of the Baluchi Khans has sent into the mountains to get milk from the nomad flocks.

As evening falls—and how I blessed it! surely those who fall on their knees towards the glowing Western sky do rightly!—large fires of dry camel-thorn are lit and out of the gloom a pacing camel comes into the circle of light, bringing skins of milk and *mast* from the mountains. Long before it came to sight we could here the thud in the skins.

There is more entertainment to-night, with dancing and pantomime; and Nazer plays the flute. He plays first of all the song of the vultures circling above the shepherd's head, their alarm and their return through the skies to investigate, and finally the beating of their descending wings. It is very realistic, for as he pipes he produces simultaneously deep down in his throat wild sounds and syllables: "Aik, aik, ayak, ayak, aik, aik."

There follows the song of the chief who has made war on and captured the fort of a rival, and who, standing on its walls, calls to his flute-player to insult the fleeing army.

The men sit absolutely motionless, their eyes fixed on the player, while the stars rise over the stacked loads around.

May 21.

The thermometer at ten o'clock stands at 112°, and the place is full of vermin, tarantulas hovering in every corner. The local explanation is that they appear when the wind blows, but Djevad's

theory, which is more picturesque, is that they are here in such numbers because of the earthquakes:

—"They crawl out of the cracks that open in the ground," he declares.

I spend the day taking down Baluchi songs. Here is one which appears to be popular and widely known:

Zarjan is a girl. She has a lover of whom she has grown tired and who, to try and revive her affection, brings her to the bazaar. While they are looking at the wares her ring snaps and he takes her to get it mended. In the shop she loses her heart to the young pedlar:

The pedlar looked on her face. He says:—"Do not turn water to mud and break my heart."

She says:—"Those golden slippers you have would suit the feet of Zarjan."

The lover is somehow got rid of and the pedlar makes love to her:

—"Come let us go to Sadaki! I have a pair of coloured trousers there I will give you.

Come let us go to Vanmasti where the reeds are green.

Your clothes are lovely, your hands are always playing with your hair.

Your veil is so thin I have fallen in love with your face;

Your shawl is so transparent I am inflamed for your narrow breast.

Come let us go to the well-head where the water sparkles.

The water of the river has dried up but the Shammal wind is blowing.

Come! We will make *mast* from the milk and spread pillows on the ground."

She answers:—"Milk will not make *mast* before sunset; and it is not yet time for sleep."

We start at five and wend our way slowly northwards. Each *sowar* carries a rifle and a flute. Sometimes they ride along firing at the tamarisk bushes, sometimes playing. Yar Mahomet accompanies us for the last time to-night. The old man who leads his caravan, striding along in the darkness behind a little black donkey, with his rifle behind his back, and whose form I have watched so often before falling asleep, comes up as we are halted for a few moments at the entrance to the night and sits down in front of me:

"Bread is a very good thing, but it is not good when you eat it in haste as you are eating it now,"

he suddenly says, and goes away.

We ascend towards mountains far away.

The waning moon is only just ahead of the dawn. In a day or two the sun will overtake it. The nose of daylight is cast already upon its heels.

May 22. *Geragheh*.

We reach, towards seven, a line of black tents, from out of which women and children crowd.

Yar Mahomet's caravan leaves again at midday to do a very long stage towards Seistan. He remains behind, till I awake, to say good-bye. Passing figures of the road! I was sorry to see him sling on his rifle and those innumerable bandoleers for the last time, and stride away in his brown coat and baggy white trousers for ever out of my life. We fixed, with every formality of make-believe, a meeting two years hence "by the reed-beds of Gurg" whence he will lead me to Qandijagah (Kandahar).

This plateau is the home of a tribe of whom Ali Shah Khan, who met me at Konarek, is the head.

Weather-swept, sun-scorched space!—with a few miles of thorn to feed the camels, some patches of thyme and *yushun* for the flocks to graze on, a few stunted gez-trees to throw here and there a little shade. It is nature free and untransformed, bitter but eternal. And tribes, without knowledge of another land, have lived here since time immemorial, with the desert on three sides and in the west the tops of mountains far away, and as if in another world, just rising over the horizon; here they are born, and live among the tents, and ride in raiding parties and tell and hear the same stories and pray the same prayer unchanging towards the setting sun; and when they die they rest here among the tents, with no heavy earth upon them but in narrow ridges above the ground, so that they can look out still to the west, to the

tops of mountains just rising over the horizon, which the fingers of dawn and evening colour, and which send out Banat-ul-Naqsh¹ at nightfall to be the *kiblah* of their dreams.

Misery and splendour! But how easy it is before these wide simplicities to clear the mind of its burdens and untruths. Folly it were for the restless spirit of the West to seek a lodging in the shelter of Majnun. But what infinite solace to watch, for a few hours, the smoke of the camp fire mingle with that which rises at sundown from these lone tents and to marry our lot to theirs!

. . . Behind the thorns the shadows lengthen; the flocks move homeward, raising little clouds of dust in the still air; a flute sounds.

An instinctive prayer forms in my heart. A prayer? I know not. Something of gratitude, of wonder and of peace.

Just as we are preparing for the night a *jambaz* rider arrives from over the desert to announce that a Baluchi raiding army—"a very powerful one; a thousand men ride in it"—is close on his heels, marching from Kwash under Shahsavar Khan, against the Kainat and Neh. We are directly on the storm track. It is soon reported that they will arrive here during the night and that they are at present passing Buzgird Kuh. The news and its elaboration spread like wildfire through the camp and Djevad and Abdullah are ready to panic. There is nothing to do but to pack up in haste and try to gain the Nung plain.

¹ The Great Bear.

The start to-night is very wonderful for fear, raised soon by comments and conversations to foreboding of impending disaster, has descended on all and confusion grows with every moment. Large fires of thorn and tamarisk are set ablaze to give light to load by, but it seems as if the countless boxes and sacks lying about everywhere on the ground can never be brought into order. The camels sit facing the blaze, their heads and necks illuminated, their bodies hidden in the darkness.

Hasting figures rush to and fro across the light, and we, too, wander hither and thither, bumping against the backs of camels, stumbling over guide-ropes, hitting against boxes. The air is rent by grumbling and snorting and wild shouting. When the loads are fixed at last, and the train is being tied, armfuls of dry mint are thrown on the fires to allow the *sowars* to search for anything that may still remain. For a moment a wider circle of the desert is lit up. Thorn bushes stretching away on all sides shine forth as if awakened from sleep. Then in a cloud of sparks the fires sink and the night recloses. The shouting is mingled with the clash of bells.

We have to change camels five times during the night and each time are delayed some twenty minutes. Minutes half reality, half dream! I remember some strange rocks protruding out of the desert like giant monuments.

May 23. *Gerandab.*

Thanks to the delays of the night we only get here two hours after dawn. The scenery is different from the last three stages, for we are camped beside a wide and dried-up swamp covered with sheets of borax and salt, and known as the Nung. There is no well and water has to be fetched from a point three miles to the south. There is nothing to do, for the story-teller, Nazer, has gone off hunting, and nothing to see, for the heat is blinding.

Nazer returns at midday disgusted, for "the thousand Baluchis" have apparently disturbed the game. Djevad maintains he did not go to look for it, but went away to hide. With a great deal of difficulty I finally got the following lovely poem out of him. Every now and then he forgot where he was or what he was talking about and started to describe an ibex he had seen at Konarek. To recall his wandering thoughts a flute had to be brought and he had to sing the whole poem over again down to the point where he had interrupted it. It is a dialogue between a tribesman and a desert girl:

— "O child of springtime, linger a moment!"

— "No. I cannot linger here."

— "O desert girl! I am strong. I will take you
against your will!"

— "If you move I will run away into the desert!"

— "I will follow."

- " I will be a wild sheep among the rocks."
- "I will be a hunter and come from the opposite side of the wind."
- " I will be a hare in the fields and hide in a hollow."
- " Then I will be a hunting falcon and pick you up in my claws."
- "I will be a young gazelle fleeing over the plain."
- " Then I will be a greyhound and course you down."
- "I will be a small cloud drifting in the storm."
- " Then I will be a flock of sheep and drink up the rain-water."
- " I will be a tuft of sugar on the tamarisk of the desert."
- " Then I will be a young camel and lick the branch."
- "I will be a tiny grain fallen among the chaff."
- " Then I will be an insect and eat you up."
- "I will be an unconscious child sleeping in a cradle."
- " Then I will be Death and enfold you in my arms."

At four a *sowar* arrives to say that the advance-guard of the Baluchi " army " are passing Geragheh.

Our departure to-night is delayed by lack of water. It was discovered just in time that the *sowars* and well-diggers and story-tellers had drunk the entire contents of the two skins we carry. The

camel sent to fetch another supply only returns towards midnight. There is an extraordinary scene when it appears. The ill-disciplined crowd fall on the animal before even it is dropped. Djevad and I have to hold one of the leather spouts in our hands by force. By force alone—I remember striking one man as hard as I possibly could on the side of his head with the butt end of a revolver, but he nevertheless crawled between my legs, holding his mouth upwards to catch the drops—we succeeded in filling two flasks. Water in a thirsty land! It is ochre-coloured and thick, and twigs and leaves, and I know not what else besides, float in it, and yet one drinks it greedily and with joy.

Baluchi Ab.

There is no well here, no water, no trace of any ground where caravans put down their loads. The only thing to mark the place at all is a lot of smashed telegraph poles and tangled wire lying about, the relics of the Afghan arms caravans in the early spring.

We halt on a ridge that slopes downwards towards the east. Far away below the immense Shela desert stretches into infinity. There where the eye loses hold in the heat haze of dawn lies Afghanistan. I sit among the boxes staring into it as the tents are set up.

These latter stages are a great deal more trying than those between Shurgez and Gurg, and, to add

to the difficulties of heat and water, we have run short of supplies. The heat is terrible, and over the fiery waste of desert from midday till sunset blows the "Bad i sad o bist ruz" (Wind of One Hundred and Twenty Days). One cannot face it. One has to hold up a coat or a rug as a shield each time one leaves the tent. Our last plate is broken. Abdullah buries it, saying that some European will some day dig it up and it will then be "from out of the earth" and of great value.

We leave an hour before sunset, to try to get through to the next stage by midnight, and soon come out from the last of the Persian mountains and turn southwards. The view is magnificent. On the left the ground drops from under us and merges without a break or undulation into the fog that hangs over the lowlands of Afghanistan, miles and miles below and beyond. To the south, like shadows in the sky, the frontier ranges are visible. The sun sets directly behind us in a low line of white heat clouds. No ray of colour breaks through the pallid light that hangs over everything in the few moments which precede the coming of night. We seem to crawl along clinging to the edge of the world, with infinity itself below us.

Half-way to the stage we pass beside an isolated hillock rising beside the road against the void. The spot has a well, they say, and is called Lewar i Ab. We rest for a moment below it to adjust a guide-rope and then come out again into the fog of space and stars. Deep ravines traverse

the onward track and we have to descend by zigzags into them and hunt about for gaps through which to ascend on the other side. There were moments when I felt sure that the camel must lose its balance, so steep was the angle at which the litter was poised, so directly did my feet point towards the stars.

We stop at last towards three A.M. It is too dark to attempt to put up tents. I spread a rug on the top of a hillock and lie down. Large caravans are camped below us and the sound of camels munching drifts up on the night breeze. On the night breeze seems to come also another sound. Half asleep I listen. Water? I get up, and stumbling about in the dark come on a spring gushing out of a mossy cranny.

May 25. Hurmek.

I was awakened early by a strange noise. Close by some fifty Afghans are collected in a circle, beating on drums and singing a kind of low chant, while a boy about eight years old dances in their midst. I go across in pyjamas to watch. While twenty accompanists mumble and beat on drums, the boy, who has only a thin coloured scarf tied round his body and bells strapped to each ankle, twitches about before them, keeping time with his clapping hands and beating feet. He holds his arms tight to his sides and throws his head back, describing a little circle in the burning sand. We make friends, and in the afternoon an old

man, who looks like Solomon ben Dawud, sings stories. I sit beside him in the middle of the circle, surrounded by a hedge of bare feet, of which the toes beat time.

Three immense caravans are halted below. The springs here are the purest in all the neighbouring country, and by them cross the tracks from Mekran to Meshed and Central Asia, from India to Persia and Baghdad.

As the heat of the day diminishes I clamber up behind the camp to gain a ridge where the largest stream pours forth. Has it a name? A legend? I know not; but from these rocks, where the eternal sound of running water mingles with the eternal sound of caravans, a voice rises that confuses time and space. . . .

Below me and around three countries meet in a mist of blue, through which, far away, the waters of the Helmund shine. The eye fails; imagination leaps to replace it; desire goes still beyond. The mountains of Qaf? Khutan?

Yet the sound of bells recalls our thought, that a vast desire would scatter, and fixes it, between the empty solitudes of the sky and the arid solitudes of the Lut, within a semicircle below.

Upon levels, worn smooth as glass, all day long loads have been stacked, and the *sareban* have slept under them as motionless as the stones; but now with the coming of evening life has awakened; little groups sit on the greensward beside the streams and the cliffs echo with the grunting and snarling of camels. For a while

the caravans mingle; for a while men take ease, talking the talk of Kabul and Basman. But soon the voices of the drivers echo: "Ya Ali! Ya Shah Nejef! YaKhezzr!"

The moments pass; the shouting and the tumult grow.

Yet a party of Afghans still linger, occupying a narrow space of shadow at the bottom of a lawn ablaze with sun. Are they held by some tale of love or adventure, too spell-bound to stretch out a hand towards turbans or slippers discarded amid the grass? The drums sound. What matter! The story will go on, eternal too, starting and restarting during the long leisures of the night. Does not the poet know a thousand *beyts*¹ of Mir Chakar's fierce battles? Cannot he set Ani whispering to her lover and scatter on the night the sweetness of Shirin's breast?

A crash of bells breaks upon the evening. Up and down the trains pass figures burning rue. A hundred and fifty camels move slowly from the shadow of the rocks like an immense caterpillar unwinding; two hundred and eighty cross them like a kaleidoscope. For a while they seem all one, till gradually the movement passes down the lines and reaches the *pas-ahang*? The gap between them opens; slowly grows; the sounds of singing rise. So they wander out, to stray like gossamer thread upon the waste; so ever have they wandered out, in search of pleasure or of gain. And time has

¹ Verses.

² The last camel on the string.

changed nothing. Where at Pasargadae they bargained for melons and saw Cyrus lay claim to the world they bargain still at Murgab and see on a crumbling stone—as a picture, a target for their rifles — his same proud words; where at Persepolis they loitered among the willows of the Pulwar and heard the soldiers of Alexander boasting of their empire they loiter to-day at Takhti Rustem and hear Indian officers boast of ours; where on the banks of Ruknabad they halted for water and listened to the poems of Hafiz they halt for water still and chant his songs.

Unchanging in the midst of change, with the same slow step, the same homes abandoned, the same sound of singing—for men have ever had their dreams. And no one can know where the end of the road lies, for a hundred thousand stages open ahead, and the dust on the road of eternal searching is the veil of truth.

. . . Slowly the last figures sink into mirage, the last sound of bells is swallowed in the night. The streams tinkle. A solitary voice among the rocks rises towards the stars:—

"Impatient thy love has risen, and in a corner
of the garden plucks the petals of a rose:
O friend! pick another rose and breathe in its
calice the perfume of this moment,
For soon, ardent and petitioning, she will
return."

BALUCHISTAN

May 26. Kuhl Malik Siah.

When we started this morning the Afghanistan plains were floating in a sea of mist, out of which spirals of dust were rising.

The country about the frontier is very wild, a maze of mountains so obliterated by the light that save for lines of salt, high up among the peaks, they appear a faint wash of colour without substance or form. The place seems not the end of a country but the end of a world. A group of semi-Indian officials come out to meet us and stand about twisting their hands, while their spokesman, a baboo, mutters at intervals: "We are assembled here for service and respect."

After a lot of idle talk we move on, passing the cairn which marks the frontiers of Persia, India and Afghanistan.

Robat lies in a stony river-bed, sloping down and out of the mountains towards the Shela desert. When we reach the stage we find, instead of nothing, a sumptuous bungalow, out of which a group of Jamadars, Thanadars and Daffadars scramble, for more service and respect. The place seems to contain everything, carpets, writing-tables, baths, cork bath-mats, sponge racks, even a red pillar-box. Abdullah and Djevad stand

bewildered. Who but England could have produced a Webb-Ware ?

For the first time the long evening of waiting drags. The boxes are aimlessly repacked. Karam comes to say good-bye. Henceforward we have other camels with Brahui drivers. They appear quite inefficient, but are extremely picturesque, with long coils of black hair resting on their shoulders and slow dreamy movements. They know no language at all.

In the evening a bedizened Indian, with clinking spurs, comes to take me round the "station." He has never seen an Englishman before who was not a Lieutenant or a Captain or a Major, and he will not abandon the attempt to discover which I am. The air is hot and the gathering night brings no change in the temperature.

We are coming into another land. Even Djevad starts muttering about "Bunderbust"—a disgraceful word that would shock a Persian's ear.

I have filled in the time working on Baluch poems, but unprofitably. They appear to be sung just as they float into the minstrel's head, without order or form, without reference to sense or story. I noticed the same thing when Mahomet Ali sang the night away across the No Gombaz desert, but then it was couplets which went astray, here it is nearly every line.

Abdullah, who turns back here for Tehran, comes to say good-bye, and, having said it, weeps in the passage for hours. The last week he has sulked and wailed: "My heart is burnt; on the

faith of God my heart is burnt to cinders." There will remain always in my memory the sound of his water-pipe, the speck of glowing charcoal in the night.

Towards midday I decided I could stand the bungalow and its orderlies waiting for orders—what orders could I give?—no longer. The mantle of Indian officialdom hangs too heavily on my nomad shoulders. I am already willing to forgo its comforts and luxuries for the shelter of the *sarebans* loads. For the first time and the last I think suddenly of an order to give:

—"I shall start for the Helmund. . . ." The heat is stifling; the clouds collect round the mountains and hang like a pall above us—clouds that will break over the Indus.

I set out at three o'clock with a Baluchi *sowar* and a Brahui camel-man. Djevad comes to the door of the bungalow: "What time will you return from Afghanistan?"

Who could answer such a question?

May 29. *Chah Mohammad Reza.*

I wake a little before dawn to find we have come out from the mountains and are skirting along their slopes. On the left the immense unbroken desert, that covers the whole of Southern Afghanistan, melts into grey mist into which the sky descends. Daylight comes quickly but without

colour. At six o'clock a group appears ahead riding towards us, and a native officer, who speaks excellent English and has come through from the garrison at Kacha with a box of soda-water and an English loaf of bread, rides up on a white Arab pony. Two hours later we come out above the stage—several stone-built houses. The bungalow is exactly similar to the first one, but has only two rooms instead of four. Towards evening, as we leave the shelter of the rooms, partridges come down from the branches to drink and the slopes are filled with their clucking. When darkness falls, the Indians return and sit in order of rank in front of me on the terrace. The Thasildar takes the chair beside me and a Baluchi plays on a violin. We are far away from the nonchalant assemblies of Persia, officialdom weighs over everything.

The nights now are gradually becoming stiflingly hot. No breath circulates in the air, only waves of heat rise from off the desert. Enormous beetles fly with a burr through the darkness and fall with a crash around my candles. There are swarms too of that kind of ant or fly I have noticed all along the road from Sipi, with two long oarlike spikes behind its wings.

I wake after an hour or so to see a figure standing watching me. After some explanation, which has to be translated twice, I discover it is a *sowar* on guard. In spite of all my entreaties he will not go away. He has been ordered to keep guard and, failing an earthquake to swallow him up, apparently he will remain.

Kacha.

The track pursues the same course as yesterday's, Keeping along the edges of the mountains about two miles from their base. I have the luck to shoot a gazelle from my pony. Towards noon we turn up into the mountains and soon enter a narrow gap between precipitous rocks. The opening we follow is only some few yards wide and down it, through gravelly sand, flows a stream of bright clear water. At the top we come upon Kacha, into scented willows and green fields—the first we have seen since Kerman. The bungalow here is immense, and is surrounded by an English garden. The way to it indeed leads down a path between beds of hollyhocks, blossoms of red and white, with bees buzzing to and fro. The barracks and hospital and mess stand like prisons on low and shadeless slopes.

I lunch in the mess. There are four officers besides Major Carter. None of them seems to know anything about Persia and think that Kerman is on the Seistan road. All the talk is of the Derby and of military racing in India. I gather that the regiment (the 107th Hazara Pioneers) has been here since March and is staying till October, that they have to pay duty on all stores from Seistan and that they hope to be ordered to Bam to fight the Baluchi.

They are all excessively kind and I come back loaded with cigarettes and more soda-water. They

have no idea what or where the Lut desert is, but know that it is very dangerous, and believe that only two or three Europeans have ever crossed it before. The story—told with heaven knows what additions by the Thasildar—of the shooting of the gazelle seems to have created an impression I shall not possibly be able to live up to. On getting back to the bungalow I find that Djevad has found a Baluchi *sotvar* to recite stories. I spend the evening taking down his tales and striving to play the flute.

The garden here would be quite lovely were not a sepoy hidden behind every shrub and in every flower-bed. I feel as if I were a German spy. If I go to smell the roses a Daffadar and two men march behind me. If I climb over the small patch among the hollyhocks at least a dozen sepoys spring up from the ground and stand at the salute.

In the evening Major Carter comes round to fetch me and show me over the place. The English soldier is indeed the most extraordinary and, in a way, the most wonderful curiosity that the world has yet created. He tells me, as we tramp over paths laid out in the ground in whitewashed stones, "that all his boys" are made to do something in the evening. If they don't elect to play hockey or football they have to go for a mile's run. In the winter of course? I suppose. But no; neither climate, nor heat, nor situation is apparently allowed to interfere with his idea, brought from an

English public school, of how the evenings should be spent. It is what he did as a boy and it is therefore to be done by everybody else; irrespective of any kind of climatic or racial condition.

And so it is that we stand and watch two full teams of Hazara sepoys, strengthened by five British officers, play violent games of hockey among dust and stones in a temperature of 101° Fahrenheit. To my uninitiated eyes they appear to play as keenly as any English team, tearing about over the ground, banging the ball at each other's legs and swearing in Pushtu—a language which was undoubtedly only intended to describe dying camels and war-songs. About one hundred yards farther on, also in the middle of the unshaded waste, a football match is in progress. They have entirely obliterated the country in which they live and converted the small station into a bit of England. Winter and summer the programme is never varied. "It keeps them from gambling," is the clearest reason that appears to exist in the Major's head, but it is obvious that in his opinion it needs no explanation at all, being the natural and only thing to do. When darkness puts an end to the games the officers come up, dripping with perspiration, to drink whiskies and sodas in canvas chairs on a hillock outside the mess. And then the conversation is only of how So-and-so played or of whether the team is "keeping up to Quetta form." They don't even appear to shoot.

I have dinner also in the mess. The gramophone

is set going. The Major's favourite tune is *Two Eyes of Blue*, and each time it is played he rubs his hands and says:—

" Jolly little refrain that," and someone answers:

" Yes, sir, quite nice."

Endless whiskies - and - sodas are served. The Major is chaffed about Paris and plays up, to everyone's delight, by slapping his knee and exclaiming:—

" Ah! Yes, that is a grand place that 'Follies Bargerés."

When I finally get back to the bungalow at midnight Djevad is sitting waiting with a Baluch poem about a girl who had put so many ornaments on her head that she could not lean out of the window to greet her lover.

Am I mad or are they ?

May 31. Kacha.

I dine again in the mess. The Major goes to sleep after dinner and snores. One of the officers says :—" Listen to the old bird warbling."

The moon is waning and the still night air is heavy with the scent of English flowers.

The caravan is suddenly halted in the middle of the night and a figure appears below my litter, saying in one breath:—" I am the second assistant of the House Surgeon." The air here, outside the mountains, on the Shela plain is stiflingly hot— one has to keep one's helmet down to ward off

the wind, just as one does in the day against the sun. The *sareban* fall asleep. Gradually sleep steals over me too. One loses all touch with the World in these night rides. Bartholdy's Concerto comes into my head and goes on and on. It seems to be the only link with anything I cling to, and even it is muddled.

June 3. *Amalaf.*

The station is the most desolate I have yet seen on the road. The desert around looks as if all the waste ends and bits of the world had been cast there out of the way. There are innumerable small hillocks some ten to forty feet high, of all shapes and sizes, half buried in sand. A terrific wind is blowing, and it is impossible to keep one's helmet on even with a strap. Everything is caked with sand. Nevertheless I have got from the only inhabitant of this inferno a long Baluch poem.

It appears useless to try to carry different methods of travel out of the country of their origin. The *Kajaveh* plan does not work on this road, so to-night I travel on the Indian plan—starting an hour or so before sunset, on a pacing camel, halting towards midnight for a few hours' rest and continuing some hours before dawn. Clusters of foam form round the mouths of the camels and sweat exudes from the backs of their heads and trickles down their necks.

June 4. *Humai.*

Start again at three-thirty A.M. half unconscious. Sometimes we seem to have come out for ever into the open; then suddenly we are once more lost in a maze of ridges and *nullahs*. Dawn comes towards five. I remember faintly playing hide-and-seek with my head with the round ball of the sun as we dipped and rose, till it freed itself from the earth and mounted slowly above us. A kaleidoscope of pictures pass before my eyes. Everything that lies on the ground—rocks, tamarisks or skeletons of camels—is half buried in sand, and there are long series of small moon-shaped sandhills in all directions. I find an occupation in watching the tracks of birds and snakes across them. Of the latter there must be crowds, for the crinkly lines run to and fro everywhere.

Apparently the whole of Southern Afghanistan to the Helmund, on the other side of the mountains, is one waste of sandhills. The wind of The One Hundred and Twenty Days blows across it day and night.

An old Baluchi with a beard like an Assyrian produces a delightful sort of anthem about a girl, a horse and a gun—"That alone drive grief from a man's heart."

We are over two hundred miles from the nearest oasis, in the midst of a windswept, sand-eaten waste uninhabited by man and also, it would seem,

by animals. The carcasses of the camels that lie by the way are hardly visible.

The scene to-night is inexpressibly wonderful.

On three sides a maze of sandhills and low black ridges, half haze, half moonlight, lead away into the sky. The east is bound by an immense rock wall broken by a narrow gap through which our way to-morrow lies. Though it is some three miles distant it seems in the luminous light to tower above us and the gullies stand out inky black. Below the hillock on which my bed is laid, caravans are halted round the well, and in the arena formed by the camels, lying ready to be loaded, the *sareban* have lit fires.

But the hour to start has not yet sounded, and even our men, though the *kafila* is to go at midnight, are lying about asleep.

Stars rise crystal-clear over the east; stars sink into the west, into a band of luminous green.

How far out of the world we have come! We are beyond all time and place here.

June 5. Mushki Chah.

I spend the day with musicians and story-tellers. The Thasildar, having discovered my mania, had, two days previously, sent across to Afghanistan for a renowned *suruz* player. They arrive in my room with a great band of hangers-on. The Afghan plays beautifully. His *suruz* is smaller than the others

I have seen and resembles a Dervish's bowl. It has six strings, and a small sound-box at the bottom, covered with goatskin on which the hairs still cling. He rests it upright on his knee and plays with a horsehair bow held tightly by the thumb. A boy accompanies him on a sort of wooden "tar" with two strings which are struck together and produce somewhat the same noise as a drum. Once started the bow never varies, except from time to time to go faster or slower. The *suruz* only breaks in now and then in a kind of pitiful wailing, seeming to copy the broken verses of Persian poetry. There are the same long pauses broken by the ever-returning phrase of resignation and despair.

I go at sunset to the well as the camels come back over the desert to drink. It is the usual hole in the ground protected from the sand by a heap of palm trunks.

Midnight

The wind has dropped at last and all is still. We might be here in the same empty space in which the moon is sailing. Everything is lost in faint pale mist that floats invisibly into the starless skirts of the sky. Far away in the south-west the outline of a range of sandhills is just visible. It is the only point on which the eye can rest in all the world around.

June 6.

The Afghan played this evening in an inspired manner. The Indians grew more and more excited, shouting at him with enthusiasm. He paid not the least attention, staring out in front with an absolutely vacant face. He and the boy accompanist seemed indeed to be mere mechanical figures. There were moments when the music sank almost to a whisper—when it was less than the faint night breeze—then endlessly once more it turned and turned again upon a point of pain, of sightless, final despair.

Strange it is that out of this arid desert, where there is but sand and sun and wind, such music should spring. The man and the boy bend unceasingly over their instruments:—

"Sir, we should die here without music"; and so they play, day in, day out, the same unvarying wail. In what strange places does genius lodge! Here in a country no man inhabits, waterless and cruel, it possesses this man body and soul and has driven him since he was a small boy to play ten to twelve hours unceasingly every day. He only leaves me this evening to sit down in the desert and play on to himself.

June 8. *Noh Kondi.*

There is a passage in *Eothen* where Kinglake says that he came near to falling down and worshipping the sun as the implacable force of the

desert. But we but hate it. One watches for the white rim to creep forth with misgiving and calculations of the road still remaining ahead: cursing its appearance, for the only hours one can breathe freely are those that precede the dawn. The desert loses the day's heat only long after darkness has fallen, and even at night one shuns any kind of a wall or hillock as one would make a detour before an open furnace door. It is impossible to sleep anywhere near the bungalow at night; it radiates heat. I can only just hold my watch in my hand.

Preparations for loading are once again started. Rifles are slung over the backs of the saddles, and boxes and tassels hang down almost touching the ground on either side of the camels. The black cords attached to the lip studs are still wound round the camels' knees and they sit, trussed up like hens on a spit, gazing vacantly in front of them. The camel will stare quite happily for hours at whatever it is set down opposite to. Only now and again one rubs its nose along the ground or against a *sareban*, lifting up its head like a sea-serpent. The five Brahui are the most extraordinary-looking collection of white rags, and drag themselves about as if they had not energy enough to stand upright. One by one the loaded camels rise.

In a few moments the bungalow and fort are lost behind us, in a few moments there is nothing but the wide open line of desert, the wide open space of

the sky. It seems inconceivable that, beyond this desert, civilization, ordinary life should exist. We have drifted so far away from it that former things seem but half-remembered shadows of a dream, a dream in which one has lost the power of believing. I sleep and wake—but in these nights it is hard to say whether one ever loses consciousness. The cries of the camel-men from time to time reach to one: "Hay haye!" I bring back out of the mists of sleep only a memory of some long ballad, recited I know not by whom, and of which, alas! I can remember only the opening words: "Oh, wild child, is it thus that you have interpreted the secret of my love?"

June 10. *Chah Sandan.*

In the bungalow-book I find the following:—

Mrs Howson:—"The Daffadar did not keep us waiting. We *were* surprised."

Against which the Commanding Officer has written:—

"I regret to observe remarks of this type in the book."

What is one to note in a diary in these exactly similar days?

I fancy that in these regions Alexander the Great and Nadir Shah must have called for their most skilled story-tellers to describe the glories of India ahead—otherwise surely their spirits must have

failed them. We have not seen a village nor a tree for nearly a month. What is done for firewood I do not know. The whole desert is a waste of black stones shining like iron in the sun.

Evening.

They are a wild people, these Baluchis. When I go outside I see them gathered by a little pile of stones roughly heaped around a short stick to which goats' horns and bits of rags are attached. There are about ten or twelve ruffians, with four goats and two sheep. After some muttering by an old man they "*halal mikunand*"

The process consists in this: One of them puts a sack over his white clothes and sharpens a long knife, first up and down a stone and then on his boots. The first sheep is dragged up and held down on its back in such a way that the blood shall not splash on to the sacrificer's clothes. He bends back the unfortunate beast's neck and with one slice severs the artery. The blood with a dull gurr spouts up in a broken fountain and falls on the black stony ground. Someone else kicks the sheep away. So on till all have been slaughtered and a space of about three feet square has been soaked in blood. In a few moments it has sunk into the burning earth and left only a dull black stain. "It is the custom of the Baluchi," is the only explanation I can get of this barbarous ceremony. The spot appears to mark someone's grave, though God only knows who has died here.

The sun sets soon after we leave; almost unnoticed, for the white heat fog obscures its rays and throws out only a grey milky radiance. Every night at this hour, as he strolls along in front of the leading camel, Lali Shir combs his hair. He unwinds his turban; shakes back his straight black locks and, tying the camel's rope round his waist, separates his tresses one by one. Djevad supposes it is for his fiancée or perhaps his mother. The combing process is a rough and summary one: then holding one end of his turban between his teeth he rewinds it round his head.

June 11. Sotag.

These last days of unbroken desert have made the eye keen to notice the slightest variation in the ground. We have come indeed into slightly different country. Where before one smooth surface stretched to the far horizon, there are now rolling *tundra* with here and there isolated patches of tamarisk scrub and *butti*. Less deserted it is not, and one wonders on and on what force of destruction can have passed over this bitter land. Still there is here the sign of some desert vegetation and through the burning air comes an unknown scent—the scent of something green and moist: looking over the edge of the *kajaveh* I see clumps of knarled palms growing in one of the *nullahs* with which the *tundra* are seared,

The arrangements made for one's comfort on this road are admirable. The Daffadar here is

an officer who has, with his son, just returned from some wild-sounding place like Gurung, with bowls of honey. Honey from the flowers of the mountains of Afghanistan!

We drift slowly into another world. Thoughts of trains and steamers pass now at times through my mind as real things, not mere hazy words. The *Pioneer* writes of balls at the Vice-Regal Lodge at Simla. The first of what lies ahead is reaching me here. The Persian frontier seems thousands of miles away.

We start a few minutes after seven and traverse more *nullahs* covered with palm scrub and tamarisk-trees: then once again ride on to the desert, Blackened as if by fire it throws out a burning heat even to the height of the camel-litter, so that if one stretches out one's face over the edge it is seared.

Just before darkness falls we enter the most desolate track of low scorched hillocks I have yet seen, It is a region of pure annihilation. And yet wonderful, wonderful is the coming of night upon it—and far beyond my power of describing. I cannot even put here the dawn-like colour of the tamarisk against the ashen *tundra* nor the flat low shadows that come out of the watercourses on to the blackened waste.

I sleep, and wake to see the waning moon rise once more behind the leading camel of the caravan. I sleep to dream that I may go on thus for ever wandering towards the sun. . . .

June 12. *Dalbandin.*

I do not know, even after an interval of a few hours, how to describe our ride into the dawn. We were in a wide valley, perhaps ten miles across, over which the first wind announcing the coming of the light was blowing. The desert was all grey, and indeed when the light slowly came it seemed to creep up in the green tamarisks and merge into the grey mountain outlines rather than fall from the sky. In a few moments we were gliding in step as if one single body, although some forty-five camels paced together. It is a sensation comparable to nothing else in the world, for the movement is so smooth and even. In the twilight the forms of stones begin slowly to appear. Then we dip southwards in the plain just as a flight of herons swerves in the air as it takes its course through the cool of dawn: a flight of herons or some such long-legged and long-necked birds we seem indeed to be, the camels' necks swinging beside my knees. All of them keep just in line with the girth of my camel; their heads popping up and down like corks, their under lips flapping to and fro.

Soon from out the waving grey, tamarisk and *butti* spring. The sun rises golden and clear, covering with fire the clouds of dust we raise. Long dark buildings appear in front and we swing down to them and alight in a wide, dusty open space.

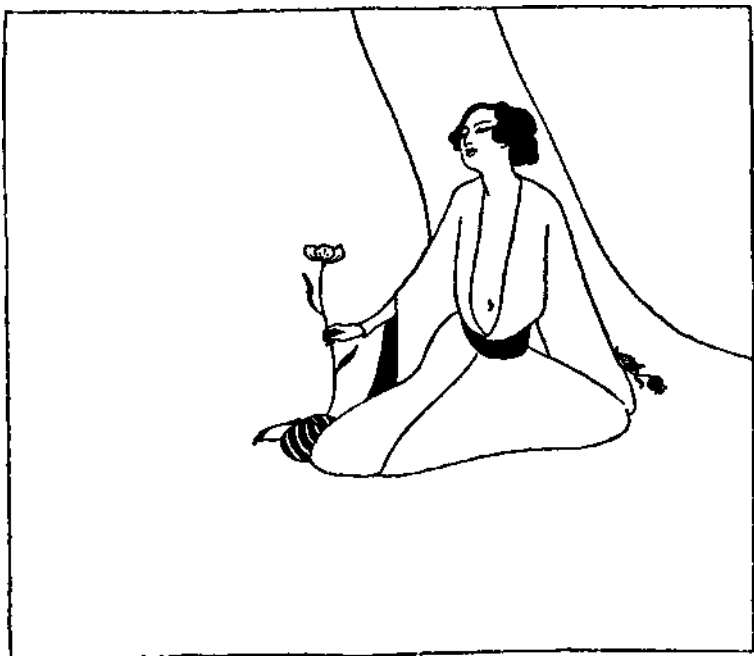
The bungalow here is surrounded by a delightful garden, with a wall of sunflowers and several very

large tamarisk-trees. Streams pour out of pipes: and gardeners appear with baskets of vegetables dripping with water, and bunches of ferns. After such a spell of desert as we have had, the scent of green leaves and flowers leaps to the nostrils, and the first hour is one long feast of delight.

Evening.

The group in my bungalow now numbers about forty men, in the middle of which Djevad and I seat ourselves to take down songs that the local bard proceeds to wail. The band is quite impossible as an accompaniment, and threatens in the room to break the drum of my ear, so that it has to be relegated to wait outside. I get finally two long poems. Then, before I have time even to read the extraordinary-looking gibberish I have written down, the Jamadar comes to say that the band is ready and that the Baluchis are coming to dance.

Tables and chairs are moved outside and the entertainment immediately begins. Two wild-looking Afghans, having tightened the strings of their drums, hang the latter over their shoulders and start to beat on them with a stick that resembles a rough wooden dagger. The third blows down a trumpet, till his cheeks swell out like india-rubber, and produces the most piercing sort of scream. The same trumpet certainly must have been blown for Alexander the Great. To the accompaniment of these discordant noises the



Baluchis slowly start to turn in a wide circle. The dance—it is apparently an autochthonic one—is very similar to what I saw at Sipi. At first the dancers move round slowly taking one step forward, then a slow movement in a circle, then one step back—all in line waving their hands somewhat after the manner of a Highland Fling. As the music gets into swing the pace of the erstwhile slowly turning circle is increased, and at every beat hands are clapped. The next stage is three whirls round between the full step forward and the half-step back. After that it becomes impossible to describe the dance at all. The Baluchis make pretence to leap at each other but keep still the slowly revolving circle round the musicians. The heat is so intense and the men so overcome with it that I suggest it might stop. Djevad fills the gap with his *tar*. In this country, however, Persian music sounds as sophisticated as European. The assembly, moreover, appear to consider it quite incomprehensible. In the midst of the entertainment a venerable old Baluchi arrives with a boy. He produces a red-stained and ornamented flute from a bag, and the "Nay, Nevi, Nevi, Nay" noise starts. He is not such a good performer, however, as Nazer, whose merits Djevad rather untactfully enlarges on, and starts each piece with a kind of death-rattle in his throat. I think it was only about this period that I had leisure to look round at the assembly. The post-master is on my right, the Hakim Sahib—a red-turbaned baboo who talks a little English—on

my left, and all the Jamadars and Thamadars, and goodness knows who else besides, in strict order of precedence, sit round the circle.

They go at last towards eight, leaving only the cooing of the doves to break the soft evening silence.

As the twilight falls the garden grows cool and the scent of green leaves hangs in the air. I lie and watch the dark tops of the tamarisk-trees grow darker in the sunset and long low mountain lines of violet that sink into the evening sky. It is cool, blessedly cool, in this garden. Streams ripple and crickets sing for the first time for over a month.

How to return to Europe after this ?

The night is extraordinarily still. Not a sound or a stirring anywhere, and though I do not sleep till towards dawn it rests my spirit just to lie there. Opening on all sides, straight on to the desert, the garden seems full of stars—those rising in the east tremble through the tall sunflowers like fireflies. It is an enchanted spot—like one of Edgar Allan Poe's dream-gardens. One can feel softness and peace dripping on one's spirit.

June 13.

Dine in the garden amid a swarm of insects. Many of them are said to live only for one hour. For a full thirty minutes a transparent fly, that looked more like a glint of iridescent light than

living insect, fed on a piece of my pudding. The full half of one's life pure bliss! What human destiny has ever equalled this ?

I am wakened at dawn by the gardeners drenching the garden paths with water.

June 15.

The camel that I am to ride this evening and that has been brought round in front of the bungalow is splendidly bedecked. His head and neck and sides are covered with all sorts of trappings and hangings and beads, and to culminate all, he wears strings of bells round his feet.

We start at sunset. The Baluchi method of saying good-bye is worthy of note. They put their arms round each other and lay their heads against each other's shoulders, but quite abstractedly, as if they were thinking of something else. It dates clearly from an older time, when no man leaving his tent and people could ever be sure of returning, but the gesture has remained unaltered.

We move away without motion, without effort, through another perfect evening in which the golden light of the falling sun seems indefinitely to hang in the sky. In front, on our right, stretch the mountains of Kharam, behind the first of which lies, they tell me, the mountain Rast Koh, which figures so prominently in Baluch poetry. Is it, I wonder, the very sterility of the country that has forced up imagination here into such jets? It is a wonderful land: a land of war and

love, where life was held cheaply; where a woman and a riding camel were man's sole desire.

Barbarous, restricted perhaps; but none of us have ever known pride in anything such as was felt here for a swift pacing *mari*, none of us have ever known physical pleasure such as was experienced here in the act of love. There is, in the story of Shey Murid, a passage of a vivid intensity which tells how, after Mir Chakar had carried off Ani and let her out of his tent alone for one night, Shey Murid possessed her three times, which is a revelation to our jaded intellects and European senses. It was natural to risk life for such things here, and the rising of a whole tribe, a twenty years' war, were counted as nothing against the pleasure of the moment. The stealing of a woman or of a camel indeed appears to be the origin of all its wars, and since the beginning of time it has seen but one endless maze of raiding and of fighting. There is not a place in it, be it even a few tamarisk bushes, that has not been seized and retaken, reseized and recaptured again, till one's head reels at the never-ending succession of similar incidents. Those swift raiding parties have ever escaped through the hands of law and order; yea, even through the fingers of history.

. . . One can hardly see them now as they pass, so like are they to the desert sand, so completely does the sun obliterate everything in its pitiless glare. If some day a register of tribal raids and warfares is compiled by a painstaking British-Indian official, no particulars will yet reach the

outside world of those enigmatic figures for which lives were staked, for which wars were fought.

Omar carried Manaz for two months in his arms with her earrings, forehead and nose jewels rubbing against his moustache. The camels fleeing over the desert with burdens as light as this would leave no deeper imprint in the sand than if their master had been alone. Only one or two men in each tribe have ever been able to tell the difference in the soft footprints. How can these legends be constructed now?

. . . To think that this evening I am passing the very ground they passed over, swinging to the very same stride. Alas for our poor restricted lives! Where they could see the horizon and its landmarks I can only discern an unbroken waste; where their arms and hands were clasped round a yielding booty, mine are cramped writing rough notes against the holster of a revolver.

June 15.

We lost our way to-night and wandered for hours in the desert till daylight came.

. . . How many suns have appeared out of that milk-like fog that seems always to hang in front of our road?

June 16. Yadgar Chah.

The thermometer stands at 119° Fahrenheit.

India is indeed a strange place. I found in the

bungalow here a small history of Western Thibet by some missionary, in the fly-leaf of which is written:—"A charge of one rupee is to be paid for reading this book. By Order."

I can fancy the conscientious baboo turning out his pockets and finding only fifteen annas and putting the book solemnly back again on the shelf of this rest-house in the midst of the open desert out of touch with all mankind—or did he read the preface for one anna?

I had a long talk with Djevad on life in general and on Europe ahead. Poor man, he does not dread it as much as I do. For him it is still the Great Unknown. "If we arrive we arrive. If we do not reach our goal we do not," he mumbles to himself.

Oh, where are we going?

June 17. Padaj.

Shekar Kaham arrives on the road to meet me before dawn and we have the same odd interview in the middle of the desert in the dark. Then, once again mounting, continue towards the coming of the day. The light as it rises over the Eastern horizon throws the ridges of the Kharam range into faint relief one behind the other. The whole East seems like some faded illumination out of an ancient missal. Desert, mountains, sky, all blend in a soft golden wash from which the actual colour has passed leaving only its vague souvenir behind. The stage blurred as always against the still dim

ground, as we ride down to it, lies near the foot of a small rock ridge rising out of tamarisk-bespeckled dunes.

Only two more stages remain to be covered to Nushki.

It is strange to think that this place in the journey corresponds to Kum at the other end. How far to that bright garden, which seemed to me to contain the very unfolded heart of Spring; where I sat under the judas-trees waiting for the post-horses to be changed and looked back on Demavend, I suppose, for the last time. In two days more we come out of the desert in which we have now travelled in one unbroken stretch for nearly six weeks—back once again into the world of man and woman, into the world where we are all more or less officials* My thoughts turn back to that reed-bed at Fahrej stretching out and ending on the desert where I spent my last evening in the living world straining my eyes towards the unknown East ahead. Will this border of the inhabited world—the world that all here vaunt in such glowing terms—stretch down, I wonder, to meet us even so? Oh! and I remember too that narrow rushing stream where I sat for a few moments at nightfall on our first evening out from Bam. It was almost the last water we have seen, and these endless days of thirst have made it live in my imagination so vividly that I can still hear its rustle, still smell its freshness as it came pouring down from out the stars. Life is a sorry business;

or rather an endless worrying and thinking; ourselves to torment us always drag our bodies where we will. In this calm world, which knows little of man and hears nothing pertaining to him except here and there the sound of a rifle-shot—passable that, for it fits in well with these rough places—I cannot free my thoughts from my incessant self. So I stand at the far end of the desert we have forced. I have lived through to see it and stand here at the gate of India and the journey's end with my mind but full of myself: all so idle and so useless and yet so impossible to set aside.

It is good after such thoughts to come out in the evening and find the desert yet there. I have still two more days' respite—two more days of God's freedom—and what an evening again it is, with the form of the caravan fading away into the brown desert, a thin line of blue smoke drifting up against the Rast Kuh mountains.

. . . Oh, Evening, give me peace! Your peace! Put your hands upon the beating wings of my spirit as you do upon the pigeons of these wilds and send to it sleep—your sleep!

We start after sunset on pacing camels, and I have this evening the best *mari* I have yet ridden. It travels as smoothly as water in a brook and as swiftly as the wind.

The lights of caravans going to Seistan flicker, casting a small circle of golden light on the sand. White figures crouch round it, shading their eyes

with their outstretched hands to look towards us. All the rest of the *kafila*—loads and camels—are hidden by the darkness. Such nights are good. A fire shining first as a tiny point of light on the desert, growing now to a bright blur, and then the circle of men around it. Who can describe here? . . . The halting of caravans on the immense roads of Asia, the thin smoke rising from the circle the kneeling camels form, the sinking of the stars of the night of parting (*Juft Kar*) in the west, the long train loading, stealing away into the void.

Even thus we go. For a little while the dim forms of *butti* are visible on either side and then thick darkness falls and there is nothing but the stars to watch. Then slowly once again we overtake the sound of tolling bells: at first only faintly in the air; then clearer in full, vibrant beats. The sound booms now quite close to us, but the caravan is still invisible on the desert. We come up alongside and pass first one, then two camels and then edge up along the train. The Brahui are as usual asleep—their rocking figures perched high on the camels amid boxes and sacks:—

"Dur Mahomet hui!" "Ali Shir, cannot you hear!"

A formless white mass shakes itself and descends by way of the camel's back to the ground, then running ahead stops the leading camel. The caravan is dropped in the desert and we climb up on to it. A few moments of waiting, a few moments to transfer a few odd things from camel

bags to the litter and we mount and start once more. Sometimes through the night comes the jangling of small bells as *sowars* pass us on their pacing camels; always Ali Shir's fantastic sloping, figure with a guide-rope tied round his waist stands out against the darkness around. We drift. . . .

Two months of nights tilted against God's stars in a rocking camel-litter till I have made my own names for the planets and filled my head with I know not what wild Afghan and Baluch astronomy. • . .

It was to this land of nothingness, to this oblivion, that the caravans set out from the caravanserai at Aqda. . . .

June 19. *Nushki.*

As the waning moon is rising, the ceremonial party (*istiqbal*) from Nushki is announced ahead, and we are met by an army of towering white figures. The following dialogue takes place:—

—"Sir, the Thasildari Nushki together with the Jamadars and the Thanadars have arrived.

They have arrived with very many soldiers."

—"That's all right."

—"Sir, the Guard of Honour has arrived from Nushki. They await Your Highness."

—"Oh, damn!"

—"Sir, many hundreds of people have gathered and are waiting for you."

—"Tell them that I am asleep."

My camel, nevertheless, is dropped, and I have

to proceed to hunt for slippers and a hat in the darkness, while they stand in serried rows around. I proceed leisurely to collect myself from out of the bottom of the litter. Then, having got tolerably straight, turn round to greet them and take the salute of about one hundred and eighty Jambaz *sowars* as if I had only just become aware of their presence. Happily the whole scene is lit only by the stars and one cannot see much. Even in the darkness, however, it has the solemnity of all the functions of the Government of India. None of the happy familiarities of Persia, none of those wild rifle-shots which are so very apt to hit one by mistake. After a few brief words I mounted my camel and we continued onwards to the stage. For some time afterwards I heard the various officials being arranged in order of precedence to follow me. The dawn, as we ride swiftly towards it, comes softly in fairy-like colours. Long lines of shell-like clouds stretch from the south across the sky, each seeming to contain a little drop of steel-blue light. For the last time I turn and look back to Persia. My vision of its memory is mist of gold through which the dazzled senses can already invent no way.

Persia!

. . . On a burning summer afternoon, five, six?—how many years ago is it?—you dragged me, Geoffrey, grumbling and protesting about rooms to be found, boxes to be unpacked, letters to be written and all the trivial occupations we carry

about with our trivial lives, you dragged me—and on a horse I could not ride—to the terrace of a palace outside the gates of Tehran and I talked, I remember, of Rome and you showed me the mountains rising behind Rhages and said I would soon forget the *Via Gregoriana*; and we sat aimlessly on looking at the mountains which barred the desert and watching the patterns of the sunlight on the steps; and time seemed suspended and the day, with only the colour of roses as its burden, to slide insensibly to night.

We forced those mountains and broke into the plain beyond, finding on a day of springtime—blossoms of Aminabad like snow upon the ground!—as a farthest goal, the village of Veramen half buried in the cracks and ruptures of the earth. The first stage that was of adventure, full of discomfort and fatigue and—alas! it was that which troubled me—within sight still of Tehran. Did we see anything? Did not the mountains of Siah Kuh bar the desert once more ahead? I fancy we only slept abominably and lamed our horses—but how sweet was the story that the poet told in the morning at the door of the tavern as the drums and flutes were playing. . . . In such moments—they pass even now so slowly through my memory—I emptied my hands of all they carried and left them free. What mattered it that no programme nor order had place in our vagabondage?

After each wild ride a fresh bond lingered in our memory, a new spot sang upon the plain.

The Regent of Persia in olden days was fond of telling a story of some tourists who brought back from the excavations of Rhages a lump of earth is a memento of their excursion. When in the heat of their rooms it crumbled, a quantity of turquoises was found, so numerous that they had them mounted as trinkets for their friends.

The precious anecdote! To all, without seeming to give, Persia has given. To those perhaps first—our sight can penetrate no further—who came thither only to fight, for it is clear that God fashioned that sunlit plain of Veramen—"the Great Plain, which is the plain in the borders of Rhages"—just that men should join battle; and who, this being so, but could itch to slaughter his neighbour? There, as the combat raged, those huge-bearded kings, mounted above the opposing armies and always visible to each other (for one cannot think it otherwise), turned aside for a moment and gazed with a quick downward glance of wonder at the enchanted land.

To them and to all, to conqueror and conquered, to believer and unbeliever, to pilgrim and traveller, it gave and gave unstintingly; and when, in a later age, decay and ruin fell, in its humblest moments, not least perhaps if last, to those who came, fronting the Persian dawn, whose dust-dim cities had never felt the shadow of its rose.

I can lay no claim to have gathered in these years the emeralds of a Sherley or to have held in my hand, like Chardin, a globe encrusted with jewels, but perhaps the turquoise is not such a

rare stone that I should refrain from thinking to have found here and there a few.

... I remember that those mingled with earth, though valueless in the market, are often the most brilliant in their hue.

Yet can any horizon, be it even of Veramen, satisfy our dreams? Alone in after years I gazed from the stricken wilderness of Siah Kuh upon yet one more range that barred the way ahead and planned again to force it and go beyond.

The journey has been taken. There are, perhaps, bitterer stages still ahead. Yet I look now for what I seek only on those behind. Days and nights between Rhages and the Helmund! . . . The human mind, clouded with sleep, is the scene of strange pictures in the hours of dawn upon the road. Of these moments one might write that there rises over the desert the "Shamsi Emaret," the spires and pinnacles of Eldorado. Almost it would be true. To tell the story of this road men invented such palaces, built those towers to give outline of form to what they had half seen. Half seen! For when the mirage fades and the caravan, with mystery of night and stars still clinging to it, is halted in the crowded market-place, do the few incidents that memory brings out hold any meaning, the faint impressions that remain—colour and cadence them as we will—show any picture to another's eye? Songs that we sing but to delude ourselves: songs of youth! As time passes we grow world-wise and call them

futilities and turn to the combat of life to keep our muscles taut, our vision clear.

Be it so! For the last time I pause and try to pay a debt.

O Wind of Dawn! If, as in Persian poems, you can carry a message, take back a thought of mine to the walls of Veramen!

1914-1927.

