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PERSIA

AND

THE PERSIAN QUESTION

BY THE

HON. GEORGE N. CURZON, M.P.

LATE FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD
AUTHOR OF 'RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA'

Shall I stretch my right hand to the Indus,
That England may fill it with gold?
Shall my left beckon aid from the Oxus?
The Russian blows hot and blows cold.
And the lord of the English writes, 'Order
And Justice, and govern with Laws,'
And the Russian he sneers and says, 'Patience,
And velvet to cover your claws';
But the kingdoms of Islam are crumbling,
And round me a voice ever rings
Of death, and the doom of my country—
Shall I be the last of its kings?

SIR A. LYALL—*Verses in India*

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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TO

THE OFFICIALS, CIVIL AND MILITARY, IN INDIA

WHOSE HANDS UPHOLD

THE NOBLEST FABRIC YET REARED

BY THE GENIUS OF A CONQUERING NATION

I DEDICATE THIS WORK

THE UNWORTHY TRIBUTE OF THE PEN TO A CAUSE

WHICH BY JUSTICE OR WITH THE SWORD

IT IS THEIR HIGH MISSION TO DEFEND

BUT WHOSE ULTIMATE SAFEGUARD IS THE SPIRIT

OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE

NOTE TO READERS

Conscious that I am, to some extent, appealing to a twofold class of readers, the student and the amateur, whose interests do not always coincide, may I so far anticipate the tastes of both as to commend to the trained acumen of the former class Chapters II. IV. VIII. IX. XII. XVI. XVII. XVIII. XXI. XXIII. XXIV. XXVI. XXVII. XXVIII. XXIX.; and to the more desultory sympathies of the latter, Chapters I. III. V. VI. VII. X. XI. XIII. XIV. XV. XIX. XX. XXII. XXV. XXX.?

PREFACE

THIS book, which is the result of three years' almost uninterrupted labour, of a journey of six months' duration to the country concerned, as well as of previous travel in adjacent regions, and of communications maintained ever since with the most qualified resident authorities in Persia, is issued in the not, I hope, vainglorious hope that, until superseded by a better, it may be regarded as the standard work in the English language on the subject to which it refers. When I went out to Persia in the autumn of 1889 as correspondent to the 'Times,' my immediate object was to furnish to that paper, in a series of communications, necessarily limited in number and length, a *résumé* of the political situation in the Shah's dominions.[1] At the same time I profited by the opportunity to collect a great deal of additional information, which it was out of my power to utilise upon that occasion, and to fill many gaps of which earlier study had revealed the existence in the contemporary knowledge of Iran. It is the information thus amassed, and since supplemented by continuous investigation and correspondence, that forms the material of these volumes.

As I advanced further into the examination of my subject, I very soon realised how inadequate were our existing sources of knowledge about Persia. Though excellent, and in some cases monumental works upon the country had been published in the first quarter, and even as late as the middle of the present century, there had not since the latter date appeared a single comprehensive

[1] These letters, seventeen in number, appeared at intervals in the 'Times' from November 1889 to April 1890.

work upon the country as a whole. Individual writers had selected and had, in some cases, adorned different branches of the subject with productions of a strictly circumscribed character. But even in their compositions I was habitually confronted by the refusal to describe this or that locality, or to discuss this or that question, on the ground that it had been so exhaustively done by earlier writers—a reluctance which, as I pushed my studies ever further and further back, and either never found the masterpiece in question (because it had never existed), or found it already rendered quite obsolete by the archæological discoveries or the political events of a later time, I ended by ascribing as frequently to indolence as to an honourable respect for the labours of predecessors. So scattered, indeed, did all correct information about the country prove to be, that a traveller, meditating the proper literary equipment for at all an extensive journey in Persia, would almost require a separate baggage-animal to carry the library of indispensable tomes. In proportion, therefore, as I advanced, so did the horizon of my task expand before me, until I realised that there was genuine and imperative need for a compendious work dealing with every aspect of public life in Persia, with its inhabitants, provinces, cities, lines of communication, antiquities, government, institutions, resources, trade, finance, policy, and present and future development—in a word, with all that has made or continues to make it a nation.

Having accepted this responsibility, I have endeavoured to atone for a lack of personal fitness, which I shall be the first to acknowledge, as well as for the blanks left in my own travels, by such diligence of study or of inquiry as the reading of books, or the reference to competent authorities, has permitted. Of the works, between 200 and 300 in number, which have been written in European languages on Persia during the last five centuries, I have either read or have referred to nearly every one myself; and I can truthfully say that, among the many hundred references in these volumes, there is hardly one that is not an honest reference, i.e. the result of my own independent reading, instead of copied

secondhand from any other work. To such of my readers as may smile at this exertion, I would reply in the words of Voltaire, 'Remember what books I have read, in order to save you the trouble of reading them, and be thankful;' and to such as express surprise I would rejoin that without such application neither could I have ascertained what other travellers or writers have said or done, or, still more, have left unsaid or undone; nor should I have had it in my power to fill so many of the unconsidered *lacunæ* of history, which the ordinary historian, bent upon big effects, is apt to pass over; nor would my picture have presented the unity of design with which I aspired to invest it.

For although the primary object of this work may be described as political, there will yet be found a good deal of History in its pages; whether I narrate the earlier records of important provinces, tribes, and cities, or whether I endeavour to trace the steps by which Persia has passed, and is still passing, from barbarism to civilisation, as she exchanges the slow beat of the Oriental pendulum for the whirr and crash of Western wheels; or whether I pick up the floating threads which, when woven into a single strand, will exhibit a connection between Europe, and especially between Great Britain, and Persia, extending over three centuries, and equally emphatic in the departments of international intercourse and of trade.

Similarly, in the domain of Archæology I have not forgotten that, while Persia is primarily the battle-ground of diplomatists and the market of tradesmen, it also contains antiquarian remains in great number that have employed the pens, and still engage the intellects, of famous scholars. Their labours have equipped me for a task upon which I have not perfunctorily entered, and in which the enthusiasm of the student may meet with a serviceable ally in the testimony of the eye-witness. To the professor, therefore, as well as to the politician and the student, I make my appeal.

To the question of Topography I have devoted an attention which a better-known country would scarcely have claimed. There

are few places of importance in Persia which are not either described or referred to in these volumes, whose index may to some extent answer the purpose of a condensed Gazetteer. Finally, I hope that the Map, which has cost me a year's anxious labour and supervision, may be regarded as a decisive advance upon any previous publication. Its original execution by the skilful hand of Mr. W. J. Turner, and its appearance here, I owe to the liberal-minded generosity of the Royal Geographical Society, who undertook and placed in my hands the responsibility for its production. For notes as to the authorities from which it has been compiled, and the principles which have been observed in its construction, I will refer to the memorandum which I wrote to accompany its first appearance in the Proceedings of the Society for February 1892. Here I will only say that there is barely a name on its surface the identification and the spelling of which I have not personally supervised. It doubtless contains many errors; but these, I would fain hope, are the result, not of carelessness, but of data as yet in many parts imperfect. The smaller maps have been specially drawn for this work, under my instructions, by Mr. Sharbau, Cartographer to the Royal Geographical Society, whose elegant and accurate workmanship none can fail to admire.

If, in the handling of these, or, still more, of the political and general branches of my subject, about which I shall have something to say in an introductory chapter, my readers, comparing this book with similar ones on Western countries, find conspicuous defects of treatment or information, may I beg of them to remember that in the East there are no official sources of knowledge accessible to the public, no blue books, no statistics scientifically compiled, no census, no newspapers, no periodicals—none of that magnificent paraphernalia of which it is still doubtful whether it adds to the sum of human happiness or is the parent of intellectual confusion. Figures and facts—which are, in their very essence, an insult to the Oriental imagination—are only arrived at in Persia after long and patient inquiry and by careful collation of the results of a great number of independent investigations; and I

can truly say that single lines in this book have sometimes cost me hours of work and pages of correspondence.

Among the special features which I have incorporated, the following may be mentioned. At the end of such chapters as relate to a particular province or part of the country, I have compiled a list of the principal routes in the neighbourhood that have been followed and described by previous writers. In a country without railways or a Bradshaw, a new comer, if he diverge from the beaten track, is likely to be quite unconscious whether his route has been traversed before, or whether he is upon virgin ground. If the former, I present him with the means of comparison; if the latter, I acquaint him with the responsibilities of discovery. I had originally hoped to append to my second volume a bibliography of Persian Geography and Travel; but to such dimensions has my list of titles swollen that I must reserve it for a separate publication. Instead I have affixed to the discussion of each locality or subject as complete a catalogue as my reading has furnished, of the works relating thereto in European tongues. Many tables, pedigrees, and catalogues that have never previously been published are also included in the text.

For the political opinions expressed therein I desire to claim the sole responsibility. They have not been derived from, and are very likely not shared in their entirety by, the British Legation at Teheran. Still less have they been borrowed from any of the friends whose services I shall presently acknowledge. If they are ever found to be unpalatable to the admirers of Persia, they have certainly not been arrived at in any spirit of unfriendliness to that nation whose best interests I desire to serve, nor are they uttered without a profound conviction in every instance that they are true. The proportion of the whole truth that ought to be told in the domain of statecraft is a question open to dispute. But at least let me side with those who abhor the diplomatic lie. Finally, let me add that the whole of these two volumes, with the exception of the chapter on Persepolis, was already in print when I became officially connected with the India Office; and that the views

expressed are therefore, in every case, those of a private individual only, and have been formed in entire independence of official authority or inspiration.

As regards orthography, I have endeavoured to strike a mean between popular usage and academic precision, preferring to incur the charge of looseness to that of pedantry. The transliteration of Persian or Arabic names into a language which is deficient in the symbols that represent some of their sounds is intrinsically difficult, and is complicated in this case by the Indian pronunciation of Persian names, with which Englishmen are more apt to be familiar, but which is not that encountered in Persia itself. In many cases I have bowed to convention, which after a time constitutes a law, spelling Bushire rather than Abu Shehr, and Meshed rather than Mashhad. Elsewhere I have endeavoured to combine approximate accuracy with as faithful a reproduction as possible of the sound of the native pronunciation. If I have sometimes been betrayed into inconsistencies, they are such as it is almost impossible to escape.

Should these volumes in any degree correspond to the fond ideal of the writer, it will only be because of the lavish assistance of which I have been the fortunate recipient. Neither my journey nor my studies would have availed for this object had they not been reinforced by the ready co-operation of every authority upon the subject to whom I have appealed, and more especially by a flood of information, extending to the very date of issue, which has reached me from correspondents in Persia itself. Neither could I have published these pages with any real confidence in their accuracy had they not, in the order of their composition, been despatched to Teheran for revision by more competent hands than my own, as well as been submitted, in many cases, to the judgment of equally eminent authorities at home.

Of these coadjutors the first, alike in authority, and in the extent of his assistance, has been General A. Houtum-Schindler, a gentleman who, after filling many important posts in the Persian Service, is now acting as adviser to the Imperial Bank of Persia

in Teheran. To the advantage of long residence in the country he adds the erudition of a scholar and the zeal of a pioneer. He has personally revised nearly every page of these volumes, besides supplying me with much of my original information; and I tremble to think how many errors they might have contained but for his generous and never-failing co-operation. Few men so excellently qualified to write a first-rate book themselves would have lent such unselfish exertion to improve the quality of another man's work. Among others who have helped me in Persia itself I must mention the names of Mr. J. R. Preece, now British Consul at Isfahan; Mr. J. J. Fahie, Assistant Superintendent of the Indo-European Telegraph at Shiraz; my various hosts of 1889–90, and others to whom my gratitude is not the less profound that they prefer the omission of their names from this acknowledgment. In England, Sir F. Goldsmid has graciously given the benefit of his revision to the chapters relating to Seistan and the South-East Provinces, upon which he is our chief authority, besides helping me in other matters. Colonel Sir E. C. Ross, recently British Resident at Bushire, has lent a similarly generous testamur to the chapters dealing with South Persia and the Gulf; and Colonel Stewart, our capable Consul-General at Tabriz, to the majority of the chapters relating to the North of the country. Mr. Cecil Smith, of the British Museum, has kindly read the accounts of Pasargadæ and Persepolis, which places he has himself visited. Finally, I have profited, in more respects than I can name, by the scholarly and experienced counsel of Sir Alfred Lyall.

The photographs that adorn the text were either taken by myself or by Persian students of the Royal College at Teheran, or by personal friends, among whom I may mention Major Sawyer and Mr. Herbert Weld-Blundell. A few engravings have been reproduced by the courteous permission of the Librairie Hachette of Paris.

So wide a scheme, I am well aware, cannot have been carried out, even under the favourable conditions above described, without the commission of some blunders or mistakes. The sincerest

compliment that a reader who detects any such can pay me, will be to amend a future edition, if ever called for, by an assistance for which I shall be truly thankful. I have already alluded to a supplementary volume. This I hope to bring out in the course of the present year. It will contain a Bibliography of Persian History, Geography, and Travel, Chronological and Topographical Tables, copies of Treaties and Conventions, lists of Dynasties, tables of Weights, Measures, and Coinage, and a good deal of additional or statistical information which I have collected while preparing these pages. It will be a work appealing to the student rather than to the general reader; but I hope that some of the latter class also will do me the favour of adding it to their libraries.

In conclusion I cannot desire a better fortune for this my second and more ambitious work, than a repetition of the indulgent acclaim that was accorded, more than two years ago, to the humbler credentials of my first.

GEORGE N. CURZON.

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PERSIA

AND

THE PERSIAN QUESTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The things to be seen and observed are the courts of princes, especially when they give audience to ambassadors; the courts of justice, while they sit and hear causes; and so of consistories ecclesiastic; the churches and monasteries, with the monuments which are therein extant; the walls and fortifications of cities and towns; and so the havens and harbours, antiquities and ruins, libraries, colleges, disputations and lectures, where any are; shipping and navies; houses and gardens of state and pleasure near great cities; armouries, arsenals, magazines, exchanges, burses, warehouses, exercises of horsemanship, fencing, training of soldiers, and the like; comedies such whereunto the better sort of persons do resort; treasuries of jewels and robes; cabinets and rarities; and, to conclude, whatsoever is memorable.—BACON, Essay xviii. on 'Travel.'

Threefold object of this work

IN this introductory chapter, before proceeding to my narrative, I wish to make clear to my readers the threefold object which I have in view. Perhaps I shall best explain to them the primary aim of this work if I quote the opening words of my first letter from Persia to the 'Times:'—

The visit of the Shah of Persia to England in 1889 and the official and public reception accorded to him throughout the country have reawakened that interest in Persia and the Persian question which the remoteness of his dominions and the increasing indifference of the English public to interests lying outside their immediate ken had allowed in recent years to languish. The attentions paid to the distinguished visitor by all ranks, from the Sovereign downwards, and the efforts made to impress him both with the resources and with the friendly consideration of Great Britain, were evidences that the Shah was regarded as much more than an interesting Oriental potentate afflicted with a taste for foreign travel, and deserving to be run after

and cheered as the latest social lion. The public was dimly aware that motives of higher policy were at work, and that the monarch who was brought in state up the Thames, and fêted at the Guildhall, and conducted on a business-like progress through the principal manufacturing centres of the kingdom, was both an ally of the British nation and an important factor in the determination of our policy in the East. Even those who knew or cared little for Imperial politics were conscious that Persia is a country providing an extensive and profitable market for English and Anglo-Indian trade, and that on the most mercenary grounds, if on no other, a good understanding with its ruler is in the highest degree desirable. At the same time, in spite of the general recognition of the uncommon significance of the visit and of the practical expediency of a hearty welcome, there were not wanting symptoms both in the press and in the House of Commons that there were many who misunderstood, or could not read, the signs of the times; and it was more than hinted that there was something ridiculous in making such a lively fuss about a monarch who probably despised these tokens of interested attachment, and from whom nothing could be expected in return. The true bearing in its many and momentous ramifications of the Persian question was but imperfectly grasped; and what is in reality a problem of the most abstruse statesmanship was discussed as though it were a casual obligation to be decently discharged and then conveniently forgotten.

Meaning of the Persian question

It is in the belief that such an impression exists, and with the conviction that it both is mistaken and may be disastrous, that I propose to describe, from the evidence of my own eyes in Persia itself, the character and dimensions of the Persian problem, and to indicate to English readers what is their stake in that distant country; why they are compelled to regard its policy and development with such acute concern; what is the meaning and what may be the results of a Persian alliance; and why it is so impossible to treat either the ruler or his people with polite indifference. There are many questions which in the course of my narrative will, I hope, come under examination. Such will be the present policy of the Shah's Government, the character, quality, virtues, or vices of the Persian Administration, the likelihood of reforms resulting from the European tour of the sovereign, the question of the succession to the throne, the strength and possible utility of the army, the opening for railroad enterprise in Persia, the political sympathies of the people, the relative degrees of influence possessed by Russia and Great Britain, the designs and ambitions of the two Powers, the meaning and significance of the Khorasan question, and the alleged danger to British commercial competition in the different provinces of the Shah's dominions. The late Sir C. MacGregor, when travelling in Persia in

1875, soon after the Shah's first visit to Europe, left on record this opinion :—

'I do not think our reception of the Shah has produced at all a good impression. The Persians know that we are anxious about the Russians, and they look on it as a purely political matter ; and, while the enthusiastic reception their Shah met with in London adds much to his importance in their eyes, it has not in any way improved our position. The idea, I think, is that we are very anxious for Persia to be on our side when the struggle with Russia comes, and that we will pay extravagantly for her assistance. This I cannot help regarding as a great pity.'

I shall endeavour to ascertain whether such an impression still exists among the subjects of the Shah, or how far their training in the rudiments of politics has progressed in the last sixteen years. In fine, Persia, from an Englishman's point of view, and from the point of view more particularly of an English politician, will be the subject of my communications. Long residents in the country usually undertake, and are incomparably better qualified for, the task of describing local customs and manners, of which a traveller can form but a hasty and imperfect judgment. But a political problem may fairly be consigned to interested hands, and can be so committed with the greater safety if an honest endeavour is made, as will be in this case, to regard it, not from any narrow or selfish, but from an Imperial standpoint, and in its due relation to the broader question of Asiatic politics as a whole, of which it constitutes no unimportant part.

Its relation to the Indian Empire

In the above paragraphs is indicated with sufficient precision the political aspect of this work. I need not conceal the fact that it is in the elucidation of that aspect that personally I am most concerned, and that I would sooner be the author of a political treatise that commended itself to the well-informed than of a book of travel that caught the ephemeral taste of the public. Nor do I make this admission merely because success if attained in the one department may have some permanence, while in the opposite case it can scarcely be other than fugitive, but because, in the contemplation of the kingdoms and principalities of Central Asia, no question, to my mind, is comparable in importance with the part which they are likely to play or are capable of playing in the future destinies of the East. Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia—to many these names breathe only a sense of utter remoteness or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game

for the dominion of the world. The future of Great Britain, according to this view, will be decided, not in Europe, not even upon the seas and oceans which are swept by her flag, or in the Greater Britain that has been called into existence by her offspring, but in the continent whence our emigrant stock first came, and to which as conquerors their descendants have returned. Without India the British Empire could not exist. The possession of India is the inalienable badge of sovereignty in the eastern hemisphere. Since India was known its masters have been lords of half the world. The impulse that drew an Alexander, a Timur, and a Baber eastwards to the Indus was the same that in the sixteenth century gave the Portuguese that brief lease of sovereignty whose outworn shibboleths they have ever since continued to mumble; that early in the last century made a Shah of Persia for ten years the arbiter of the East; that all but gave to France the empire which stouter hearts and a more propitious star have conferred upon our own people; that to this day stirs the ambition and quickens the pulses of the Colossus of the North. In the increasing importance with which domestic politics are invested in our own public life and in the prevailing tendency to turn westwards, and to seek both for the examples and the arena of statesmanship amid younger peoples and a white-skinned race, room may yet be found for one whose fancy is haunted by 'the ancient of days;' who reminds his countrymen that, while no longer the arbiters of the West, they remain the trustees for the East, and are the rulers of the second largest dark-skinned population in the world; and who argues that no safeguard should be omitted by which may be secured in perpetuity that which is the noblest achievement of the science of civil rule that mankind has yet bequeathed to man.

History and Geography

Whilst, however, the connection of Persia with the larger problems of Asiatic politics is the first object which I have had in view, a second, scarcely less important, has ever been before me, and has gradually swollen in scope and dimensions, until of itself I would fain believe that it might justify these volumes. This is a desire to depict Persia as she now is, apart from her foreign relations; to give a succinct account of her provinces and peoples, her institutions and features, her sights and cities, her palaces, temples, and ruins; to trace her entry, in the present century, and particularly during the last half-century (a period nearly coterminous with the reign of the

present king), into the diplomatic comity of nations, and her efforts to accommodate herself to the ill-fitting clothes of a civilisation that sits but clumsily upon her: so that any man, anxious to ascertain in any respect what is the Persia of Nasr-ed-Din Shah, how to reach it, whither to go when he gets there, what to ask for and to see, what has been done or explored or said by others before him, what there remains for him to do, may discover that which he seeks in these pages, finding therein, not merely an account of the *status quo*—the fleeting record of a moment—but, pieced together, fragment by fragment, the processes and means by which that state has been produced, and by a knowledge of which alone will he be able either to comprehend the resultant issue or to frame a forecast as to the future. In a word, I shall endeavour to do here for Persia what far abler writers have done for most other countries of equal importance, but what for two hundred years no single English writer has essayed to do for Iran, viz. to present a full-length and life-size portrait of that kingdom.

Travel

Finally, I shall add whatever of variety or incident may be possible to a text that might otherwise prove somewhat solid of substance, by describing the wayfarer's life in the East and the ever-fresh, if seldom momentous, incidents of travel.

Interest of Persian nationality

It ought not to be difficult to interest Englishmen in the Persian people.[1] They have the same lineage as ourselves. Three thousand years ago their forefathers left the uplands of that mysterious Aryan home from which our ancestral stock had already gone forth, and the locality of which is still

[1] In the minds of a great many English folk I fear that Persia awakens few other images than a recollection of the tales of Herodotus, the verses of Moore, and the diamonds of the Shah. On the whole, Herodotus more often wrote history than story; while the quality of the Shah's jewels is unimpeachable. But I regret to say that a heavy weight of responsibility lies at the door of Moore, whose descriptions of Persia are about as much like the original as the Alhambra of Leicester Square is like the exquisite palace of Boabdil. The roses of Bendemeer's stream are equally illusory with the nightingales; 'Kishma's amber vines' are in comical contrast with the treeless sterility of the real Kishm; and when Luttrell wrote—

> 'I am told, dear Moore, your lays are sung
> (Can it be true, you lucky man?)
> By moonlight in the Persian tongue
> Along the streets of Ispahan,'

he must have been confiding in the ignorance, as well as humouring the egoism of the poet.

a frequent, if also the most futile, battlefield of science.[1] They were the first of the Indo-European family to embrace a purely monotheistic faith. Amongst them appeared Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, the second in date of the great religious teachers of the East, if, indeed, he ever appeared at all.[2] Thence sprang the ennobling creed of Ormuzd and Ahriman. Then the Avesta took shape, and there was kindled the fire that, all but extinguished on its parent altars, still lights a subdued but steadfast flame in the rich and comfortable exile of Bombay.

Drama of Persian history

As we descend the stately flight of Persian history we encounter many a name familiar to us from childhood. Dismissing the legendary as appertaining to a region of myth more nebulous in the case of Iran than of almost any country, we are confronted with the illustrious figures of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, whose handwriting still echoes their fame from the halls where they ruled and feasted. A succession of meteoric phenomena, the wonder or the scourge of humanity, an Alexander, a Jenghiz Khan, a Timur, a Nadir Shah, pass, at different epochs, in a trail of fire and blood across the scene. The direst day of the later Roman Commonwealth was when the legions of Crassus were strewn on the plain of Carrhæ. Twice did a Roman Cæsar surrender to a Persian or semi-Persian conqueror; when the Emperor Valerian bowed his neck beneath the heel of Shapur I.; and when the Emperor Romanus Diogenes fell a prisoner to the Seljuk Alp Arslan, the Great Lion. The death in battle of a third, the renowned Julian, was a triumph more precious than a battlefield to the second Shapur. Twice also, in the days of the famous Chosroes, or Nushirwan, and again under his grandson, the second Chosroes or Parviz, the borders of Iran were extended to the Mediterranean, and the terror of her

[1] I am aware that it is now asserted that the Aryans never came from Asia at all. But, for the present, I hesitate to adopt either the Sarmatian theory (Dr. Schrader, *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples*, translated by F. B. Jevons, 1890; and Canon I. Taylor, *The Origin of the Aryans*, 1890) or the Scandinavian theory (Herr Penka, *Die Herkunft der Arier*, 1886), for fear of being presently invited to surrender them for a third and, as yet, undiscovered alternative. In the meantime, therefore, I prefer the old Asian hypothesis, to which Professor J. Schmidt has gallantly rallied in an essay published in 1890 in the *Transactions of the Royal Academy of Berlin.*

[2] Again a necessary qualification, seeing that so learned an authority as Professor Darmesteter has found in the personality of Zoroaster nothing more substantial than 'a product of the ubiquitous storm-myth.'

arms to the walls of Byzantium. Then fell the sword of Omar and the devouring flame of the Koran. In the ensuing ages great names—Avicenna (Abu-ibn-Sena), Firdusi, Omar-el-Khayam, Sadi, and Hafiz—adorned her literary annals, and have left her a legacy of imperishable renown. Finally a native dynasty and a naturalised religion appeared; and the name of Shah Abbas the Great is to this hour associated with anything that is durable or grandiose during the last three centuries of Persian history. A record of inferior names, of internecine conflict and international struggle, in the course of which Russia and England enter upon the scene, brings us down to the present time, when a dominion, greatly contracted, but withal much consolidated, acknowledges a Turkish dynasty, and parades before the world the now familiar figure of Nasr-ed-Din Shah. If Persia had no other claim to respect, at least a continuous national history for 2,500 years is a distinction which few countries can exhibit.

Anglo-Persian connection

There is, further, in the special connection of Persia with this nation at different epochs, and more especially during the present century, a claim upon Englishmen's attention which no student of his country's history should be willing to ignore. As long ago as the reign of Edward I. an accredited plenipotentiary was deputed from Great Britain to the court of the Mongol sovereign Arghun, in whose dominions Persia was included. Nearly three centuries later an envoy bore letters from Queen Elizabeth to the second Sefavi monarch. An ambassador from Charles I. reached Persia only to die. In the sixteenth and again in the seventeenth centuries gallant attempts were made by British agents to establish a trade with Persia by the north of Europe and the Caspian. Between the two periods the growing maritime ascendency of Great Britain had opened to her first a share, and presently the control, of the commerce of the Persian Gulf. Finally, with the dawn of the present century, emerged a policy of close Anglo-Persian relationship, which, though twice suspended by diplomatic rupture, and once by war, has remained in existence ever since; which has given birth to a few deservedly great reputations; and which, though it has been signalised by many follies and by some shame, by spasms of prodigal concern succeeded by intervals of unreasoning apathy, has yet bound the two nations in a closer bond of political interest than unites this country with any other independent sovereignty in Asia.

The memorials of many of these ages, the handiwork of some of these men, will come under notice in the narrative to which I shall presently turn. My journey was divided into four portions, each of which will be found to possess a historical interest or a political importance, as well as physical idiosyncrasies, of its own. They will deal respectively with the north-east, the central, and the south-west provinces of Persia, and with the maritime highway on the south, the thread upon which will be strung whatever of information I have been able to collect, either with regard to the regions actually traversed or to those bordering thereupon, being supplied by the description of my own travels, which consisted of (1) a ride of 850 miles through the frontier province of Khorasan and thence to the capital, Teheran; (2) the more familiar journey of 800 miles, also on horseback, from Teheran to Bushire; (3) the ascent of the Shat-el-Arab and the Karun River; and (4) the navigation of the Persian Gulf.

Fourfold division of journey

In the first case I shall conduct my readers to the last remaining possession of the once mighty principality of Khorasan—a dominion that embraced Merv, extended to Khiva, included Herat and Kandahar, and was laved by the Oxus. Though shorn of its high estate, this province, fortified by savage mountains and inaccessible ravines, interspersed with plains that sustain the relics of famous capitals, and possessing one city at least of world-wide renown, will be found to present many problems of undiminished and imperial interest. For hundreds of years it has been the battle-ground of races and the prey of a rapine less merciful than sustained war. More persons have probably died a violent death in Khorasan than in any other territory of equal size in Asia. There, moreover, at this moment, on the north and east, the eagles are again gathered together, and in the barracks of Transcaspia and the council-tents of Turkestan is being debated the destiny of Meshed.

1. Khorasan

While treating of this portion of my journey it will be both natural and necessary to the scope of these volumes that I should give the latest information about the adjacent provinces or districts; information the bulk of which was derived from inquiries made by myself while in the neighbourhood, and the whole of which has been supervised by the most competent authorities. This will apply to the Perso-Afghan border and Seistan question on the east, where a political crisis is

Contiguous provinces

always possible and sometimes acute, and where the Indian Frontier question emerges as a formidable factor in the situation; to the maritime provinces of Persia on the Caspian, where such an amazing difference of natural conditions exists that they might be mistaken for the antipodes, instead of a physical continuation, of Persian soil; and to the north-western and western provinces, containing great cities, an alien and divided population, and indestructible remains of antiquity. Similarly, when I come to the southern parts of the country, information will be forthcoming about those more distant and little known provinces in the south-east and south-west, which have held out the longest against the centralising tendencies of the age, and which still, in some sort, exhibit an image of the nomad turbulence that was once a uniform characteristic of Iranian society.

2 Central provinces

Resuming my journey at Teheran the opportunity will await us of seeing something of a court whose splendour is said to have formerly rivalled that of the Great Mogul, of a Government which is still, with the exception of China, the most oriental in the East, and of a city which unites the unswerving characteristics of an Asiatic capital with the borrowed trappings of Europe. Thence the high road—only ninety miles of which is a road in any known sense of the word—will lead us across the successive partitions of the great plateau, possessing a mean elevation of 4,000 to 5,000 feet above the sea, that occupies the heart of Persia; and whose manifold mountain ridges intervene, like the teeth of a saw, between the northern and southern seas. In the plains of greater or less extent lying at their base we shall find, in the shape of large but ruined cities, the visible records of faded magnificence, of unabashed misrule, and of internal decay. Kum, from behind its curtain of fanaticism and mystery, will reveal the glitter of the golden domes that overhang the resting-place of saints and the sepulchre of kings. Isfahan, with its wreck of fallen palaces, its acres of wasted pleasaunce, its storeyed bridges that once rang beneath the tread of a population numbered at 650,000, will tell a tale of deeper pathos, although in its shrill and jostling marts we may still observe evidence of mercantile activity and a prospering international trade. Shiraz, which once re-echoed the blithe anacreontics of Hafiz, and the more demure philosophy of Sadi, preserves and cherishes the poets' graves; but its merry gardens, its dancing fountains, and its butterfly

existence have gone the way of the singers who sang their praises, and are now only a shadow and a lament. In this neighbourhood, and in eloquent juxtaposition to these piles of modern ruin, occur at intervals the relics of a grander imagination and a more ancient past. Here on the plain still stands the white marble mausoleum that, in all probability, once held the gold coffin and the corpse of Cyrus. At no great distance the rifled sepulchre of Darius gapes from its chiselled hollow in the scarp of a vertical cliff. Opposite the princely platform of Persepolis lifts its dwindling columns, and amid piles of *débris* displays the sculptured handiwork that graced the palace of Xerxes and the halls of Artaxerxes.

Monuments of antiquity

I shall not be reproached if I linger awhile amid these renowned, and often commemorated, relics of the past. They show us that, just as mediæval Persia was far removed from modern Persia in its pageantry and wealth, so ancient Persia—the Persia of Herodotus and Xenophon—was immeasurably superior to mediæval Persia in its attributes, and is even now more respectable in its ruin. Though in dealing with these ancient and historic monuments I shall not recapitulate architectural or topographical details, which can be found better displayed in other and more technical works, I shall yet avail myself of the latest scientific knowledge and research, having no sympathy with those who rush through a country that has elicited the services of profound and famous writers, and who think the ignorant jottings of a tourist's note-book good enough to supersede the labours of a long line of scholars and men of science. A historian of travel who possesses any self-respect will thankfully profit by their researches, in the spirit of the seventeenth century editor of Tavernier, who wrote that 'he was sufficiently imbued in his intellectuals with all due knowledge of sciences, languages, and geography, and precedent travellers' maps and books, without all which common travellers cannot conceive so soon and so orderly, nor reap so much benefit for themselves or others.' At the same time he will endeavour, by the exercise of personal observation and of honest criticism, to give an independent account of what has passed before his own eyes.

In the extreme south-west I shall invite attention to a part of the country where nature has been lavish of gifts that man has alternately blessed and despised; where navigable rivers flow through plains once enriched with a superb vegetation, though

now relapsed into stony wastes; and where great engineering works, enduring memorials of a hydraulic ingenuity, and a public-spirited zeal, to which later centuries afford no parallel, now raise their shattered piers amid a waste of untended waters and uncultivated lands. There great cities once adorned the river banks; great palaces reared their colonnades and halls upon the summit of elevated mounds; great kings, a Cyrus, a Darius, an Alexander, a Shapur, either swept past on the stormy tide of conquest, or paused to taste the splendid luxury of repose. Here I shall halt to notice the newly revived sparks of industry and trade, which the present generation should not pass without fanning into a livelier flame. This romantic region abuts upon one still more famous in the annals of the past. Its borders are washed by the broad estuary down which the Euphrates and Tigris roll their commingled waters to the Gulf. Here we are in a land of equal honour in sacred legend and profane history. We may sail past the traditional Garden of Eden to the mysterious site where, amid colossal mounds of pottery and brick, the alphabet of Nebuchadnezzar speaks loudly from the ruins of sculptured palaces, of terraced temples, and Babylonian towers, where Daniel prophesied, where Israel wept, where Alexander perished. We are on the river threshold of Busrah, the Balsorah of Sinbad the Sailor, that Arab Columbus of an earlier age. We may fringe the soaring arch of Ctesiphon and descry on the horizon the minarets and palm trees of Baghdad.

3. South-western provinces

Finally, skirting in a vessel the southern and maritime borders of Persia, I shall ask attention to a country and a sea little known at home, to warring Arab tribes and piratical professions, to seaports, now dead and deserted, whose fame once sounded through Europe; to waters that have been ploughed by the rival argosies of Portugal, Holland, and Great Britain. If I am there tempted to unravel some few of the threads that have been woven into a web of history, intensely personal to our own country and race, I shall also be able to show that Great Britain sustains, in a less acquisitive and martial age, the prestige which she gained at the dawn of her career of Asiatic conquest, and that the British name is still on these distant waters a synonym for order and freedom.

4. The Persian Gulf

These will provide what I may call the pictorial aspects of my narrative; mingled with the normal and yet uncommon episodes

of travel in the East, they may win a hearing even from the desultory reader. Nor shall I despair of arousing his concern when I turn from a past, however eventful, to a present, however degenerate and sad. A country that possesses no railways is *ipso facto* the possessor of a great charm. Here may still in many parts be found a people retaining the indigenous customs and modes of Asiatic life, and as yet unawakened to the summons that is beating at their doors. Fifty years hence the outlying towns of Persia may have taken on some of the varnish of the capital, and have lost their peculiar individuality of combined dignity and decay. But for the present Persia is of the East, most Eastern; and though the Persian nobleman may ride in a Russian brougham, the Persian merchant carry a French watch, and the Persian peasant wear a Manchester blouse, yet the heart of the nation is unregenerate, and is fanatically (and not always unfortunately) attached to the ancient order of things. We may still re-echo the words of the philosophic Chardin :—

Changelessness of the East

> That it is not in Asia as in our Europe, where there are frequent changes more or less in the forms of things, as the habits, buildings, gardenings and the like. In the East they are constant in all things. The habits are at this day in the same manner as in the precedent ages; so that one may reasonably believe that in that part of the world the exterior forms of things (as their manners and customs) are the same now as they were 2,000 years since, except in such changes as may have been introduced by religion, which are nevertheless very inconsiderable.

And here let me endeavour in some sort to explain to others what I am sometimes conscious of having only imperfectly explained to myself, viz. the wonderful and incalculable fascination of the East. Mr. Stanley in one of his letters spoke of the mysterious Soudan fever which drew Gordon and many another brave spirit to perish in the dim recesses of Africa, and which will require how many more human hecatombs before its appetite be appeased? Just such another, though a less perilous contagion is that which tempts the traveller into Asia, makes him regardless of the petty restraints of distance and time, animated only by a burning desire to go on. Perhaps it is that in the wide landscape, in the plains stretching without break to mountains, and the mountains succeeded by plains, in the routes that are without roads, in the roads that are without banks or ditches, in

Its abiding charm

the unhampered choice both of means of progression and of pace, there is a joyous revulsion from the sterile conventionality of life and locomotion at home. Something, too, must be set down to the gratified spirit of self-dependence, which legions of domestics have not availed to subdue, and to the love of adventure, which not even the nineteenth century can extinguish. Or is it that in the East, and amid scenes where life and its environment have not varied for thousands of years, where nomad Abrahams still wander with their flocks and herds, where Rebecca still dips her water skin at the well, where savage forays perpetuate the homeless miseries of Job, western man casts off the slough of an artificial civilisation, and feels that he is mixing again with his ancestral stock, and breathing the atmosphere that nurtured his kind?

Contrast between the East and West

Upon the vivid and never failing contrast between the picture and the furniture of existence in the East and West, as an element of attraction, it is needless to enlarge. The most casual visitor to the true East is no stranger to its strange intensity. Countries which have no ports or quays, no railways or stations, no high-roads or streets (in our sense of the term), no inns or hotels, no bedsteads or tables or chairs, but where a traveller is sufficiently equipped so long as he is provided with a saddle and some soap, are severed by a sufficiently wide gap from our own to appeal to the most glutted thirst for novelty. Do we ever escape from the fascination of a turban, or the mystery of the shrouded apparitions that pass for women in the dusty alleys? How new to us is a landscape where there are no hedgerows or timber, no meadows or fields; where in the brilliant atmosphere minute objects can be distinguished for many miles,[1] where the cities are not swathed in smoke, and the level roofs are not broken by shafts or chimneys. How mute and overpowering the silence that prevails over the lone expanse, so different from the innumerable rural sounds that strike upon the ear at home. And how grateful a climate where fogs and vapours never strangle, but where the sun strikes with straight lance from the zenith.

In no Oriental country that I have seen is the chasm of exterior divergence between Oriental and European scenery more abrupt than in Persia. It is difficult to bring home to English

[1] I have seen a small object, such as a single hut or building, for at least twenty miles before reaching it; and every traveller in Persia will confess to the frequent exasperation of hope thus baffled and delayed.

readers, whose ideas of nature are drawn exclusively from the West, the extremity of the contrast that meets the eye. Mountains in Europe are for the most part blue or purple in colour; in Persia they are flame-red, or umber, or funereal drab. Fields in Europe, when not decked with the green of grass or crops, are crimson with upturned mould. In Persia they are only distinguishable from the brown desert by the dry beds of the irrigation ditches. A typical English village consists of detached and often picturesque cottages, half hidden amid venerable trees. A typical Persian village is a cluster of filthy mud huts, whose outline is a crude combination of the perpendicular and the horizontal, huddled within the protection of a decayed mud wall. Outside the Caspian provinces and a few mountain valleys there is not a forest, and barely a wood in Persia that is worthy of the name. One may travel for days without seeing a blade of grass. Rivers do not roll between trim banks, nor do brooks babble over stones. Either you are stopped by a foaming torrent, or you barely moisten your horse's fetlocks in fording a pitiful thread.

Extreme in Persia

For my own part—so normal and blunted after a while do these sensations become—I find a more abiding charm in the contrast existing, not between the lives of the East and West, but in the elements and conditions of Oriental life itself. It is a contrast equally visible in the inanimate and in the human world. Extensive plains are suddenly terminated, almost without slope or undulation, by gaunt and forbidding peaks. A drear and colourless desolation in winter is succeeded by riotous, though ephemeral, verdure and a thousand tints of flowers in the spring. Even in the green and cultivated spots, the moment we leave the charmed circle of water distribution the stark desert recommences, and the transition is as awful as from life to death. An entrancing warmth by day is expiated in the autumn and winter months by biting cold at night and in the hours immediately preceding sunrise. Nature seems to revel in striking the extreme chords upon her miraculous and inexhaustible gamut of sound.

Intrinsic contradiction

And how faithfully do the cities and people respond to the suggestion that is always eloquent around them. Majestic ruins that tell of a populous and mighty past rear their heads amid deserted wastes and vagabond tents. Tiny and ill-

The lies of life

nurtured children grow up into robust men. Conversely, female beauty in early youth is followed by a premature decay and ugliness beyond words. Just as from a distance a town surrounded by its orchards looks a gem of beauty, but shrinks upon nearer approach into a collection of clay hovels; and just as in the exterior of these houses, consisting of blank and unsightly walls of mud, there is no hint of the flower-beds and tanks, of the taste and comeliness that sometimes prevail within, so does the human exterior tell a contradictory tale of its inmate. *Splendide mendax* might be taken as the motto of Persian character. The finest domestic virtues co-exist with barbarity and supreme indifference to suffering. Elegance of deportment is compatible with a coarseness amounting to bestiality. The same individual is at different moments haughty and cringing. A creditable acquaintance with the standards of civilisation does not prevent gross fanaticism and superstition. Accomplished manners and a more than Parisian polish cover a truly superb faculty for lying and almost scientific imposture. The most scandalous corruption is combined with a scrupulous regard for specified precepts of the moral law. Religion is alternately stringent and lax, inspiring at one moment the bigot's rage, at the next the agnostic's indifference. Government is both patriarchal and Machiavellian—patriarchal in its simplicity of structure, Machiavellian in its finished ingenuity of wrong doing. Life is both magnificent and squalid; the people at once despicable and noble; the panorama at the same time an enchantment and a fraud.

Literature of travel

I desire before concluding to say a few words about the literature to which the study of Persia has given birth, more especially the literature of discovery and travel. Few countries so sparsely visited have been responsible for so ample a bibliography. The reason is obvious. To each new-comer the comparative rarity of his experience has been conceded as the excuse for a volume. In the category of these productions are to be found works as painstaking and meritorious as ever passed through the press. Nor is their value in any degree diminished, it is, on the contrary, enhanced by the fact that the list of which I speak includes some of the most worthless rubbish that ever blundered into print. I shall hope shortly to publish in a supplementary volume as complete a bibliography of Persian history and travel as my own studies and existing sources of information have enabled me to

compile; but I append here a table which I have drawn up, as the result of personal reading, of the names of all such travellers, within my knowledge, as have, since the beginning of the tenth century, added to our geographical or historical acquaintance with Persia by themselves visiting and writing about the country, and whose compositions are, with few exceptions, accessible to the public. To the name of each traveller I affix the date, not of the publication of his work—since that appears to me to be but an illusory guide—but of his own visit to Persia or residence in that country. And when I add that the collection of these figures has involved reference in every instance, with barely an exception, to the original work of the author, sometimes far from easy to procure, and that the cases are few in which I have not myself perused the work in question, it will, I think, be conceded that such a catalogue, the first of the kind that has ever been compiled with reference to Persia, is the result of no mean labour. In the following tables I include no writer whose work was not originally written, or has not subsequently been translated, in a European tongue:—

900–1000 A.D.	1000–1100 A.D.	1100–1200 A.D.	1200–1300 A.D.
Ali Abul Hasan Masudi, 913–5 Abu Ishak el Istakhri	Nasiri Khosru, 1035–50	Edrisi, circ. 1150 Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, 1160–73	Yakut, circ. 1180–1229 Friar William de Rubruquis, 1253 Nicolo, Maffeo, and Marco Polo, 1271–94 Abulfeda, 1273–1331

1300–1500 A.D.	1500–1600 A.D.	1600–1700 A.D.
Marino Sanuto, 1300–6 Friar Odoricus di Pordenone, circ. 1325 Ibn Batutah, circ. 1330 Friar B. Pegolotti, circ. 1340 Friar Jovanni di Marignoli, circ. 1350 Don Ruy Gonzalez di Clavijo, 1404–5 Abdur Rezak, 1441–58 Nicolo Conti, 1419–44 Athanasius Nikitin, 1470 Josafa Barbaro, 1474 Ambrosio Contarini, 1474–5 Hieronimo di Santo Stefano, 1494–9	Ludovico di Varthema (Ludovicus Wertomannus), 1504 Anonymous Merchant, 1507–20 Giovanni Angiolello, 1510 Antonio Tenreiro, 1529 Gabriel de Luetz, 1546–50 Sidi Ali, 1556 Factors and captains of (British) Muscovy Trading Company, viz.: Anthony Jenkinson, Richard Chenie, Arthur Edwards, Laurence Chapman, Lionel Plumtree, Christopher Burrough, 1562–80 Cesare Frederico, 1563 V. de Blanc, circ. 1570 Vincentio d'Alessandri, 1571 John Newberry, 1581–5 Ralph Fitch, 1583–5 J. H. van Linschoten, 1583–9 C. Lambert, 1598 Antonio di Govea, 1598	Sir Anthony and Sir Robert Sherley, 1599–1627 G. Mainwaring, 1599–1600 John Cartwright, Preacher, 1600 'Don Juan de Persia,' circ. 1600 Sir John Mildenhall, 1600–6 S. K. Zalonkémény, 1602 Pedro Teixeira, 1604 Père Paul Simon, 1607 Joseph Salbancke, 1609 Fray Gaspar de San Bernardino, 1611 John Crowther and Richard Steele, 1615–6 Thomas Coryate, 1616 Pietro della Valle, 1616–23 Don Garcias de Silva y Figueroa, 1618 Giles Hobbs, 1619–20 Nicholas Hemm, 1623 Sir Thomas Herbert, 1627–8 Père Pacifique de Provins, 1628

1600–1700 A.D.

Père Gabriel de Chinon, 1628–50
J. B. Tavernier, 1629–75
Adam Olearius, 1637–8
J. A. de Mandelslo, 1638–40
Heer Basting, 1645
Père Rigourdi, 1650
Don Pedro Sebastiano Cubero, circ. 1650
Père Alexandre de Rhodes, 1656–60
Père Manuel Godinho, 1663
Père Angelo de la Brosse, 1664-78
J. de Thévenot, 1664–7
Sir J. Chardin, 1665–77
A. Daulier-Deslandes, 1665
H. de Jager, *circ.* 1665
John Struys, 1671–2
F. Petis de la Croix, 1674–6
John Fryer, 1676–7
Père S. N. Sanson, 1683
Eng. von Kæmpfer, 1684–8
Père Villot, 1689–90
Giov. Franc. Gemelli-Careri, 1694
Père de la Maze, 1698
F. C. Schillinger, 1699

1700–1800 A.D.

Capt. A. Hamilton, circ. 1700–20
J. P. de Tournefort, 1701
Cornelius Le Brun, 1703–4
Père Krusinski, 1705–25
John Bell, of Antermory, 1716–7
Basil Batatzes, 1716–30
Dourry Effendi, 1720
Père Bachoud, 1722
Capt. P. H. Bruce, 1722–3
Père Leandro di S. Cecilia, 1735–6
J. Otter, 1737–9
'Two English Gentlemen,' 1739
Abdul Kerim, 1741
Père Bazin, 1741–7
Jonas Hanway, 1743–8
Père Desvignes, 1744
Dr. J. Cook, 1747
Bartholomew Plaisted, 1750
Lieut. E. B. Ives, 1758
Carsten Niebuhr, 1761–5
S. G. Gmélin, 1771–2
R. Hablizt, 1773–4
Abr. Parsons, 1775
G. Forster, 1783–4
Comte de Ferrières-Sauvebœuf, 1784–5
P. S. Pallas, 1785
W. Franklin, 1786–7
Sir H. Jones (Brydges), 1786, 1808–11
Abbé de Beauchamps, 1787
John Taylor, 1790
G. A. Olivier, 1796
John Jackson, 1797

1800–1891 A.D.

Sir J. Malcolm, 1800–10
J. Scott Waring, 1802
P. Amédée Jaubert, 1805–6
Col. A. de Bontems, 1807–9
P. A. de Gardanne, 1807
Capt. Truilhier, 1807–9
A. Dupré, 1807–9
P. Tancoigne, 1807–9
Col. Trézel, 1807–9
J. P. Morier, 1808–9, 1811–5
Capt. W. P. Grant, 1809
Sir H. Pottinger and Capt. Christie, 1810
Gen. W. Monteith, 1810–31
Sir J. Macdonald Kinneir, 1810–30
Sir W. Ouseley, 1811–2
W. Price, 1811–2
Rev. H. Martyn, 1811–2
J. B. Rousseau, 1812
Col. G. Drouville, 1812–3
M. Freygan, 1812
J. S. Buckingham, 1816
Lieut. W. Heude, 1817
M. von Kotzebue, 1817
Col. J. Johnson, 1817
Sir R. Ker Porter, 1818–20
Lieut. T. Lumsden, 1819–20
P. Gordon, 1820
C. J. Rich, 1820–1
J. B. Fraser, 1821–34
Hon. G. Keppel, 1824
M. A'Court, 1826
(Sir) J. E. Alexander, 1826
Capt. R. Mignan, 1826–30
T. B. Armstrong, 1828–9
Th. Alcock, 1828–9
C. Bélanger, 1829
E. Smith and H. G. Dwight, 1829
A. N. Groves, 1829
E. Ménétries, 1830
Capt. A. Conolly, 1830
Sergeant Gibbons, 1831
Dr. J. Wolff, 1831–44
G. Fowler, 1831–6
J. S. Stocqueler, 1831–2
(Sir) A. Burnes, 1832
Lal Mohan, 1832
Lieut. T. S. Powell, 1833–4
Major Heidenstamm, 1834
Baron Th. Korff, 1834–5
Rev. J. Perkins, 1834–42
(Sir) H. Rawlinson, 1834–60
Col. W. Stuart, 1835–6
Aucher Eloy, 1835–7
Alex. Chodzko, 1835–40
Gen. F. R. Chesney, 1835–7
W. H. Ainsworth, 1835–40
V. Fontanier, 1835–8
Major D'Arcy Todd, 1836–7
Sir J. McNeill, 1836–8
(Sir) Justin and Lady Sheil, 1836–53
Capt. R. Wilbraham, 1837
Eugène Boré, 1838–40
Haji Abdun Nabi, 1838
Capt. Lemm, 1838–9
Prince A. Soltykoff, 1838–9
Capt. E. Conolly, 1839
Ch. Texier, 1839–40
E. Flandin and P. Coste, 1839–41
Dr. A. Grant, 1840
Baron C. De Bode, 1840–1
(Sir) A. H. Layard, 1840–2
E. L. Mitford, 1840
Comte de Sercey, 1840
Dr. F. Forbes, 1841
G. Osculati, 1841–2
Lieut. W. B. Selby, 1841–2
Dr. G. P. Badger, 1842
W. R. Holmes, 1843–4
N. L. Westergaard, 1843
M. Wagner, 1843
Lieut. R. Leech, 1843
Com. J. F. Jones, 1844–7
J. P. Ferrier, 1845
H. de Hell, 1846–8
Miss Ida Pfeiffer, 1848
Dr. F. A. Buhsé, 1848–9
E. Keith Abbott, 1849–59
Hon. R. Curzon, 1849–52
W. K. Loftus, 1849–52
M. Tchirikoff, 1849–52
R. B. Binning, 1851
J. Berezin, 1851
Czarnotta, 1852–3
H. Garnier, 1852
Conte J. A. de Gobineau, 1855–8
Sir J. Outram, 1857
W. A. Shepherd, 1857
Capt. C. H. Hunt, 1857
Capt. C. Clerk, 1857–73
N. de Khanikoff, 1858
Dr. O. Blau, 1858
E. Duhousset, 1860
R. G. Watson, circ. 1860
J. Osmaston, 1860
M. de Blocqueville, 1860
E. B. Eastwick, 1860–2
Dr. H. Brugsch, 1860–1
J. Ussher, 1861
(Sir) F. Goldsmid, 1861–72
F. de Filippi, 1862
(Sir) Lewis Pelly, 1862–72
Arm. Vambéry, 1862–3
(Sir) O. St. John, 1864–72
Comte J. de Rochechouart, 1864–6
D. W. Marsh, 1864
F. Méchin, 1865
Viscount Pollington, 1865
Dr. C. Haussknecht, 1865–9
Dr. J. E. Polak, 1865–82
Major B. Lovett, 1866–81
C. J. Wills, 1866–81
A. H. Mounsey, 1866–7
Col. E. C. Ross, 1867–90
D. W. Freshfield, 1867
G. Melgunof, 1868
Rev. E. L. Cutts, 1870
Col. Euan Smith, 1870–2
J. Bassett, 1871–85
W. Brittlebank, 1872
Baron Max von Thielmann, 1872
Capt. H. C. Marsh, 1872
Dr. H. W. Bellew, 1872
Dr. G. Rozario, 1872
W. T. Blanford, 1872
Col. Val. Baker and Capt. W. Gill, 1873
P. Ogorodnikof, 1874
Capt. Hon. G. Napier, 1874
F. Stolze and F. C. Andreas, 1874–81
A. Rivadeneyra, 1874–5
(Sir) C. MacGregor, 1875
H. Ballantine, 1875
T. S. Anderson, 1875–6
A. Arnold, 1875
Dr. E. Tietze, 1875
E. A. Floyer, 1876–7
Sir R. Murdoch Smith, 1876

1800–1891 A.D.

Capt. Puschin, 1877	M. and J. Dieulafoy, 1881–6	A. Nikolsky, 1885	J. T. Bent, 1888
Mme. C. Serena, 1877–78	E. Stack, 1881	J. R. Preece, 1885	H. de Windt, 1888
K. D. Kiach, 1878	Gen. Gasteiger Khan, 1881	Hedin Sven, 1885	M. von Proskowetz, 1888
Dr. G. Radde, 1879–80	(Col.) H. L. Wells, 1881-91	J. D. Rees, 1885	Comte de Sabran, 1888
Gen. Grodekoff, 1880	E. Orsolle, 1882	Dr. A. Rodler, 1885	E. G. Browne, 1888
Gen. Petrusevitch, 1880	H. Moser, 1883	Capt. A. C. Yate, 1885	Capt. F. R. Maunsell, 1888
Gen. A. H. Schindler, 1877–91	S. G. W. Benjamin, 1883–5	G. Bonvalot, 1886	H. F. B. Lynch, 1889
G. Riederer, 1879-81	A. Riley, 1884	T. Stevens, 1886	Dr. P. F. Traubenberg 1889
A. Laessoe, 1880	Col. M. S. Bell, 1884	H. Binder, 1886	Author, 1889–90
Col. C. E. Stewart, 1880-91	Capt. R. H. Jennings, 1884–5	Col. A. Le Messurier, 1887	Major H.O. Sawyer, 1890
E. O'Donovan, 1880	Fr. Houssay, 1885	Lieut. R. E. Galindo, 1887	Mrs. Bishop (Miss Isabella Bird), 1890
A. Condie-Stephen, 1881–5		Lieut. H. B. Vaughan, 1888–91	

A few remarks about some of the names occurring in the above tables may not be out of place, whether as explaining their sequence in order of time, or as facilitating a classification in order of merit. In the early centuries immediately succeeding the Mussulman conquest, we have but few records of Persian travel, though we may be grateful that the piety of some pilgrims belonging to various persuasions, such as Rabbi Benjamin, the Spanish Jew; Ibn Batutah, the Moor of Tangier; and the Catholic Friars William de Rubruquis and Odoricus di Pordenone, impelled them to perambulate much of the East. Almost simultaneously with these the great figure of Marco Polo passes, none too slowly, across the stage. At the latter end of the fifteenth century, the commercial pre-eminence of Venice is attested by the appearance upon the scene of a number of Venetian merchants or grandees; just as a century later the expanding mercantile ambitions of England are represented by a similar batch of British pioneers, opening up trade routes respectively in the North and South. An example already set in the fifteenth century by the Spanish envoy Don Ruy di Clavijo—who kept an invaluable record of the mission upon which he was sent by Henry III. of Castile to the Court of Timur at Samarkand—is followed in the seventeenth century by the ambassadors who flocked to the capital of the illustrious Shah Abbas at Isfahan from the crowned heads of Europe. The brothers Sherley, and Sir Thomas Herbert, who accompanied Sir Dodmore Cotton, Ambassador from Charles I., and wrote by far the most amusing work that has ever been published on Persia, represent the British point of view. Don Garcias de Silva, deputed by Philip III., is the official mouthpiece of Spain; Adam Olearius keeps the record of the Embassy from the Duke of

Division into periods

Holstein; to the Capuchin Père Pacifique de Provins we must refer for the standpoint of France; Kæmpfer, the Westphalian, went out to Persia as Secretary to the Embassy sent by Charles XI. of Sweden. The same, or seventeenth century, is the great era at once of Persian grandeur and of foreign additions to the literature of travel. A succession of instructed voyagers, drawn to the country either by commercial interests or by a taste for exploration, succeed each other with great rapidity upon the scene, and have bequeathed to us, as a record alike of their own industry, and of the opportunities that were placed at their disposal by a Court consistently favourable to foreign intercourse, a number of works, almost monumental in character, dealing with every aspect of the national life, and enriched with elaborate, if not always accurate, copper-plate engravings. In their pages we find not merely a contemporary record of the habits and customs of the Persian people, and of the pomp and pageantry of the Sefavi kings, but the first attempt to give a minute and illustrated description of the great ruins at Persepolis and other places, which already attracted the concern, while suggesting ludicrous reins to the fancy, of the *literati* of Europe. Pietro della Valle, a Roman of good family, and the husband of a Nestorian lady whom he wedded at Baghdad, but lost by death while in Persia, though pilloried by Gibbon as intolerably prolix and vain, is the first in date of this voluminous school of authors, prolixity and vanity being pardonable vices in a writer who lifts for our gaze the dim curtains of the past. He is succeeded by Jean Baptiste Tavernier, the well-known French jeweller, who included the Court of the Grand Sophy (as the Persian monarch was then called in Europe from a misadaptation of the name of the dynasty), as well as that of the Great Mogul, within the range of his businesslike peregrinations; by Chardin, *clarum et venerabile nomen*, a French Protestant, and also a jeweller, who, after writing his *magnum opus* on Persia, retired in later life to England, upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and died a Knight and Alderman of the City of London; by Thévenot and Daulier-Deslandes, also Frenchmen; by Sanson, a French Missionary; by Dr. Fryer, surgeon to the East India Company, who is only less quaint and comical than Herbert; and by Cornelius Le Brun, the Dutchman, who was always ready with his measuring rod and pencil, and while freely denouncing the

errors of his predecessors, bequeathed a scarcely inferior stock for the critical delectation of his successors.

Eighteenth century

The next or eighteenth century was one of political storm in Persia; a condition of affairs unfavourable to travel or research, and represented by a proportionate shrinkage in the number and contributions of foreign writers. Nevertheless in the works of John Bell of Antermory, who acted as surgeon to a Russian embassy from Peter the Great to Shah Sultan Husein, the last of the Sefavi monarchs; of Krusinski, who in the same reign was Procurator of the Jesuits at Isfahan, and of other Roman Catholic priests; of Otter, who travelled through Persia while Nadir Shah was absent on his famous march against India; and most of all, of Jonas Hanway, the intelligent and philanthropic London merchant, who attempted a revival of the impossible project of a British Caspian trade—we have presented to us pictures, no less lurid in detail than vivid in outline, of the horrors attending an epoch of anarchy and bloodshed. Towards the latter part of the same century, G. Forster, the first overland traveller by Afghanistan and Persia from Hindustan to England, adds greatly to geographical knowledge by his adventurous journey in the North; while in the South the liberal-minded and popular régime of Kerim Khan Zend, who ruled as Vekil or Regent at Shiraz, is pourtrayed to us by Ensign Franklin of the Anglo-Indian army, and by Carsten Niebuhr, fresh from his great journeys in the Arabian peninsula. In the same period Gmélin and Olivier sustain the credit respectively of Russia and France.

Nineteenth century

Turning the corner of the nineteenth century, we cross the threshold of an epoch when the avenues of entry to Persia having been reopened by European diplomacy, a stream of travellers has followed in the wake of plenipotentiaries, ministers, and envoys, both classes devoting themselves with equal assiduity to the literary record of their experiences. The two missions of Sir John Malcolm in 1800 and 1810, resulted in two works from his own pen: the 'History of Persia,' which, though written before the scientific spirit had pervaded the historical school, has yet remained the standard English work on the subject, and his 'Sketches of Persia' (published anonymously), one of the most delightful compositions ever penned; in the Geographical Memoir of Captain Macdonald, afterwards Sir J. Macdonald Kinneir, and British Minister in Persia, which for

some time enshrined the *corpus* of available geographical knowledge about the country; and in the journeys and explorations of several English or Indian officers, notably Grant, Pottinger, Christie, and Monteith. Almost simultaneously, the French Mission of General Gardanne, the emissary of Napoleon, carried with it a train of emulous writers, amongst whom we may notice the names of Truilhier, Trézel, Tancoigne, and Dupré, the latter being responsible for the best book. Sir Harford Jones, in 1809, penned the record of his own energy and misfortunes, and was accompanied by Morier, who on this occasion, and again two years later, when returning in a similar capacity with Sir Gore Ouseley, utilised his opportunity to publish two works of considerable authority and careful research. No mission ever had more plentiful historians than that of Ouseley, for, in addition to Morier's second work, its record was written by Sir W. Ouseley, brother to the ambassador, and a great Oriental scholar, and by W. Price. In 1817, Kotzebue penned the narrative of the Russian Embassy of Count Yermoloff. In 1835, Colonel Stuart came out as secretary to Sir Henry Ellis, and left an interesting picture of the administration of Mohammed Shah. Later, Sir Justin Sheil, British Minister, assisted his wife in the compilation of a serviceable and informing work. The Comte de Gobineau utilised a diplomatic residence at Teheran in the interests of France to issue more than one learned volume; while the junior branches of the various legations have been creditably represented by the Baron de Bode, secretary to the Russian Legation, who described an interesting journey to Bakhtiari Land in 1840–1; by Eastwick, who filled an analogous position in the British Legation twenty years later; and by M. Barbier de Meynard, whose translations and annotations of Oriental writers have placed him in the front rank of French scholars.

Attracted by the increasing noise that Persia was making in the Western world, a number of English travellers of independent means selected that country, from the first decade of the century onwards, as the arena of geographical or archæological research, and of subsequent literary enterprise. Scott Waring, Buckingham, Sir R. Ker Porter, and J. Baillie Fraser, belong to this class in the first half of the century, the last-named having found in Persia a literary mine which was not exhausted until he had given several admirable books of travel, as well as a number of romances, to the world. Another class of writers has been

furnished by the Indian civil and military services, officers belonging to both of which have taken Persia on their way to or from England; the most conspicuous among their names being, in the military department, those of Colonel Johnson, Captain Arthur Conolly (afterwards murdered at Bokhara), and Sir Alexander Burnes, the subsequent victim of the tragedy of Kabul; and in the civil department, R. B. Binning, who, in 1851, assisted by an uncommon familiarity with the Persian language, wrote the last really good book that has been written on Persia, and E. Stack, who, in 1881, threw the graces of independent thought and a fascinating style over the novel area of his explorations. In the middle part of the century, and at intervals since, distinct additions to our store of knowledge have been provided by the English and American missionaries, who have selected Persia as the scene of their labours, whether with the Nestorian Christians on the north-east frontier, or with the Armenians in several of the larger cities. In the same period a few other names stand forth from the ranks with conspicuous pre-eminence. The first of these is Major (now Sir Henry) Rawlinson, who to the merit of his own topographical researches, when employed as an officer in the service of Mohammed Shah, superadded a political knowledge and grasp that subsequently made him British Minister at Teheran, and in later times the political historian of Anglo-Persian relations, and an archæological acumen that revealed to him the dark riddles of the Cuneiform alphabet, and have elevated him to the front rank of Oriental scholars. Sir H. Layard, a not inferior name, also most fortunately devoted to a portion of the Persian dominions those gifts of insight and of style that have rendered him famous; whilst among the officers of other nationalities who have been employed in Persia, the Frenchman Ferrier is conspicuous for his valuable and scholarly work. France has also had the credit of sending to Persia the expeditions of Texier, of Flandin and Coste, and, in later years, of Dieulafoy, whose researches or discoveries, supported by ample funds, have resulted in the production of splendid volumes, illustrated on the most sumptuous scale. In 1859 the Geographical Society of St. Petersburg deputed M. de Khanikoff, who applied to the study of Persian topography the spirit of scientific scholarship somewhat marred by political prepossessions. And if, during the same epoch, Great Britain has neither commissioned nor endowed similar inquiry—a department in which she appears to

be unpardonably slack—at least the political undertakings with which the British Government has charged itself, have resulted in the labours and writings of Sir F. Goldsmid, and of his able band of collaborators in the services of the Telegraph and Boundary Commissions. A useful history of Persia within the compass of a single volume, has been published by Mr. Clements Markham, while the history of the first half of the present century has been carefully compiled by Mr. R. G. Watson. The field of Persian history, however, as a whole, is one that still calls for the enterprise of some English student, combining the rare gifts of familiarity with Oriental tongues, historical knowledge, and classical erudition. In Germany, Spiegel, Justi, Nöldeke and Gutschmid have worthily divided the rôle. I should add that by far the best and most accurate account of Persia, within the limit of 100 pages, that I have ever seen, occurs in the monumental work of the Frenchman Elisée Reclus.[1] During the last thirty years the north-east portion of Persia has been brought more closely under our view by the labours of a succession of competent explorers; Khanikoff, the Russian, already mentioned; Colonel Valentine Baker and Captain Gill, the former of whom displayed a rare intuition of Central Asian politics; Sir C. MacGregor, whose impetuous patriotism was reflected in his unpolished but masculine style; and E. O'Donovan, the 'Daily News' correspondent, who penetrated to Merv and afterwards perished in the Soudan, and whose literary accomplishments equal those of any other writer on Persia. All of these have since died.

In the same period Messrs. Stolze and Andreas have thrown much light upon Persian commerce, industry, administration, and resources; and General Houtum Schindler, whom I shall so frequently have occasion to quote, upon almost every branch of topography, archæology, and general knowledge. Dr. Wills, who was for many years Doctor to the Indo-European Telegraph Establishment, has given us a series of vivid and entertaining representations of life and customs in modern Iran. Mr. Benjamin, the first American minister to Persia, is the author of the last work in English on the country; but his observations on manners and arts, which are interesting, are handicapped by a general inaccuracy that renders his book of little value.[2] Madame Dieulafoy's portly

[1] This has been translated into English, *Universal Geography*, vol. ix.

[2] What, for instance, can be thought of a writer who describes as 'a small salt lake at Oroomieh' an expanse of water which is three hundred miles in cir-

volume is superbly illustrated; and there is entertainment, as well as instruction, in her pages. Another lady, Mrs. Bishop, has just published a volume on her travels among the Bakhtiaris and Kurds, containing much novel and interesting information.

Order of merit

In the above long list of eminent writers and authorities, it would be invidious and perhaps impertinent to attempt too minute a discrimination on the ground of merit. I have already named the majority of those who either by faithful reproduction of what they saw with their own eyes in interesting or troublous times, or by patient research, have added to the sum total of our knowledge of Persia. A few of these, by virtue of deeper insight or a wider range of observation, deserve promotion to the highest rank.

These are, in my judgment, Chardin, Tavernier,[1] Hanway, Malcolm, Morier, Ouseley, Baillie Fraser, and Rawlinson. Of the trio whose works have for so long formed the basis of English ideas about Persia, viz., Morier, Ouseley, and Fraser, the first named, by his story of Haji Baba, even more than by his travels, has gained the firmest hold of the public ear. An equal rank is, in my opinion, deserved by Fraser, for his broad acquaintance with and faithful portraiture of every aspect of modern Persian life, and by Ouseley, for the amazing erudition which renders his ponderous tomes at once the delight and the despair of scholars, and which did not admit of their publication till the lapse of a full decade after the events which they describe. Of the older travellers the palm will be conceded, *nemine contradicente*, to the French Huguenot and English Knight, Chardin. He is apt to exaggerate,

cumference, and as 'a lake of some size' the Hamun in Seistan, which is frequently dry; who speaks of the Elburz range as extending to Merv, and represents the tribes with whom Kaufmann fought in Central Asia as Tekke Turkomans; who makes Hasan, as well as Husein, slain at Kerbela, and, even at this date, confounds Shushter with Susa; who descants upon 'inexhaustible coal mines in the south-west, near the best ports of Persia,' when not a cubic foot of coal has ever been extracted from those regions; who antedates Nadir Shah by half a century, and post-dates the famous famine by three years; and who thinks there are twenty-five thousand grenadiers in the British Army?

[1] I am aware that grave charges have been brought, with some truth, against Tavernier. Chardin said he never understood a word of Persian. One critic declares that he could neither read nor write. His descriptions of some places are manifestly incorrect. There is no doubt that his editors experienced much difficulty in arranging his papers, which were in a state of chaos (*vide* Ouseley's *Travels*, vol. ii. Appendix, 10). Nevertheless his work retains its value, both for its independence and general freedom from exaggeration.

and he cannot invariably be relied upon; but he is always painstaking, frequently ingenious, and not seldom profound. The second class I have already filled with a goodly array of names. There are others who might well have been, and should perhaps still be, included under the same heading, were it not that the romantic atmosphere of the East has proved too much for their critical equilibrium and has swept them away on gusts of sentiment, now lifting them to giddy heights of rhetoric, now plunging them into woeful depths of bathos. Of the early travellers John Struys, a Dutchman, made the widest excursions into these fairy fields. In the present century he has been ably seconded by Sir R. Ker Porter, who, though a most diligent enquirer, has diminished the appreciation arising from careful plans and excellent drawings by a turgid pomposity of style that is alternately exasperating and ludicrous. It is when they contemplate the majesty of Nature, or the pathos of ruin, that these rhapsodists are impelled to their greatest efforts; and on such occasions a Howling Dervish might learn something from their transports. Of the class of writers, daily receiving fresh and enthusiastic recruits, who rush through a country, either not having read what has been written by better men before, or reading it only in order to plagiarise and reproduce it as their own, and who misunderstand, misspell, and misinterpret everywhere as they go, I will say nothing. They too have fastened upon Persia. But the aids to such compilation as theirs are here less readily forthcoming than elsewhere; some considerable exertion must be endured; there are no railroads to ease the body, while great folios must be read to supply the place of mind; and altogether the kingdom of the Shah does not promise the best of spoils. Neither would I waste one drop of ink in rescuing any such from a salutary oblivion.

CHAPTER II

WAYS AND MEANS

(*Dedicated to the Traveller only*)

Sive per Syrtes iter æstuosas,
Sive facturus per inhospitalem
Caucasum, vel quæ loca fabulosus
Lambit Hydaspes.
HORACE, *Carm.* lib. I. xxii.

THE questions that were put to me before I left England, as to the direction which I was about to take, and after I had returned as to the direction which I had taken, lead me to think that, even in these days of universal primers and travellers' guides, geographical information is not so widely diffused as to render superfluous a chapter explanatory of the different ways by which Persia can be approached or left, and of the preparatory steps which require to be taken by a traveller. There is so wide a choice open to the latter in regard both to route and means, that some guidance in either respect is desirable. The tables of routes and distances which I shall give are all derived from first-hand sources, and are brought up to the latest date. There is no existing publication in which they can be found similarly collected.

Necessity of information

Persia, though remote, is the reverse of inaccessible. The physical situation of the country between two seas, on the north and south, at once suggests the easiest avenues of approach; whilst her land frontiers on the east and west, abutting as they do upon wide extents of territory, in the hands of alien if not hostile powers, indicate other but less facile modes of entry. It results accordingly that the majority of arrivals first land upon Persian soil on the shores either of the Caspian Sea or of the Persian Gulf. The situation of the modern capital, Teheran, at a distance of about 200 miles by road from the Caspian, renders this the more frequented line of approach; just as in the seven-

Situation of Persia

teenth century, when the Sefavi dynasty held their gorgeous court at Isfahan, the ports of the Persian Gulf were the more natural point of debarkation. Even in the early part of the present century, while the Caucasus was still unsubdued and a terror to travellers, the southern route was preferred by European, and especially by English voyagers, the more so as Anglo-Persian relations were then in the hands of the East India Company, and were dictated and controlled from Calcutta or Bombay. It was at Bushire that the missions of Sir John Malcolm, Sir Harford Jones, and Sir Gore Ouseley first set foot upon the territory of the King of kings.

Scheme of chapter

Premising, therefore, that these are the simplest and most obvious lines of access, I will commence upon the north with the Enzeli-Teheran route, and will next describe the remaining northern approaches; after which the eastern, southern, and western entrances will succeed each other in natural order.

I. Enzeli-Teheran route

The Persian port, or rather landing-place (for, as will be seen, Persia enjoys no such luxury as a port), on the Caspian is at Enzeli, a village upon a low spit of land enclosing upon the sea side a broad but shallow lagoon, known as the Murdab, or Dead Water, on the inner or southern shore of which, at a slight distance from the sea, is situated the considerable town of Resht. It is in this sense that travellers commonly speak of landing in Persia at Resht.

Means of reaching Enzeli

Enzeli is served by the steamers of the Russian Caucasus and Mercury Company, running from Baku, which place there are several methods of reaching from Europe. (1) Train may be taken to Constantinople, boat (Messageries, Austrian Lloyd, or Russian) from thence to Batum—3 or 4 days—and train *viâ* Tiflis to Baku—32 hours; (2) train may be taken *viâ* Berlin and Cracow to Odessa, and Russian steamer thence to Batum—3 days; (3) Tiflis may be reached overland from St. Petersburg and Moscow by rail to Vladikavkas, and by carriage over the famous Dariel Road—136 miles—into Georgia; (4) there is still another method of reaching Baku, viz. by rail across Russia to Tsaritsin, on the Volga, thence by river-boat to Astrakhan, and thence by Caucasus and Mercury Company steamers down the west coast of the Caspian, touching at Petrofsk and Derbent—2½ days—to Baku. This is perhaps, in point of time, the most ex-

peditious route. In any case the traveller cannot rely upon reaching Baku under eight or nine days from London.

Caspian steamers

From May to November the Caucasus and Mercury steamers run weekly, and sometimes bi-weekly, to Enzeli, leaving Baku as a rule on Sunday night; during the remainder of the year somewhat irregularly. After touching at the Russian (once Persian) port of Lenkoran, and the frontier village of Astara on Monday afternoon, they are timed to arrive at Enzeli —a total distance of 197 nautical miles, in from 30 to 36 hours from the start, i.e. at some time on Tuesday morning.

Landing at Enzeli

Here, however, the peculiar and doleful idiosyncrasies of Persian travel are not unlikely to begin, for there is often such a surf on the bar[1] that it is quite impossible to land passengers in boats; and in the winter months it not infrequently happens that the unhappy voyager, after being tossed about for several hours in sight of his destination, is taken all the way back again to Baku, whence, after a mournful week of dabbling in naphtha and becoming saturated with petroleum, he returns in order to repeat the experiment.

The Murdab

Should the elements, however, prove propitious at Enzeli, he is transferred to a small steam-launch, in which he is conducted to the projecting spit of land, at the western extremity of which stands the custom-house of Enzeli, and where also is a somewhat decayed but picturesque five-storeyed pagoda or summer-house belonging to the Shah. The decorative features of this structure, which is painted blue, red, and green, increase in smartness as they approach the upper storeys, the topmost of which is reserved for the use of His Majesty; but they are in a state of great dilapidation, and are moreover often rendered invisible by a mat covering, intended as a protection against the appalling damp. From here the launch steams across the Murdab, a voyage of about ten miles, in an hour and three-quarters. This shallow and wind-swept lagoon is some thirty miles long from east to west, by twelve in maximum breadth from north to south, and is peopled with every variety of wild fowl—

[1] This bar is such an obstruction that ships drawing over five feet of water cannot enter, but must lie outside. The Persian Government has often been pressed, but has never yet taken any steps, either to remove or reduce it. For an account of the Shah's small steam yacht, the 'Nasr-ed-Din,' which is generally on the Murdab, *vide* a later chapter on the Navy.

cormorants, geese, swans, duck, coots, divers, guillemots, gulls, pelicans, crane, and snipe. They dot the surface and swarm in the islets and reed-beds on its inner fringe, supplying a foretaste to the sportsman of the richness of the entire belt of country between the sea and the mountains, which abounds in game. At the southern extremity of the lagoon the launch is exchanged for a native boat, which is towed up a creek for five miles to the fishing village of Pir-i-Bazaar.

Pir-i-Bazaar

Pir-i-Bazaar (i.e. Saint of the Bazaar; more probably Pileh-Bazaar, i.e. the Cocoon Mart, so called from the silk industry) consists of a caravanserai, a few houses and sheds, and a fishing establishment, a weir being thrown across the stream at this point, resulting in a multitudinous capture of a species of carp. Rickety carriages are here available which transport the new-comer along a vile road, roughly paved, for a distance of six miles through the jungle to Resht. The Resht river, or Shah Rudbar, flows down to the sea on the left hand, and snakes and tortoises crawl in the slimy watercourses and swamps on the right.

Resht

Of Resht I shall have something to say in a later chapter upon the northern provinces of Persia, of one of which, viz. Gilan, it is the capital city. In this context it is regarded solely as the first town in which the traveller sets foot on Persian soil, and as the starting-point of his journey into the interior. From the aspect of the place and of the surrounding country he will probably derive an impression of Persian scenery and life which requires very early to be abandoned, and which is as unlike the general characteristics with which he will afterwards become so sorrowfully familiar as Dover is unlike Aden. At Resht he sees red-tiled cottages and mosques, lanes, and hedgerows, and gardens, which speak to him of other lands, whilst in the wealth of wood and water that is spread around he observes a favourable indication of the fertility of Persian soil. Let him take his soul's fill of both sights; for the modest yet appreciable architectural features of Resht he will see nowhere repeated beyond the Caspian littoral, and the forests and rivers will presently be succeeded by stony deserts and treeless peaks.

At Resht the traveller will form his first experience of that Persian wayfaring, of whose pleasures and pains I shall have so much to say as I proceed. Here he must decide between the only

two practicable methods of travel in that country, viz. riding *chapar*, i.e. by Government post—or riding with his own animals and appointments by caravan. The former means rapid, if exhausting and sometimes painful progress; the latter is attended with less physical discomfort, but is apt to be unutterably tedious, and, as the same animals must be used day after day, unconscionably slow. In the one case the traveller is an item or piece of animate baggage, who is transferred from his starting-point to his destination with as much swiftness as a succession of mediocre and sometimes abominable steeds can manage to convey him, or as his own inclinations or strength will permit. He transports his wherewithal on horseback with him, he sleeps in *chapar-khanehs*, or post-houses, which occur at regular intervals along the route, he carries his food in portable shape or buys it on the way, he pays a fixed tariff for horses and accommodation, he diverges not one inch from the main track, he seldom looks behind him, and he has but one appetite —viz. to get on.

Choice of means of progression. *Chapar*-riding

The other plan involves much forethought and preparation—the purchase of a camp and equipments, the hiring of a large number of riding and baggage animals and of servants to look after both, and all the responsibilities consequent upon the superintendence of a numerous following. On the other hand, it leaves the traveller absolute discretion as to his movements, and, while it never allows him to hurry (for baggage animals cannot be trusted to do more than twenty-five miles on an average in the day), it gives him unstinted liberty to dawdle. According to his objects and tastes, therefore, the stranger will have very little difficulty in choosing between the two. If he is anxious to go ahead, does not mind roughing it a little, and is fairly active and strong, he will travel *chapar*. If he has ladies or a family and household with him, if he is not inured to much riding, still more if he requires to move slowly and investigate or explore, and most of all if he wishes to diverge from the beaten track (for there are less than a dozen post-roads in Persia, the number being restricted to the chief lines of communication), he will travel caravan. In either case he will probably do wisely to adopt the speedier method as far as Teheran, where he can then make up his plans as to the future; whilst, if he can persuade some friend at the capital to send down a *gholam* (courier) or a Persian servant

Caravanning

to meet him at Enzeli or Resht, he will be saved from the agony of the opening struggle with an unknown people and tongue, and will pass with less mental exasperation through the grim ordeal of Persian *chapar-khanehs* and post-boys. In favour of this decision are also the facts that he can take a carriage from Resht as far as Kuhdum, eighteen miles, and therefore need not begin his ride till the latter place; that the post-houses between Resht and Teheran are somewhat better equipped than those on the other lines; that more and rather better or less execrable horses are engaged in the service; and finally, that at Kazvin they can be abandoned altogether for the luxury of a carriage which will convey him the remaining hundred miles to the capital over the sole road in the country on which the European method of locomotion is common.

Cost of *chapar*-riding

In passing I may say that the charge for post-horses is one *kran* (7*d.*) per *farsakh* (approximately 3½ to 4 miles) for each horse required. The minimum number usually employed by a single traveller is one for himself, one for his native servant,[1] and one for the *chapar-shagird*, or post-boy, who takes back the animals, driving them in front of him, when the stage is over. If the traveller is carrying a good deal of baggage, a fourth horse may be required; but the vagaries of this animal, who is far too obstinate to be led by a rein, and who, being riderless, takes every opportunity of bolting from the track and disappearing across country, where he has to be pursued and whipped back again, constitute such a check upon progression as well as such a tax upon temper, that most persons will gladly purchase immunity from so indefinite an expansion of their journey by the necessary contraction of their personal effects. And it is surprising, as I shall presently show, how much can be carried on the backs of the three horses already named. The charge for each stage must be paid beforehand to the *chaparchi*, or post-master, at the *chapar-khaneh* where the fresh animals are engaged; and at the end of the stage it is customary to give one *kran* for an ordinary stage, or two *krans* for a very long stage, to the post-boy who has accompanied you. Not once in postal rides of over 1,200 miles did I receive the faintest sign of acknowledgment from any

[1] I should prescribe as a golden rule, not to take a European servant unless travelling by caravan. In the latter case, he is merely a single addition to a large cavalcade, and may be of use, as well as a luxury.

one of these individuals, whose stolidity is proof even against the agreeable emotion of receiving a tip, and who never deviate, even by accident, into an expression of gratitude. As a Persian traveller seldom gives them anything, I suppose they look with contempt upon a European who is foolish enough to squander a gratuitous shilling. At the *chapar-khaneh*, where the traveller puts up for the night, and where he is supplied with a few conveniences, such as water and firewood, possibly with milk and eggs, it is usual to give the postmaster, upon leaving in the morning, a gratuity varying, according to the nature of the service, from two to four *krans*. These are the only disbursements required, except for provisions bought in the villages *en route*; and to meet this outlay a supply of a few hundred *krans*, which can either be procured in one-*kran* or two-*kran* pieces at Baku, or can be sent down from Teheran, is necessary. These are usually carried in bags in the rider's holsters, and are a great encumbrance on a long journey. But no other currency is in existence, and no other method of payment is therefore possible.[1] With these preliminary instructions for his guidance, from which he will already have learnt that the journey lying before him, if not luxurious, is at any rate cheap, the traveller will upon arriving at Resht (or Kuhdum) make his way to the post-house, and after procuring his *tezkereh* or postal order, will arrange for starting upon his ride as soon as possible. He will not, as did a friend of mine, ask for a porter to take up his luggage to the hotel! There is an English as well as a Russian Consulate at Resht; and the former building, after being for some time unoccupied, has lately received another official inmate, so that in the last resort the help of a countryman and the majesty of officialdom can both be appealed to for assistance.

Character of route

The stretch of country between Resht and Teheran may be roughly divided into three sections—(1) the forest belt extending from Resht to the mountains, which is a portion of the immense wooded zone that covers the flat coast-line from Talish in the west to Astrabad in the east, a total distance of 400 miles; (2) the spurs and the main range of the Elburz Mountains, which at the highest point of the pass attain an altitude of over 7,000 feet above the sea; (3) the elevated plateau or plain upon

[1] The Imperial Bank has since issued bank-notes, but as they can only be cashed, at present, in the towns where issued, I doubt whether they are accepted at the post-houses.

their southern side, descending from Kazvin to Teheran. Between Resht and Kazvin the stages are as follows:[1]

Name of station	Distance in *Farsakhs*	Approximate distance in Miles
Resht to Kuhdum	6	16
Kuhdum to Rustamabad . . .	5	18½
Rustamabad to Menjil . . .	5	17½
Menjil to Paichenar	5	13
Paichenar to Mazreh . . .	5	20
Mazreh to Kazvin	5	21
Total . .	31[2]	106

After leaving Resht the road strikes inland through the first or woodland belt, traversing a forest, which, while it reeks with miasma, also abounds in game. Here are to be found not only the humble *fauna* with which we are familiar in England, such as hares, foxes, pheasants, and the like, but wolves, hyenas, jackals, leopards, tigers, lynxes, and wild boar. Generally

Resht to Kazvin

[1] The following modern writers have given descriptions of the journey from Enzeli to Teheran: E. B. Eastwick (1860–61), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. i. pp. 293–end; vol. ii. pp. 1–14. Col. Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 312–317. A. Arnold (1875) *Through Persia by Caravan*, vol. i. caps. viii.–x. A. H. Schindler, (1877), *Zeit. d. Gesell. für Erd. z. Berlin*, vol. xiv. Sir C. MacGregor (1878), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 176–180. E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. pp. 307–337. E. Orsolle (1882), *Le Caucase et la Perse*, caps. xi.–xv.

[2] The total of *farsakhs* if multiplied by four seldom corresponds to the actual number of miles, for the reason that, the *farsakh* being the unit of measurement, no fraction of a *farsakh* is taken into account. Thus 12½ miles will count as 4 *farsakhs* equally with 16 miles, and be paid for accordingly. Moreover, the length of the *farsakh* differs in different parts of the country according to the nature of the ground, the local interpretation of the term being the distance which a laden mule will walk in the hour. Thus in mountainous country the *farsakh* will be apt not greatly to exceed three miles; whilst on level ground four miles may sometimes be an inadequate measurement. The name *farsakh* is, as well known, the Arabicised form of the old Persian *parasang* (transcribed by the Greeks as παρασάγγης), and is supposed to be derived from pieces of stone (*sang*) placed on the roadside as marks at fixed distances apart. In one of the books of the Zend Avesta there is the following not too precise definition of the term: 'A *farsakh* is the distance at which a long-sighted man can see a camel and discern whether it be white or black.' In Luristan, on the other hand, the standard is sound, not sight, a *farsakh* being the distance at which a drum beat can be heard. As a matter of fact, the original *parasang* was an old Babylonian measure, based on the Babylonian cubit, and was equal to 3·523 miles. But the modern *parasang* varies in proportion as the modern cubit varies; its mean value being 3·915 miles, which corresponds with the Royal Babylonian cubit. *Vide* 'Notes on the Length of the *Farsakh*,' by Gen. A. H. Schindler, in *Proceedings of the R. G. S.* (new series), vol. x. pp. 584–588 (1888).

the tigers along the Caspian littoral are not man-eaters. They are frequently of immense size; and I saw the skin of one, killed near Resht, which a noted Indian *shikarri* declared was larger than any that he had seen in that country. The impenetrability of the jungle and its malarial fevers are presumably the obstacles that have saved from the clutch of the Englishman one of the few remaining sporting grounds in the neighbourhood of Europe. Higher up in the Elburz Mountains is found the big game that is common to loftier altitudes—ibex, mountain sheep, wild goat, antelope, and huge bears. After twelve miles the road begins to rise, and soon after leaving Kuhdum enters the hills. In this section it has at one time been paved with cobbles, but, like most things in Persia, the causeway has fallen into ruin, and in wet places is apt to become a treacherous quagmire, whilst on a steeper acclivity it often resembles a staircase rather than a ramp. Beyond Kuhdum, the left bank of the Sefid Rud (White River) is reached, and, through lovely scenery, where woodland is variegated by open glades and rocks, is followed as far as Rustamabad. At this stage, and as the elevation increases, vegetation begins to dwindle; the forest trees are replaced by olives, and finally by low bushes and shrubs; the scenery gains in ruggedness and grandeur, until at length, a little before the station of Menjil, the river is crossed by a seven-arched bridge (not infrequently broken down), over which the wind sometimes whistles through the narrow gorge with concentrated fury. Between Menjil and Paichenar the road skirts first the Shahrud (King's River) as far as the Loshan bridge, and then the Paichenar river, which is a tributary of the Sefid Rud; and steadily but laboriously, and over heartrending inequalities in the ground and beside savage precipices, mounts to the Kharzan pass, some 7,500 feet above the sea. This is a terrible spot in winter, being frequently blocked for days by snow; and many are the camels and mules that have left their bones to bleach on its cruel heights. Nevertheless, there is a village here and a large caravanserai. Thence, the apex of the ridge having been conquered, the descent begins on the other side to Mazreh, one of the Persian villages famous for the visitations of the loathsome bug (variously called *gherib-gez*, i.e. Bite the stranger, or *shab-gez*, i.e. Night-biter, better known to science as *Argas Persicus*), that is one of the horrors of Persian travel. After passing the village of Agha Baba, level ground is reached, and the traveller endeavours

to screw a gallop out of his jaded steed as he approaches the extensive vineyards and orchards that encircle the once populous city of Kazvin.

Kazvin

Kazvin, which is reported to have 40,000 inhabitants, but has probably not much more than two-thirds of that total, is the first large town which the newcomer will have seen in Persia; and it will supply him with some idea of the typical Persian city, of which he will encounter so many analogous samples later on. Like many of them, it has been a capital city in its day, sharing this distinction with Isfahan, Shiraz, Teheran, Tabriz, Suleimanieh, Ardebil, Nishapur, and Meshed. Like most of its compeers, however, the sun of its glory has now set, and deserted spaces and crumbling remains mark the spot that once teemed with busy life and glittered with the pageantry of royal rule. Said to have been founded by Shapur II. (Zulaktaf),[1] it was one of the places that were captured in 1078 A.D. by Hasan Sabah, the celebrated chief of the so-called Assassins, known in Europe, from a paraphrase by the Crusaders of his Arabic title, Sheikh-el-Jebel, as the Old Man of the Mountains, whose original method of recruiting his band is so agreeably related by Marco Polo, and whose impregnable stronghold of Alamut (i.e. Eagle's Nest) was only about thirty miles distant in the mountains.[2] It was not, however, till the rise of the Sefavi dynasty that Kazvin attained the zenith of its renown. By the second sovereign of that line, Tahmasp I. (1524–1576 A.D) it was made the seat of government,[3] the change being variously attributed by historians to the inability of that monarch to defend Tabriz against the Turks, and to his anxiety to remove to some distance from Ardebil, where the humble

[1] Eastwick (vol. i. p. 212) says in 150 A.D.; but the reign of Shapur II. was 310–379 A.D. Others relate that the founder was Shapur I. (241–272 A.D.). For mention of Kazvin in early historians, *vide* Istakhri (*Viæ regnorum*, p. 211); Yakut (*Dictionnaire Géographique*, pp. 441–445); Nasiri Khosru (*Sefer Nameh*). M. Ch. Schefer, in his edition of the latter work (p. 12), has given a list of the native historians of Kazvin, of whom some attained considerable eminence. *Vide* also B. de Meynard, *Descript. Hist. de la ville de Kazvin*, 1857.

[2] The Castle of Alamut (which must have been rebuilt after its capture and destruction by the Mongol Hulaku Khan) was used in later times under the Sefavi kings as a prison for disgraced persons of high rank. When their continued existence was found irksome they were pitched off the high rock upon which it stands. Chardin (edit. Langlès), vol. ix. p. 115. For a modern account of Alamut, *vide* Sir J. Sheil's 'Teheran to Alamut in 1837,' in the *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. viii. p. 430.

[3] *Vide* Milton's *Paradise Lost*, x. 433–6.

circumstances of his family were known. After fifty years of metropolitan supremacy Kazvin was itself superseded by Isfahan, Shah Abbas the Great finding in the southern capital a more convenient centre for his extensive dominions. Pietro della Valle, the travelled Italian, was here in 1618, during the lifetime of Shah Abbas, but found in it 'nothing to satisfy the expectations of a royal residence, and only two things worthy of observation, the gate of the King's palace and the grand meidan or square.' On the other hand, Sir Thomas Herbert, the quaint historian of the embassy of Sir Dodmore Cotton from Charles I. to Abbas the Great, who accompanied Sir Robert Sherley and the English envoy hither after their bootless interview with the Persian monarch at Ashraf in 1627, reported of Kazvin that it was 'equal for grandeur to any other city in the Persian Empire, Spahawn (i.e. Isfahan) excepted;'[1] that its walls were seven miles in circuit, and its population 200,000. Here poor Sir Robert Sherley, fretting at his rebuff and at the inconstancy of princes, died on July 13, 1627, and was buried under the threshold of the door;[2] and here, only ten days later, his companion, Sir D. Cotton, stricken down with dysentery, followed him to the grave.[3] Chardin, who was at Kazvin half a century later, in 1674, describes its walls as then in ruins, the town having 'lost all those perquisites that set forth the pomp and grandeur of a sumptuous court;' but says that it nevertheless contained 12,000 houses and 100,000 inhabitants, and that its chief feature was the palaces of the grandees, which had passed for generations from father to son.[4] It was taken by the

[1] Herbert was phonetic rather than accurate in his spelling. Thus he converted Julfa into Jelphea, Teheran into Tyroan, Larijan into Larry John, and the Padishah, or title of the sovereign, into Pot Shaw. In the previous century the English factors in Gilan generally transliterated Shah Tahmasp into Shaw Thomas, which had not a very regal sound.

[2] I cannot resist quoting the quaint language of Herbert: 'And hence came those discontents, nay, that arrow of Death that arrested him; for upon the 13th of July he gave this transitory world an *ultimum vale* in his great climacteric'.—*Some Yeares' Travel* (3rd edit.), p. 212.

[3] 'Like discontents, long conflict with adverse dispositions, and fourteen days consuming of a flux (occasioned, as I thought, by eating too much fruit, or sucking in too much chill air upon Taurus), brought that Religious Gentleman, Sir Dodmore Cotton, our Ambassadour, to an immortal home. The 23rd of July he bade the world Adieu.'—*Ibid.*, p. 213.

[4] *Travels*, pt. ii. pp. 378–382. *Vide* also a description of Kazvin in 1600 by John Cartwright, Preacher, Purchas' *Pilgrims*, vol. ii. lib. ix. cap. 4; and in 1671 by John Struys, *Voyages*, vol. iii. cap. xxiv.

Afghans in 1722 and by the Turks in 1725, and has suffered severely from earthquakes since. Among the remains of its ancient grandeur are the Royal Palace, built by Tahmasp and enlarged by Abbas the Great, which is now in ruins, but whose high gate, called Ali Kapi, like that at Isfahan, remains. The Musjid-i-Jama, originally built by Harun-er-Rashid in the eighth century, also survives; a huge structure with two broken blue-tiled minarets and vast deserted courts. But the principal mosque is the Musjid-i-Shah, rebuilt by Agha Mohammed and Fath Ali Shah upon the remains of the original edifice of Tahmasp and Abbas. Although, however, Kazvin has fallen from its high estate, its position at the point of junction of the two roads from Resht to Teheran, and from Tabriz to Teheran, and of a third to Kum;[1] its vineyards, which produce a grape of good repute in Persia; and its textile manufactures, which are not inconsiderable, render it a place of some importance; and side by side with the evidences of decayed splendour are signs of reviving prosperity and pretentious appearance. The town has very showy modern gates, and it contains by far the finest inn (there is only one other competitor) in Persia. This building, or *mehman-khaneh*, is attached to the post-house, and is situated in a large garden with a wide avenue of trees. It is a handsome two-storeyed structure with large portico, belonging to the Governor of Kazvin, whose residence is hard by, and who 'runs' the concern. Furnished apartments and good food are an almost bewildering luxury to the traveller. There is also at Kazvin a combined station of the Persian and Indo-European Telegraph Departments, the wires of the latter connecting Teheran with Tabriz, and the Persians having the management of a line to Resht.

Carriage road to Teheran

From the hotel at Kazvin, springless *tarantasses* and lumbering four-horsed European vehicles can be procured to transport the traveller the remaining 100 miles to Teheran; and he may well profit by the convenience while he can, for he will traverse one of the only two made roads in the country, and will enjoy a method of locomotion which he cannot repeat for months. The distance is reckoned as 24 full *farsakhs*, or 96 miles, and is divided into six stages of about 16 miles each,

[1] This was the road that was traversed by most voyagers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, before Teheran had been made the capital—e.g. by Struys, Chardin, Le Brun, and others.

the halting-places or stations, which are serviceable brick structures containing decent accommodation for the night, being Kavandeh, Kishlak, Yenghi Imam, Hissarek, and Shahabad. It would be a mistake to suppose that this carriage-road at all resembles anything which might be called by the same name in Europe. It is simply a cleared width of ground, off which the surface stones have been picked, but which has neither been metalled nor levelled. It is freely intersected by irrigation ditches, and in parts might be mistaken for the track of a switchback railway. And yet the cost of this unique work is reported to have been 640*l.* a mile! At Teheran, if no other quarters have been prearranged or offered, the traveller will find two small hotels in a very central position near the big Meidan, kept by a Frenchman named Prévot, who was formerly confectioner to the Shah.

Postal road

The old postal road, which the devotee of the *chapar* may prefer to follow, runs to the south of the carriage road, the *chapar-khanehs* being at Abdulabad, Safar Khojah or Khwajah, Sunkurabad, and Mianjub. At Karij on this route, between the two last stations, and 26 miles from Teheran, is situated a palace or shooting-lodge, called Suleimanieh, belonging to the Shah, and built by his great grandfather, Fath Ali Shah, in 1812.[1] It stands upon the banks of the Karij, a fine stream which emerges from a gorge in the mountains, and whose water Fath Ali had conveyed to him in skins every morning to Teheran; and it contains two large portrait panels by Abdullah Khan, the famous Court painter of the earlier Kajar sovereigns, representing the Courts respectively of Agha Mohammed Shah and of his nephew, Fath Ali Shah.[2]

Caravan routes

Those who are journeying by caravan may possibly be conducted by their muleteers over yet other routes between Kazvin and the capital, the choice depending upon the season of the year and the price of fodder. The option of so many alternative routes will of itself suggest to the newcomer that he is in a country where the ordinary channels of communication do

[1] It was being built when Sir Gore Ouseley and Morier marched this way on the return of the former from his mission to Teheran in May, 1812 (Morier's *Second Journey*, p. 199), and is said both to have been named from and paid for out of the proceeds of a successful raid upon the Kurdish district of Suleimanieh by one of the sons of Fath Ali Shah.

[2] For a description of this road to Teheran *vide* Eastwick, *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. i. pp. 213–217.

not exist, but where he can, as a rule, adopt pretty well what line he pleases in getting from place to place. The absence of any boundary marks between properties, and of hedges or ditches (except irrigation ditches) between arable plots, the wide stony plains over which one may gallop in any direction for miles, and the choice in many cases of a number of passes through the mountain ranges, leave the traveller in Persia a greater freedom of movement than in any other inhabited country in the world. By the carriage road, which is usually followed, the time occupied upon the entire journey from Resht to Teheran will be, according to the rate of progress in the earlier stages on horseback, from three to four days.

Such is the main and the easiest avenue of approach to the Persian capital from the Caspian. Under peculiarly favourable conditions, and with a perfect correspondence of trains and steamers, the journey from London to Teheran can be accomplished in a fortnight. In the majority of cases it occupies a little less than three weeks. I pass now to the overland routes which enter Persia from the north-west, and have for their immediate objective the commercial capital Tabriz, Teheran being reached therefrom, *viâ* Kazvin, by a postal road whose length from Tabriz is about 360 miles.

Length of journey

Of these routes there are two, of which the one is taken by caravans laden with other than Russian merchandise, and, in order to escape the prohibitory tariffs of Batum and the freight charges of the Transcaucasian Railway, starts from the Turkish port of Trebizond, in the south-east corner of the Black Sea, following from there a very steep line of country, 500 miles in length, to Tabriz. This route, as I shall subsequently show in a chapter upon the commerce of Persia, has been somewhat extensively adopted by English trade during the last half-century, and particularly since the final abolition by Russia of the free transit across the Caucasus in 1883, and is unquestionably the shortest way by which merchandise can reach Tabriz. It is not likely, however, to be followed by the traveller, unless he is anxious to visit the Turkish fortress of Erzerum *en route*, or to pursue a local examination of the Kurdish or the Armenian Question.[1]

II. Trebizond-Tabriz route

[1] It is described by Lieut.-Col. Stuart (1835), *Journal of a Residence in N. Persia*, pp. 76–138; Ch. Texier (1839), *Description de l'Arménie, la Perse, &c.*, vols. i., ii.; M. Wagner (1843), *Travels in Persia*, vols. ii., iii., part iii.; Arm. Vambéry

The second is the line taken by the Russian import and export traffic, and also by a large number of travellers, which approaches Tabriz from the direction of Tiflis, crossing the frontier between Russia and Persia at Julfa, on the Aras (Araxes).

III. Tiflis-Tabriz route

In former times Tiflis was the starting-point of this route for all travellers by road;[1] but since the Caucasian isthmus has been crossed by a railroad the station of Akstafa, about 50 miles east of Tiflis, is the usual point of departure where the train is left,[2] and where vehicles or horses are engaged for the journey.[3]

(1862), *Life and Adventures*, caps. iv., v., vii.; and by J. Bassett (1871), *Persia, the Land of the Imams*, cap. ii. The list of caravan stations between Trebizond and Tabriz, and the duration of the journey in hours between each (the Turkish hour or measurement by time being the precise counterpart of the Persian *farsakh* or measurement by distance—i.e. the marching pace of a baggage animal in the hour) is as follows:—Trebizond-Djevizlik (6), Khamsikeui (5), Ardassa (8), Gumushkhaneh (5), Murad Khan (5), Kadrak (5), Baiburt (6), Kop Dagh Khan (6), Ash Kaleh (9), Ilidja (8), Erzerum (3), Hassan Kaleh (6), Amrakum (5), Deli Baba (6), Tayar (5), Mullah Suleiman (7), Kara Kilissa (7), Tashlitchai (5), Diadin (6), Kizildizeh (5), Ovadjik [Persian frontier] (5), Karaaineh (7), Zorova (6), Pereh (6), Khoi (3), Seyid Haji (5), Tessieh (6), Diza Khalil (7), Mayana (6), Tabriz (3). Total, 172 hours, or (at the normal calculation of three miles an hour) 516 miles. Colonel Stuart, in 1835, calculated the distance as 490 miles.

[1] The journey from Tiflis to Tabriz has been described by Sir J. Chardin (1671), *Travels*, pp. 238–252; J. P. Morier (1814), *Second Journey*, pp. 301–320; Lieut.-Col. Stuart (1835), *Journal of a Residence in N. Persia*, pp. 145–169, E. B. Eastwick (1860), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. i. pp. 146–178; A. H. Mounsey (1865), *Journey through the Caucasus*, pp. 50–90; A. H. Schindler (1881), *Zeit. d. Gesell. für Erd. z. Berlin*, vol. xviii.; Mme. Dieulafoy (1881), *La Perse*, pp. 12–43; H. Binder (1884), *Au Kurdistan*, pp. 17–51. The last named gives an accurate account of the journey as at present accomplished, by rail to Akstafa, vehicle to Julfa, and *chapar* to Tabriz.

[2] Duration of journey from Tiflis to Akstafa 3½ hours by quick train, 5 hours by ordinary train; first-class fare, 5 roubles.

[3] A *podorojna*, or postal order, for the purpose must be procured at Tiflis, and entitles the holder to the hire of horses and use of the post-houses along the road. A carriage (either a phaeton or a springless wooden *troika*) can be hired for the entire distance from Akstafa to Julfa (but not beyond) for 30 to 40 roubles. The hire of post-horses is at the rate of 3 kopecks per verst (⅔ mile) per horse, *plus* a regulation gratuity of 20 kopecks to the driver at each stage. The stages between Akstafa and Tabriz, and the distances in versts are as follows: Akstafa-Uzuntali (22¼), Caravanserai (17½), Tarsa Chai (18½), Dilijan (14½), Semenofska (18¾), Helenofska (21½), Achti (16½), Fontanka (12), Eilyar (19¼), Erivan (15), Agha Hamdali (13), Kamarlu (15), Davalu (18¾), Sadarak (18¾), Baschnuraschin (22¼), Tartshah (10), Kivrak (19), Bejukdusi (12¼), Nakhchivan (21), Alinja Chai (25), Julfa (13). Total, 363¾ versts, or 242½ miles. Of the above stations there are telegraph offices and clerks of the Indo-European Telegraph Department at Akstafa, Dilijan (where the road to Kars branches off), Achti, Erivan, Sadarak, and Nakhchivan.

From Akstafa to Julfa is a distance of about 250 miles. The traveller will pass through the interesting town of Erivan, the capital of Russian Armenia, and will be able to make the excursion to the Armenian ecclesiastical centre of Echmiadzin. At Julfa he crosses the river in a ferry-boat to Persian territory, where, after passing through the custom-house, he emerges upon the system of *chapar-khanehs*, postboys, decayed horses, physical discomfort, and execrable track, which I have already described between Resht and Teheran. The distance from Julfa to Tabriz is about 80 miles, or, according to Persian computation, five stages of 4 *farsakhs* each, the post-houses and distances being as follows :—

Name of Station	Distance in *Farsakhs*	Approximate distance in Miles
Julfa	—	—
Airandibil / Galand Kaya	5	20
Marand	5	24
Sufian	5	17
Tabriz	5	23
Total . .	20	84

About Tabriz I shall have a good deal to say in a later chapter upon the north-west provinces of Persia, to which I will refer my readers. The route from Tabriz to Teheran is the second most travelled route in Persia, and has been followed by a long succession of eminent voyagers, who have left a record of their experiences extending over a period of two hundred years.[1] The post stations and distances to Kazvin are as follows, the concluding section of the road from Kazvin to the capital having already been described :—

Tabriz to Teheran

[1] I only mention a few : Sir J. Chardin (1671), *Travels into Persia*, pp. 370–382; M. Tancoigne (1807), *Narrative of Journey into Persia*, Letters xii.–xiv.; J. P. Morier (1809), *First Journey*, cap. xiv.; Sir W. Ouseley (1812), *Travels*, vol. iii. cap. xviii.; Sir R. K. Porter (1818), *Travels*, vol. i. pp. 251–306; J. B. Fraser (1834), *Winter's Journey*, vol. i. Letter viii.; Col. W. K. Stuart (1835), *Journal of a Residence*, caps. v., vi.; Lady Sheil, *Glimpses of Life, &c.*, cap. vii.; A. H. Mounsey (1865), *Journey through the Caucasus, &c.*, cap. viii.; Mme. Dieulafoy (1881), *La Perse*, pp. 66–119.

Name of Station	Distance in *Farsakhs*	Approximate distance in Miles	Name of Station	Distance in *Farsakhs*	Approximate distance in Miles
Tabriz . . .	—	—	Nikbey . . .	3	12
Saidabad . .	6	20	Zinjan . . .	6	18¼
Haji Agha . .	4	13	Sultanieh . .	6	23½
Gejin . . .	5	20	Khiah or Hidej .	5	20½
Turkomanchai .	5	19	Kirveh . . .	4	19½
Mianeh . . .	6	24	Siahdahan . .	5	17¾
Jemalabad . .	3	12	Kazvin . . .	6	18½
Serchem . .	4	12			
Ak Mazar . .	4	13½	Total . .	72	263½

The total distance from Tabriz to Teheran is accordingly about 360 miles, and from Julfa to Teheran, 440 miles.

Upon the above route a few places are worthy of special note. Turkomanchai is the village where on February 21, 1828, the famous treaty between Russia and Persia was signed by Paskievitch on behalf of the Emperor, and by Abbas Mirza on behalf of his father Fath Ali Shah. By this treaty was concluded a war of two years' duration. Persia lost Erivan and Nakhchivan, and was mulcted in a war indemnity of three and a half millions sterling. It set the seal upon the victories of Russia in this quarter since the opening of the century, and established the conqueror in a position of overwheming armed preponderance upon the north-west. Since that date Azerbaijan has always lain under the cold shadow of the Colossus of the North.

Places of note

Mianeh is the traditional head-quarters and favourite hunting ground of the redoubtable *gherib-gez*, or *Argas Persicus*, and appalling stories are here related of its achievements. It is a curious fact, however, that its selection of Mianeh as the chief scene of its devastations appears to have been of comparatively modern occurrence; for in none of the travels of the seventeenth century, from Chardin downward, and even later, have I found any mention of the insect when Mianeh has been alluded to or described. Its bite, which is dangerous, and alleged sometimes to be fatal to strangers, is foolishly said to have no effect upon the natives, although they occasionally guard against its possible consequences by a system of homœopathic inoculation, which consists in administering the insect itself to the new arrival, wrapped up in a piece of bread. The creature, of which slightly different types are found in different parts of Persia (e.g. Mazreh, Shahrud,

The Mianeh bug

&c.), is but little larger than a European bug, but is of a dark grey colour with little red spots on its back.[1] A favourite prescription of the Persian practitioner, should any one have been bitten, is to make the patient drink off a bowl of sour milk, then to place him in a seat suspended by cords to the ceiling, and twisting these, to spin him round as they unwind until he is violently sick; by which heroic remedy the poison is supposed to be effectively expelled. Another remedy is to wrap the bitten part in the still warm skin of a newly killed bullock. It is only fair to add that there is a small class of persons who disbelieve absolutely in the prowess of the Mianeh bug. Dr. Cormick, who, like his father before him, spent many years of his life as a physician in Persia, always declared that the current tales were absurd fictions; and facetious travellers who have reposed at Mianeh with impunity have been known to style the insect a hum-bug. On the other hand, I know of persons who have suffered for months from the effects of the bite; and an infantry regiment, marching from Tabriz to Teheran in April 1891, had 130 men laid up in the hospital from this cause. In 1817 Kotzebue mentions two quite recent cases both of which were attended with fatal results.[2]

Zinjan and Sultanieh

It only remains to notice Zinjan and Sultanieh. The former is a considerable town with over 20,000 inhabitants, and is the capital of the district of Khamseh. It was the original stronghold of the sect of the Babis; and here it was that in 1850, after the execution of the Bab at Tabriz, a great massacre took place of his fanatical adherents. Sultanieh is one of the deposed capitals of the past. Three centuries ago travellers expatiated upon its splendid palaces and mosques, and left illustrations of its external appearance and surroundings. War, earthquakes, the march of time and the caprice of royalty have combined to effect its degradation; and shrinking at the feet of the superb mausoleum of Sultan Khodabundeh, it is now only a shadow of its ancient self.[3]

[1] *Vide* an appendix on the subject in Eastwick, vol. ii.; and Baron Walckenaer's *Histoire Naturelle des Insectes.*

[2] One was an English servant of the British Consulate at Tabriz, the other a Cossack servant of the Russian Envoy, Baron Wrede. *Narrative of a Journey*, p. 211.

[3] In the early part of the present century Fath Ali Shah made Sultanieh his summer quarters, retiring there for the hot months of every year with his army, his court, and his wives, and spending the time in hunting and enjoyment. But after the Russians had, in 1828, approached so near to the 'Asylum of the Universe' as Turkomanchai, his outraged dignity could tolerate Sultanieh no

These, then, are the two principal north-western and northern entries into Persia. There remain two subsidiary avenues of approach also on the north and from the Caspian, with Teheran as their objective; which, however, are little used because of the difficult country that requires to be traversed and the absence of any facilities for transport. The first of these is the route across the Elburz range from the landing-place of Meshed-i-Ser, on the south coast of the Caspian, between Resht and Astrabad, *viâ* Barfurush and Amol, to Teheran. Meshed-i-Ser (i.e. Tomb of the Head, from a tradition that Ibrahim, brother to the Imam Reza, was beheaded here), the only port of Mazanderan, is not a port any more than are other Persian claimants to the title. A river flows into the sea, forming, with the aid of the prevalent westerly gales, the familiar bar off its mouth; and the ships of the Caucasus and Mercury Co., which touch here after leaving Resht, are compelled to lie out in the offing. As regards mileage, this route is by far the shortest from the Caspian to Teheran, the distances being to Barfurush 15 miles, to Amol 38 miles, and *viâ* Demavend to Teheran 160 miles, or five days by caravan.[1] An ill-constructed line of rail, of which I shall have occasion again to speak, has recently been laid down as a private speculation by a wealthy Persian from a neighbouring point on the coast to Amol, but has ended, as might be expected, in collapse. The landing-place, however, of Meshed-i-Ser and the route therefrom are both used to some extent by Russian merchandise for Mazanderan, and even for Teheran itself, and the road from Amol has been reconstructed by an Austrian engineer officer, General Gasteiger Khan, under instructions from the reigning Shah. But, in spite of their decided advantage in distance, they are scarcely qualified to compete with the Resht-Teheran line.

IV. Meshed-i-Ser-Teheran route

The second of these subsidiary routes is from the landing-place of Gez, in the extreme south-eastern recess of the Caspian, whence a junction can be made with the above-named road at

more. For ground-plan, elevation, and restoration of the tomb of Khodabundeh, *vide* plates liv.–lviii. in vol. i. of Ch. Texier's *Description de l'Arménie, &c.*; also P. Coste's *Monuments Modernes de la Perse.*

[1] It is described by J. B. Fraser (1834), *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii., Letters xv., xvi.; Capt. Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 118–129; Mme. C. Serena (1877), *Hommes et choses en Perse*, caps. ii., iii., viii., ix.; E. Stack (1881), *Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. caps. vii. viii.; E. Orsolle (1882), *Le Caucase et la Perse*, cap. xviii.

Barfurush;[1] or whence an independent line can be pursued to Astrabad (23 miles), and thence over terribly steep passes (65 miles), to Shahrud, where the main caravan and postal route is struck between Teheran and Khorasan. I shall require to deal so fully with all these places later on, that I will do no more at present than indicate this as a possible variation in entering the country.

V. Gez-Teheran route

Further to the east, the Transcaspian Railway, recently completed by Russia in her newly conquered regions north of the Persian border, and the road which she has constructed in correspondence therewith from Ashkabad, her administrative and military capital, to the boundary of Khorasan, and which is being continued on the other or Persian side to Kuchan and Meshed, has within the last two years supplied a new means of access to North-eastern Persia, which did not previously exist, or could not be pursued with safety. The fact that no description of this new road into Khorasan had yet been published, coupled with my own desire to see something of the border regions of that important province, and to visit its capital, Meshed, determined me to enter Persia, if possible, from this novel quarter. English officers serving at Meshed had more than once received permission to quit or to return to their posts by this route; and, having already travelled on the Transcaspian Railway in the preceding year, I indulged in hopes that the Russian Government would not be averse to renew the permission, which indeed there could be no valid ground for refusing. The courtesy of the Russian Ambassador in London, assisted by the kindly offices of the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg, happily effected this object, and the ensuing pages will contain a description of my journey, which I need not now anticipate.

VI. Ashkabad-Meshed route

Upon the eastern borders of Persia no English traveller is now very likely to think of entering the country. The intervention of Afghanistan between India and Persia in this quarter, and the merciless policy of exclusion pursued by the Amir, Abdur Rahman Khan, render it absolutely impossible for any Englishman to dream of approaching Persia from this side. In bygone centuries we read of many European voyagers

VII. Afghan approaches

[1] This route has been described by (Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. pp. 105–114; E. B. Eastwick (1862), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 60–101; Col. Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 70–77.

who passed from the Indian territories of the Great Mogul *viâ* Kandahar into Eastern Persia; and conversely, even in the first half of the present century, and down to as late a date as 1873, when Captain H. C. Marsh was the last to perform the through journey, there were several Englishmen, such as Captain Arthur Conolly (1830), Mr. Mitford (1840), and Sir Lewis Pelly (1860), who left Persia on the Afghan side and rode from Meshed, *viâ* Herat and Kandahar, into British Hindustan. But what these could do with impunity, although not unattended with danger, is forbidden to a later age, and the eastern flank of Persia and the countries beyond are accordingly a *terra incognita*, except to the privileged members of Boundary Commissions, or to those who have laboriously made their way hither from other and less known directions.

VIII. Persian Gulf. Bunder Abbas route

We thus come, in our circuit of the Persian border, to the southern coast-line, and to the ports of the Persian Gulf. I shall have occasion later on to describe the various trade routes which lead therefrom into the interior of the country, and I will refer any traveller who contemplates landing at Bunder Abbas to that chapter. The main trade routes starting from Bunder Abbas are those which proceed to Kerman and Yezd; but for such as contemplate a westerly march from Bunder Abbas to Shiraz I may say that, although that method of entering or leaving the country seems now to have been entirely abandoned, it was once—during the time when the Sefavi dynasty held their capital at Isfahan, and when first Ormuz and afterwards Gombrun were among the greatest marts in the East—the most travelled route in Persia, and has been minutely described by a succession of famous voyagers, culminating in Tavernier and Chardin.

IX. Bushire-Teheran route

It here concerns me rather to notice the main southern channel of entry, which I have in an earlier portion of this chapter indicated as second only in popular use to the Resht line—viz. that which starts from the Gulf at the landing-place (again I am loth to use the word port) of Bushire. This is the route that is taken by all visitors coming from India, by all English and Indian merchandise going as far north as Isfahan, and by some of that which feeds Teheran itself; and it has been more travelled in this century and is better known than any route in Persia. As I traversed it in the opposite direction, and shall

subsequently narrate my own experiences, I will only add here that it leads through the cities of Shiraz, Isfahan, Kashan, and Kum, to Teheran, a total distance of just 770 miles. The first 170 miles, between Bushire and Shiraz, must be covered by caravan, there being no postal road over the precipitous ladders of the southern mountains; but from Shiraz northwards the rider can clatter along as fast as spur, bridle, and horse-hoof can forward him.

X. Mohammerah-Teheran route

The risks and *désagréments* of this route, which are not inconsiderable, are likely before long to be obviated by the creation of a new avenue of entry into Persia from a point somewhat further to the west upon the southern coast line. Just as the aggrandisement of Russia upon the north-eastern borders of Persia has resulted in the construction of the Ashkabad-Kuchan road, already alluded to, so the predominance of British influence in the south is likely to lead to the construction of a new road from the Karun River, *viâ* Ahwaz, Shushter, Dizful, Khorremabad, and Burujird, to Teheran. A concession has been procured by the Imperial Bank of Persia, for the authorised execution of this enterprise, which was commenced in the autumn of 1890; and, should it be successfully completed, we may find that the stream of future travel is largely diverted from the Bushire line to one that will possess the advantage of being shorter by 250 miles from the point of debarkation to the capital. More about this, too, will be said elsewhere. For the present the line thus sketched cannot be considered as practicable for travellers, nor be recommended to the stranger.

XI. Baghdad-Teheran route

The circuit which has already brought my readers to the furthest extremity of the Persian Gulf, and to the outlet of the Tigris and Euphrates does not require to be greatly extended in order to land them at Baghdad, which, it may surprise many at home to hear, is one of the most interesting points of departure for the Persian frontier and interior. Not only is there a considerable movement of trade into and from Persia in this direction, but some of the most notable Persian cities and monuments of antiquity can be visited from this quarter, and, it may almost be said, from this alone. Let me first state, therefore, the various means of reaching Baghdad, and then briefly sketch the route from thence across the Persian border.

Some years ago, when I was first contemplating a visit to

Baghdad, I experienced the greatest difficulty in obtaining any authentic information in England upon the rival methods of reaching that city. Owing to the peculiarity of its situation, no place that I know is accessible to a European from such a variety of quarters, or is at the same time so difficult and so easy of access, the facility being only purchased at the cost of a disproportionate expenditure of time.

Means of reaching Baghdad

Baghdad may be reached from the Black Sea by one of two routes: either from Trebizond, *viâ* Diarbekir, Mosul, and the Tigris,[1] or from Samsun, *viâ* Diarbekir and the Tigris. The latter is the route that is taken by the Turkish post to and from Constantinople; and letters conveyed by this route, at a speed which no ordinary traveller could emulate, have been delivered in Baghdad twenty-four days after leaving London.[2] Samsun is one of the ports on the Black Sea at which most of the steamers to and from Constantinople touch. In both the above cases the outward journey to Baghdad may at certain seasons of the year be expedited by raft upon the Tigris from Mosul, or even from Diarbekir to Baghdad. But both are journeys which only the hardy traveller should undertake.

1. Trebizond and Samsun routes

Baghdad may be reached from the Mediterranean either from Alexandretta *viâ* Aleppo, or from Beirut *viâ* Damascus; and in each of these cases, after leaving Aleppo, and after leaving Damascus, a further choice is open to the traveller. The ordinary route from Alexandretta runs first to Aleppo, a distance of 4 stages;

[1] For the route from Trebizond to Erzerum, *vide*, in addition to the authorities before quoted, 'Notes on a Journey,' by H. Suter, in 1838, *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. x. p. 434; Mrs. Bishop (1890), *Journeys in Persia*, vol. ii., Letters xxxiv.–xxxv.; for the route from Erzerum to Diarbekir, *vide* Ditto by J. G. Taylor, *Proceedings of the R.G.S.*, vol. xii. p. 302.

[2] The stages between Samsun and Baghdad are as follows, the figures in brackets being the number of hours between:—Kawak (8), Eladik (6), Chifta Khan (6), Amasia (7), Igna Bazar (6), Turkhal (7), Tokat (9), Yalduzdagh (9), Bahra (7), Sivas (7), Aolash (7), Deli Kali Dash (5), Kankar, or Kangal (4), Alayar Khan (7), Hasan Chelevi (6), Hakim Khan (4), Sermeli (9), Gumush Madan (9), Arpaghut (6), Kharput (6), Mullah Kai (6), Bakir Madan (9), Arghan (5), Baklash (6), Diarbekir (6), Komur Khaneh (6), Shikhan (6), Gallieh, or Mardin (6), Darah (6), Nisaibin (6), Aznaghur (6), Dairund (6), Jazireh (8), Takian (6), Zakho (6), Sumail (7), Tel Eskif (7), Mosul (7), Zab (10), Arbil (7), Kush Tepe (6), Altun Kupri (6), Kerkuk (9), Taugh (9), Duz Khurmati (7), Salahieh (9), Kara Tepe (7), Deli Abbas (9), Neherwan (9), Jedideh (5), Baghdad (5). The greater part of this route, between Sivas and Baghdad, is described by Sir F. Goldsmid (1864), *Telegraph and Travel*, pp. 412–451; and the whole of it by Viscount Pollington (1866), *Half-way round the World*, cap. xii.

thence to Deir on the Euphrates, 10 stages; thence to Hit on the Euphrates, 10 stages; and thence to Baghdad, 4 stages; total, 28 stages.[1] From Alexandretta to Aleppo the distance can be covered either by horse or carriage in two days. From the latter place horses must be hired to Baghdad; and according to the *impedimenta* carried by the traveller he will be able to complete this section of his journey in from fourteen to sixteen days. A longer route from Aleppo may also be pursued, *viâ* Diarbekir (11 stages) and Mosul (13 stages), whence it is 12 stages by land to Baghdad.[2]

2. Alexandretta-Aleppo route

From Damascus, which is connected by an excellent carriage road and daily diligence service (9 hours) with Beirut, the alternative routes are as follows: (1) *viâ* Tadmor or Palmyra and Deir, a total distance by ordinary camel of 20 days, by fast dromedary of 13 days, no other means of locomotion being possible, and the security being none of the best;[3] (2) *viâ* the old Desert or Dromedary Postal Route straight across the desert, a distance for the ordinary traveller of about 150 hours

3. Damascus route

[1] They are as follows:—Alexandretta-Khan Diarbekirlich (4 hours), Ain-el-Bedeh (7), Fermanin (7), Aleppo (8), Deir Hafir (8), Meskineh (7), Abu Hureira (8), Humam (9), Shariat Mohammed Agha (5), Sabkha (5), Hamad el Kelaib (7), Tebni (8), Deir (10), Miadin (10), Salahieh (11), Abu Kamah (6), Gaim (6), Nahieh (8), Ana (7), Fehaimieh (7), Haditha (6), Jubba (8), Hit (8), Remadi (10), Fellahieh (8), Abu Ghraib (6), Baghdad (7). This route (with small variations) is described by Lady Anne Blunt in *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates*. Wonder may be felt that, so much of the above journey being upon the banks of or near to the Euphrates, the waterway is not used to facilitate communication. For a short time the attempt was made. During the vigorous government of Midhat Pasha at Baghdad a small paddle-steamer plied on the Euphrates between Hillah (Babylon) and Meskineh. But the intention was rather to keep an eye upon the Bedouins than to encourage traffic; and with the departure of its founder the scheme fell through.

[2] This route is described by Tristram Ellis, *On a Raft and Through the Desert*, vol. i. The stages between Aleppo and Diarbekir are as follows:—Akharin (7), Begler Begi (6), Muslim (7), Mazar (7), Berajik (4), Hawah, or Dewak (9), Mishmishieh (7), Severak (6), Kainak (6), Kara Bakcha (6), Khan (6), Diarbekir (6). The route from Mosul to Baghdad is described by Thielmann (1872), *Journey in the Caucasus, &c.*, vol. ii. cap. vi.; Binder (1884), *Au Kurdistan*, cap. ix.

[3] This route is described by Tristram Ellis, vol. ii. The stages between Damascus and Deir are as follows:—Jerud, Kasseir, Karyatain, Ain-el-Baida (Bedeh), Tadmor, Rakha, Sukhneh, El Bowaib, Bir Kabakib, Deir. Those between Deir and Baghdad have already been given. M. von Thielmann in 1872 rode from Kerbela *viâ* Palmyra to Damascus. *Journey in the Caucasus*, &c. vol. ii. cap. vii.

(nominally = 450 miles) or 15 days, but which the postman covered in 10 days. For over forty years, from 1838 to 1881, the British Consulate at Baghdad, assisted at first by a subsidy from the Indian Government, kept up this mounted post, which was originally established in connection with the Euphrates Expedition and Flotilla,[1] but was ultimately killed by the competition of the Turkish Government, who started a rival post at international rates. The hardships and lack of real interest, as well as the occasional danger, by this route are so great that few, if any, adopt it, except such as are resolutely bent upon sacrificing comfort and risking safety.

Finally, there is the circuitous and comfortable method of reaching Baghdad, which consumes much time, but no tissue, proceeding entirely by water. The steamers of the British India Navigation Company run from Bombay (in correspondence with the P. & O. boats from Europe), *viâ* Kurrachi and the Persian Gulf to Busrah, where transhipment is easily effected into the excellent river-boats of the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company, which in from three to four days, according to the state of the river, accomplish the ascent of the Tigris to Baghdad. The only drawback to this route is the length of time, over five weeks, that is consumed between London and our destination.

4. Persian Gulf route

Having thus conducted the traveller, by any one of the above approaches to Baghdad, let me now show him how he will enter Persia from this quarter, and what he will see by so doing. From Baghdad to the Persian frontier, five miles beyond the Turkish station of Khanikin, the distance is ninety miles, the road running for the most part over a level desert, and the halting-places being as follows: Beni Saad or Orta Khan (15 miles), Yakubieh (14), Shahrabad (26), Kizil Robat (18), Khanikin (17). There is no postal service; and the traveller, who must engage his baggage animals at Baghdad, halts in *khans* (the Turkish equivalent to caravanserais) and rest-houses. After passing through the custom-house on the Persian border he finds the following route extended before him:—

Baghdad to Teheran

[1] The cost of this post from February 1838 to April 1843 was 89,550 rupees. For the next twenty years the cost was about 8*l.* a trip, after which time so many letters were sent that it paid its own way. The halting-places or wells between Damascus and Baghdad by this route are Idhmair, Aitha, Rumana, Iltinf, Zagf, Igara, Idama, Imhewar, Rajmi Sabun, Aamij, Giseir Khubaz, Kubaisa, and Hit.

Name of Station	Distance in *Farsakhs*	Approximate distance in miles	Name of Station	Distance in *Farsakhs*	Approximate distance in miles
Khanikin † (1,000 ft.)			Hamadan † .	6	25
Kasr-i-Shirin (1,700 ft.)	6	18	Mila Gird .	7	25
Sarpul . . .	5	18	Zerreh . .	4	16
Kerind † (5,250 ft.) .	8	29	Nuvaran †. .	9	32
Harunabad . . .	6	20	Shamiran .	4	14
Mahidasht . . .	6	22	Khushkek .	5	19
Kermanshah † (5,000 ft.)	4	14	Khanabad † .	6	22
Bisitun . . .	6	21	Robat Kerim	8	32
Sahneh . . .	4	16	Teheran (3,800 ft.)	7	28
Kangavar † . .	5	18			
Saidabad . . .	6	23	Total . .	112	412

† = Telegraph Stations.

The total distance between Baghdad and Teheran is thus 90 + 408 miles, or close upon 500 miles.[1] Between Kermanshah and Teheran there is a *chapar* service and *chapar-khanehs*; but between Khanikin and Kermanshah there is only one post station, Sarpul, where the mail changes horses. It is accordingly usual to caravan from Baghdad to Kermanshah.

Mountains, cities and monuments

This journey is one of threefold and exceptional interest. It crosses the mighty Zagros range between Khanikin and Kermanshah, the steepest part of the pass, known as the Teng-i-Girra, between Sarpul and Kerind, being fully comparable with the *kotals* of the Bushire-Shiraz line, and, in winter, being frequently impassable from snow. By this ascent the traveller is brought up from the level plains of Assyria and

[1] This route is in whole or in part described by J. S. Buckingham (1816), *Travels in Assyria*, vol. i. caps. i.–ix.; Hon. G. Keppel (1824), *Personal Narrative, &c.*, caps. xiii.–xix.; J. B. Fraser (1835), *Travels in Koordistan*, vol. ii. Letters viii.–xii.; Sir H. Layard (1840), *Early Adventures*, vol. i. pp. 201–252; E. L. Mitford (1840), *Land March*, vol. i. cap. x., vol. ii. cap. i.; Com. Felix Jones (1844), *Narrative of a Journey to the Frontier of Turkey and Persia*, Bombay Records; J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Caravan Journeys*, pp. 1–50; H. W. Bellew (1872), *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 413–469; H. Binder (1884), *Au Kurdistan*, caps. xi. xii. An alternative route from Baghdad to Teheran *viâ* Kum is usually followed by caravans in winter. Diverging at Kangavar, it pursues the following line: Parispah (19 miles), Nanej (30), Dizabad (25), Saruk (19), Siahwashan (27), Jairud (21), Salian (16), Kum (21). *Vide* Mrs. Bishop's *Journeys in Persia* (1890), vol. i. Letters iii.–viii. It is worthy of mention that at Kangavar are ther uins of a temple of Anaitis, the Persian Astarte, the worship of whom was wide-spread in Media, Susiana, and Cappadocia. *Vide* C. Texier, *L'Arménie, &c.*, plates 62–8, and Flandin and Coste, *Perse Ancienne*, vol. i. plates 20–3. The temple is attributed to the Parthian period. *Vide* M. Dieulafoy, *L'Art Antique de la Perse*, part v. pp. 7–11.

Chaldæa to the great Iranian plateau, which he does not again quit until he leaves Persia. Secondly, he passes through the important and flourishing Persian cities of Kermanshah and Hamadan, for accounts of which I must refer my readers to Chapter XVI., and which are situated in exceedingly productive tracts of country. Lastly, at Bisitun and at Tak-i-Bostan (four miles from Kermanshah) he encounters some of the most celebrated remains of Persian antiquity; and in the rock carvings, sculptures, and inscriptions which look down upon him from the chiselled surface of the mountain-side, he both reads a tale of bygone splendour and observes the most important historical document, albeit in stone, next to the Damietta Stone, that has been discovered and deciphered in this century. Here again let me invite any inquisitive reader to read on.

Summary

I have now, at some expense of space, and at a greater expense of previous trouble than many would imagine, completed the tour of the Persian frontier, and have supplied to the intending voyager information which he will not find collected in any other volume, but which I have judged to be indispensable to a work that claims to be one of general reference upon the country with which it deals. I have shown how Persia can be approached from the north, south, east, and west, and have indicated the routes and the means of doing so. It remains only for me, before concluding this chapter, to furnish that information regarding outfit and equipment which is as necessary to a traveller in the East as is a ticket upon a European railway.

Caravan equipment

For the requisite equipment for caravan travelling in Persia I cannot do better than refer my readers to Appendix I. of the second volume of Sir C. MacGregor's 'Journey through Khorasan,' to cap. xiii. of the second volume of Mr. E. Stack's 'Six Months in Persia,' and to Appendix C of Dr. Wills's entertaining work, 'In the Land of the Lion and the Sun.' Few persons will commence caravanning in Persia who have not tried it elsewhere, and already formed their own conclusions as to the desiderata of camp life. The size of tents, the structure of beds, the irreducible minimum of furniture, the provision of ammunition, the extent of the camp, the canteen, are matters dependent partly upon the taste or purpose of the traveller, partly upon the fashion of the day; and any too definite instructions might easily be found superfluous or might soon become obsolete. The case, however, is different with the *chapar* rider, who probably leaves England without the slightest idea of what lies before him, and who may be saved great expense and annoyance by knowing

clearly beforehand what to take and what to leave behind, what to expect and what to avoid.

It is useless to take out the usual European paraphernalia of portmanteaux, hatboxes, and trunks. They will merely have to be discarded on the way, or left behind to follow at snail's pace after the owner—and be knocked to pieces in the process—by mule or camel caravan. The first rule to be observed is that every piece of baggage must be of such a size as can easily be suspended or strapped to one side of a galloping horse; the second, that, as far as possible, the several pieces must correspond in size and weight. The slightest inequality makes it very hard upon the horse, and necessitates constant stoppages to readjust the load. I took out to Persia two medium-sized Gladstone bags (measuring 22 inches in length by 14 inches in depth), and the agreement of other travellers with my own experience leads me to recommend them as by far the best. When you arrive in Persia you can buy in the bazaar of any Persian town, or get manufactured in a day, a pair of large native saddle-bags or *khurjins*. They are made of carpet and leather. Put your Gladstone bags, one into each side, and throw the whole over the back of your postboy's horse. The two sides will balance, and no trouble will ensue. As the postboy does not use a saddle, but merely sits straddlewise upon the top of whatever baggage may be strapped upon his animal, he can be further made to carry bundles of rugs, coats, and bedding to almost any extent. Your Persian servant, who must be engaged beforehand, and without whom it would be foolish to travel, can carry upon his horse a second pair of saddle-bags, in which can be stored any smaller bags or articles, the cooking apparatus, and his own kit. Finally, in the holsters and saddle-bags of your own mount you will carry the immediate necessaries of the journey—flask, money, pistol, requisites of the toilette, books, &c. In addition to my Gladstone bags, I took two stout brown canvas bags, which I found most useful. They would hold a great deal when filled; and yet, if not wanted, could be rolled up into a very narrow compass. It will be obvious that the lighter a horse's load the more quickly will the stage be accomplished.

Chapar-riding. Baggage

As regards saddlery, the Persian saddle, which is small and high-peaked, is so unlike anything that an Englishman has ever been accustomed to ride upon that he will only suffer from making the experiment. He must take out a roomy English military saddle, with holsters and saddle-bags, and plenty of rings or staples fitted for straps, of which he will find that a good surplus supply will be invaluable. In one of my holsters I carried a flask that held over a quart bottle of spirits, and whose contents were ample for the requirements of a journey of many hundred miles. The traveller is sometimes so exhausted that he would be tempting Providence if he had not some

Saddlery

restorative at hand; and I commiserate the teetotaller who starts on a hard *chapar* ride through Persia. I took out an English snaffle and two-reined bridle, and used them nearly throughout. I do not, however, recommend the former, except on the score of mercy. It is utterly unlike the Persian bit, and a Persian horse does not understand it. If he is a crock it does not much matter, but if he is a mettled animal he runs away. It is better, on the whole, to employ the native bit, cruel though it be.[1] With the saddle must be taken a felt saddle-pad, as most of the *chapar* horses have sore backs; and humanity, if no other consideration, dictates the precaution. I had my stirrup-irons bound round with flannel, a useful preventive of the acute cold at night and in the early morning.

Kit

For riding I recommend a stout pair of breeches, not too tight at the knee, where the strain soon tells. I took a hint from Dr. Wills, and bought at Tiflis an invaluable pair of big Russian top boots, at least two sizes too large for me over the foot. They are easily pulled on and off, are very flexible, and, by reason of the loose fit, keep the feet warm. Anglo-Indian officers usually ride in *puttis*[2] and shoes; and some travellers prefer riding-trousers to breeches. A good pair of nailed shooting boots are a *sine quâ non* for the climbs over the rocky *kotals* and passes, which would very soon knock a hole in the soles of any lighter construction. Goloshes should also be taken for visits to the grandees, who are very particular about their carpets, and do not like muddy or dusty footprints upon them. Woollen socks and stockings are indispensable, as also is a pair of spurs. Flannel shirts will always be worn when riding, although linen shirts are essential for the critical *coteries* of Teheran. I found a Norfolk jacket with single collar buttoning round the neck, and plenty of pockets, the best dress for riding; and I shall ever be grateful for the advice that prompted me to take a worsted (Cardigan) waistcoat, which could be pulled on and off as the temperature demanded, and was a supreme consolation on a cold night. A black frock-coat must be taken, if visits are contemplated to royal personages, governors, or ministers. The Persians look upon a cut-away coat as grossly undignified; and

[1] Sir Thomas Herbert wrote, 270 years ago: 'They curb their horses' mettle with sharp bits, a ring of iron helping them;' and there is not a doubt that the same bit is in use now. It is shaped like the letter H, with a sharp projection upwards from the middle of the cross-bar. To this is attached a ring, which passes round the lower jaw and operates as the most effective curb that I have ever seen. If a horse has at all a tender mouth, the slightest touch will make him wince; while to rein him in tight, as the Persians are in the habit of doing in order to show off their horsemanship, must often cause the poor brute intense suffering.

[2] *Putti* is probably in its origin a Persian word, being contracted from *pai-tua*, the bandages that are worn round the leg by the inhabitants of Mazanderan.

would appear to estimate rank by the extent to which the hinder part of the body is enveloped, if one may judge from the voluminous skirts that are worn by H.M. the Shah. On the other hand, they care nothing for head gear; and the Sovereign is the only man in the country for an interview with whom a tall hat is *de rigueur*. Stout riding-gloves are required; and I agree with MacGregor in recommending a double Terai hat. It cannot get smashed, like a helmet; it furnishes ample protection against any but a summer sun, and when you enter a city you strip off the outer shell, and appear as smart as if you have just stepped out of Bond Street. But of all the necessaries of outfit, commend me, after a long experience, to a suit of dress clothes. Were I setting out to-morrow either for Lhasa or for Timbuctoo, they should accompany me; for I am convinced that I should find them equally useful were I to meet in audience either the King of the Negroes or the Dalai Llama of Tibet. I remember having heard that Gordon started in a dress suit from Cairo for Khartum. For outer coverings, I recommend a covert-coat for everyday wear, a macintosh (if in the rainy season), and an ulster of the amplest and warmest type, the colo at nights being sometimes excruciatingly severe.

Bedding

The Persian *chapar-khanehs* contain nothing in the least degree resembling a bed. If unprovided, the traveller will have to sleep on the mud floor. By far the best substitute to carry is a big canvas bag, some seven feet long by four feet broad, with an opening which can be buttoned up. At every village in Persia, chopped barley or *kah* is procurable. Stuffed with this, and stretched out on the floor, the canvas sack makes the most comfortable couch in the world. A quilt or *resai* can be purchased in any Persian bazaar; and some good rugs or blankets and a pillow must be brought from home. A waterproof sheet, to wrap round the bedding for transport in the daytime and to spread under it at night, is also useful. I took linen sheets with me; but I never once used them in a *chapar-khaneh*. The weather was always much too cold, and I was far too tired to admit of complete undressing at night. For purposes of ablution, a folding indiarubber bath and basin are an invaluable luxury; nor must towels be forgotten. The Persians do not wash in our sense of the term; and accordingly their provisions for such requirements are of the slenderest. As the room in the *chapar-khanehs* occupied by the traveller usually has doors on two, and sometimes on three sides, opening on to the outer air, and as these are always rickety and frequently non-existent, it is advisable to carry with one a couple of light curtains and nails, in order as far as possible to vanquish the inordinate draught.

The traveller who is riding hard will probably find that he eats very little, and that his needs in this respect are easily satisfied. In the villages on the road, or at the post-houses, he can always purchase

bread and eggs, and sometimes a venerable fowl. Milk is not everywhere procurable, as cows are not kept to any great extent; and I more often failed than succeeded in getting it. Goat's milk is on the whole more common than cow's milk. A frying-pan, a tea-kettle, and a teapot must be carried, and can be bought in any Persian bazaar. Japanned plates and drinking cups, egg cups, knives and forks, and a small Etna spirit lamp, should be brought from Europe (Baku). Tinned meats, soups, and biscuits can now be procured at European or Armenian shops in Teheran, Isfahan, and Shiraz; but it is a wise precaution to take them. Crosse and Blackwell's tinned soups are quite excellent, and, besides being easily prepared, are almost a meal in themselves. Soup in tablets or powders are good in their way and economise space, but require more trouble and time in cooking. Sardines, potted meats, chocolate or cocoa, Liebig's beef tea, and good tea or coffee, are useful adjuncts, which should be procured in Europe. Lump sugar can be bought in the humblest Persian village. I nearly always cooked my own dinner. Firewood is easily and cheaply purchased; a couple of bricks make a respectable fireplace; and, though there is frequently no exit for smoke but the door, the situation has compensations which you must have ridden eighty miles in the day to discover.

Food and cooking

A small medicine chest or case should be carried; and the maladies against which the stranger must chiefly provide are fever, diarrhœa, and dysentery. Chlorodyne and quinine form the nucleus of any such medical outfit.

Medicine

If the traveller be a sportsman he will of course accommodate his armament to whatever game he proposes to pursue. If he is merely voyaging along the recognised highways in order to see the country, I do not recommend him to carry gun and cartridges; as game cannot easily be got at without time and trouble, and as these implements will add greatly to the weight of his baggage. In the out-of-the-way parts there is a great deal of game, and a sportsman well provided with introductions and equipped for the purpose might make a successful expedition. Round Teheran all the best shooting is in the hands of the Shah; but I have no doubt that should any sportsman encounter one of the royal keepers while in pursuit of game, the present of a shilling to the latter would turn him into a willing and competent beater. There are tigers in the north, lions in the south and south-west; wild fowl and partridges everywhere; and on every mountain range are to be found wild deer, sheep, or goat, of some description, from the mouflon and the ibex to the gazelle. Wild bears are seen in the Elburz range, and wild boars along the southern rivers. The wayfarer who has no lethal intent usually and wisely carries a revolver. The mere knowledge that he is armed acts as a deterrent upon robbery

Arms and ammunition

or brigandage. I used mine for no more sanguinary purpose than to fire at running partridges, and to put out of its misery a broken-legged and abandoned donkey.

Minor suggestions

Among minor articles which will be found serviceable, but upon whose particular use I need not dilate, are wax matches, folding candlesticks (candles are always procurable in the native bazaars), insect powder, vaseline (the skin is apt to get terribly chapped by the sharp contrasts of climate), blue spectacles to resist the glare, air cushions, a telescope, and last, but of supreme importance, the best map that money can procure. I hope I shall not be thought impertinent if I suggest that the gratification of the last-named want will involve the purchase of this book.

Seasons for travelling

As regards the best season of the year for visiting Persia, there are two alternatives, the late autumn and the spring. The former is the period from October to January, the latter from March to May. Snow as a rule falls towards the end of December at Teheran (in Azerbaijan much earlier), and blocks the loftier passes, besides rendering travelling excessively cold. It begins to melt in March. The advantages of the spring season are the richness of the verdure, which the stranger sees at no other time, the songs of the birds and the blooming of the flowers, which alone render the national poetry intelligible, and, above all, the length of the days, which facilitates long marches. But these are purchased at the cost of considerable heat in the middle of the day, and of persecution by vermin at night. In the autumn and winter, on the other hand, the climate is invigorating and superb. I rode 1,000 miles without a drop of rain; and in a country famous for filth I did not fall a victim to a single flea. On the other hand, there was no verdure or beauty in the landscape; and as the winter drew on the days closed in, and it was piercingly cold at night. During the summer months outdoor movement is impossible during the daytime. Travellers sleep or repose; and all marching is done by light of the moon and stars.[1]

[1] It has been reserved for an American traveller, after committing the initial indiscretion of journeying through Persia in the hot season, and consequently making his marches by night, to perpetrate the second of writing a book about what he had not seen (*Midnight Marches through Persia*, by H. Ballantine).

CHAPTER III

FROM LONDON TO ASHKABAD

> I to the Orient from the drooping West,
> Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold
> The acts commencèd on this ball of earth.
>
> SHAKSPEARE, *Induction to Henry IV., Part II.*

Journey from Paris to Constantinople

It was in the latter part of September 1889 that I left Paris by the new Orient express which, after leaving Pesth, runs *viâ* Belgrade, Sofia, and Adrianople to Constantinople. Through Servia, Bulgaria, and Turkey the pace was little better than a crawl, but nevertheless the terminus was reached in time. There can be no doubt that the journey, which now takes sixty-nine and a half hours, and which I have again made since under similarly irritating conditions, could without difficulty be accelerated by at least six or eight hours, a suggestion which it seems useless to commend to the directors of the lines concerned. The discomforts of arrival at Constantinople and departure therefrom are well known, and have tested the patience of many travellers. But the horrors of the boat-landing, which could be assuaged by bribes, are as nothing compared with those of the Customs examination, which is now pursued with a merciless incivility that only Turkish officials can display, at the newly opened railway station at Stambul. I was the bearer of a courier's passport and was met by an Embassy *kavass* at the station. But notwithstanding these evidences of respectability I was detained there for an hour and a quarter, my boxes were ruthlessly overhauled, my stores, accumulated and carefully packed for Persian travel, were broken into, and a box containing a few watches which I was taking out as small gifts in return for civilities in Persia, having been pounced upon, was hailed as triumphant evidence of a sinister disguise, and was immediately mulcted by a duty. If this system, or rather the manner in which it is enforced, be maintained, travellers are more likely to be repelled from Constantinople than attracted to it by the overland route.

At Pera a happy accident revealed to me the fact that my friend Professor Vambéry was lodging in the same hotel, having come to the city at the invitation of the Sultan as the head of a Hungarian Commission to inquire into the historical and literary treasures stored in the palaces of Stambul. I enjoyed with him a long and interesting conversation on the journey that I was about to make, and parts of which he had undertaken himself nearly thirty years before under conditions far less agreeable than those which await the modern traveller. Persia itself has not appreciably moved in the interval, but its neighbours have; and the presence of the Cossack sentry where the Turkoman raided and the Tartar reigned has multiplied tenfold the absorbing interest of the situation.

Professor Vambéry

It being necessary for me to reach Batum by a certain day in order to make the desired connection with my steamer at Baku, and no passenger boat being about to leave the Golden Horn for that destination, I procured a passage upon a boat flying the English flag and belonging to Messrs. Armstrong, Mitchell, and Co., of Newcastle, one of that new class of steamers of which several now plough the waves of the Black Sea, familiarly known as tank-steamers, and specially constructed for the transport of petroleum oil from Batum. There is a fleet of about thirty of these vessels, of which most have been built in England and over twenty are in English hands, and which ply between Batum and London, Liverpool, Venice, Trieste, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Antwerp, and other ports of the Continent. To India, China, and Japan, with which a large export trade has suddenly sprung up, the oil is carried, not in tank-steamers, but in cases ready for distribution throughout the country. The tank-steamer consists of a series of detached iron tanks, into which the oil is pumped straight from the reservoirs at Batum, whither it has been conveyed in tank-cars by the railway from Baku. Certain of these are old cargo boats converted; but every day improvements are being effected in the designs of new vessels, some of which, to hold 4,000 tons, have lately been built, and of which larger types may be expected in the future. The 'Lux,' in which I was a passenger, was now empty, but was making her way to Batum to take on board a new cargo, of which she could accommodate over 2,000 tons. These boats, though not constructed for passenger traffic, present this advantage to the traveller in a hurry, that they do not touch,

Tank-steamers on the Black Sea

as do nearly all the passenger steamers, at the Turkish ports of Ineboli, Sinope, Samsun, and Trebizond, but ply direct to Batum, which at the easy rate of nine knots can be reached in less than three days from Constantinople.

Town and population of Batum

I was at Batum for five days about a year before, detained by one of those tremendous storms for which the Euxine has always been famous (we all remember, though we may be excused from quoting, Byron's celebrated, if unsavoury, rhyme upon that sea),[1] but little expected so soon again to behold its beautiful but unattractive features. In the year's interval I found that immense progress had been made by the Russians in the development and strengthening of the place. It was only eleven years since, by the Treaty of Berlin, they had first gained a footing in Batum; and only three and a half years since, in violation of that instrument, they had unceremoniously annexed what had, till then, been nominally a free port. Batum is now a large and increasing town, with an estimated population (though accurate statistics, as is to be expected in Russia, are not forthcoming) of 30,000 persons,[2] of whom probably one-third are Russians, and the remainder a motley congeries of Turks, Georgians, Circassians, Mingrelians, Persians, Armenians, Greeks, Levantines, Jews, English, Germans, French, Austrians, and, indeed, every nationality in Europe. The town has that inchoate and adventitious appearance which is ordinarily associated with a new American settlement in the Far West. Palatial buildings alternate with hovels, and broad streets terminate in quagmires and dust-heaps. The sanitary conditions of the place are abominable, and the bulk of the dwelling-houses are flimsily and wretchedly constructed. During the hot season of the year 50 per cent. of the labouring population are said to be disabled by sickness, and few residents

[1] This is how, 200 years ago, Sir John Chardin, the great traveller, accounted for the horrors of the Black Sea navigation: 'Now the reason why the storms are more violent and dangerous in that than in other seas is because the waters are contracted within a narrow channel and have no outlet; the Bosphorus not being to be accompted for an outlet by reason it is so very straight. And therefore, the waters being violently agitated by a storm, and not knowing where to have room, and being strongly repelled by the shoar, they mount and rowl aloft and beat against the ship on every side with an invincible swiftness and force.'—*Travels into Persia*, p. 156.

[2] Contrast this with what Mr. Mounsey saw when touching at Batum in 1865 on his way to Persia: 'At present Batum contains nothing but some squalid-looking huts.'

escape the malarial contagion of the neighbourhood, which, after one or two years' sojourn, commonly asserts itself in physical inertia or decline.

There are several hotels, mostly kept by Frenchmen, of which the best is the Hôtel de France. Here, and at the Hôtel Impérial, the better class of the population and the Russian officers meet to take their meals and to consume the hours not spent on business in such limited conversational relaxation as the stupor of life at Batum admits of. There are no interests or occupations, or even amusements, in the town outside the ordinary official or mercantile routine. The talk soon reverts to 'shop;' and oil, which is the staple commodity of business transactions, fills the same place in conversation also. There is little to tempt the resident into the surrounding country, surpassingly beautiful though it be. Sport is only pursued with much labour, and, if at a distance, expense. There are not sufficient roads to furnish any variety of rides. The heat during the greater part of the year in the middle of the day is excessive, and rain is usually falling. It is the *auri sacra fames* alone that has attracted so large a population to this uncanny spot. Fortunes can be and have been made with startling rapidity; and there are few of the residents who do not look forward to an early flight, with lined pockets, and a resolute intention never to set foot in Batum again.

Daily life

Military necessities dictated to Russia the occupation of the only decent port on the eastern coast of the Black Sea; but petroleum, as I have indicated, has made Batum, and petroleum is its life blood. All along the recesses of the bay, and on the flat and feverish fringe of soil which separates it from the splendid wooded background of hills, are to be seen the clustered reservoirs and premises of the various firms engaged in this lucrative trade.[1] Over 5,000 tank-cars run between Baku and Batum, the largest owners being Messrs. Nobel and Rothschild, the former of whom, with the enterprise for which they have long been notorious, have procured a concession for a pipe line over the difficult Suram mountain on the railway line nearer Tiflis;[2] so that their tank cars, bringing the oil from the refineries

Petroleum industry

[1] There are at Batum eighty-five iron reservoirs, with a tankage capacity of 138,000 tons.

[2] Messrs. Nobel's pipe line is forty miles long, from Michaelovo to Kvirili, has a diameter of four inches, and can convey 700 tons of oil daily.

at Baku, can pass it on here to similar cars waiting to transport it to Batum, thereby escaping the extra mileage, the wear and tear of rolling stock, and the consumption of time on the extraordinarily steep gradients between.

Bradshaw's Continental Railway Guide, in the few lines which it devotes to Batum, says that 'no custom duties are levied here.'

Russian Custom House

I should like the writer of that paragraph to make the sea-journey to Batum, and to repeat this confident assurance to the polite but inexorable Russian official who will board his vessel before he is permitted to land. The only way by which the severity of that individual can be in any degree relaxed is by taking, as far as possible, an old or second-hand instead of a new travelling equipment.

Trade and harbour

The extent of the foreign trade which is now conducted with Batum may be judged by the fact that, in 1889, 417 foreign, i.e. non-Russian, steamers entered the port, of which 214 were British, representing a registered tonnage of 268,781 out of 480,213 tons. The total of petroleum exported in 1889 was 649,085 tons, with a value of 3,023,300*l.*, as compared with 450,326 tons, with a value of 1,724,446*l.*, in the preceding year. In 1889 the export to India, China, and Japan, of which I have spoken, and the figures of which were infinitesimal in 1887, rose to 935,822*l.*, a total which suggests to England the urgent necessity of developing, if possible, her own sources of supply in Beluchistan, India, and Burmah. In Russian hands the port of Batum, hitherto not a particularly good one, except for the great depth of water close up to the shore, is being rapidly improved. A mole had been built on the inner side of the north breakwater during the past year, and is to be fortified by a turret at the end; piles were being sunk all round the shore-line, which will be fitted with a stone quay, and it is ultimately intended to carry forward an additional breakwater from the lighthouse on the south till it overlaps the pier on the north. The entire cost of these harbour improvements is estimated at about half a million sterling, which will be borne by the Imperial Government. Lately (October, 1891) it has been stated in the press that the trading port is to be transferred to Poti, where great docks will be constructed, while Batum will remain a military and naval establishment, and an arsenal. But I doubt this.

Strategical requirements are, indeed, far from being neglected

at Batum. They are being advanced with a strenuousness and a purpose that sufficiently indicate the value set by Russia upon this maritime key to her Caucasian base. Five large forts—some of them not yet completed—command the shore line, and are already mounted with over twenty guns of heavy calibre. The principal battery, in the centre of the town, immediately overlooking the harbour, contains twelve guns of, it is said, from eighteen to twenty-two tons each. All strangers, and even Russian civilians, are strictly excluded from its precincts. Practice was proceeding, on the day that I left, at canvas targets moored out at sea. Higher up on the side or summits of the first range of hills behind the harbour, four other batteries are being, or have been constructed, armed, for the most part, with mortars. The permanent garrison of Batum is three battalions, kept at their mobilized strength of 1,000 men each. At the time of my visit four other infantry battalions were in the immediate neighbourhood, engaged in constructing a military road into the interior up a valley where it will be masked from marine attack by the intervening hills. These details will show that Russia is keenly alive to the importance of her new acquisition; and that, should a naval armament ever steam up from the Bosphorus with hostile intent, she is not likely to be caught napping at Batum. An interesting commentary is thus afforded upon the complacent puerilities about Batum that were the commonplaces of a certain class of English politicians at the time of the Berlin Congress in 1878.

Russian military dispositions

Nothing can exceed the beauty of the line of railroad from Batum to Tiflis. Leaving Batum on the south, it describes a semicircle round the town on the outside, and follows the coast on the north for a distance of thirty miles in the direction of Poti before it plunges inland into the valley of the Rion, that ancient waterway of the Phasis, up which sped the adventurous keel of the 'Argo.' The vegetation is almost tropical in its luxuriance; maize is planted everywhere in the low lands; and the hills are wrapped from foot to crown in a sumptuous forest mantle. At every station, where are sidings, long lines of tank-cars stored with oil crawl by like an army of gigantic armour-plated caterpillars, and disappear down the stretch of rails just vacated. Each portentous insect is laden with a wealth to which that of the Golden Fleece was nothing, and which attracts to the Phasis many a modern 'Argo' that would have struck Jason with

Railway from Batum to Tiflis

even greater consternation than the magic of the Colchian princess. As the line ascends, clinging closely to the bed of the stream almost to its source in the watershed that separates the Caspian and Black Sea drainage, the scenery becomes more imposing. The mountains climb to an airier height, and the train creeps tortuously through solemn gorges and magnificent glens. The station platforms are crowded with wild Georgian urchins—true sons of the mountains—anxious to exchange for a few kopecks long strings of chestnuts or bunches of miniature grapes. Stately bearded figures, close pinched at the waist by the tightly fitting *tcherkess* or Circassian pelisse, and wearing a curled lambskin bonnet, tall leather boots, and a small armoury of damascened weapons, attend the arrival and departure of the trains with military regularity, and survey the scene with stalwart composure.

Suram Tunnel works

The railroad from Batum to Tiflis, a distance of about 220 miles, or at least from Poti to Tiflis, has now been open for many years; but the Russians have for some time been engaged upon extensive alterations upon a section of the line between the stations of Rion and Michaelovo, where the existing rails climb the steep and laborious gradients of the Suram mountain at a height of 3,000 feet above the sea. The alterations involve not only the piercing of a tunnel three miles long through the mountain, but the entire realignment, at a more practicable level, of the railroad for a distance of several miles, an undertaking which necessitates the construction of new bridges and viaducts, as well as an immense amount of cutting, stonework, and embankment. A large number of workmen were engaged upon this task when I passed a year before. In the interim a great advance had been made. The spring of 1890 was named as the period when the works would be finished, but it was not till October that the tunnel was opened, after the Russian fashion, with a religious service; nor did that mean the completion of the whole undertaking. The Russian Government is putting itself to an enormous outlay in this quarter, a fact which illustrates the importance attached by it not only to secure, but to easy and rapid rail communication in the Caucasus.[1] The works struck me as being conducted on a large and worthy scale, and as being marked by great strength and solidity. The Suram Tunnel is remarkable

[1] It has since been announced (November 1890) that a military railway has been authorised, connecting the fortress of Kars with the main line.

as surpassing all European tunnels in the dimensions of its profile. The St. Gothard Tunnel has a section of only sixty square metres, but that of the Suram Tunnel is ninety metres. Perhaps it is the expense thus incurred that accounts for the heavy charge for passenger traffic from Batum to Baku. A first-class ticket costs 47½ roubles, for a distance of 560 miles—that is, at the rate of over 2*d.* a mile. The locomotives between Batum and Baku are entirely propelled by residual naphtha, or *astatki*, as it is called, driven in the form of a fine spray into the furnace. Over the Suram mountain a double Fairlie engine pulls in front, while a second pushes and puffs behind. I found that the time consumed in getting to Baku was three hours longer than formerly. Upon inquiring the reason, I was told that the railway used to belong to a company, but has since been purchased by the State. To those who know the ways of the Russian Government this was quite enough.

Tiflis

Tiflis is too well known to travellers to deserve mention. Those only who are unacquainted with the East are likely to go into ecstasies over its modest, though perhaps singular attractions, among which Orientalism plays every year a less and less distinguished part. The town was in some excitement over an agricultural and industrial exhibition, the first ever held in the Caucasus, which had just been opened in a series of wooden pavilions on an open space outside the town. Here were collected specimens of the agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, pisciculture, and arboriculture, as well as of the textile fabrics and manufacturing industries of the Caucasus, together with objects from Central Asia and Transcaspia. The local manufactures, whether in metals or textiles, were varied and interesting, but the general level of the exhibition did not rise above that of an agricultural show in an English county town; and the grounds appeared to be visited quite as much for the sake of the bands and refreshment booths as for more business-like objects.

Hôtel de Londres

The Hôtel de Londres at Tiflis is perhaps the most wonderful rendezvous of varied personalities that is to be found in the East. Situated on the dividing line between Europe and Asia, and on the high road to the remote Orient, almost every pilgrim to or from those fascinating regions halts for a while within its hospitable walls. Here the outgoing traveller takes his last taste of civilisation before he plunges into the unknown. Here, too, the returning wanderer enjoys, very likely for the first

time for months, the luxury of sheets, and forgets his hardships over the congratulatory glass of champagne. Here, for instance, at the time of my visit, were collected a young French *vicomte*, fresh from the slaughter of *ovis poli* in the Tian Shan Mountains upon the Mongolian frontier; a high official of the Anglo-European Telegraph Department in Persia; an Irish engineer employed on the Transcaspian Railway; the Polish contractor who built the famous wooden bridge over the Oxus; two English sportsmen fresh from a hunting expedition amid the glaciers of the Caucasus; as well as Russians, Armenians, and the polyglot crowd that is always to be found upon the fringe of civilisation. Dragomans, who have accompanied eminent travellers and have left their names in well-known books, loiter about the doorway and present their travel-worn letters of recommendation. Clearly, as I write at home, can I recollect the emotions of anticipation, half hesitating and half confident, with which I have more than once started from the threshold of the Hôtel de Londres; no less than the satisfaction with which, my purpose accomplished, I have at a later date re-entered its doors.

Departure from Tiflis

After three days' stay I was not sorry to leave Tiflis, the more so as some enterprising Tiflite took advantage of my parting moments at the station to relieve me of a *porte-monnaie*, containing 10*l.* in roubles. Considering, however, that the hour when the train starts is about midnight, and that the voyager seldom gets off without a wait of nearly two hours in the midst of a packed and constitutionally predatory crowd, I regarded myself as having purchased at a reasonable price the privilege of departure, and turned my back without annoyance upon the amenities of the West.

Baku

Baku, with its chimneys and cisterns and refineries, with its acres of rails outside the station covered with tank-cars, its grimy naphtha-besprinkled streets, its sky-high telegraph poles and rattling tramcars, its shops for every article under the sun, its Persian ruins and its modern one-storeyed houses, its shabby conglomeration of peoples, its inky harbour, its canopy of smoke, and its all-pervading smells—Baku, larger, more pungent, and less inviting than ever, was reached on the evening of the day after I had left Tiflis. The population is now estimated at no less than 90,000, a growth which is almost wholly that of the last fifteen years, and is the exclusive creation of the petroleum

industry. When I inquired the basis of this calculation, the reply was given that it was only an approximate census; and that, when asking for accurate or official statistics, I was surely forgetting in what country I was travelling. I remember once being told in Russia that the only really scientific table of statistics which the Government had issued for some years was one relating to the consumption of *vodka* and its effect upon the national mortality. The population was divided into three classes: the moderate drinkers, the excessive drinkers, and the total abstainers; and it was triumphantly demonstrated by the returns that the first named were rewarded with the longest span of life; a result which was as warmly welcomed by the Excise Department as it was acceptable to the consuming public. The story, *se non è vero, è ben trovato.*

Across the Caspian

From Baku to Uzun Ada I crossed the Caspian in the same English-built boat, the 'Bariatinski,' in which I had made the passage last year. Though now an old vessel, she is still one of the best of the Caucasus and Mercury Company's fleet. The total number of their steamers plying between the different ports of the Caspian is fifteen, and they are in receipt of a large annual subsidy from the State for the conveyance of mails and troops, and also for the use of their boats for transport in case of war. One of these steamers sails from Baku to Uzun Ada twice a week—on Wednesdays and Fridays, leaving at 5 P.M. We had a beautiful passage, the Caspian having exhausted its humours after a storm of ten days' duration; and, after a long steam up the serpentine channel framed in yellow sand hills, reached Uzun Ada at 2.30 the next afternoon.

General Annenkoff

General Annenkoff was residing at Uzun Ada at the time, and extended to me his customary hospitality, talking with enthusiasm of the present and future of his railway, and expounding his well-known ideas of a Russo-Indian railway and an Anglo-Franco-Russian alliance. Subsequently, at an improvised entertainment, he drank courteously to the health of the English visitor, who, if he did not altogether share these roseate views, had, at any rate, on a previous occasion shown his willingness to do justice to the Transcaspian Railway, and honour to the policy of its promoters. Uzun Ada appeared to me to have somewhat extended its scanty and unstable dimensions during the past year;[1] and the piers and surrounding sand were literally

[1] The population in October 1889 was 1,650 persons.

packed with bales of cotton waiting for shipment. The General hoped to be able to undertake the extension from Samarkand to Tashkent, which, he said, had been finally sanctioned, in the forthcoming summer;[1] and at no distant date to effect a junction with the projected Omsk-Tomsk line through Siberia to Vladivostock. Nor in the dim future had he renounced his pet project of a Merv-Penjdeh-Herat-Kandahar diversion, which should bind the East and West in friendly fusion.

Native passengers

At Uzun Ada the number of native passengers waiting to take tickets at the single small window of the ticket office—Uzbegs from Bokhara, Sarts from Samarkand and Tashkent, Chinese Mohammedans from Kulja, Turkomans, and even Afghans, returning from pilgrimages to Mecca or other sacred shrines—was so great that it was not till two hours after the quoted time that the train steamed out of the station. It appeared to be difficult to persuade these inveterate Orientals either to regard the price of a ticket as a fixed quantity or to comprehend the French system of the *queue*. They fought and jostled each other at the tiny opening; and when the ticket distributor named the price, in true Asiatic fashion they offered about half the sum in the expectation of a leisurely haggle and a possible bargain.

The Desert

A cloudless sun on the following morning showed me again the staring waste of the Kara Kum and the crumpled mountain gorges of the Kuren Dagh. Great improvement was noticeable at most of the railway stations—more trees, more water, greater general comfort. We passed Geok Tepe at 11.30 A.M., and I had time to pay a flying visit to the ruins of the famous fortress which I have described at length in my previous work. The solidly-built walls of rammed clay appear to dwindle very little, and, unless artificially levelled, should be visible for at least a century. It has since been announced (November 1890) that a new use is to be made of Geok Tepe. A penal settlement is to be established here, and a large prison erected for convicts from the Caucasus sentenced to hard labour, whose constitution is unequal to the rigour of Siberia. Russian convicts at work amid a native population by whom, only ten years ago, Russian prisoners in battle were being put to death, will be a dramatic accessory thoroughly in keeping with the surroundings. Two hours behind

[1] Nevertheless, at the time of going to press (winter 1891), it has not been begun.

our time (having made no effort to pick up arrears), and nineteen hours after leaving Uzun Ada, we steamed into the station of Ashkabad (literally 'abode of love'), the capital of Transcaspia, situated 300 miles from the Caspian. Here I was to leave the train, and here was to commence the long ride of 2,000 miles which lay in front of me before my programme of Persian travel was exhausted. I watched the noisy departure of the locomotive with the feelings of one who is saying good-bye to an old and faithful friend.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSCASPIA

I hear the tread of pioneers
  Of nations yet to be,
The first low wash of waves where soon
  Shall roll a human sea.

The rudiments of Empire here
  Are plastic yet and warm,
The chaos of a mighty world
  Is rounding into form.

J. G. WHITTIER, *On an Eagle's Quill.*

Latest information

BEFORE proceeding with the record of my travels, I propose in a short chapter to give the latest information concerning the Transcaspian Railway and Transcaspia, so as to bring the narrative of its progress as nearly as possible up to the present time. Such readers as wish to tread immediately upon Persian soil will omit this chapter. In my former work, 'Russia in Central Asia,' I carried the history of the railroad as far as the autumn of 1889. Later writers have discoursed upon the subject, but have added little to our store of knowledge.[1] I think I may claim to be almost the only Englishman who has on two separate occasions journeyed over the line; and the information supplied in this chapter must therefore be regarded as complementary to that contained in the afore-mentioned volume. Nor can the subject be considered as alien to a work professedly dealing with Persia and the Persian Question, seeing that for nearly 300 miles of its length General Annenkoff's railway runs parallel and in close proximity to the Persian frontier, that its existence has already had a considerable, and is likely to have an even greater, influence upon the politics and trade of the important Persian province of Khorasan, and that the only side from which the railway, viewed strategically, is open to danger is by attack from the Persian border mountains

[1] I must except two interesting papers by Captain A. C. Yate, on the Tashkent Exhibition, 1890, in the *Proceedings of the R.G.S.*, January 1891, and 'A Journey to Tashkent' in the *Journal of the Scotch Geographical Society.*

on the south. Some of these subjects will require additional treatment in later chapters. I will here limit myself to the engineering, political, and commercial advances which have been made since I first visited Transcaspia.

Steam communication on the Caspian

Uzun Ada is now served not only by the bi-weekly service of the Caucasus and Mercury Company from Baku, but also by other steamers trading from the same port and by a weekly steamer from Astrakhan, started during 1889.[1] The route *viâ* Tsaritsin and Astrakhan is now, therefore, the shortest and most expeditious route from England to Central Asia; whilst, even if a direct steamer be not found leaving Astrakhan for Uzun Ada, the regular service, which descends the west coast of the Caspian to Baku and then crosses over, will convey the traveller to Transcaspia as quickly as the Transcaucasian route. In the coming winter I heard that daily boats were to ply to and from Baku. All these facts tended to show the increasing use that was being made both by passenger and goods traffic of the Transcaspian line.

Change of terminus to Krasnovodsk

At the time of my visit the much-debated question of shifting the railway terminus from Uzun Ada to Krasnovodsk had not yet been settled, though a special commission from St. Petersburg, which was sent independently and contrary to the wishes of General Annenkoff, reported shortly afterwards in favour of the change, which has consequently been authorised by the Ministry of War. There could be little doubt that this must be the ultimate solution, Krasnovodsk being recommended by its superior depth of water (twenty to twenty-five feet instead of only twelve to fourteen feet), by its more abundant, or, at any rate, less infinitesimal fresh-water supply, and by the shorter crossing to Baku. In view, moreover, of the certain commercial development and the probable military requirements of the Transcaspian Railway, and of the extension of the Caspian mercantile marine already produced by the growth of Baku, and likely to be much increased if the port of Petrofsk (like Baku, a deep-water harbour) were connected by rail with the European system, it was almost absurd either to suppose or to contend that the Asiatic port

[1] The companies, in addition to the Caucasus and Mercury Company, who trade with their own steamers between the Russian ports on the Caspian and Uzun Ada are as follows: The Lebed Steamship Company, the Caspian and Drujina Steamship Company, the Masis Steamship Company, Messrs. Kamenski Brothers and the Kousis and Prophylaktos Company.

and terminus could be permanently fixed in a shallow bay, commonly frozen over in winter, and presenting no advantages for the storage or embarkation of merchandise or for the debarkation of troops. General Annenkoff, however, had all the affection for Uzun Ada that a parent feels for a single and sickly child, and his attitude assured me that he would fight against the change with all the energy of desperation. He asked me of what good were twenty-four feet of water when the only vessels that were required were those with a draught of fourteen feet; where could be seen better piers than the wooden erections at Uzun Ada; and, when I pointed to the bales of cotton strewn pell-mell in every direction and awaiting shipment, where could more ample space be found than in their present resting-place? The only valid arguments against the change appeared to me to be the capital that had already been sunk in Uzun Ada, and the cost of the additional fifty-three miles of railway that will be required, entailing a corresponding increase in freight charges. Such an increase, however, will probably be more than counterbalanced for traders by the reduced cost of transport to Baku, which stands at 10 kopecks a poud from Uzun Ada, but might, it is said, be reduced to 5 kopecks a poud from Krasnovodsk. The deviation of the line, as decided upon, will start from the station of Mullah Kari, thirty-two miles from Uzun Ada, and will run to Krasnovodsk, a distance of eighty-five miles.

Further improvements

Between the stations of Bala Ishem and Kazanjik, I heard of a realignment of the railroad for a distance of sixty miles; but, having passed over this portion of the line in the night, I cannot say whether this description was correct, or whether the rails were merely relaid. The naphtha wells of Bala Ishem, to which a Décauville railway was originally laid, have ceased to be worked; the cost of production, in the absence of any refineries on the east coast of the Caspian, being greater than that of transport from the stills of Baku.

Workshop at Kizil Arvat. Stations, culverts, and bridges

At Kizil Arvat, 160 miles from Uzun Ada, a large workshop had been fitted up, at a cost of 50,000*l.*, by an English engineer resident in St. Petersburg, for the repair and, it was said, the manufacture of locomotives, and for the general mechanical requirements of the line. He was expressly prohibited from employing foreign materials or workmen. These works, when completed, would give permanent employment to 600 men. The buildings were already illuminated

by the electric light, which was also to be found at Amu Daria, and with which it was proposed before long, by means of accumulators, to light the passenger waggons. A railway train lit by the electric light and speeding through the sand-deserts of Central Asia, would add one more to the many startling contrasts in which this extraordinary region abounds. On the further parts of the line the stations were now completed, and the temporary structures which I had noticed in 1888 had been replaced by neat buildings in brick or stone. A good deal of money had been spent during the past year in constructing new bridges and culverts to carry off the unpremeditated but disastrous torrents that sweep down after sudden rains from the Persian mountains. But, nevertheless, thirty miles of rail near Kizil Arvat, the ever vulnerable spot, had again been destroyed during a storm in July; and the danger is one against which, as in the far more serious case of the Bolan Railway in Beluchistan, it will always be difficult to guard altogether. M. Bielinski, the Polish contractor, who built the big wooden bridge over the Oxus and the smaller bridges over the Tejend and Murghab, was a traveller by the same boat as myself, having received a contract to replace the wooden bridge over the Tejend by an iron fabric at a cost of 30,000*l*. A similar change was next contemplated at the same cost over the Murghab at Merv. It does not appear, however, that either of these changes has been carried into effect, though a new girder bridge has been erected across the Zerafshan at Kara Kul. The great wooden bridge over the Oxus at Charjui (which, it will be remembered, was a marvel of cheapness, having been constructed in the space of 100 days for 30,000*l*.) had again broken down a few months before, as it must continue to do when any great strain of uncommon flood or shifting channel is directed against it. But it appears, on the whole, to be better adapted to the situation than would any more costly substitute; whilst, by frequent repairs and, if necessary, extensions in order to accommodate the vagabond humours of the river, it may continue to serve all essential purposes. The channel, I have since heard, has shifted more than half a mile to the eastwards, and the bridge has had to be extended to keep it company.

Not much advance had been made in the interim with the problem of the navigation of the Oxus above Charjui. The two barges which were built for the carriage either of cargo or of

troops could not, owing to the sinuous channel, be towed up stream by the two steamers, the 'Czar' and 'Czaritsa.' Furthermore, at that time the normal period consumed by the steamers in reaching Kerki, a distance of only 140 miles, was a week. This seems, however, to have been since reduced, in the case of the up-stream journey, to four days, and of the down-stream journey to three days, the boats in neither case proceeding by night. Further improvements will be required before the river navigation can be of much commercial value in transporting merchandise to or from Afghanistan; whilst it will be still longer before, as a strategical auxiliary, it adds much to the offensive strength of Russia in Central Asia.

Oxus Flotilla

As regards Merv, and the heroic measures that I found in progress a year before for the resuscitation of the Merv Oasis by the reconstruction of the Sultan Bund across the Murghab, thirty-five miles above modern Merv, and the irrigation of the property which is administered out of the private purse of the Czar, I heard disparaging remarks, which threw doubt upon the ultimate success of the undertaking. It was said that the Murghab was found not to hold sufficient water to admit of irrigation or canalisation on any largely extended scale; while the evaporation from the lake above the dam was expected to exhaust the bulk of its contents. On the other hand, an English Engineer officer, visiting the works not long afterwards, was, I believe, most favourably impressed both with the skill and with the work already accomplished by Col. Kozell-Poklefski, the engineer;[1] and the latter gentleman was understood to have no doubts about the success of his scheme.[2] That there must, however, be some uncertainty as to the results is, I think, clear from the conflicting

Merv irrigation and the Sultan Bund

[1] *Vide* an interesting paper by the officer in question, Col. H. L. Wells, R.E., published in vol. xv. of the *Occasional Papers of the Royal Engineers*, 1889.

[2] That my information, however, and my forebodings were correct was demonstrated in the autumn of 1890, when it leaked out that M. Poklefski's great dam was a failure, having been swept away, or at least seriously damaged, by a flood on the Murghab; and when the Imperial landlord, at the same time that he was banishing Englishmen from Transcaspia, was driven to request from the British Government the loan of the services of an English official, Sir Colin Moncreiff, who had attained a conspicuous success in charge of the irrigation works of the Nile. There was a delicious irony in the spectacle of an Englishman being solicited to repair the blunders of Russians at Merv. In consequence of Sir C. Moncreiff's report, M. Poklefski's plans have been in the main abandoned, and a new scheme of irrigation is to be tried.

figures of cultivable area which have from time to time been officially presented by the Russian authorities. First it was said that 800,000 acres would be irrigated and fertilised; then the figures fell to 300,000 acres; and the descending scale has even touched at its lowest point, the humble total of 18,000 acres. The last-named estimate is probably as much below the mark as the others are above it. Nor, if the work be properly carried out, does there appear to be any reason why considerable results should not be attained; inasmuch as in the Middle Ages and down to a century ago, when the forerunner of the new dam was destroyed in war by the Bokhariots, it was owing to this and similar irrigation works that the district of Merv won a repute for splendid fertility unequalled in the East. Should a large extent of ground be successfully reclaimed, it will of course admit of a greatly augmented population, M. Poklefski being of opinion that the entire oasis would support a total of 1,000,000 inhabitants. One hundred families of Dungans (Chinese Mohammedans) and Taranchis (Turki Mohammedans) from Kulja have been transported to Merv as an experiment in colonisation; and it is said that several hundred more families (presumably European) have been engaged as settlers on the Czar's estate. The only other tract where irrigation, followed, it is hoped, by colonisation, is to be undertaken on a large scale, is on the right bank of the Amu Daria, between that river and the Zerafshan, where the Russian Government is reported to be negotiating with the Amir of Bokhara for the cutting of a canal from the Oxus.

Rolling stock

Recent figures of the rolling stock now on the Transcaspian Railway differ slightly; but the following totals may be regarded as approximately correct. There are from 120 to 130 locomotives upon the entire line, and a total of over 2,000 waggons, trucks, and cars of every description. The number of cistern-cars for the transport of water or petroleum is said now to be 150. These figures show that improvement is being made; although the standard that is required alike by commercial and military considerations has not yet been reached. General Annenkoff's passion for economy and a plausible balance-sheet, though excellent in their way, have somewhat retarded the proper development of the railway.

A triple wire runs parallel to the line from the Caspian to Samarkand, whence it is continued to Tashkent; whilst branch

wires conduct from Kizil Arvat to Bujnurd, and thence to Chikishliar and Astrabad, from Karibent to Sarakhs, from Merv to Takhta Bazaar (Penjdeh), from Charjui to Khiva, from Bokhara station to Bokhara town, and, I was informed, from Charjui to the advanced post of Kerki on the Oxus. Elsewhere it has been reported that the service in the latter case is performed by pigeon-post. The question of connecting the Russian wires from their advanced point at Sarakhs or Takhta Bazaar with those of India *viâ* Afghanistan, touching Herat and Kandahar on the way, and thereby of providing an alternative overland telegraphic route from Europe to India, is one that has suggested itself to certain English and Indian authorities. But, apart from the advisability of the project, which is open to question, the circumstances are not at present such as would be favourable to its execution.

The telegraph

On the occasion of my first visit to Transcaspia in 1888, the duration of the journey from Uzun Ada to Samarkand—a distance of 900 miles—was seventy-two hours. This has now been reduced for the passenger and postal trains, which run two or three times a week, according to the season, to a little over sixty hours, of which ten are consumed in stoppages. Slower trains, mixed passenger and merchandise, circulate every day, and occupy about fifteen hours longer in the transit. Refreshment cars of moderate but serviceable quality are now attached to the trains, and have replaced the stationary buffets, except at the larger stations.

Speed and service

The figures of receipts and cost of working of the Transcaspian Railway, which are sometimes officially published, sometimes communicated by General Annenkoff to newspaper correspondents, and sometimes gleaned from private sources, are unfortunately as conflicting as the different estimates which have at various times been derived from the same variety of sources of the original cost of construction. The working expenses of 1887 showed an excess of 40,000*l.* above the receipts; those of 1888 an excess of 30,000*l.* A deficit in the balance-sheet of the same amount was expected in 1889; but the 'Novoe Vremya' has published the total of working expenses in that year as 241,731*l.*, and declared that the receipts were 7,000*l.* in excess. General Annenkoff, however, gave me much more ambitious figures at Uzun Ada. The budget of M. Vishnegradski, the singularly able

Balance-sheet

Russian Minister of Finance, who himself visited Transcaspia in the autumn of 1890, returned the working cost of the Transcaspian Railway and Oxus Flotilla combined in 1889 as 287,235*l.*, figures which are not irreconcilable with those above quoted from the 'Novoe Vremya.' On the other hand, the same Minister's estimate for 1890 contained an addition of 120,447*l.* to the figures of 1889, or a total of 407,682*l.* for the combined charges of railway and flotilla during that year. I have since heard that a surplus of 29,000*l.* is claimed for 1890.[1]

Goods traffic

About one fact there can be no doubt—viz. that the goods traffic upon the railway is enormously on the increase, and that it will reach infinitely greater proportions still. The total weight of goods carried upon the railway in 1889 was 21,741,880 pouds, or 350,675 tons; out of which Central Asian indigenous product and raw material amounted to 9,069,081 pouds, or 146,275 tons. In the same year the value of manufactured goods and sugar imported by the railway into Transcaspia, Bokhara, and Turkestan was 94 per cent. higher than in 1888; while the value of exports conducted thereby from Central Asia to Russia, and consisting of cotton, wool, silk, dried fruits, and grain, increased 127 per cent. Of the goods thus conveyed by far the most remarkable, and an as yet unexhausted, rise has been that in exports of cotton from the ever-spreading Asiatic plantations. In 1888 the amount so carried was 1,213,274 pouds, or 19,655 tons,[2] in 1889 it was 2,200,000 pouds, or 35,484 tons; in January 1890 it was 252,760 pouds, or 4,077 tons (of which 193,229 pouds, or 3,116 tons, came from Bokhara); figures which indicate a much higher monthly average than in the preceding year, even although they do not quite come up to General Annenkoff's confident expectation, which he confessed to myself, of a total of 4,000,000 pouds in the whole year. In June, however, more than a quarter of a million pouds were reported to be lying on the piers at Uzun Ada waiting for shipment, while the railway was said to be bringing up some 20,000 pouds daily. The receipts for the first five months of 1890 were also said, largely in consequence of this increased export, to be larger by more than 50,000*l.* than in the

[1] In February 1891, however, the *Novoe Vremya* stated the surplus at 323,610*l.*, figures which I can hardly credit.

[2] Before the construction of the Transcaspian Railway the total annual export of cotton from Central Asia to European Russia by camel caravan, *viâ* Orenburg, was 9,680 tons.

corresponding period of 1889. Afghan merchants were further declared, for the first time since the completion of the railway, to have established direct relations with it by the despatch of several hundred bales of cotton to Charjui.[1]

Organisation of Customs

The great mercantile use made of the railway, and the stream of goods traffic pouring towards it from all points of the compass, have necessitated a thorough Custom-house organisation in Transcaspia. This has been constituted on the basis, familiar in Russian practice, of exclusion, so far as possible, of foreign competition, preferential treatment of subject populations, and protection of home products and manufactures. The chief Custom-house is at Uzun Ada, but posts are also established at Kizil Arvat, Ashkabad, Artik, Kaahka, Dushak, Tejend, Sarakhs, Merv, Yuletan, and Takhta Bazaar. An *ad valorem* duty of 2½ per cent. is levied at Uzun Ada on all foreign goods imported by sea. A similar duty, calculated at local market prices, is also levied on all goods of European, Persian, or Indian origin, brought by land into Transcaspia, whether for local consumption or in transit to Bokhara, Khiva, or Turkestan. All such goods, if exported from Uzun Ada to European Russia or the Caucasus, are further liable to an *ad valorem* duty of 5 per cent. (the duty previously levied being returned). On the other hand, goods from Bokhara, Khiva, and Turkomania, for European Russia or the Caucasus, are allowed to pass through Uzun Ada free of duty. Similarly, all Persian goods in transit to Europe are passed duty free if forwarded by Ashkabad or other stations of the Transcaspian Railway.

Great commercial future

These facts, as well as everything that I saw or heard on my second visit, tend to bear out my previous conclusions as to the immense commercial future that lies before the Transcaspian Railway. Skirting or traversing countries of great though inadequately developed resources, commanding the export and import traffic of Transcaspia, Khorasan, Bokhara, North Afghanistan, and Russian Turkestan, conveying to those countries the exclusive productions of Russia, and taking away from them in return the cotton and silk and wool and tissues

[1] In order still further to encourage and develop the growth of cotton by Russian merchants in Central Asia, the Minister of Finance in 1890 ratified a project for leasing 170,000 acres in Turkestan to the 'Central Asian Commercial and Industrial Society,' the lease to run for ninety years, and no rent to be paid for the first fifteen.

and furs of the East, it will in a few years' time be the artery of the whole of Central Asia, along which the life-blood of half a continent will throb, commingling the already half-amalgamated strains of East and West. This railway is a far more potent weapon to Russia in her subjugation of Asia than half a dozen Geok Tepes or a dozen Panjdehs. It marks a complete and bloodless absorption. Great credit must be allowed to General Annenkoff for the inexhaustible energy with which he has worked for this consummation.

Facilities for English travellers

Touching the facilities of the line for English travellers, I heard that less objection is now raised to the appearance of strangers than was formerly the case, though this appeared to be a general belief rather than an induction from recorded cases. So great, however, is the traffic upon the line that a stranger might conceivably travel along it unobserved. He would, however, of course, be liable to be warned off or sent back if he could not produce a special permit from St. Petersburg. It is possible, as time goes on, that the stringency of these regulations may be relaxed. Nevertheless, the experience of subsequent English travellers upon the railway, including a lady, was not a favourable one. They were treated with some discourtesy and suspicion, the First Secretary of a British Legation being actually brought, upon a fictitious charge, before a Russian police court at Samarkand. These amenities were, I subsequently heard, intended as a reply to my own too truthful description of Russian affairs and policy in Central Asia.[1]

I have already spoken of the Mullah Kari-Krasnovodsk extension, now sanctioned. The suggested branch from Charjui to Kerki along the left bank of the Amu Daria, which was a good deal talked about at the time of the Afghan war scare in the spring of 1889, has since disappeared from view, and will probably not

[1] I am tempted to say in this context that there is small inducement to any English writer to endeavour to treat Russia with fairness or generosity in matters where the two nations happen to be political or national rivals. After issuing a work which aspired, and was, I believe, considered, to render greater justice to Russian labours and aims in Central Asia than any recent publication, the only Russian acknowledgment that I received was a sneering article from the best-known Russian writer in the English press, the blackening out of every passage of my book that was anything but complimentary to Russia by the Press Censorship of that country, and the remark, in a leading Russian newspaper, that if an Englishman could pay such a tribute to the merits of Russians in Central Asia, what fools must the latter be not to take greater advantage of our innocence!

again be heard of till forward operations are contemplated. On the other hand, the extension from the present terminus at Samarkand to Tashkent, which I previously predicted as probable, has emerged into clearer perspective; and General Annenkoff hoped to be able to start work upon it in May 1890.[1] It has since been announced that the Czar has given his approval to the scheme drawn up by a special commission for the great Siberian Railway, debouching upon the Pacific at Vladivostock, which is to be 4,785 miles in length, to occupy ten years in construction, and to cost a sum variously estimated at from twenty-five to forty millions sterling.[2] Should the scheme be carried out, it cannot be long before the Transcaspian Railway, prolonged by then to Tashkent, will be carried forward till it joins the Siberian trunk line and completes the circle with European Russia. The point of junction is said to have been fixed at Omsk. In Transcaspia itself a branch line is talked of from Karibent on the Tejend to Sarakhs. This would take Russia eighty miles nearer to Herat.

Extensions of the Trans-caspian Railway

Casting our eyes back upon Europe, where the Caucasian railway system is the indispensable corollary and complement of the Transcaspian Railway, we find that after many delays the Vladikavkas-Petrofsk line is said once again to have received the Imperial sanction;[3] although other voices are heard recommending a junction with the Central Russian lines

Parallel European extensions

[1] Captain A. C. Yate, the latest English traveller on the Transcaspian Railway (October 1890), informs me that there is now an idea of continuing the line from Samarkand to Khokand, so as to avoid the expense of bridging the Syr Daria.

[2] After a protracted controversy between the rival schemes of a combined rail and waterway, and a continuous railway, the latter was decided upon in March 1891. The line will run from Zlatoust, the present terminus of the Samara-Ufa line to the mining districts of Miask and Cheliabinsk (84 miles); thence *viâ* Tukalinsk, Kaensk, Mariensk, Krasnoiarsk, and Kansk, to Nijni Udinsk (1,736 miles), the estimated cost of this section being 11,807,500*l.* or 6,500*l.* a mile. Thence the line will run *viâ* Uchtuskaia, Irkutsk, S. Baikal, Sretensk, and Habarovka, to Vladivostock, (2,965 miles.) Total length, 4,785 miles; total estimated cost, 36,765,000*l.*, or an average of 7,680*l.* a mile. Work has been commenced at both extremities; and a few versts of rails were hurriedly laid at Vladivostock to enable the Czarevitch to perform the opening ceremony in the summer of 1891.

[3] This line would be 160 miles long, and would, it is estimated, cost 1,200,000*l.* In the Russian Financial Estimates for 1891, a sum of 100,000*l.* is allotted for the preliminary expenses of construction. From Petrofsk to Baku, a further extension, 220 miles in length, is also discussed.

and the Volga at the same time by a rail to Petrofsk from Tsaritsin. Simultaneously a commission has been entrusted with the task of reporting upon the feasibility of a tunnel through the main range of the Caucasus from Vladikavkas or some neighbouring point to a station on the Batum-Tiflis line.[1] Surveys are also being made for a line from Adji-Kabul on the Batum-Baku line to Astara on the Persian frontier. The fact that all these rival projects are at the same moment on the *tapis* is an indication of the importance most wisely attached by Russia to the improvement of her direct communications between European Russia and the Caspian; since any military operations undertaken upon the eastern side of the latter sea must depend for their reinforcements and supplies almost wholly upon correspondence with the West.

Russian *morale* in Transcaspia

While in Transcaspia I penned the following words to the 'Times' newspaper: 'My ears have been, as usual, assailed with stories of the intrigues and scandals, the drinking, gambling, and other vices, that, unknown to the authorities at home, are said to prevail in Russian military circles in Transcaspia. So persistent and, it may be added, so consistent are these tales, that they must contain a large percentage of truth. Young men who have committed indiscretions, or lost money, or taken to bad habits in European Russia are banished to a temporary purgatory in Central Asia, in forgetfulness of the fact that the painful tedium of life in those regions is an incentive rather than a deterrent to repetitions of the old offence. Accordingly, every Russian station in Central Asia is rife with gossip and scandal. Every prominent man has a host of enemies who would stick at nothing in order to pull him down. An outward show of discipline masks acute discontent, evil tempers, and ill-regulated habits. Much must be forgiven in consideration of the frightful climate and the utterly odious life. But it is questionable whether a Power so represented in Central Asia is one whose moral prestige is likely to remain in the ascendant, or whether its forces, if directed against an enemy, might not be found to have been weakened by the long-existing canker.'

These remarks, which were not lightly or unadvisedly written,

[1] It is said that such a line, leaving the main railway at a station north of Vladikavkas, might follow the Roki Defile through the Caucasus, pierce a tunnel less than five miles in length, and emerge, at a distance of 113 miles, upon Gori, on the Tiflis Railway. But the cost would be enormous.

caused, I believe, some offence; but how true they were appeared only a few months afterwards in an explosion of scandal, wrong-doing, and intrigue, which shook the society of Transcaspia to its foundations, and was not terminated until there had been a complete and radical reconstruction in the *personnel* of the Government. Into the story itself, which is an unattractive one, I will not enter. The upshot of the entire matter was that General Kuropatkin is now Governor-General of Transcaspia in the place of General Komaroff, and that Colonel Alikhanoff has been removed from his important and responsible post at Merv, and has been placed at the disposal of the military authorities of the Caucasus. Simultaneously M. Tcharikoff, the accomplished representative of Russia at the Court of Bokhara, has been succeeded by my friend M. Lessar, of Afghan Boundary fame, and till recently Russian Consul-General in Liverpool. Further to the east, General Rosenbach no longer rules as Governor-General at Tashkent, but has been replaced by General Vrevsky, formerly head of the police at Odessa. General Annenkoff did not escape in the universal wave of slander and denunciation, but appears so far to have triumphed over his accusers.[1]

Administrative changes

These changes, the effect of which cannot fail to be considerable, have been synchronous with the long-contemplated reconstruction of the Transcaspian Government. An official decree was promulgated in St. Petersburg on March 29, 1890, organising a separate administration for the Government of Transcaspia. Henceforward the latter post is, except in certain particulars, relieved from dependence upon the Government of the Caucasus, and enjoys a limited independence, analogous to that which prevails in Turkestan, including the privilege of direct correspondence with the Foreign Office at St. Petersburg. This is a change that has long been discussed, if not anticipated, and that is thoroughly justified by the increasing political weight and individuality of Transcaspia. Simultaneously the four Khans of Merv, whom I described in my previous book, have been deprived of administrative functions over their fellow-tribesmen, while retaining their pensions of 120*l.* a year for life. Their place has been taken by Russian officers. No more striking

Independence of Transcaspia

[1] In March 1891 it was announced that General Annenkoff would not again return to Transcaspia as Director of the Railway, which was transferred to the control of General Kuropatkin.

evidence could be given of the successful disintegration of old tribal ties, customs, and traditions among the conquered Turkomans, who, little more than ten years ago, were fighting like fiends against those whom they now humbly follow and serve.

General Kuropatkin

More significant even than the new form given to the Government of Transcaspia is the character and personality of the new Governor. In place of a quiet and unwarlike professor, who was happier when labelling his insects than when reviewing his men, we have the right-hand man and *alter ego* of Skobeleff, and the first soldier and strategist in Central Asia. Born in 1848, Kuropatkin entered the Turkestan army at the age of eighteen, and, among other operations, was present at the siege and subsequent capture of Samarkand. Having passed out first from the Staff College in 1874, he spent a year in Algeria, where he joined the French expedition to the Great Sahara, and wrote his first work upon the campaign. He then returned to Central Asia, and was on Skobeleff's staff during the war with Khokand, in which he was wounded and received the Cross of St. George. In 1876 he was sent on a special mission to negotiate a treaty with Yakub Beg of Kashgar (as a counterblast to the British Mission of Forsyth), and made this the subject of his second work. In the Russo-Turkish war he was Chief of the Staff to Skobeleff, and at its close was appointed head of the Asiatic section of the General Staff; while occupying which post he wrote a third work on the recent war. In 1879 he again returned to Central Asia, in command of the Turkestan Rifle Battalion, and in the following year executed a brilliant march at the head of a column across the Turkoman desert in order to join Skobeleff at Geok Tepe, arriving in time to lead one of the three divisions to the assault. Since then he has been the chief adviser of the War Office in St. Petersburg on all questions of Central Asian administration or strategy, and now returns in the prime of life to the highest command in a country of which he knows more than any living Russian general. His strategical abilities and reputation for courage render his appointment one of extreme significance. Nor can it be forgotten that he is the author of the famous secret memorandum upon the invasion of India by Russian troops, which is generally accepted in Russian military circles as embodying the most orthodox and feasible scheme of advance, and to which I shall have occasion to refer in later chapters. General

Kuropatkin has already (1891) inaugurated quite a new reign in Transcaspia, and military exercise and movement are the order of the day. His salary is 1,400*l.* a year, and 800*l.* allowances, a reduction of 600*l.* upon the pay of Komaroff. M. Lessar is better acquainted, perhaps, than any living Russian with the Central Asian and frontier questions on their English as well as their Russian side. General Vrevsky is understood to be a man of action. His predecessor, General Rosenbach, was a man of peace. In the coincidence, therefore, of these three appointments, Englishmen have reasonable cause for believing, not that the Central Asian question is necessarily about to enter upon a new or violent stage, but that the interests of Russia in those regions are likely to be safeguarded with uncommon vigilance. Since writing these words I have heard that General Kuropatkin has at the same time given a taste of his quality and initiated his *régime* by ordering the expulsion of all foreigners from Transcaspia, including the one Englishman whom I have before mentioned.

Russian consolidation in Central Asia

It cannot indeed escape our notice that Russia is with much prudence utilising a period of peace and repose for the systematic consolidation of her position in her new territories. The strain of conquest was great, and produced a temporary dislocation of force. The crisis of 1885 found her, relatively, even less prepared for advance than ourselves. In the intervening five years, however, she has made great and invaluable strides, while the still incomplete character of many of the undertakings to which I have referred is an evidence that her ambitions fall as yet far short of realisation. Sweeping our eye in retrospect over the entire stage from the Black Sea to the Oxus, we note the piercing of the Suram Tunnel and consequent addition to the utility of the Transcaucasian Railway; the contemplated lines from the north of the Caucasus to the south at Tiflis, or to the Caspian at Petrofsk; the steady enlargement of the Caspian marine; the change of railway terminus to Krasnovodsk; the increase of rolling stock and mechanical improvements on the Transcaspian line; the emancipation of the Transcaspian Government, and still further dissolution of tribal cohesion among the Turkomans; the construction of new barracks at Merv, Amu Daria, Kerki, and other places, and of military cantonments at various spots, notably Sheikh Junaid, near Kara Tepe, on the Afghan frontier; the appointment of Russian officers and non-

commissioned officers to the Bokharan army;[1] and the contemplated railway extensions to Sarakhs and Tashkent. Each of these steps in itself would be important; but their combination, if effectively carried out, as there is every reason to suppose will before long be the case, will place Russia in a position almost incredibly superior to that which she occupied in 1885. At the same time she is introducing compulsory education for her Asiatic subjects in Russian schools, and is applying to Transcaspia the strict passport system of European Russia. If we take a leap over the intervening five hundred miles, which are described as Afghanistan on the map, and observe what is being done on the Indian side of that mysterious middle ground, we shall find as great cause for satisfaction on our own part as may the Russians on theirs. Either side is busy with preparations. But preparations for war have a tendency to prolong peace; and experience seems to show that two equally well-prepared countries are much less likely to fight than two ill-prepared ones, or than two countries of which the better prepared is burning to profit by the backwardness of the less.

The future

If I were asked again at this time to cast a horoscope of the immediate political future in Central Asia (for extended prophecy would be absurd), I should reply that the omens are still those of peace.[2] Time seems to strengthen the conviction on both sides that a collision could not be confined to a small area or to a brief period of time, but that it must have far-reaching consequences which none can foresee. The notoriously peaceful proclivities of the reigning Czar are a potent factor in the situation, but one upon which in the unsettled state of Russian society it is unsafe to depend too implicitly; although it may be hoped that the same instincts will be developed in his eldest son, who recently toured through the Indian dominions of the Queen. Afghanistan remains as it has now been for half a century, the key of the situation. If Russia continues to respect alike her own plighted word and the boundaries of her neighbours, the Cossack and the Sepoy may remain friends, at a distance, for some time to come.

[1] Announced in the *Moscow Gazette*, January 1891.

[2] As these sheets go to press somewhat disquieting rumours reach us of Russian advance in the Pamirs and elsewhere; and it is possible that we may be on the threshold of a more troubled era.

CHAPTER V

FROM ASHKABAD TO KUCHAN

Wild warriors of the turquoise hills.
T. MOORE, *Veiled Prophet of Khorasan.*

Arrival at Ashkabad

AT the station at Ashkabad I was accosted by a Persian servant whom Colonel Stewart had been kind enough to send out to meet me from the British Consulate at Meshed. The camp, which he had also despatched, was, I understood, awaiting my arrival somewhere on the Persian side of the frontier, over thirty miles distant. The Russian authorities at Meshed being reluctant to give permission to English subjects resident in Persia to cross the border into Russian Transcaspia, my future attendants were unable to meet me at Ashkabad; but the Persian, to whom the restriction did not apply, had been despatched thither to guide me to the frontier. Unfortuantely, neither of us spoke any tongue that was intelligible to the other, and an intermediary was equally difficult to find. I drove to the Governor-General's house through suffocating volumes of dust, only to discover that General Komaroff had left the day before, and that my previous year's acquaintance with him would stand me in no stead. The Colonel commanding in his absence, whom I next sought, and who was without instructions as regards myself, expressed a desire to telegraph to St. Petersburg for information, and in the meantime suggested that I might with advantage devote a few days to the charms of Ashkabad. As I knew from former experience that these were of the most meagre description, consisting only of a common native bazaar, several Russian shops, the houses inhabited by the Russian civil and military officials, and the military cantonments—planted down on a flat and featureless desert, and wrapped up in a perpetual whirlwind of dust [1]—I declined the invitation and expressed my desire

[1] In 1881, when the Russians invaded Transcaspia, Ashkabad was a Turkoman settlement of 500 *kibitkas.* Being constituted the Russian capital, it speedily changed its character and extended its dimensions. In 1884 it contained a population of 4,000; in 1886 of 10,000, exclusive of the military. Since then it has remained at a little above that figure.

N. E. KHORASAN.

Scale of Miles.

10 0 50 100

F. S. Weller.

Longmans, Green & Co., London & New York

to proceed at once. As this intention appeared to be incompatible with any concealed design to spy out the land, I was permitted to depart, although I received no assistance or offer of assistance in the dilemma in which I was placed as regards my arrangements. The fact is, the Russian military authorities do not very much care about seeing Englishmen at Ashkabad, and have on more than one occasion shown an incivility rare in so polite a people.

Start for the frontier

Having at last entered into communications with my Persian, through the medium of two intervening parties, and having spent some hours in rearranging my baggage and transferring it to mules, I started forth an hour before sundown, intending to drive in a droshky to the mountains, and to ride the remaining distance on a horse which had been brought for me by the Persian. A misunderstanding, arising from the too numerous necessary links in our chain of conversation, resulted in my baggage being lost for the night, in the Persian having to walk fifteen miles, and myself being compelled to ride entirely alone to the frontier at midnight, and there to wander about till by good fortune I struck the encampment at 1 A.M.

History of the Ashkabad-Kuchan road

The road upon which I travelled, and which I shall now describe, is one of great importance, inasmuch as it provides Russia with a private way of entry into the coveted province of Khorasan. Immediately after her subjugation of the Turkomans in 1881, she set to work to consolidate her position upon the Persian border and to utilise the advantages which conquest had given her over her weak and timid neighbour on the south. A strategical ascendency she already possessed by virtue of her newly acquired territories, and of a border treaty which she proceeded forthwith to conclude with Persia, and which placed the crest of the mountains as well as the command of the principal water-supplies in her hands.[1] General Annenkoff's railway promised her a commercial superiority not less assured, provided that her merchandise could easily and securely pass across the border. Existing communications between the Turkoman Atek (literally, 'skirt' of the mountains) and Khorasan were none of the best, and had been all but closed by the savage forays of the border clans. It was for the purpose of opening up a new, secure, and direct line of connection that a military *chaussée* was presently commenced from Ashkabad to the frontier, the Persians undertaking at the

[1] Printed as an Appendix to *Russia in Central Asia.*

same time to co-operate in the amicable enterprise by constructing a similar road upon their side of the boundary which should meet the Russian road, and eventually link Ashkabad by a carriageable highway with Kuchan and Meshed. The Persian section of the road was entrusted to General Gasteiger Khan, an Austrian Engineer officer in the service of the Shah. Before the close of 1888 the Russian section, thirty miles in length, had reached the frontier; but the Persian, it is needless to add, had scarcely been commenced and showed no signs of progress. Irritated at this delay, and at the advantage presumed to have been gained by Great Britain in the Karun Concession of 1888, Russia now put on the screw at the Persian Court; and, among the stipulations of a secret agreement which has not been divulged, insisted upon the immediate completion of the Ashkabad-Kuchan road. The Shah did not relish the injunction, but was powerless to resist. General Gasteiger Khan was relieved of his office, it being variously alleged that he had quarrelled with the Governor-General of Khorasan, and that he had been found secretly corresponding with the Russians; and the contract was entrusted to the Malek-et-Tajar or Head of the Merchants' Guild at Meshed, who undertook to complete the work in a year at a cost of 13,000*l.*, receiving in return a concession of the rest-houses, wells, and collection of tolls along the route. This was the situation when I travelled upon the road in the beginning of October 1889.

Russian section

Leaving Ashkabad in a southerly direction, the road strikes across the plain towards the mountains. It is of uniform width, twenty-five feet, and, although near the town it was full of holes, yet the gradients, even in the steepest parts, are such as to render it easily available for the passage of artillery. At a distance of eight miles it reaches the foot of the hills and then winds up a lateral valley parallel to the axis of the main range of the Kopet Dagh. Later on an ascent in zigzags commences, leading, at a distance of fifteen miles, into a narrow mountain gorge, at whose bottom is a stony torrent bed, empty when I passed it, but evidently liable to a sudden rush of water in times of melting snow or flood. It must be economy rather than any practical object that has induced the Russians to cross and recross this torrent-bed, not by bridges, but by a rough stone causeway built through the channel itself, and already in many places broken up and swept away. A second series of zigzags leads, at about the

twenty-fifth mile, into a desolate upland valley, across which the road runs in a dreary line until, again passing into the hills, it reaches the Russian village of Baj Girha (literally, 'Takers of the Tolls'), previously known as Andan, at about one mile beyond which the crest is mounted that marks the boundary between Russian and Persian territory. Neither on the road nor at the frontier were there any Russian soldiers, though the Chief of the Staff at Ashkabad had presented me with an order for passing any

PERSIAN BAJ GIRHA

that I might encounter. The fact is, Russia can afford to leave this portion of her Asiatic frontier absolutely unguarded, aggression from Persia being out of the question, and none but Russians or natives going the other way. Near the end of the road, however, and at a short distance from the frontier, I found a large rectangular stone building in course of construction, which is, I believe, to serve the purposes of a guard- and rest-house combined. The Persian Baj Girha, where there is a Custom-house at which dues are levied on caravans from Ashkabad, is a small village of mud

huts, clinging to the hill side, at about two miles from the frontier down a valley; and here it was that, stumbling along on foot with my bridle on my arm, I fortunately struck my camp. A glorious moon, idealising the gaunt and sombre landscape, had cheered my solitary ride and guided me to my destination. There was not an atom of verdure on the brown bleak hills; and not a sign or sound of life on the road except a rare caravan moving with music of camel-bells through the silence.

The Border Mountains

The mountain range through which I had been passing, in whose spurs and branches I spent another two days before reaching Kuchan, and in whose rugged eastern ramifications I was to wander for the ten days following, is the eastern prolongation of the great Elburz range that runs like a mighty rock wall along the entire northern border of Persia. Connected with the Caucasian system upon the west, it follows at distances varying from ten to thirty miles the south coast line of the Caspian, throwing up on its way the prodigious peak of Demavend (19,400 ft.), until, temporarily arrested in the valley of the Gurgan beyond Astrabad, it assumes a new lease of vigour in the knotted mountain ridges that stand one behind the other like infantry files, with an axis pointing from north-west to south-east, in the middle district between the Turkoman plains and the northern skirts of the Great Persian Desert. Further on the connection is as distinct with the misnamed Paropamisan range above Herat, itself a western continuation of the tremendous Hindu Kush. In the region under examination, the border ranges on the north are known by the names of the Kuren Dagh and Kopet Dagh, whilst the main and still higher inland ridge, enclosing the valley of the Atrek on the south, bears the successive names of Ala Dagh and Binalud Kuh. The upland valleys concealed between these parallel barriers have an average elevation of 4,000 feet, and are dominated by peaks that claim an altitude of from 8,000 to 11,000 feet. It is said that in Khorasan alone there are not less than sixteen summits which answer to this description. Nothing can exceed the bleak sterility of their outward form. Unredeemed by any verdure but a stunted and scanty growth of juniper, watered by few springs, and with little or no soil upon the slopes, the grey limestone tells with frank and forbidding effrontery its remote geological tale. It was not out of keeping with the chill and savage character of these hills that until the last decade they were

the chosen haunt of rapine and murder, the Turkoman man-hunters sweeping down like a flame through their sullen gorges, and falling with sword and musket upon the villages and flocks that presumed to survive their repeated devastations.

Projected railroad

It was said, when the Russians began to build the Ashkabad-Kuchan road, that they contemplated in the future laying upon it a line of rails—whether a railroad or a steam tramway—that should facilitate their connection with Meshed. As has been pointed out to me, however, by an English Engineer officer who has inspected the work, such cannot possibly be the case, the zigzags by which the ridges are surmounted being of a character with which, in their present condition, no railroad in the world could grapple; while the same may be said of many of the angles on the Persian section of the road between Baj Girha and Kuchan. It would be easy enough to lay a line of rails from Kuchan to Meshed, where the track would run upon a level plain. But no purpose would be served by such an outlay; and it is more probable, as will be pointed out later on, that, if Meshed is to be brought into correspondence with the Russian railway system, it will be from the opposite direction.

From Baj Girha there are two short marches, *viâ* Durbadam and Imam Kuli, to Kuchan. The distance is said to be 12 *farsakhs*, nominally 48 miles. I reckon the stages, however, from Ashkabad as follows:

	Miles
Ashkabad to Baj Girha	30
Baj Girha to Persian Do.	2
Persian Do. to Imam Kuli	21
Imam Kuli to Kuchan	23
Total	76

Between the frontier and Kuchan, the present camel and mule track does not follow precisely the same line as will the *chaussée*.

Persian section of the road

The latter, it is understood, will make a *détour* by Aughaz, and will avoid other steep or difficult places. Nevertheless, I kept continually striking upon the incomplete works, small segments of the road being finished, others only marked out, and others again in the hands of the workmen. I met some hundreds of these in batches,[1] blasting the rocks, or building unsubstantial bridges, which will probably be destroyed by the first flood. A German engineer had been engaged to infuse

[1] Their wages were about $6\frac{1}{2}d.$ a day.

a little science into the proceedings, but he died a month later; and if native engineering talent has since been thought sufficient, it is a poor look-out for the durability of the undertaking. The labourers I saw at work were engaged in the most leisurely fashion; and if the Malek-et-Tajar completes his contract in double the time specified I shall be very much surprised.

Durbadam and Imam Kuli

Passing down the valley in a south-easterly direction from Baj Girha, the present route leads through stony hills and glens that reminded me strangely of the forlorn belt of country in Palestine that is crossed between Jerusalem and Samaria. A little further we entered a narrow defile, which was so steep that I was obliged to dismount and lead down my horse. Small watch-towers perched like eyries on the cliff tops, and a rudely constructed wall of stones built across the ravine, were reminders of the not yet forgotten days of Turkoman forays. At the end of the gorge we emerged upon a small circular plain, in which the village of Durbadam takes advantage of the presence of a mountain stream, deriving therefrom both its *raison d'être* and wherewithal of life. A square enclosure with high mud walls and projecting towers at the angles was a sight with which I was to become daily if not hourly familiar later on, and which was an elementary obligation of tactics imposed by the Turkomans upon every village within a hundred miles of their border. At Durbadam (14 miles) I spread a carpet in an orchard and lunched.

Following the gorge by which the river Sharek enters the valley, and where the new road will cross the stream several times, and will be very liable to demolition by floods, we came into more open country, and passed the first of two villages known as Imam Kuli on the left. Hearing sounds of lamentation proceeding from a miserable hovel, and observing a circle of women and children weeping and bewailing outside, I went up and found that one of the natives of the village, a husband and a father, had been killed by a fall of rock, while blasting on the new roadway, in the gorge which I had just quitted. The dead body, naked, but covered with a sheet, lay with its feet in the doorway. I gave the poor creatures a few *krans*, as they looked miserably poor. Outside the village I passed a shallow gravelly trench dug by the roadside, where, amid a little cluster of stony mounds, the hapless victim was about to be laid to rest. At 3 P.M., in a wider opening of the valley, dignified by occasional clumps of poplar, I reached the main

village of Imam Kuli, built, as are all these Persian mountain villages, in tiers upon the hill side—a series of squalid mud terraces pierced by low holes for doorways. The headman of the village offered me his house, but I preferred the prospect of cold in a tent to the certainty of fleas indoors. Here I was met by a messenger from the Ilkhani or Chief of Kuchan, whose capital I was to visit on the morrow, and who had been apprised of my arrival. The emissary, an old gentleman with white beard most imperfectly dyed with henna, inquired at what hour I proposed to arrive at Kuchan, as his master wished to give me a befitting reception outside the town. I gave him the *rendezvous* at noon. He suggested that I should spend an entire day at Imam Kuli—a solicitude on my behalf which I found to be due to his own reluctance to make the return journey to Kuchan with sufficient speed to anticipate my arrival. I replied that the irresistible attractions of Kuchan drew me on.

Zobaran to Kuchan

As I started at seven o'clock the next morning, a party of pilgrims for Meshed, who had come from Resht, *viâ* Uzun Ada and Ashkabad,[1] passed out of the village on donkey back in front of me, singing loudly in praise of Ali and Husein, and other saints of the Shiah calendar. I followed the main road out of the valley, and then struck off to the south-west, taking a short cut over a rolling range of hills which constitute the watershed between the streams that drain north to the Atek and those that drain south to Kuchan. In a ravine on the left could be discerned the small villages of Kelat-i-Shah Mohammed, watered by a *kanat* or underground aqueduct, and further on Kelat-i-Mullammamud (Mullah Mahmud ?). There was no contrast of colour on the barren hills, even though they now became lower and more undulating, while their flanks had in parts been ploughed for grain. The landscape might have been draped in *khaki*, that excellent but unlovely material with which we clothe our soldiers in torrid climes. Zobaran (15 miles), though the name signifies plenty, did not by its appearance betray that it enjoyed plenty of anything but stones and dust. However, a tiny rill of clear water fed a

[1] The Transcaspian Railway is very largely used by Mussulman pilgrims of both persuasions, making their way to or from the sacred shrines. For the Sunnis of Central Asia it supplies an agreeable abridgment of the long journey to Mecca, and is equally serviceable for that to Kerbela and Nejef. By the Persian Shiahs and the Mahometans of the West, it is enormously used on the pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza at Meshed.

small pool and watered a few straggling poplars and willows. The two remaining *farsakhs* to Kuchan were full *farsakhs*, and it was a little past noon when I arrived. For three-quarters of an hour beforehand I had seen the town and its orchards and vineyards lying far below in the midst of a broad valley, like a footprint of red mould upon a sandy floor. The limits of the highly cultivated ground around the town were distinctly marked; and it was as though some giant, stepping over the earth, had planted one big foot in this desolate hollow of the world's surface, which had straightway burgeoned and blossomed under the magic touch. On the north and south the valley was confined by rolling ranges which stretched away towards Shirwan in the west and eastwards in the direction of Meshed. Within about two miles of the town, and at the last swell of the hill before descending into the plain, I struck the main road again, and galloped briskly towards the walls. About a mile therefrom a bridge with a single high arch and no attempt at a parapet spanned the then waterless channel of the Atrek.[1] A flock of goats was standing in the dried-up bed, and sipping the little remaining moisture in a few stagnant pools. A few dusty poplars fringed the banks of the vanished stream. On the other side vegetation was general and even prolific. Orchards of peaches, mulberry, apricot, and pomegranate were yellowing under the fall of the year. The enclosures were thickly planted with vines straggling in irregular double rows with broad deep irrigation trenches for the water between, and presenting an appearance very unlike the trim precision of the vineyards of Bordeaux. The industrial energy of Kuchan seems to be specially devoted to the manufacture of wine, and in a scarcely less degree to its consumption, a genial immunity which the Shiah Mahometans have never been slow to claim for themselves from the stern asceticism of the Sunni dogma.

By this time I was much surprised to have met no carriage or deputation from the Khan, in view of the recognised reception given to strangers at Persian seats of government, and of the

[1] That this is the main stream of the Atrek I do not think there can be any doubt. It rises in the defile of Tabarik below the Allah-o-Akbar range, about twenty miles to the south of Kuchan, and is sometimes called Tabarik as far as that place. Valentine Baker claimed to have discovered the real source in a pool called Kara Kazan (Black Cauldron), close to Shirwan. But he can only have ignored the upper course of the river, because at that time it must have been dry.

THE ILKHANI OF KUCHAN

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preparations of the previous day.[1] I remembered that when Colonel Baker came to Kuchan in 1873, in the time of the same Ilkhani, he was treated with a similar scant ceremony on his arrival, the reason being that the Khan was sleeping off the effects of a heavy debauch the night before. As these orgies were said to be of constant occurrence, it was extremely likely that the same plea might be forthcoming for the failure to receive me now. However, I was sufficiently versed in Oriental etiquette to know that in matters of ceremony a foreigner is taken at his own estimation, and that any failure to vindicate his titular importance is ascribed not to modesty but to weakness.[2] Accordingly I halted outside the walls of the town, which I declined to enter under such auspices, and sent on my Afghan sergeant and one of the Turkoman *sowars*[3] to the house of the Khan, to say that I had arrived at the hour agreed upon, and was surprised at the indignity of being compelled to halt in a caravanserai outside the walls. In about ten minutes there was a clatter of hoofs; eight or ten horsemen galloped up; and a somewhat dilapidated single brougham, drawn by two grey steeds, on one of which was mounted a postilion, rumbled up to the door. The leader explained that the Khan was very much distressed at my legitimate annoyance; that he had intended to meet me as arranged, but that the messenger from Imam Kuli, the old fellow with the skewbald beard, had named one o'clock as the hour of my arrival. He begged I would forgive the mistake and accept a house which he had prepared for me. My wounded dignity having received this balsam, I mounted the vehicle; my horse was led before; my escort came behind; and the Khan's cavaliers galloped in front, clearing a way through the streets and bazaars with astonishing rapidity.

Reception on arrival

Entering the town by a low gateway with earthen towers in the earthen wall, we jolted along a number of narrow and tortuous lanes, and at length pulled up at a house which, I was informed, the Khan had furnished and placed at my disposal. Three excellent rooms, carpeted and with whitewashed walls, relieved by shallow niches, looked out on a

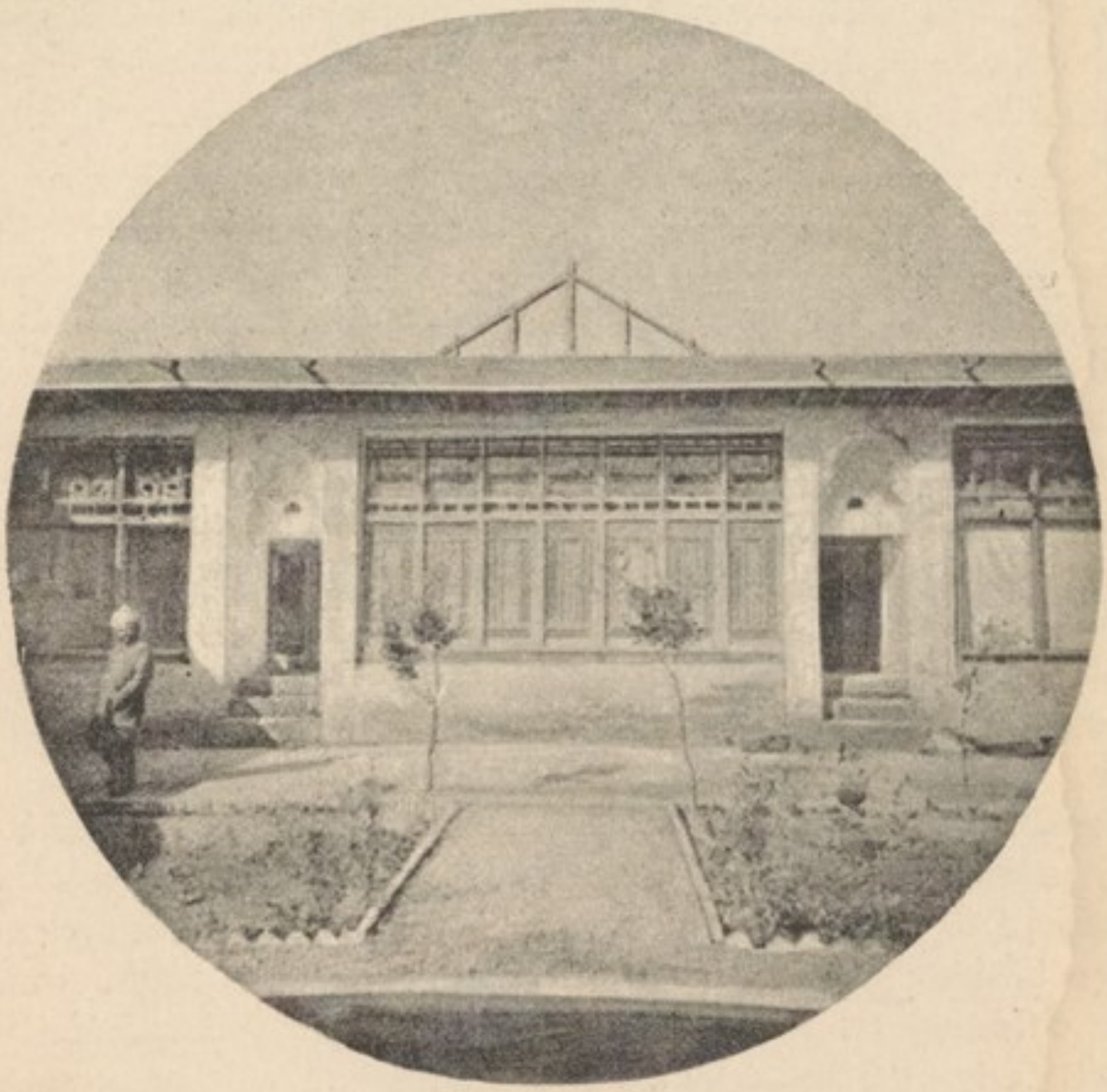
Hospitality of the Khan

[1] *Istikbal* is the name of the mounted escort usually sent out to meet a guest of distinction; *mehmandar*, that of the official who, on behalf of the prince or governor, welcomes the new arrival.

[2] A Persian grandee will frequently try to get the better of his guest in this manner, not so much with the intention of being rude as to magnify his own importance.

[3] *Vide* next chapter.

little open court, in the centre of which was a circular basin and fountain, surrounded by flower-beds—the normal interior of every Persian mansion. A Russian *samovar* simmered on the table, and some cane-bottomed chairs (which a Persian nobleman invariably keeps for European visitors) stood around. The entire garden wall of the principal room was one large window frame, filled, according to the prevailing Persian fashion, with little pieces of stained glass prettily set in a species of wooden lattice. The



GUEST HOUSE AT KUCHAN

second apartment, intended as a bedroom, contained a small iron stove of Persian manufacture; and the niches in the walls were completely covered with Russian pictures of a character that we associate either with tradesmen's advertisements at Christmas time or with the special issues of illustrated newspapers—viz. brilliantly coloured pictures of the Russian Royal Family, and fanciful portraits of black-haired houris with gorgeous necklaces and bare necks and arms. There were no less than four large pictures of the Czar and Czarina, and a coloured print of the principal

sovereigns of the world, with the Czar, quite double the size of the rest, in the centre; and the old Emperor of Germany and the Emperor of Austria, of size No. 2, on his right and left. Queen Victoria, in a red silk dress, occupied the central position in a row of the third dimension. Along with these embellishments were nailed up a number of brightly coloured and gilded chromos of religious subjects, such as the Virgin Mary, Christ, and different saints of the Greek calendar, contrasting curiously with the uniformed royalties and the smiling coquettes. The decorations of the room sufficiently indicated the foreign influences to which the Khan is most amenable, and must originally have been devised for guests of another nationality than my own. Huge trays laden with pink and white sweetmeats now arrived from the Khan, who renewed his apologies, asked when I would come to see him, and inquired whether I would be willing to remit the punishment of the red-bearded emissary from Imam Kuli on the ground that, being a Kurd, he had imperfectly understood the explanations of my interpreter. I named five o'clock as the hour of meeting, and gladly acquiesced in the pardon of the offender.

And now, having arrived at Kuchan, let me, before proceeding further, give some idea of the character and inhabitants of this important frontier province, and of the personality of the Kurdish chieftain whose guest I was, and whom I was about to interview.

General description

Three hundred years ago the north-eastern border of Persia was as subject to Tartar inroads as, till ten years ago, it was to the *alamans* of the Akhal Tekkes. Collecting in the desert on the north, they burst through the mountain gorges and defiles, burnt, harried, massacred, plundered, and retired with as much swiftness and as great impunity as they had come. It was characteristic of the dispositions of a great monarch that, recognising the inability of so timid a people as the Persians successfully to resist the invaders themselves, Shah Abbas looked elsewhere for his frontier garrison. Just as he transported an entire Armenian community from his north-west provinces to Isfahan, in order to teach trade and attract prosperity to his newly founded capital, so he now transferred an entire community of warlike Kurdish tribesmen from the same quarter, and planted them in the mountainous glens and uplands of Khorasan. By this judicious act he served a double purpose; for he both

Plantation and power of the Kurds

fortified his position in the east and relieved himself of the insecurity arising from the bloody feuds and divisions of the Kurdish clans in the west.[1] The expatriated tribes were the Shahdillu, Zaferanlu, Kaiwanlu, and Amanlu; and it is said that while the transplantation of 40,000 families was originally contemplated by Abbas, the resistance of several of the chieftains reduced the number actually moved to 15,000 families.[2] Settled in the mountains and valleys between Astrabad and Chinaran, they held their new territories free from revenue or tribute, on the feudal ground of military service, being responsible for the safety of the frontier and for the provision of mounted troops to the army of the King. The great richness of Kuchan accounted for a money tribute being subsequently demanded from its ruler as well. Bujnurd, as a poorer district, was not mulcted in more than a nominal annual present from its chief to the sovereign. The independent position, no less than the hereditary instincts of the new-comers, soon led to the acquisition by their chieftains of great power and much importance. Of these, Kuchan from an early date acquired the superiority, and the title of Ilkhani (i.e Lord of the Ils or Clans) was bestowed upon its ruler, either in recognition of his pre-eminence or, as some say, in order to make him personally answerable to the central authority for the good behaviour of the whole. Nevertheless, the Kurdish settlers were constantly either in veiled or open rebellion; and although Nadir Shah attempted to conciliate them by marrying a daughter of the Ilkhani, they took advantage of his absence in India again to assert their independence. At this he was so infuriated that, vowing their complete extermination, he marched against Kuchan, and was already outside its walls when, in 1747, he was murdered in his tent. Again in the present century Kuchan was in open rebellion against Fath Ali Shah; and when Burnes was there in 1832 the town had just fallen, after a protracted siege, to the army of Abbas Mirza, the heir apparent, whose artillery was directed by British officers. The experiences of the present Ilkhani, which I shall presently relate, have shown that under the reigning Shah rebellion is a more precarious experiment; and

[1] The original plantation is referred by some writers, but I think incorrectly, to Shah Ismail, the founder of the Sefavi dynasty.

[2] Yet I have somewhere seen the number of removals stated as 100,000 families, which I think must have been a misprint for 100,000 persons.

during the last twenty years and more, especially since the advent of the Russians on the north, and the consequent disappearance of the particular necessity to which the Kurds owed both their position and their power, the strength of the latter and the authority of their chieftains have very sensibly declined.

Their character

Of the five Kurdish states originally settled in Khorasan, three alone—Kuchan, Bujnurd, and Deregez—now remain. Of a simple, if rude and independent, character when first they entered the country, their turbulent existence and the opportunities of plunder which they enjoyed soon exercised a deteriorating influence upon the *morale* of the colonists; and travellers who visited them during the days of Turkoman border warfare, and saw both parties at work, reported that there was very little to choose between the methods of the two. Both raided, pillaged, and massacred whenever they had a chance. A Turkoman was always fair game to a Kurd, and a Kurd to a Turkoman; and if we have heard more of the awful results of the Tekkes' devastations in Persia than of the return compliments paid by the Kurds to the Atek, it is probably because no curious stranger ever dared to penetrate the Turkoman desert, while a hundred eyes have witnessed the desolated villages and hamlets of Khorasan. In appearance the Kurds are easily distinguishable from the Persians, both in physiognomy and dress. They are a fine masculine race, with open countenances, strongly marked and well-shaped features, sometimes fair complexions, and untrimmed beards and hair. They have adopted the principal articles of Persian costume, but they wear rough sheepskin bonnets (instead of the smug *kolah* or the small egg-shell felt cap) and long sheepskin coats or *poshtins*. Until quite recently they were distinguished for their tribal cohesion and attachment to their chiefs, whom they were ready to support at any time in an insurrection against the central power.

Authority of the Ilkhani

The title of Ilkhani has always been hereditary in one family, though nominally subject to the ratification of the Shah. The Persian Government has, on occasions, tried the experiment of appointing its own officials; but this has invariably led to rebellion and the compulsory withdrawal of the intruder. Till the accession, or rather till the assertion in the last twenty-five years of the authority, of the present Shah, the Kurds have uniformly regarded the Kajar dynasty as an alien

L. of C.

usurpation. They were the subjects of their own rulers, but not of the Persian monarch. The Ilkhanis dispensed law and justice in their own name, without reference to Teheran, and even wielded the power of life and death. An incident, however, which had occurred just before my arrival in Kuchan will better indicate than any words the change that has taken place. The Vizier or Deputy-Governor of Kuchan, one Ramzan Khan, had been shot by a would-be assassin in pursuit of personal revenge. Though the injured man had not died, the Ilkhani, without any reference to Teheran, put the attempted murderer to death, it was said with horrible tortures. This was regarded by the Shah as an unwarrantable encroachment upon his own prerogative; and I have no doubt that the old Ilkhani did not escape without paying a substantial indemnity.

Ruling family

The pedigree of the Ilkhani's family is as follows: The first chief of whom I find record was Mohammed Husein Khan, who resided at Shirwan towards the close of the last century. His son, Amir Gunah Khan, moved to Kuchan in the early years of this century, and was engaged in frequent conflict with the Turkomans. About 1815 he was deposed by his son, Reza Kuli Khan, who must have ruled for the greater part of fifty years. He was Ilkhani when Fraser visited Kuchan (which he called Kabushan or Cochoon, Kuchan being a contraction of the longer name) in 1822, and was described by him as a man of good and honourable character, but of no great courage or talents, although he succeeded for long in remaining more or less independent of the sovereign power. Taking advantage of his absence upon one occasion, Fath Ali Shah, who was as ambitious of military aggrandisement as he was personally timid and unwarlike, advanced against Kuchan, but failed to take the town, and was obliged to conclude a truce and withdraw. Later, as I have shown, the place was successfully captured by Abbas Mirza, and Reza Kuli Khan was compelled to acknowledge his subjection. Sent as a prisoner first to Teheran and afterwards to Tabriz, he died of chagrin on the way at Mianeh.[1] His son, Sam Khan, was made ruler in his place. The present Ilkhani was a younger son, and told me that he succeeded his elder brother twenty-four years ago.

Amir Husein Khan, my host, who also bears the grandiloquent titles of Amir el Omrah (i.e. Lord of Lords) and Shuja-ed-Dowleh

[1] Fraser, *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 226.

(i.e. Boldness of the Empire, a title conferred upon him by the Shah), has, during his life of over sixty years, enjoyed a somewhat checkered existence. In early days he took part in the campaign against Herat in 1856–7, and in the Persian expedition against Merv that had such disastrous consequences in 1860. Vain, ambitious, and inordinately proud, he was unwise enough, after succeeding to the chieftainship, to incur the enmity of the Governor-General of Khorasan. Summoned to Meshed to render account, he declined to obey, and held out till a Persian army, sent to chastise him, arrived within sight of Kuchan, when a compromise was arrived at, and the Ilkhani was left in possession on payment of a fine to the Shah which I have heard variously named as 3,000*l.* and 7,000*l.* Again, however, he was either guilty or was suspected of rebellion, and on this second occasion was summoned to Teheran, deposed and imprisoned, his son being made Ilkhani in his stead. After a short time, probably in return for a second and larger ransom, he was released and reinstated, and has since remained in undisturbed possession, having learnt quite enough of the present Shah to find that rebellion, even on the part of a Warden of the Marches, no longer pays. Though the deterioration of his Kurdish clansmen, arising from a long period of peace, and the weakening of his own position consequent upon the strength of the present Shah, and upon the centralisation introduced in all parts of the kingdom by the electric telegraph, have shorn the Khan of much of his ancient prestige, he is still one of the most powerful vassals of the Persian crown, and, apart from his own personality, is interesting as perhaps the last survival of a vanishing order.

The present Ilkhani

With his eldest son, Abul Hasan Khan, now about thirty-six years of age, he has long been upon the worst of terms. The latter was once Governor of Shirwan, the second town of the principality, but was deposed and imprisoned by his father. He now resides at Chinaran, where he enjoys a fixed revenue by order of the Shah, and had lately married a daughter of the Vizier of Khorasan. It is not certain, however, whether he will succeed the old Ilkhani, as he is subject to fits of madness, in one of which he was said to have beaten his former wife, a Turkoman woman, to death; and, moreover, he inherits in full measure the parental addiction to drink.

His son

It is, I fear, as a drunkard that the old chief is best known to

English readers and has been commemorated by English writers. During the past twenty years he has been visited and interviewed by several Englishmen: by Colonel Valentine Baker in 1873, Captain Napier in 1874, Sir C. MacGregor in 1875, and Edmund O'Donovan in 1880;[1] and by most of these authorities was found either drinking or drunk, or slowly recovering from the effects of drink, Kuchan being noted for its white wine, and the Khan having a partiality besides for brandy, arrack, and any spirit that is sufficiently potent. General Grodekoff, who was despatched to Khorasan in disguise in 1880 by General Skobeleff, with the knowledge of the Shah, in order to purchase supplies for the Russian army then operating against the Tekke Turkomans in Transcaspia, was well aware beforehand of the propensities of the Kurdish chieftain, and in his official account of the mission entrusted to him very candidly avows the steps by which he sought to ingratiate himself with his too convivial host:—

His reputation

> Knowing that he was fond of liquor, we placed several bottles of wine, liqueurs, and *vodka* before him; and in a very short time the Shuja had drunk several glasses of different wines, and then called in his singers and musicians. The men who came with him, his surgeon, and his favourites, Vali Khan and Ramzan Khan, drank themselves stupid, and a regular orgy began. Next day I went to see the Amir, and presented my documents to him. Bottles were already standing before him, and he explained that he was recovering from his intoxication. During our conversation he repeatedly partook of brandy, opium, *hashish*, and wine, and by noon was quite drunk. In the evening of the same day he invited us to a European supper, and again got intoxicated to the last degree.'

In the negotiations that followed, General Grodekoff was alternately impressed by the astuteness of the Ilkhani and disgusted by his habits. Once his editor writes:—

> A three days' sojourn in his society showed Colonel Grodekoff that the Amir was very much in possession of all his faculties; that he was not to be deceived by our giving ourselves out as commission agents; and that, although he was a drunkard, still he saw and remembered everything.

[1] The authorities on Kuchan are J. B. Fraser (1822), *Journey into Khorasan*, cap. xxii. and Appendix B; (Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. pp. 74–84; Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 277–278; Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), 'Diary of a Tour in Khorasan,' *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. p. 87; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 83–88; E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. cap. xxviii.; General Grodekoff (1880), *The War in Turkomania* (Russian), vol. iv. cap. xvii.

But on another occasion :—

> To carry on business with him was more than difficult. One had to drink with him, to listen to his drunken speeches, to be present at his orgies, and still to be on one's guard not to show signs of disgust, which would at once have called forth the anger of the barbarian. Truly the world has produced few such brutes, as Colonel Grodekoff expressed himself in a telegram to General Skobeleff.

It would appear, however, that the Khan has only perpetuated himself, and bequeathed to the estimable son whom I have before named, a taste which he had himself inherited from his father; for when Fraser was the guest of Reza Kuli Khan in 1822 he relates that he saw 'the Khan and the whole court dead drunk.' There is a certain fine continuity, therefore, in the family proceedings.

Two interviews

It may be imagined that, knowing as much as I did about Amir Husein Khan, my familiarity with whose antecedents would probably have caused a severe shock to the old gentleman had he been aware of it, I looked forward with some anxiety to my interview. Donning my frock coat, which I confess looked somewhat incongruous beneath a Terai hat, and my goloshes, and attended by as large a retinue of my own servants as I could muster,[1] I followed the escort of six persons who had been sent by the Khan to conduct me to his palace hard by. The façade over the entrance gateway was in the form of a triple arch filled with elegant bas-reliefs in white plaster, made after the fashion of an Italian villa, behind which a neat little kiosque rose above the roof. Passing through the gateway, which was filled with guards, I was conducted to the left into a large open court, about twice as long as it was broad, the lower end of which was divided into flower-beds, while above the middle was a *hauz*, one of those large tanks common to every Persian house of any pretensions, and so cunningly constructed that the water just laps over the stone brim and trickles down into a channel outside. On the pavement beyond were standing some thirty individuals with their backs turned to the tank and their faces towards the upper end, where I could see into an elevated *aiwan* or reception chamber, separated

[1] It is a cardinal point of Persian etiquette when you go out visiting to take as many of your own establishment with you as possible, whether riding or walking on foot; the number of such retinue being accepted as an indication of the rank of the master.

from the court by a latticed window, the central panels of which were thrown open. Entering a small room in the right-hand corner, I left my goloshes, and was ushered into the central apartment of the daïs, which contained only two inlaid tables down the middle, positively laden with coloured glass candelabra, vases, and curios, and an iron bedstead with a mattress in the corner. The glass baubles represent an incomprehensible but very widely spread taste among the Persians of the upper classes, while the bedstead was doubtless introduced as a crowning evidence of successfully assimilated civilisation. In the centre of this audience chamber at the back was a recessed apartment, where the Khan was seated at a table, and whence he rose to welcome me. While he was dictating to the interpreter the customary opening civilities, and during our subsequent interviews, which lasted fully two hours, I had abundant opportunity to become acquainted with his features and deportment.

Appearance of Amir Husein Khan

In appearance the Shuja is striking, but the reverse of handsome. There was a photograph of him hanging in the house where he entertained me, which I subsequently begged of him, and a reproduction of which adorns the accompanying page. He was careful to explain that, having been taken by a Persian artist, the likeness entirely failed to do him justice, a criticism which I am bound to endorse, as, though an ugly, he was in no sense a forbidding-looking man, but wore an air both of authority and of intelligence. Though over sixty years of age, his beard and hair were jet black, the result, I imagine, of dye. He had strongly marked features and a very sallow complexion. He was dressed in a black cloth coat and trousers, with diamond buckles, and a diamond-hilted sword, a black sheepskin *kolah* or hat pressed low down on to his ears,[1] white cotton gloves and stockings, and patent leather shoes. Being very short-sighted, he wore colossal blue spectacles over his eyes. When speaking,

[1] The *kolah*, as the national headdress of the Persians, was only introduced by the Kajar family a century ago. Up till that time the turban was universal. Even after the introduction of the *kolah*, a shawl was sometimes wrapped round it; but this was a distinction limited to the King, the Royal Family, and a few of the great officers of State. It is now only seen in the Court dress worn at the Shah's levées. On the other hand, the *kolah* itself has changed in shape; for whereas at the beginning of the century it was about a foot and a half in height, and sloped up to a peak at the top, it is now ordinarily from six to ten inches in height and is level round the top.

his manner and locution were those of one habituated to command. In parleying with the interpreter he showed great animation, and when calling for his *kalian* (the Persian water-pipe or *narghileh*), or issuing an order, his utterance was an imperious growl. At his left hand sat a Seyid (i.e. descendant of the Prophet) in a green turban and prodigious *khelat* of dark blue colour, who occasionally interpolated remarks when appealed to, and generally acted the part of an echo to his master. One of the younger sons of the Khan, a boy of fourteen, was also present, and a *mirza* or secretary was afterwards called in, who understood a few words of French. A group of attendants stood at a little distance, and ran to and fro with *kalians*, tea, coffee, and ices.

Conversation

In the two conversations which I enjoyed with the Khan—for he returned my visit early on the following morning—he said many quaint and characteristic things which I shall not here repeat at full length, but the bulk of which may advisably be condensed. I soon found that I was dealing with a man who, whatever his common delinquencies, was in full possession of his faculties upon the present occasion, and who had an acute and questioning mind. He occasionally displayed an ignorance that in a European would be puerile; but this mixture of childishness and sagacity is characteristic of the Oriental intelligence, and is natural to a state of life where mental development is crushed by restricted surroundings and by a total lack of general experience.

Question and answer

In reply to my question, he could not tell me how many subjects he possessed, because they were never counted. But there were 40,000 houses under his rule (I am afraid a great exaggeration), and each house paid one *toman* (six shillings) in taxation (a greater still), and each house supplied an armed soldier (the greatest of all). They were very good soldiers, and would fight anybody. This gave me the opportunity I desired of sounding the old gentleman about Russia and his Russian proclivities. I observed that Khorasan was a very rich country, and that it was sometimes said that the Russians wanted to take it.

'How should they take it?' he said.

'In the same way that they have already taken Akhal Tekke,' he replied.

'No, that is out of the question! The people will fight for it. They will all gather together and fight for Meshed. They are good

soldiers. We are not sour milk that the Russians should swallow us down.[1] We have a wall of men; a wall of men is stronger than a wall of stones.'

While treating this asseveration with becoming respect, I fear that I was uncharitable enough at this juncture to remember not only the mural decorations of the house which I had so recently quitted, but a certain passage that occurred in a letter written by this same vehement old patriot to the Russian, Grodekoff, only ten years before, in which he had remarked: 'There is only one Jesus on whom were poured out all divine blessings, so that he should come from heaven and create such a people as the Russians.' Changing the subject, I inquired what the Khan thought about railways in Persia. Though he had never seen a railroad in his life, he surprised me by advocating their introduction everywhere into the country, and wondered why they were not begun. He was aware that Queen Victoria had reigned over fifty years and had recently celebrated her jubilee. He could not understand the niggardly policy of the Amir of Afghanistan in refusing to allow strangers to enter his dominions, and was unwilling to believe that it was more difficult to penetrate to Herat than to Kuchan. The narrow range of his knowledge, however, transpired when I told him that eight days were required to go from London to America, and he immediately asked if the distance was 80 *farsakhs*, i.e. 320 miles, arguing from the maximum distance of a day's land march in Persia.[2]

Very characteristic too, and in strict accordance with the practice of his family (his father, Reza Kuli Khan, put the same questions to Fraser, and the Ilkhani himself had repeated them seventeen years before my visit to Baker), were his interrogations as to my object and motive in travelling. 'Why do you come to Kuchan? What do you want? Do the English Government pay

[1] This was an allusion to the coagulated milk, called *mast* or *ab-i-dugh*, which is a favourite drink with the Persians and Kurds; and the meaning was, 'We are not such a simple and agreeable draught as some suppose.'

[2] This answer, which is typical of the ignorance on all matters concerning geography that is universal in Persia, reminds me of the story told by Morier (*First Journey*, p. 215) of Fath Ali Shah, who was very curious about America, and asked Sir Harford Jones, 'What sort of a place is it? How do you get at it? Is it underground?' Similarly, a Persian envoy to London, half a century later, being told that the steamer which was carrying him had engines of 500 horse-power, exclaimed delightedly, 'Oh, show me the stables.'

you to travel? How much do they pay you? If not they, then who pays you?' The taste for travel and gratuitous thirst for knowledge are emotions quite incomprehensible to the Oriental mind.[1]

I had great difficulty also in explaining to him my own profession and the position of my family. Parliament he had never heard of; and when I told him that I was a member of the great *mejilis* (council), he replied, 'Are you a soldier?' The status or rank of an English nobleman conveyed nothing to him; but he put the pertinent questions, 'Has your father many soldiers?' and 'Who made him governor of his property?' He was positively amazed at a tenure of the same estates lasting over 800 years, but replied, in the spirit of Mr. Hardcastle in 'She Stoops to Conquer,'[2] and with a Conservatism which I could not fail to admire, that Ferenghistan was a great country because of its antiquity; age, as he said, meaning authority.

Gift to the Khan

Acting in unconscious imitation of Fraser, who, nearly seventy years before, had presented a silver hunting watch to the father of my host, I endeavoured to make some little recognition of the hospitality of which I was the recipient by offering the Ilkhani a watch, the hours and minutes upon the face of which were marked not by a revolving hand, but by numerals appearing on a disc. He was vastly interested in this novelty; but as he could not understand the figures, which did not correspond with the Roman numerals on watches which he had previously seen or possessed, I had to draw up a table with the ordinary numerals from 1 to 60 and their Roman equivalents, to which his secretary appended a Persian translation. Having accepted the watch, the Shuja somewhat staggered me by inquiring how much it had cost. I attributed this question, which in a European would have implied impertinent curiosity, to the Oriental desire to make a return of as nearly as possible equivalent value to the donor, the notorious character of the Ilkhani for stinginess rendering it certain that he

[1] 'These people cannot conceive that any one should travel for pleasure or from curiosity. Who, argue they, would voluntarily undergo the fatigues and dangers, not to mention the heavy expense, of a long journey merely for the sake of collecting information? If, therefore, there be no ostensible motive for the journey, as that of business or of traffic, they at once assign the one in their opinion most likely.'—Fraser, *Journey into Khorasan*, p. 579.

[2] 'I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine.'

would not give a farthing in excess. What the quality or worth of his return gift may have been I never discovered; because, although he brought a bundle with him on his valedictory visit the next day, which I afterwards heard contained an intended present of carpets or embroidery, he failed to offer it to me, and it was said to have been purloined by some of his servants.

Such were the main incidents of my intercourse with the old chief of Kuchan. I am glad to be able, if not to contradict the versions of his character and accomplishments that have been given by my predecessors, at least to depict another and more favourable side of his nature. I note that on Sir C. MacGregor in 1875 he left the same impression of dignified manners and considerable intelligence. In the evening I had an opportunity both of becoming acquainted with the Persian *cuisine* and of testing the quality of the Khan's own kitchen. A dinner that would have fed a regiment was brought ready cooked from his house to that which he was pleased to call mine, and deposited in dishes upon the floor of the room. There were soup, chickens cooked in no less than three different ways, leg of lamb, mutton *ragoût*, excellent *kabobs*, a Persian omelette, three gigantic platters of rice, two of them containing the famous Persian *chilau* or plain boiled rice, the third a *pilau*, or rice mixed with meat and currants,[1] and other dishes for which I cannot find a name. The cooking of such as I tried was excellent, and the rice especially was prepared in a manner that no Parisian artist could emulate. For drink there was Kuchan wine, which I thought extremely nasty, sour milk, which is equally distasteful to the untrained palate, and native sherbet, which, though little else than iced sugar and water, is a most agreeable and refreshing beverage. Delicately carved and transparent pear-wood spoons from Abadeh floated in the sherbet-bowl. Lastly there were piles of grapes. I more than

Dinner from the Khan's kitchen

[1] The *chilau*, which is a triumph of cooking, comes up in the form of 'a white pyramid of steamed rice, every grain of which is dry outside, but inside is full of juice,' and is served with a large number of *entrées*. For its recipe, *vide* Thielmann (*Journey in the Caucasus*, vol. ii. p. 26), copied from Polak's *Persien*. As for the *pilau*, Chardin declared that there were above twenty sorts, for which he gave the recipes, made up with mutton, lamb, pullets, &c. The results of a long experience are condensed in these words: 'It has a wonderful, sobering, filling, and nourishing effect. One eats so much that one expects to expire; but at the end of half an hour you do not know what has become of it all; you no longer feel the stomach loaded' (edit. Lloyd, vol. ii. p. 226; edit. Langlès, vol. viii. p. 187).

once afterwards partook of a Persian dinner, and thought the fare, though excessive in quantity, better than in any of the other Oriental countries whose native styles I have tested.

While at Kuchan I rode out to inspect the town and its environs. I was informed that it now contains 12,000 inhabitants, but cannot help regarding this as an exaggerated estimate. The walls, of which I made the tour and which, along with the ditch, were constructed by the father and grandfather of the present Ilkhani, have never been repaired since their bombardment by the siege train of Abbas Mirza, and have been still further reduced by frequent shocks of earthquake since, notably one in 1872. Indeed, MacGregor in 1875 said the town was such a mass of ruins that he felt absolved from giving any description of it. The old ramparts are now in many places no more than shapeless heaps of mud. Outside the town are a large number of brick-kilns, and several ice-houses with lofty mud cones, built in beehive fashion over a pit in which the ice is stored. I was also taken to an extensive garden or orchard belonging to the Khan, the interior of which, ten or twelve acres in extent, was planted with vines, and avenues of apple, pear, apricot, pomegranate, mulberry, peach, plum, and quince. In the centre was a raised platform of beaten clay about a foot high, on which the Shah's pavilion was pitched when he stopped here on his second journey to Meshed in 1883, and where the Khan sometimes camps out when there is danger of earthquakes. Outside the town are also pointed out an elevated plateau known as Takht-i-Shah (i.e. Throne of the King), where Fath Ali Shah's tents were pitched in his expedition against Kuchan; and a hill called Nadir Tepe, at a distance of a mile and a half from the walls, where Nadir Shah met his fate in June 1747.

Town of Kuchan

The only building in Kuchan, in addition to the palace, that lifts its head above the horizontal level of the dusty roofs or is of the least importance, is a mosque with a dome and two stunted minarets, one of these having a wooden gallery at the top from which is given the summons to prayer. As the Shiah Mahometans do not allow unbelievers to enter even the gateways of their mosques, combining a peculiar fanaticism in this respect with excess of laxity in others, neither here nor elsewhere was I able to do more than gaze through the Arabic archway into the inner court.

Buildings

I am sorry that it was not till later that I read Fraser's account

of his visit to Kuchan in 1822; because I should have liked to ascertain the whereabouts of the fragments, described by him, of a magnificent Koran which had been brought by some of the Kuchan soldiers of Nadir Shah from the grave of Timur at Samarkand. Seventy years ago about sixty of these pages, ten to twelve feet long by seven to eight feet broad, and covered with beautiful calligraphy, were seen by Fraser lying upon a shelf in an *imamzadeh*, or saint's tomb.

Native bazaars

While at Kuchan I also visited the native bazaars. They are of the usual Oriental character—long alleys roofed over with timbers meeting above in an arch, and covered with mud and faggots to keep out the glare. I stopped in the cotton bazaar, where I saw a number of shops stocked with what were evidently European printed calicoes and cottons, and asked where they came from. 'Russia,' was the reply. Every piece bore the name of a Russian firm. I asked if there were any English goods sold in the bazaar. In reply some Turkey red was produced, and also some striped cotton-stuff. Neither, however, bore any English mark, and the vendor could not say where they came from. At length was produced some calico bearing the stamp of a Bombay manufacturer, and doubtless made of Indian cotton. I asked how it was that it was worth while to import goods from such a distance. The answer was that, though the price was high, yet the quality, which was not equalled in other wares, created a demand. All the glass, hardware, and crockery in the bazaar were Russian. So was the sugar. I was told that most of the tea came from India *viâ* Bunder Abbas and Meshed, but that some also came from Russia. Russian interests, political as well as commercial, are indeed well looked after at Kuchan, for the Russians keep a paid agent in the town. The export trade, which is principally in cotton and skins, is in the hands of Armenians, whose commercial aptitudes place much of the trade of Persia in their control. The proximity of Kuchan to Ashkabad, and the easy and secure communication between the two places, are alone sufficient to account for the Russian preponderance. The town is connected by a single (Persian) telegraphic wire with Meshed on the one hand, and Bujnurd, thirty miles lower down the Atrek valley, on the other. There connection is established with the Russian wires at Kizil Arvat. Kuchan is also served by a weekly Russian post from Ashkabad, carried by mounted Turkomans, who ride *viâ* Kuchan to Meshed.

Before I leave Kuchan I may furnish a few details of the district and government of which it is the capital. Bounded by the district of Bujnurd on the north-west, it extends as far as Radkan on the road to Meshed, a total length of nearly sixty miles, its breadth from north to south being a little less, and being about equally divided between the mountain ranges and uplands in which I had been journeying from the frontier and the Kuchan valley itself, which is fifteen miles in average width, and stretches without physical interruption to Meshed. The Shah Jehan mountains, which enclose it on the south, rise behind the town of Kuchan, which is 3,800 feet above the sea, to a peak of 10,000 feet. There is no more fertile or better watered tract in the whole of North Persia than the Kuchan valley. Under irrigation it gives a hundred-fold return of grain; and its cereal productiveness entitles it to be termed the granary of Khorasan. Skobeleff knew very well what he was about when he despatched Grodekoff to buy forage for his horses and camels from the Shuja-ed-Dowleh; and the Russians of to-day also know very well what they are doing in planting themselves within easy reach and in strategical command of a district which would feed a large army and dominate the whole of Khorasan. The population of the principality consists mainly of Zaferanlu Kurds, but contains also some Geraili Turks and a few Persians. Its total has been variously estimated at from 90,000 to 200,000 souls, the lower figure being, it is needless to add, nearer the probable mark. The income of the Ilkhani is derived partly from duties on houses and shops in the towns and on cultivated lands outside, partly from the revenues of his own private property. Out of it he is required to defray the charges of his cavalry contingent, who are well mounted and armed with guns, but whose numbers, which formerly stood at 1,000, had, I was informed (perhaps in consideration of the altered condition on the frontier), been reduced to 500.

The Kuchan Principality

Supplementary Routes from Kuchan

Kuchan to Meshed (*viâ* Jafirabad, Shurcha, Radkan, Chinaran, Gunabad, Kasimabad, 93 miles).—J. B. Fraser (1822), *Journey into Khorasan*, cap. xxii.; (Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. pp. 74–5; Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 79–87 and 151–3; E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. cap. xxviii.

Kuchan to Sebzewar (69 miles).—E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. p. 437.

KUCHAN TO ASTRABAD (*viâ* Shirwan, Bujnurd, and the Gurgan).—J. B. Fraser (1823), *Journey into Khorasan*, caps. xxiii.–iv., and (1834) *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. Letters xii., xiii.; (Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. pp. 86–101.

KUCHAN TO SHAHRUD (*viâ* Shirwan, Bujnurd, Semulghan, Jajarm, and Bostam). —Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, caps. xvi., xvii.; Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 98–113 and 164–5; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 88–113.

KUCHAN TO DEREGEZ.—Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 88–94 and 158–9.

CHAPTER VI

FROM KUCHAN TO KELAT-I-NADIRI

And one a foreground black with stones and slags,
Beyond—a line of heights, and higher
All barred with long white cloud the scornful crags,
And highest snow and fire.

TENNYSON, *The Palace of Art.*

Intention of visiting Kelat-i-Nadiri

FROM Kuchan it was my intention, if possible, to visit the famous frontier stronghold of Kelat-i-Nadiri, the Fort of Nadir Shah, described by previous travellers as one of the most extraordinary natural phenomena in the world, and famous even in this land of mountain fastnesses and impregnable defiles for its inaccessibility and amazing natural strength. Ever since the rumour had been spread, and even circulated in Europe, that Russia coveted this particular possession [a question was asked in the House of Commons in the spring of 1889 as to whether it had not actually been ceded to the Czar], the Persians had looked with a jealous eye upon any intruder, and I accordingly judged it prudent to say nothing of my desire. I had ascertained that it was impossible for me to fortify myself before starting with a special permit from the Shah, the latter not having as yet returned to Teheran from Europe, and the British Minister not being at the capital, in order to approach the sovereign's representatives. Nor in any case should I have solicited such permission, knowing that if granted it would at once have been treated as a precedent by the Russians for demanding a similar concession, which might in the case of their emissary have meant something very different from the visit of so innocent a traveller as myself. I was still less willing to telegraph for leave to the Governor-General of Khorasan at Meshed, because I doubted his ability to grant it, and felt certain that my footsteps would at once be dogged by spies, if I was not actually turned back. The Persians are so extravagantly suspicious of foreigners, and particularly of such as sketch, or ask questions, or measure, or

pull instruments out of their pockets, that no successful exploration would ever be undertaken if they were to be forewarned of the traveller's intention. I determined, therefore, to take no one into my counsels, but to announce that I was going to Meshed and might possibly diverge on the way to hunt in the mountains; my secret resolve being to strike across country by whatever route I could find,[1] and ascertain for myself whether it was possible for a single individual, unexpected and unannounced, to penetrate into Kelat.

The victoria of the Ilkhani

I had the greatest difficulty in eluding the vigilance of the Ilkhani, who was not only full of curiosity as to my movements, but also insisted upon my travelling in his brand-new Russian victoria as far as Meshed, threatening to return me the silver watch if I would not accept the loan of his vehicle. It was in vain that I said that I preferred to ride. 'You will have plenty of riding later on,' was the reply. Or that I wanted to stop at the villages *en route*. 'So can the carriage,' was the rejoinder. Finally I compromised by accepting the victoria, with the intention of sending it back at the end of the first stage; and concluded by a most ceremonious departure from Kuchan. The Khan walked with me through the streets, holding me by the hand, and deposited me in the vehicle, which was of Moscow build and of the newest and most elegant description (I fell to wondering from whom the present had come), and to which were harnessed four grey horses with postilions. With mounted *gholams* clearing a way in front and attendants walking by the side, the victoria, with myself inside it, rolled slowly out of the town.

Kuchan to Chamgir

The first part of my route lay along the highway to Meshed; as, in order to avoid suspicion, I had decided upon pursuing it as far as Radkan, on the outskirts of the Shuja's government, and forty miles from his city. The road runs across an almost dead level, although at about twenty miles from Kuchan it crosses the watershed between the Atrek and Keshef Rud drainage. It was unmetalled, in bad repair, and reflected no credit on the engineer who had constructed it. My postilions, as a rule, preferred to drive over the open plain, for the road was frequently intersected by irrigation trenches of a foot or more in depth, which

[1] I had no information as to the existence of any such route, the few English travellers who had previously been to Kelat having gone from Meshed.

caused excruciating scrunches to the springs of the light victoria. For the first ten miles the country, though at this season destitute of verdure, was richly cultivated, every square yard being turned by the plough. Wrapped up in a shroud of dust, I could scarcely see a yard in front. At intervals on either side of the plain occurred small mud villages, clinging to the shade of tiny clumps of trees, which owed their existence to some stray watercourse or to a happily unchoked *kanat*.[1] Of these villages we passed in

[1] I shall have occasion so frequently to speak of *kanats*, and they constitute so striking and almost invariable a feature of the Persian landscape, that, for the benefit of those who have not seen them, I will describe what they are. A *kanat* (identical with the Beluch and Afghan *kariz*) is a subterranean gallery or aqueduct conducting the water from its parent springs in hill or mountain to the village where it is required either to promote cultivation or to sustain life. The process of construction is as follows. Experimental shafts are first sunk until a spring is tapped in the higher ground. Then the labourer begins at the other end, where the water is required upon the surface, or at intervening points, and digs a trench or cutting, on a very slightly inclined plane, in the direction of the spring. As he goes further and gets deeper underground, circular pits or shafts are opened from above, at distances of twenty yards or more, by which the excavated soil is drawn up to the surface and heaped round the mouth of the shaft. In time the subterranean tunnel reaches the spring, and the water flows down the nicely calculated slope to its destination. The shafts are subsequently used to keep the gallery clear and free from obstruction. A village with any extent of cultivable soil is, therefore, as a rule, the apex from which radiate a number of *kanat* lines, often several miles in length, to the nearest mountain, the long succession of shafts resembling an array of portentous mole-hills thrown up one after the other across the plain. The water-way, however, is very easily blocked or choked or in other ways impaired, whereupon the whole labour is repeated *ab initio*, two parallel *kanat* lines being often encountered within a few yards of each other, the earlier of which has been totally abandoned. It will easily be understood how dangerous are the open shafts of the latter. The *débris* round their summits gets washed in by the rain, so that nothing remains to mark the mouth of the pit; and many are the animals that have found a premature death by falling down. Their skeletons can sometimes be seen wedged half-way down the shafts. Riders and their horses have had the most extraordinary escapes, and the case is well known at Teheran of a gentleman who, while out hawking, suddenly disappeared from view, having dropped down a disused shaft, but was hauled up along with his horse without any damage to either. The *kanat* shafts are the favourite abode of blue-rock pigeons, who, if the hands be clapped at one opening, will dart out of the next, providing shots that would puzzle even the professors of Hurlingham. In the account of his Persian travels, given by one of the Venetian Ambassadors, Signor Josafa Barbaro, over 400 years ago, occurs an interesting passage about the digging of *kanats*, which was thus rendered into English in a quaint translation of the sixteenth century: 'Neere to the ryver they make a pitt like unto a well, from whense they folowe, diggeng by lyvells towardes the place they meane to bringe it to; so that it may evermore distende chanell wise; which chanell is deeper than the botome of the foresaid pytt, and whan they have digged about

succession Fathiabad, two miles from Kuchan; Sarkhan, seven miles; Jafirabad, a collection of low cubical domes, fifteen miles, and Dashtabad. Black goats'-hair tents scattered here and there showed that not all the Kurds had taken to sedentary life, but that some retained their nomad instincts; while an occasional deserted village marked the site of a destroyed *kanat* or exhausted spring. At Kelata,[1] about twenty-two miles from Kuchan, I dismissed the victoria, with instructions to go home on the morrow; and mounting my horse, and leaving the high road to Meshed and the telegraph poles on the right, continued for another eight miles on the level to Chamgir, a small village some way short of Radkan. As we rode along the plain, now quite destitute of vegetation, a lovely lake of water, the creature of the Eastern mirage, trembled and glittered on the horizon, and ever receded while we advanced. Towards evening the north-east hills, on which the declining sun shone with full orb, acquired a startling glory with tints of rose and coral; the opposite range, plunged in the shadow, was suffused with an opaline vapour that temporarily endowed it with almost ethereal beauty. Presently they both relapsed, the one into a russet brown, the other into a cold and ashen grey. I camped in an orchard outside the village.

Primitive threshing

At one of the hamlets which we had passed during the day I saw a decidedly primitive manner of threshing barley straw. A threshing-floor was prepared of trodden earth outside the walls, and upon this the straw was spread out; while a long wooden cylinder or roller, armed with big wooden spikes, like the barrel of a colossal musical box, and drawn by bullocks, was driven slowly round and round over the heaps. The result was that the straw was chopped up into small pieces, which constitute the *kah*, or fodder, that is the common food of horses and mules in Persia. This mode of threshing and the implement employed are as old and unalterable as are most of the habits and utensils of the East. It is described at length by Chardin over two hundred years ago,[2] and by even earlier travellers, and will doubtless be visible in remote hamlets two hundred years hence.

XX. paces of this chanell, than digge they an other pitt like to the first, and so from pitt to pitt they conveigh the water alongest these chanells whither they woll.' But the system is older yet, for it is described by Polybius (lib. x. 25).

[1] Kelata is the plural, and signifies a collection of villages or hamlets, each of which is usually distinguished by a separate title.

[2] *Voyages* (edit. Langlès), vol. iv. pp. 105–106.

It is impossible to tire of the interest and humours of camp life. The traveller arrives first on his superior mount, and selects a favourable spot, beneath the protection of trees, and if possible near to running water. Stretching himself at full length upon an outspread carpet, he enjoys the luxury of relaxation and repose. The villagers crowd round and stare. Some firewood and forage are bought for a few coppers. A flame is soon crackling and blazing; the *samovar* puffs out its grateful steam; and an excellent cup of tea proves to be the best beverage in the world. By this time the remainder of the camp has arrived. The horses are unsaddled by their grooms, currycombed, wrapped in thick felts from ears to tail, picketed, and fed from nosebags containing grass and chopped straw. The tents and beds and cooking utensils and baggage are pulled with a crash from the backs of the mules, who, relieved of their burdens, immediately seek the nearest tree to scratch their hinder parts, and then incontinently lie down, and kicking their heels in the air, do their ineffectual best to turn a somersault in the dust. Meanwhile the cook is hard at work on one side scooping a hole in the ground, into which he transfers the already lighted fuel, and over which he props an iron grid. On the other side the tent-pegs are driven in; the tent soon rises, and, extended on his couch, the traveller recalls the incidents of the day, tries to summon up resolution to write his diary, and awaits the crowning consolation of dinner. By 8.30 or 9 P.M. all is still save the tinkle of the mule bells and an occasional sneeze from the horses; for at five next morning the forward movement must again begin.

Camp life

And here, before I proceed further, let me introduce to my readers, for the purposes of this chapter only, the names and individuality of my attendants, who will appear several times within its pages. Their leader was Ramzan Ali Khan, an Afghan of Persian extraction (i.e. a descendant of a Persian ancestor who had accompanied either Nadir Shah or Ahmed Shah Durani into Afghanistan in the previous century, and had settled there), himself a *duffadar*, or sergeant, in the Indian Corps of Guides, who are recruited on the north-west border of India very largely from these sources, and whose members are commonly employed upon frontier expeditions or foreign service. Ramzan Ali had accompanied General Maclean, the British Consul-General at Meshed, from India, and was a fine

My retinue

specimen of the Asiatic. Courageous and resourceful, a good horseman, with the manners of a perfect gentleman, he entertained a profound conviction that there was no people in the world like the English. Colonel Stewart, then acting as substitute for General Maclean at Meshed, had kindly given me the loan of his personal servant, Gregory, an Armenian of Julfa, who, knowing English fairly well, and Persian thoroughly, proved himself a most efficient interpreter,[1] and also of his cook. He

NOBAD GELDI

had, moreover, sent as a personal escort two of the Turkoman *sowars*, or horsemen, a small contingent of whom are kept by the Indian Government at Meshed, and are employed as a private mounted post between that city and Herat. They are chiefly Sarik Turkomans of Penjdeh, who threw in their lot with Great Britain before the Russian advance of 1885, and have preferred to

[1] The poor fellow died a few weeks later on the march from Meshed to Teheran.

maintain this allegiance rather than join the conquerors, whom they cordially dislike. I present upon the accompanying page a portrait of Nobad Geldi, the senior of these Turkomans, which I took with my 'Kodak' at Imam Kuli. He rode a white Turkoman horse, whose tail was dyed with henna, and which, though of unprepossessing appearance, could always go both faster and longer than any other animal in the caravan. Its favourite pace was the peculiar amble or run which the Turkomans teach their horses,

THE TURKOMAN'S CHARGER

and which it performed with its hind legs very wide apart. The Persians look upon this idiosyncrasy as a good sign in a horse, proving that it is not knock-kneed, and call an animal thus gifted *asp shulwari gushad*—i.e. 'a horse with broad trowsers.' Riding behind him, I never failed to be tickled at the paces of Nobad Geldi's red-tailed charger, and used to amuse both myself and him by taking him off, as he was ambling along, with my photographic camera. Finally, the only other servant whom I need mention was the Persian groom, Shukurullah, who had met me

at Ashkabad, and of whom it was impossible to say whether he was more willing or more stolid.

I will give my diary for the ensuing week according to each day's march, as the information may conceivably be useful to a later traveller following the same line.

Tower of Radkan

October 15.—Starting at 7 A.M., we reached Radkan (seven miles), a largish village of 400 to 500 houses and superb orchards, inhabited by Kaiwanlu Kurds, at 8.30. Away to the right I could discern Saidan (or Saidabad), a village on the road to Meshed; and the curious tower, or Mil-i-Radkan, one of those lofty circular structures, evidently dating from the times that succeeded the Arab conquest of Persia, but whose exact purpose has never clearly been ascertained. Its exterior consists of fluted brick columns, round the summit of which, beneath the conical roof, ran a gigantic Kufic inscription in blue tiles. The interior originally contained three storeys, which have fallen in and disappeared. O'Donovan, who carefully examined the structure,[1] says it could neither have been a dwelling nor a tomb. Why not the latter he does not state; and good authorities have regarded it as the mausoleum of one of the Tartar rulers of Khorasan, although the theory that it was designed as a watch-tower is also worthy of consideration. Colonel Stewart conjectures that it was intended for a hunting-tower.[2] It is a curious fact that a somewhat similar tower is to be seen near another village, also bearing the name of Radkan, on the road between Astrabad and Gez; from which we may infer that the name, which is neither modern Persian nor Turkish, contains some reference to the object of the building.

[1] *The Merv Oasis*, vol. ii. pp. 22–24.

[2] *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (New Series), vol. iii. (1881). Colonel Stewart also says of Radkan: 'A splendid breed of camels is met with in this district. The Khorasan camel is celebrated for its size and strength. It has very long hair, and bears cold and exposure far better than the ordinary Arab or Persian camel. The best animals are a cross between the Bactrian, or two-humped, and the Arab, or one-humped, camel. The first cross is by far the best. The load of an ordinary Persian camel is generally 320 lbs., of an Indian camel 400 lbs., but one of the Khorasan breed will carry 600 and even 700 lbs.' It is worth while in this context to repeat the correction of the never sufficiently corrected error that the camel is an animal with one hump and the dromedary with two. A dromedary is merely, as the Greek derivation of the name implies, a fleet riding-camel, irrespective of hump. I think it was Palgrave who said that it stands in the same ratio to other camels as a Rotten Row hack does to a country nag.

Halting outside the village, I sent Ramzan Ali to hire a guide to lead us to Kelat, having heard from an Afghan trader at Kuchan that there was a track from here across the mountains. A man was found who, for three *krans*, offered to conduct us to Pushtah, six *farsakhs*. Further he had never been, but another guide would be procurable there. As we were waiting outside the walls in some fields that formed part of the *vakf* or endowment of the shrine of Imam Reza at Meshed, the leading personage of Radkan—a green-turbaned *seyid* who administered the domain—came out with a posse of townsfolk behind him to inspect some tobacco with which the ground had been planted. He loudly expressed his dissatisfaction with the crop, and his intention to sow wheat another year. We started again at ten. It was a long wearisome ride to Pushtah, for the sun was piercingly hot, and a brisk wind sprang up and blew the desert into suffocating whirlwinds of dust. At about ten miles from Radkan the track passed into the first fold of the foot hills on the north side of the plain, and then struck boldly up a dried torrent bed to a higher plateau, the first of a series of similar terraces between the main range and the Meshed valley. There were no villages, water, or vegetation in this arid desert. At twenty miles from Radkan we came to a kind of circular crater with ragged walls, at the extreme end of which, under a rock once crowned by a fort, nestled the village of Shiri[1] by the side of a genuine stream. Skirting this and continuing to the north, we now passed on to a second and higher terrace that stretched for several miles to the base of the Hazar Musjid,[2] or main range. Dotted at intervals along its length could be seen the villages of Girri, Pushan, and Ardokh. We camped at the village of Pushtah, on the southern side of this plateau, six good *farsakhs* from Radkan. On the plain outside was a very large encampment of Kurd nomads, with black many-peaked tents, and innumerable flocks.

March to Pushtah

October 16.—Started at 6.45 A.M. We marched straight across the plain to the village of Ardokh (or Ardrakh), two miles, at

[1] I find few of these names marked in any map that I have seen, and can only, therefore, give them as they were given to me.

[2] 'Hazar Musjid' signifies 'A Thousand Mosques,' the needle-like pinnacles and crags of the mountain range being compared by the facile imagination of the Mussulman pilgrim to the minarets of many mosques—*hazar* being frequently used in Persian as a round number. Others say that the Mohammedans believe in the existence of 1,000 prophets, with a mosque for each.

the foot of the mountain range. Here we entered the bed of a broad but empty torrent that clove a winding passage in the wall of rock. Coming, after a mile or more, to a plain where two gorges converged, we followed that to the right, and proceeded up a mountain valley to the village of Oghrah, picturesquely situated upon a rocky slope at its extremity. Here we procured a guide, following whom we plunged into a deep and narrow gorge that cut straight into the heart of the rock wall, as though some Titan's axe had slashed a savage gash in the solid stone. Its walls were absolutely perpendicular, and shaped in parts by the storms of centuries into windy buttresses and towers, while at the bottom brawled a stream, which had hollowed pools in the rock, and up and across the bed of which it was with difficulty that our horses could be persuaded to climb. The formation and the scenery of this magnificent gorge, whose walls were in receding terraces, are a precise reproduction on a miniature scale of the little known but unequalled cañon of the Colorado River, in Arizona. After two hours' marching in this splendid defile, we scaled the right or east side, and followed a line over the mountains in a north-easterly direction, crossing a second sweep of hills, and emerging upon another valley, richly watered both by springs and streams, and tilled by the villagers of Maresh. This was the most remarkable of the mountain villages that I saw. Clinging to the side of the steep rock, its houses were built entirely of stone, rudely quarried and loosely put together, the ruins of an old stone castle frowning from a peak above the whole. It was a sombre-looking place, even in the full blaze of the sunshine. Here we again turned northwards, and after climbing another ridge of hills descended upon yet another valley, commanded by the romantic village of Bolghor. There we halted for the night, having been on the march for nine hours; although, owing to the extraordinarily rugged ground, we had probably not covered more than twenty-four miles.

March to Bolghor

After we had encamped I heard that the peasant who had guided us in the afternoon had, while returning to his village, been overtaken and soundly thrashed by a Persian *sowar*. He had, apparently, told my muleteers that he expected this chastisement for showing us the way. But three *krans* were too tempting a bait to be resisted. One of my men overheard the howls of the poor wretch, and watched the soldier beating

The guide beaten

him; but we neither saw nor heard any more of the latter. He was probably the solitary representative of the Imperial Government in these parts, and did not care to assert its majesty in the face of a numerous caravan.

Bolghor to Vardeh

October 17.—Undeterred by the fate of his predecessor, another guide was forthcoming this morning. For an hour we were occupied in climbing and descending the ridge immediately to the north of Maresh; and then, facing due northwards, we struck the track from Meshed to Kelat, the passage of which along a deep gorge was marked by telegraph poles and a single wire, so loosely hung that we had frequently to dip our heads in order to avoid being struck in the face. At this point I joined the principal caravan route from Meshed to Kelat-i-Nadiri, which has been followed by most English visitors to the stronghold of Nadir.[1] It runs here through a profound and narrow gorge, whose sides are so close that in places there is only room for a single horseman to pass between.[2] The pass is called Dahaneh-i-Zaupirzan,[3] or Old Woman's Gorge, any peculiarly horrible piece of country in Persia being described, as I shall have reason again to observe later on, by this quaint but in Persia most apposite simile. After an hour's laborious marching, we emerged upon a more open valley, where two roads diverged, to the east and to the west. I was informed that the latter also led to Kelat, but was very rough and almost impassable for horses, and that the other was the easier and more ordinary way. Accordingly we turned our faces towards the sun and struck eastwards along a rolling upland valley, having upon our left hand the main range of the Kara Dagh (Black Mountains), whose splintered limestone crags were dotted on their inferior

[1] The Englishmen who have visited and described Kelat are as follows (Fraser, who endeavoured to come here with Yalantush Khan from Meshed in 1834, having been compelled to desist from the attempt):—Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 194–210; Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 75–79, 149–150; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 38–62; E. O'Donovan (1881), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. ii. p. 82; Captain A. C. Yate (1885), 'Through Khorasan' in the *Daily Telegraph*, August 27, 1885. It was also visited by Mr. A. Condie-Stephen (1881), when a Secretary of the British Legation at Teheran, but his report was not made public.

[2] The lower and even more rugged portions of this tremendous defile will be described upon my return journey to Meshed, where also I shall quote MacGregor's opinion as to its astonishing strength.

[3] The distinction between *Dahaneh* and *Teng*, both Persian words applied to passes, is strictly as follows: *Dahaneh* is the space or pass lying between the base of two hills; *Teng* is a narrow defile between vertical walls of rock.

slopes with mountain juniper. At one point of this valley, where an elevation is crossed, a most superb view unrolled itself to the east. In tier after tier the mountain ridges descended towards the basin of the Tejend River (formed by the junction of the Keshef Rud and Heri Rud) and the Turkoman plains; while like a yellow scarf against the sky hung the dim outline of the desert. After pursuing this valley for an hour and a half, we turned sharply to the left and scaled the ridge by a path known as the Dewah Boini, or Camel's Neck, so steep, and alternately so rough and so slippery, that, although on foot ourselves, it was with much difficulty that we could prevail upon our horses to ascend. At the crest we gazed down upon a second valley parallel with that which we had just left —i.e. running from north-west to south-east, in the bottom of which appeared a little hamlet with a ruined fort perched upon a knoll, and beyond this again the larger red-coloured village of Vardeh.

Baghkhan

Leaving these villages on our left hand, we struck eastwards, following the telegraph poles in the direction of Kelat, the horizontal ramparts of which we thought we could now discern against the distant sky. At noon, having been in the saddle for over five hours, I stopped for lunch by a rivulet running at the valley bottom, which here deepens into a rocky ravine. At this juncture one of the Turkomans, whom I had left behind to point out our direction to the muleteers, arrived with the news that in scaling the Camel's Neck one of the mules had slipped and rolled down for fifty feet, maiming or breaking its leg. I was not in the least surprised at this intelligence, as there are certain places which even Persian mules cannot attack with impunity, and of which this horrible natural ladder was most assuredly one. We left the poor brute behind to be looked after till our return, and followed the gully down for two miles till at its eastern end we came to the small village and crumbling fort of Baghkhan.

Mountain defiles

Here the wire turned sharply to the north-east, and an hour was occupied in crossing a rolling hump of hills, at whose further edge a deep ravine disclosed itself below, and a second magnificent panorama burst upon our view. Now we could distinctly see the corrugated battlements of the southern outer wall of Kelat, dipping at the point where is the solitary rift in this portion of their circumference. Beyond to the north fold succeeded fold of lower undulations, until like a sea upon the

horizon spread the blue band of the Kara Kum (Black Sand), which I had left little more than a week before at Ashkabad. A bee-line due north from where I was standing would have struck the Russian station of Kaahka, on the Transcaspian Railway, from which, or from the neighbouring station of Dushak, a year before my companions and I had lightly and without any preparations contemplated an expedition to Kelat and Meshed, little recking of the appalling stretch of country that intervened. On that occasion we had been stopped by the Russian authorities;[1] and I had since travelled some thousands of miles in order to renew the experiment from the opposite quarter. We now commenced a very steep and prolonged descent, having to lead our horses most of the way, the ravine breaking at times into a sheer precipice upon our left hand. The opposite side of the gorge had sloping sides of coloured clay and marls, above which rose sandstone pinnacles and towers; and as we contemplated the strange and variegated spectacle, it was as though the mountain had been draped for festal purposes in a particoloured skirt with purple and crimson flounces.[2] The defile was alive with partridges, in coveys of from four to eight. They started up with a whirr almost under our feet, but seldom flew more than a hundred yards. Indeed, they seemed to be greater adepts on foot than on the wing, for they scudded up the bare vertical cliffs just like squirrels. At the bottom of the descent we followed the dried-up bed of a torrent till, through a rocky portal, it opened upon the last valley but one before that of Kelat. Here the telegraph poles and track diverged to the right, but as it was now late in the afternoon, and our animals were dead beat, we turned to the left, following the course of a plentiful stream that ran down the valley and made it green with *chenars* (the Oriental plane) and poplars. At the mouth of this valley is a gigantic *chenar* springing from the base of a rock which contains an *imamzadeh*, or saint's tomb. Its boughs were positively covered with rams' horns, a favourite offering of the pious Mussulman to the distinguished dead, and with other emblems of reverence. After a mile and a half I reached the secluded little village of Issurcha or Ab-i-garm (i.e. hot water), so called from some warm springs which rise near by.

[1] Vide *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 101.

[2] I have nowhere seen such brilliant natural colours in rock and mould except in the cañon of the Yellowstone River in North America.

Realising that my mules, which I had left far behind, would be unlikely to arrive for hours, if indeed they succeeded in coming at all before it was dark, I made up my mind for a night in a Persian hovel. The inhabitants of Issurcha, however, were by no means glad to see a stranger, and at first declared that they could provide me neither with forage nor with accommodation. After a little delay a villager was found who placed at my disposal an empty mud apartment, in which, with nothing but what I had on me, I made myself as comfortable as I could. Fortunately, about 10.30 P.M. the mules appeared, having found a guide who brought them safely down the mountain.

Ab-i-garm

During the last two days I had, from such natives as we met and interrogated, heard the most conflicting reports of the possibility of entering Kelat. Some declared that any one could go in or come out as he pleased;[1] others that a strict guard was kept at the entrance, and no strangers permitted to pass. The question accordingly presented itself how and in what guise I was to make the attempt. I did not want, after all this trouble, to be turned back. On the other hand, I was reluctant to do anything that, if discovered, might arouse suspicion, or bring discredit upon the English name. I imagine from what I saw later that it would have been possible to ride in at night, though I cannot be sure. I resolved, however, as I had no motive in concealing my intentions, and as they were of the most innocent description, to ride down to the gate, if gate there was, at daylight, and either enter uninterrupted or not at all. My presence, moreover, was likely so soon to become known in the neighbourhood, that disguise or concealment, even if temporarily successful, would be liable to detection in the end.

Possibility of entering Kelat

October 18.—I was called at 4.30 A.M., and started at five in the moonlight, having a rough ride of nearly ten miles before me. Descending the valley of Issurcha to the point where we had entered it on the previous day, we followed the course of the stream, which here turned northwards and plunged into a black and rocky gorge called Derbend-i-Jaur, where we threaded our way between sombre walls in and out of the river bed. The

Approach thereto

[1] General Annenkoff at Uzun Ada had asked me why, instead of going to Meshed *viâ* Kuchan, I did not take the more interesting route by Kaahka and Kelat-i-Nadiri. 'Russian officers,' he said, 'were forbidden by their own Government to enter; but no one would stop an Englishman.'

moon hung high overhead, and straight in front the Great Bear twinkled solemnly, standing upon his tail. At the exit of the gorge was a ruined and unoccupied fort. The track now broadened into a flat and open valley, across which were drawn the segments of a curious rocky ridge which had been burst through by some convulsion of nature, and whose strata were strangely contorted and inclined. Streams of water, impregnated with naphtha, gushed from the mountain side and joined the river channel, from which a flock of wild duck started with a prodigious clamour. The sun rose as we were about half down the valley, and disclosed the southern wall of Kelat on our right hand, a magnificent and lofty rampart of rock, springing from the valley bottom to a height of 700 or 800 feet, as level along the summit as though pared by a plane, but scarred and fluted down its absolutely vertical and impervious sides. Four times I passed to and fro beneath this stupendous barrier, and never failed to think it one of the most astonishing natural phenomena that I have ever seen. Its outer slopes or glacis consist of steep acclivities and shelving spurs, which swell up to it from the plain, and resemble colossal piles of *débris* that might have been shot from its summit. From the point where they terminate the rock rises sheer and abrupt to its aërial battlements. As this wall encloses Kelat on the south-east side, it does not catch the morning sun, but remains plunged in shadow. In the evening, however, towards sundown, the red sandstone under the descending rays glistens like columns of porphyry and jasper, and the entire rocky rampart seems to be on fire.

The gate of Argawan Shah

In descending the valley, where not a soul was to be seen, I had observed a place ahead of us where the level top of the rocky parapet ended abruptly in a jutting point, and its continuity was evidently broken by some sort of rift or cleft. As we drew nearer this spot, at a distance of about seven miles from the gorge by which we had entered the valley, the sides began to converge and close, until presently they left only the narrowest passage, the bottom of which was filled by the bed of the stream. Following this natural cutting through one or two zigzags, we came in sight of a rocky portal, some twenty yards in width, completely barred by a wall, the only aperture in which consisted of three arches that admitted the stream, and were also the sole gateway for any visitor to Kelat.

The upper part of the wall above the arches was loopholed and had a parapet, but there was no one upon it and no sign of life or movement. This is the famous Derbend-i-Argawan Shah, or Gate of Argawan, or Arghun Shah, the passage having originally been fortified by that monarch, who was the grandson of Hulaku Khan, and is said to have retired to Kelat after being defeated on one occasion in battle by his uncle, Ahmed Khan.[1] A fine inscription on a smoothed surface of rock upon the right-hand wall of the

GATE OF ARGAWAN SHAH

defile beyond the gate records this act of the sovereign. The present barricade is only a modern substitute for that which was built by Nadir Shah, and which, I do not doubt, was a far more substantial structure.

[1] This monarch, called by the Persians Argawan Shah, but more commonly spoken of as Arghun Khan (1284–1290 A.D.), was the remarkable man to whom Marco Polo was sent by Kubla Khan from China in charge of a Tartar bride, who opened diplomatic intercourse with the sovereigns of Europe, including King Edward I., and who, like his father, Abaka Khan, was almost a Christian, and degraded the Mussulmans from all public office.

In the fond belief that all my previous fears had been groundless, I put my horse into the bed of the stream, and, accompanied by Ramzan Ali Khan, Gregory, and Shukurullah, also on horseback, rode through the central arch. No one appeared or challenged. I had time upon the other side to note the inscription of Argawan Shah, and to observe a round tower at the summit of an eminence commanding the entrance, and had already advanced about a hundred yards towards the houses of a village that appeared upon either side of the defile, when suddenly a terrific shouting was heard from the gate behind us, and a miserable soldier, still half asleep, and pulling his tattered cotton tunic about his shoulders, came running out, yelling at the top of his voice. Answering cries were heard; and presently there poured out of the wall, which was really a gate-tower and had casements on the inner side, a motley band of half-clad individuals, for the most part in rags, though an occasional button with the Lion and Sun upon it, and one pair of blue trousers with a red stripe, showed that I was in the presence of some of the *serbaz* or regular infantry of the King of Kings.

Entrance detected

As I did not want to begin with a fracas, and as the soldiers were clearly doing their duty, although they had been within an ace of letting me slip through unobserved, I halted and we entered into conversation. At first they were very violent and tried to pull back our horses. But when I represented that I had no intention of going further without leave, they became calmer. I inquired for the officer in command. There did not appear to be such a person. I next asked where was the Khan of Kelat. The reply was given that he was at his village, two miles away. Accordingly I despatched Shukurullah (as a Persian and therefore free from suspicion), with a soldier mounted on the same horse behind him, to the Khan, to tell him who I was, and to request permission to pass through Kelat and out on the other side; or, if this could not be granted on his own responsibility, then to telegraph to Meshed.

Colloquy with the guard

While the Persian was away I remained in the rocky gateway conversing with the soldiers. It was bitterly cold, for the sun would not strike the chasm for some hours, so I bought some brushwood and lit a fire. When they heard that I was an Englishman they seemed disposed to be more friendly; for they said that if I had been a Russian they would have shot me

Attitude of the *serbaz*

down as I rode through the gate, though how they could have guessed my nationality when they never saw me, or have shot at all when they were fast asleep, I did not needlessly vex them by asking. They added that a Russian had come to Kelat last year, and had beaten a Persian, and been beaten by them, and had then started to come with 300 Turkomans in revenge; but that they had marched out, and the Russian and the Turkomans had marched back again. They also asked me if it was true that the Zil-es-Sultan, the eldest son of the Shah, had put off the Persian costume, donned English dress, and sailed from Bushire for London. I interrogated them about their existence and service at Kelat. They said that the water was very unhealthy, being impregnated with naphtha, and that they suffered from it.[1] They also complained that, though they were to have been relieved in three months, they had already been there for five, and during that time had received no pay. I could not help feeling for the poor wretches, who were about as like what one ordinarily associates with the idea of a soldier as a costermonger's donkey is like the winner of the Derby.

After an hour and a half of tedious waiting, Shukurullah returned with the news that the Khan wished me to telegraph for leave to the Governor-General of Meshed, and that if the answer was favourable I might pass through. This was all that I desired; so I proceeded to write a telegram to Colonel Stewart, asking him to interview the Governor on my behalf and to wire me a reply. There was some difficulty, however, in finding any one to transcribe the message into Persian characters. Few of the lower orders know the Persian alphabet; if they want to write a letter they hire a scribe to do it for them. The solitary scribe of Kelat was reported to be asleep under the influence of opium; but I insisted upon his being severely awakened, and at length he appeared, and spent exactly half an hour in transliterating the despatch which it had taken half a minute to compose. I now proposed to return to my camp, leaving the Persian behind till an answer arrived from Meshed; but Gregory suggested, from a more profound knowledge of the national

Answer of the Khan

[1] The unhealthiness of Kelat is notorious, whether it be due, as is generally supposed, to the water-supply or not. When Colonel Baker was there in 1873 he found the population decimated by typhus, and the proportion of sick among the garrison is invariably exorbitant.

character, that I was not yet out of the wood, and that it would be advisable to wait. So I moved to the other side of the gateway and halted in the sunshine.

Persian tactics

In an hour Shukurullah reappeared upon the scene with the news that the telegram had been refused on the plea that the line was broken between Kelat and Meshed. Presently arrived a mounted emissary from the Khan, who was voluble with explanations, and afforded me an interesting insight into Persian character. First he repeated that the wire was broken; but when I replied that if that were the case it was unlikely that the Khan would himself have invited me to use it, he shifted his position and said that the wire, though not broken, was trailing upon the ground. Upon my rejoining that communication was not thereby interrupted, he was ready with the counter plea that the Khan had meant me to telegraph not to Meshed but to Teheran. As there was no wire to Teheran from Kelat except by Meshed, this falsehood was easily exposed; but I confess I was scarcely prepared for the fourth, which immediately replaced it—viz. that the Khan had meant me to telegraph neither to Teheran nor to Meshed, but *from* Meshed on my return thither. As it was useless bandying words with so accomplished a liar, I resigned the verbal contest, but insisted upon receiving a direct answer or a direct refusal from the Khan to my request to telegraph; and it was agreed that Gregory, as a more befitting ambassador than Shukurullah, should ride back to the village and receive a definite answer to my ultimatum.

Abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit!

All this occurred within 100 yards of the gate of Argawan Shah on the outer side. As I was giving final instructions to Gregory, the Persian, who had remounted, suddenly clapped spurs to his horse, and disappeared like lightning through the archway, shouting to the guard not to let any one through. When Gregory arrived a few seconds later he was refused the passage. There was nothing more to be done; and thus ignobly ended my attempt to penetrate to the interior of Kelat-i-Nadiri! Shukurullah now told me that when he took the telegram to the office the clerk was about to accept it, when the Khan's son came in and said that his father absolutely forbade any message to be sent at all. I had heard a good deal of Persian artfulness before entering the country, but had scarcely expected so artistic a sample within the first fortnight; and I do not know

whether I was more incensed at the treatment I had received or tickled at the illustration it afforded of Oriental tactics.

The most amusing episode, however, was yet to come; for on arriving at Meshed three days later I found the Governor-General in a great state of excitement, having been informed by the faithful Khan that the new British Vice-Consul had appeared at Kelat with an armed retinue, had tried to force a passage, and had drawn his sword upon the guard! The latter had gallantly performed their duty and had expelled the intruder.

Report at Meshed

October 19.—Before I left the neighbourhood I determined to make one more effort to see the interior of Kelat. I knew from MacGregor's book that, besides the two main entrances of Argawan Shah and Nafta, there were other pathways by which it could be entered; and at Ab-i-Garm a hunter was found who said that he knew one of these very well, but was afraid to conduct me himself. He had a nephew, however, who would act as his substitute, and would appear in the morning. I need hardly say that at the appointed hour the nephew was not forthcoming. That my presence in the vicinity of Kelat was beginning to be regarded with some suspicion, was evident both from this and from an incident which occurred that evening. As I was discussing plans in the mud hovel with Ramzan Ali and Gregory, I heard a scratching in the roof overhead, and, looking up, detected a man, who, it appeared, had come from Kelat, with his ear to a hole in the rafters, eaves-dropping. As no guide was procurable, I decided to go without one. I had noticed in riding down the valley to Kelat that there was one place where the otherwise unbroken parapet of the southern wall dipped, and formed a V-shaped indentation, which seemed to be accessible from below by one of the sloping natural buttresses that swell up against it from the plain. Any future visitor to Kelat who has read this description will not fail to recognise the spot, about halfway down the valley. I was called at 3.30 A.M., the mules were laden, and we all moved out of Issurcha at 4.30 on a black cold morning. Sending the camp on to Vardeh from the Derbend-i-Jaur, I rode down the valley for the last time, and leaving my horse at the foot of the hills began the climb. It did not take long to mount the stony skirts, though the slope was very steep; and I easily arrived below the craggy battlements. Here the rock, the natural conformation of which is in wavy horizontal bands, parallel with the

Attempt to climb the wall

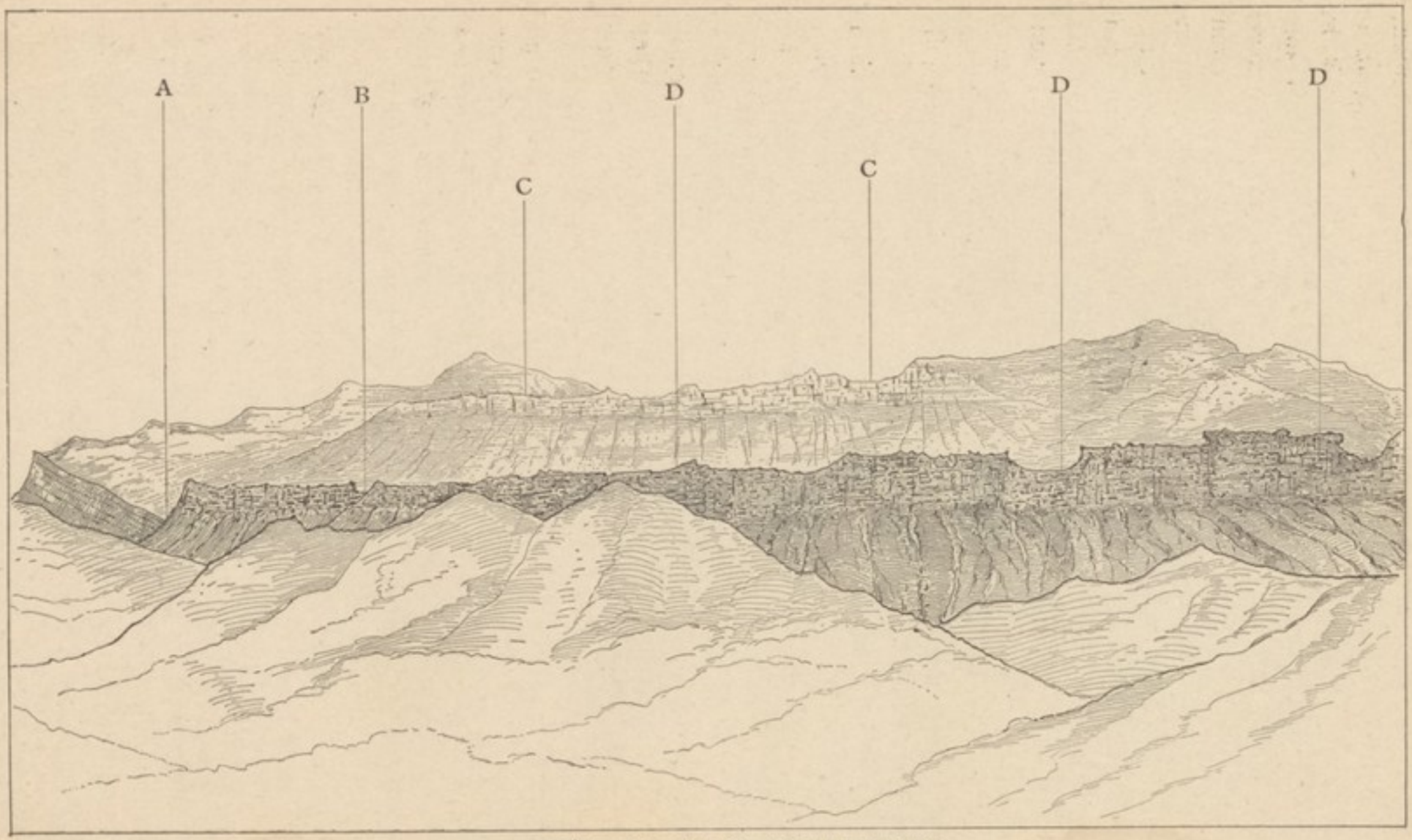
summit, had been artificially scarped by some previous occupant, no doubt by Nadir Shah, so as to form a sort of rocky ledge or pathway running along the face, and defended at intervals by ruined circular towers. There were two such rocky ledges, one about thirty feet above the other. I scrambled on to the lower and pursued it as far as the V-shaped gap. There were only about thirty feet of rock above me; and it was to be climbed. But the face of the rock was very steep and smooth; I was alone, and though I could have scrambled up it was the kind of place that would have been very awkward to come down from again. Accordingly I resigned the attempt. With the aid of a friend and a rope it could easily have been managed, but from what I know of the interior of Kelat I doubt whether the panorama afforded from the top of the wall would be as striking as might be expected from its external configuration.

Bird's-eye view of the circumference

On my way back, however, I climbed the highest mountain in the neighbourhood, the name of which I do not know, but whose elevation is far higher than the perimeter of Kelat; and from there my ambitions were so far and unexpectedly realised that, though I could not see the interior level of Kelat, the angle of vision being too obtuse, I could trace the entire circuit of its walls from east to west on both sides; the southern wall, which I had attempted to climb, appearing from the height on which I stood to be the lower of the two, and the summit of the north wall rising above it on the further side. From this point I could follow, without difficulty, the whole southern rampart, nearly twenty miles in a straight line, running as regularly as though it had been built by design, and scarped and scarred along its vertical sides down to the point where the buttress-slopes shelved away to the valley. If in their war with Olympian Zeus the Titans had ever had occasion to build for themselves an unassailable retreat, such might well have been the mountain fortress that they would have reared. I made a sketch from this point of the entire circumference, which is reproduced on the next page.[1] The mountains in the foreground are the range that separate the valley of Issurcha from the valley that leads down to Argawan Shah's gate.

And now, having related with so much minuteness what I did see, I propose to describe from a variety of sources, some of which

[1] Though my own sketch is poor enough, I cannot say that I think at all an adequate or faithful idea of Kelat is given by the drawings of Sir C. MacGregor.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF KELAT-I-NADIRI

A. Gate of Argawan Shah. B. Site of attempted ascent. C. Northern wall of Kelat. D. Southern wall of Kelat.

have not been accessible to the public, what I did not see, in order that my readers may be able to form an accurate idea of Kelat-i-Nadiri as it is at the present moment. They will already have gathered that, though literally translated and commonly called the Fort of Nadir Shah, it is not a fort at all in the accepted sense of the term; consisting as it does of a mountain plateau, with a mean elevation of 2,500 feet above the sea, intersected by deep gullies and ravines, some twenty miles in total length by from five to seven in breadth; and only so far resembling a fortress that this vast extent of ground, comprising a probable area of 150 square miles, is surrounded as with a ring fence by a mighty natural rampart enclosing it from end to end with a cliff-wall of naked and vertical rock, 700 to 1,000 feet in sheer height above the valley bottom. From early times the extraordinary character of the place, which must have resulted from some abnormal convulsion of nature, impressed itself upon the imagination of the neighbouring peoples; and Iranian legend localises here one of the mythical combats between the hero Rustam and the alien forces of Turan under Afrasiab, who, expelled from Kelat by the victorious hosts of Iran, fell back upon the Oxus, where they sustained a final and crushing defeat. Here too, according to the Shah Nameh of Firdusi, settled Ferud, the brother of Kai Khosru, and here he was attacked and slain by Tus. The inscription to which I have alluded proves that as a defensible and defended retreat it was known to the Mongol successors of Jenghiz Khan. Timur is said to have possessed himself of it by stratagem.

History of Kelat

But it was not till the times of Nadir Shah that full use was made of its invaluable natural gifts. Returning from India, laden with the spoils of conquered kingdoms and with the rifled treasures of the Great Mogul, he saw in Kelat, with which he must have been familiar from childhood,[1] the ideal storehouse where this vast wealth could be deposited, and also an invulnerable place of arms. Accordingly, he constructed powerful fortifications at all the entrances, placed watch-towers on every peak and point of vantage, artificially scarped the rocky battlements both within and without, in order to render them still more impossible of access, built himself a residence on a plateau in the interior (which it is said he rarely occupied), and provided for a supply of

Fortification by Nadir Shah

[1] Nadir Shah was born in a tent near Mohammedabad, the capital of the neighbouring district of Deregez.

good water by excavating large tanks and bringing in fresh supplies by an aqueduct from the exterior.

Basil Batatzes

I have only come across one description of Kelat as it was in the days of Nadir Shah, by a traveller who had evidently been there himself and had not trusted merely to hearsay. This occurs in the narrative of one Basil Batatzes, a Greek merchant who travelled far and wide in Persia and Central Asia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, penetrating to Khiva and Bokhara and visiting Nadir Shah at Meshed. His diary, written in quaint but very intelligible Greek,[1] appears to have been quite unknown to the historians who from oral evidence compiled such erroneous descriptions of Kelat in the early part of the present century,[2] and diffused an altogether false impression of the place that remained uncorrected till the visit of Baker and Gill in 1873. Returning from Bokhara to Meshed in 1728, Batatzes came by way of Kelat, to which he devotes forty lines of his diary (780–822). The mountains here rise, he says, to a great and inaccessible height, and the place is surrounded, as it were, by a mighty wall, which is not only barren and treeless but is like as though made of marble or of brass. The circuit thereof is forty or fifty stadia [this is one of his few mistakes], and there are two entrances only, and those by means of zigzag approaches. One might say that the mountains had been rent asunder by an earthquake to form these entrances, where there is barely space for three horsemen or footmen to pass. Of the interior of Kelat (which was then under Nadir's fostering care, very different from what it is now) he will only say that it contains all that a man can want in the way of natural delights, and that it is self-sufficing and could sustain itself without ever bringing in aught from the outside. He also speaks of it as the intended treasure house of Nadir Shah.

[1] It has been edited by M. Ch. Schefer in *Nouveaux Mélanges Orientaux* (one of the *Publications de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes*), Paris, 1886. Basil Batatzes, or Basile Vatace, as his French editor calls him, also wrote a biography of Nadir Shah, which has disappeared.

[2] For instance, Malcolm, using Kinneir as his authority, thus describes the place: 'The fort of Killaat is situated about thirty miles north-east of Meshed. It is upon a very high hill, only accessible by two narrow paths. An ascent of six or seven miles terminates in a plain about twelve miles in circumference, watered by several fine streams, and covered with verdure and cultivation. A second ascent by a route of ten or eleven miles leads to another plain of greater elevation but of equal richness.'—*History of Persia*, vol. i. cap. iii., vol. ii. cap. xv.

After the assassination of the latter in 1747, Kelat passed into the hands of the present Khan's family, who have held it ever since, along with the Atek or slopes extending to the Turkoman desert below, in nominal vassaldom to Persia, but with occasional assertions of independence which have more than once led to the despatch of punitive expeditions from Meshed. It has indeed been the habit to keep the head of the family as a hostage at Meshed, in order to guarantee the good behaviour of his *locum tenens* at Kelat. Since the conquest of the Atek by Russia in 1881, and the subsequent delimitation of the Russo-Persian frontier in these parts by agreement between the two powers, the greater part of the external properties of Kelat, such as Abiverd (now Kaahka), Mehna, Chardeh (now Dushak), and Chacha—the villages, in fact, which are situated at the northern base of the range—have passed into Russian hands; and, as I shall show later on, the new-comers are gradually creeping further and further up the slopes towards the crest, till they will ultimately reach Kelat itself.

Later history

The loss both of possessions and of prestige thus involved has co-operated with the centralising policy so vigorously pursued by Nasr-ed-Din Shah to reduce Kelat to thorough subordination; and the present Khan, Haji Abul Fath Khan, would not dream of the rebellious vagaries of his predecessors. Kelat is garrisoned by the Persian Government, by a wing of one of the infantry regiments stationed at Meshed, there being a nominal force of 500 *serbaz* in the valley, and two guns of the horse artillery. From what I saw at the Derbend-i-Argawan Shah, I cannot think that anything like this effective strength is maintained, any more than the conditions of service which promise relief at the end of three months are observed. Though the place has enormous natural strength, I should think that with the present ragged and scattered garrison it might be 'rushed' any day; while the defences are not such as would stand for ten minutes against modern artillery.

Persian sovereignty

It appears indeed that the military value of Kelat (in its present condition) to Persia is very small; nor, if acquired by Russia, can I see that its value to her would be very great. No future conqueror is likely to wish to use Kelat for Nadir's purpose—viz. as a fortified treasure-house; nor would any modern tactician, I imagine, contemplate the fortification of an

Military value of Kelat

enclosure over sixty miles in circumference. The real value of Kelat is as a basis of operations and starting point for offensive movements against Transcaspia. Well guarded at the entrances and held by a strong garrison, it might have been made, and might still become, a veritable thorn in the side of an enemy stationed in the Atek below. A hostile force quartered here might, for instance, descend without warning and with overwhelming strength upon the Transcaspian Railway, and cut the Russian line of communication with the Caspian. But Persia is not the power to do anything one half so heroic; and Nadir's fortress is in the highest degree unlikely ever to be made a sally-port against General Annenkoff's railway. Should the Russians take Kelat, which they appear to be excessively anixous to do, the gain to them in prestige would be considerable; for ever since Nadir's days it has been looked upon as the principal military outpost of Khorasan. They would also acquire what might be made a suitable depôt for stores, and arsenal for a limited nnmber of troops (neither the water nor the grain supply would sustain many), and there would be the decided negative advantage of preventing a position so formidable in the hands of an enemy from falling into an enemy's hands. But as an offensive measure against Khorasan I do not see that they would profit thereby, as other and far simpler ways are open to them of reaching Meshed, and as no modern army would trust itself to the awful defiles that extend for quite forty miles between the two places. In other words, the offensive eye of Kelat, so to speak, looks northward not southward; and, the march of power being in the latter direction, it is unlikely that we shall again see it utilised as a place of arms.

So much for the military value of Kelat-i-Nadiri. Let me now say something about its interior features. How little was known about it before the visits of Baker and MacGregor may be illustrated by the scanty description furnished from hearsay by Fraser, who doubled both its length and breadth.[1] Entrance to the interior is gained by one of five gates, of which the two principal are Argawan Shah on the south and Nafta on the north. The three others are Kushtani on the south-east, Chubast on the west, and Dehcha on the north-west. All of these gates are said to be fortified and defended by troops; of the two main entrances it is undoubtedly true. There are also several footpaths (it is said

Its five gates

[1] Vide *Journey into Khorasan*, Appendix B (1).

nine) by which it can be entered; and I doubt not that in that large circumference shepherds must have discovered goat-tracks by which approach, though difficult, is feasible. Nevertheless, the character, no less than the paucity of the acknowledged entrances, which are in each case through easily barred defiles, confirms the general opinion which I have expressed as to the phenomenal nature of this mountain stronghold.

Population

The inhabitants are Turks chiefly of the Jallayer and Benjat tribes, with a few Arab and Kurdish families as well. Their total number does not exceed 1,000. They are to be found in two villages, situated in the valley by which the stream which I followed enters and traverses Kelat, and in six hamlets upon the uplands or higher elevations. Of the two main villages, I saw that of Argawan Shah, clustered upon either side of the gorge, at a short distance within the gate of the same name. The other, Giuk Gumbaz (i.e. 'Vault of Heaven' in Turkish) or Ja Gumbaz, locally contracted into Gugumaz, is a little over two miles down the valley from the same entrance, and is the spot to which I had twice despatched Shukurullah to interview the Khan and to send the telegram. Here is a curious circular tower of red sandstone, with fluted half-columns on the outer surface, rising from a big octagonal substructure. It is called Makber-i-Nadiri, having been built (for what purpose does not appear clear) by that king, and is now used as a residence by the Khan.[1] From Gugumaz the river continues to run for six miles at the bottom of the same valley, which intersects Kelat from south to north, and deepens into a rocky gorge, until upon reaching the northern wall it passes out through a cleft not unlike that of Argawan Shah, similarly fortified, garrisoned, and closed by a wall pierced with arches across the bed of the stream. The latter, emerging from the defile, makes its way down through the lower ranges, and ultimately irrigates the cornfields of Dushak.

Remains of antiquity

In addition to Nadir's tower at Gugumaz, there are other but quite inconsiderable relics of that king's occupation. To the north-west of the village, upon an elevated open plateau, are the ruins of what purports to be his palace, and is called Imaret-i-Nadiri, the largest remains being those of an enclosure, called the Diwan-Khaneh, twenty yards square. Beyond this,

[1] There is an illustration of it in MacGregor's *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. p. 50.

again, most travellers have been taken up the summit of the Kuh Khisht, which is 1,500 feet above the level of the plateau and 4,000 feet above the sea; but than which MacGregor was of opinion that finer views are afforded by other elevations. The water tanks and conduit constructed by Nadir have already been mentioned.

Cultivation and water supply

O'Donovan compared Kelat with the Happy Valley of Rasselas; but he would probably have shifted his simile had he been condemned to reside for a time within its walls. Of the total inside area, only a small portion is under cultivation, the water supply consisting merely of the stream so often mentioned and of five small springs. This scarcity renders the support either of a large population or of a powerful garrison impossible, except by supplies brought from the outside. Cultivation in the interior is limited to two areas, the river valley and the uplands. In the former, along the banks of the stream and in the flat spaces, rice, cotton, lucerne, vines, melons, and cucumbers flourish under the persuasive influence of water. On the higher ground, which rises to 1,000 and even 1,500 feet above the valley bottom, are grown barley and wheat. There are few trees or shrubs inside Kelat; and the grass cannot be remarkable either in quantity or quality, seeing that the inhabitants frequently send their flocks outside to graze. To represent the place, therefore, as an oasis is a misnomer.

Return march to Vardeh

From this point I may resume my return march to Meshed, the first stage of which was by the route already traversed and described between Kelat and Vardeh. The distance is said to be five *farsakhs*; I should call it a bare twenty miles. My camp was pitched outside the tiny hamlet on the knoll, and here I found the mule which had tumbled down the Camel's Neck, but whose leg was fortunately not broken, but only severely sprained. From standing out in the cold at night, the limb had grown so stiff that the poor brute could scarcely hobble.

On to Kardeh

October 20.—We marched to Kardeh, nominally seven *farsakhs*, but according to my reckoning not more than twenty-six miles. For the first part of the route I was repeating my journey of three days before, up to the point where the lateral ravine comes in from Bolghor. From here we continued down the main gorge, following both the telegraph poles and the stream which flows along and often entirely fills its bottom. For miles

we threaded this intricate and precipitous defile, clambering over the boulders in the river-bed, now confined in a narrow chasm, now emerging upon a neat little valley. MacGregor, who was a good judge of country from the soldier's point of view, paid no ordinary, though a well-deserved, tribute to this section of the Meshed-Kelat road when, in his graphic way, he said :

> I certainly have never seen a stronger bit of country than the twenty-seven miles between Kardeh and Vardeh, it being one continual succession of impregnable defiles, any one of which would make the road celebrated. . . . The country is more like what one would see in a nightmare than anything one has ever beheld awake.[1]

On the way we pass a mighty lump of sheer rock, perched upon the top of a 1,000-feet slope, and known as the Kuh-i-Panjmana or Five-*man* (= about 32 lbs.) Mountain, from a story about a facetious monarch who invited one of his courtiers to weigh the airy trifle. A little further, on the left hand, is an Arabic and Persian inscription upon the smoothed surface of a big limestone block, some twenty feet above the path, which records a victory of Sheibani Mohammed Khan, the Uzbeg conqueror of Bokhara, over the Persian unbelievers in the year of the Hejira 916. We then came to a little village, the name of which was pronounced to me as Hark (or Whark), where I found an agreeable shade in an orchard sloping down to the stream. After another six miles through the same defile, the valley widened into an open plain, at the head of which, surrounded by trees, was situated the larger village of Kardeh. It is an insignificant place, but is the residence of the chief of a petty district.

October 21.—After skirting the eastern slope of the hills that enclose the valley of Kardeh, the track to Meshed plunges into a narrow gorge, called the Derbend-i-Kardeh, through which the stream, coursing in rapid zigzags between the walls, occupied the whole of the slender space between. Above the lower slopes the cliffs rose in craggy magnificence to a sheer height of 1,000 or 1,500 feet. This ravine equalled in savage splendour anything that I had seen even during the past week of astonishing scenery ; and I could not help thinking that if those who rave about the Alpine passes, set though they be in the incomparable framework of snow and ice, could travel to this unvisited corner of Asia, even their senses would be bewildered by

Road to Meshed

[1] *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 44, 49.

so amazing a succession of natural phenomena, each one of which would attract a stream of pilgrims in any better-known land.

Scenery of North-eastern Khorasan

At this point we finally left the mountains and debouched on to the eastern continuation of the same plain from which I had diverged a week before at Radkan. The moment, therefore, is an opportune one for casting an eye in swift retrospect over the country and surroundings in which I had been travelling since I entered Persia, and which embrace the least known and yet most typical characteristics of North-eastern Khorasan. I summed up my impressions, without, however, describing my journeys, in the 'Times' in these words:

'After leaving Kuchan, I struck eastwards through the mountains, and spent eight days in wandering about amid the mountain valleys of this rugged and almost inaccessible corner of Khorasan. Being hampered by a camp and mules, I was limited to about twenty-five miles a day, but even so succeeded in traversing about 200 miles of this interesting and rarely visited country. The names of most of the villages are not upon any English map, and only a few larger or more notable localities, such as the famous stronghold of Kelat-i-Nadiri, are known to European ears. It is astonishing how difficult it is in these parts to procure reliable information about anything, most of all about that which should be best known—namely, the distance between adjoining places. A *farsakh*, nominally about four miles, is the sole unit of measurement, but, judging by my own experience, it may mean anything from two to five. The commonest thing is to be told that a place is half a *farsakh* distant—a term which, being used to imply any fraction less than the whole *farsakh*, may describe a distance of either one mile or three miles and a half. The scenery through which I travelled, and which may be said to extend over the whole of North-eastern Khorasan, is singularly uniform in its characteristics. A series of lofty mountain ridges, with an axis inclined from north-west to south-east, run parallel to each other at varying distances, the intervening hollows being in the more northern parts deep gorges admitting little more than a torrent bed at their bottom, while further south they widen into valleys watered by mountain streams and dotted with villages, and eventually into broad, rich plains, such as that of Kuchan to the north and Nishapur to the south of the Binalud Kuh mountains. Transverse ravines cut these ridges, often at right angles, and provide a way

of communication from valley to valley. These gorges are frequently of almost inconceivable abruptness and grandeur. Each one presents a score of positions of absolute impregnability; and I do not suppose that more savage mountain scenery, in zones below the snow line, exists anywhere in the world. The base of these defiles seldom admits more than a torrent bed blocked with enormous boulders, and the walls are frequently vertical to a height of from 500 to 1,000 feet. The higher mountains rarely display even the scantiest vegetation, being sterile, stony, and forbidding to a degree, though the loftiest peaks are majestic with splintered outline, and occasionally some astonishing natural phenomenon is encountered, like the southern wall of Kelat. Cultivation is almost wholly confined to the valley bottoms, and is there dependent upon precarious streams and watercourses dug therefrom to the arable plots. Each village is like an oasis in a brown desert; and the squalid mud huts, with their fringe of green poplars and orchards, present an appearance almost as refreshing to the wayfarer as the snuggest of English homesteads.

Animal and human life

The ordinary beasts of burden in these mountain villages are very small grey donkeys, camels being only seen when belonging to a caravan, and a horse being beyond the means of the poorer people. The arid hill slopes provide a slender herbage that sustains large flocks of black sheep and goats, which are met with everywhere, guarded by big dogs. Mutton is consequently cheap and abundant. Rude wooden ploughs unshod with iron are drawn by yokes of black oxen; but cows and milk are not to be met with in every village. Fowls abound, and can be always bought for about 3*d.* apiece. The valley of Kuchan revels in every kind of fruit, but further north I was not able to procure any. Rice appeared to be the staple food of the peasantry. These struck me as a fine and masculine race, and as a very different type from the Persian of the towns. They spring for the most part from a different stock, being not of Iranian, but of Turkoman or Turkish origin, and are far more like the Uzbegs or Tartars in appearance than the Persians. They wore sheepskin bonnets on their heads, not unlike those of the Turkomans, but less lofty in the crown, canvas bound round their legs with thongs, and big loose shoes of untanned cowhide similarly attached. The women were everywhere visible, but, as a rule, carefully concealed their features, not with a veil, but with the

upper cotton garment drawn over the lower part of the face. Such as I saw were prematurely old and ugly, the melancholy law of the East.'

In extension of what was here said, I may add two other observations upon the peculiar orography of the country. In the first place the dividing lines between the watersheds are seldom the highest ranges or crests; illustrations of which phenomenon I noticed in the case both of the dividing line between the Atek or Transcaspian and Kuchan drainage, and again of that between the Kuchan and Meshed drainage—i.e. the streams that run respectively to the Caspian and the Heri Rud. Secondly, the rivers, instead of pursuing a course parallel to the axis of the mountain ranges, or, in other words, running down the deep valleys between them, and then turning the corner where the saddle dips, prefer to pierce the ranges almost at right angles to their previous course; Nature having provided for that purpose transverse fissures and gashes through the very heart of the rock, which they could never have forced for themselves, and which do not betray the symptoms of aqueous detrition, but must rather have been caused by extreme tension at the moment of original elevation.

Physical peculiarities

Once upon the plain, we passed in quick succession the villages of Anderokh and Rezan, which appeared to revel in an abundant water supply and in a wide area of cultivation. Far away on the southern side of the expanse the mountains behind Meshed could be seen, broken up into detached ridges, with sharp and serrated points. I strained my eyes to catch in the distance the glint of the golden cupola and minars of the holy Imam. Slowly the mist curled upward, as though a silken window-blind were being delicately raised by cords; and first a sparkle, and then a steady flash, revealed at a distance that must still have been from twelve to fifteen miles the whereabouts of the gilded dome. Though my emotions were not those of the devout pilgrim who had very likely travelled hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles to see the hallowed spot, though I did not break into wild cries of 'Ya Ali, Ya Husein,' and though I did not tear off fragments of my dress and suspend them upon the nearest bush, according to the formula of the pious Shiah, I yet looked with the interest of one who has heard and read much from afar upon the famous city which I was approaching; and, putting spurs to

Approach to Meshed

my horse, I sped as quickly as I could over the intervening plain.

Nobad Geldi and I were galloping in front, and the old red-tailed charger was showing the best of his speed, when, ceasing to hear the clatter of the rest of the party behind me, I turned round to see what had befallen. At a distance of 200 yards Gregory's horse was lying on its back, furiously kicking its heels in the air. Its load lay scattered in every direction on the ground. The unhappy Armenian was slowly extracting himself from under the horse and ruefully rubbing his knee. Ramzan Ali Khan, also on foot, and covered with dust, was seen careering over the plain after his horse, which was disappearing in an opposite direction. It appeared that Gregory's animal, overtired, and unable, with its heavy load, to keep the pace at which we were going, had stumbled and fallen on the top of Gregory; and that the Afghan, dismounting in order to extricate his colleague, had received a kick on the head which knocked him over. All was soon right again, and, leaving the slow movers to follow at their own pace, I pushed on. At five miles from the town we came to a massive high-backed bridge, of eleven arches, spanning the slender current of the Keshef Rud.[1] The bridge, which is called Pul-i-Shah (King's Bridge), looked ridiculously out of proportion to the attenuated volume of the stream, which was only about twenty-five feet in width, and was barely moving. The ramps of the bridge had originally been paved with big cobbles, but, in common with all good work in Persia, these had for the most part disappeared, and the ruined causeway was better adapted to break legs than to save them.

Accident to the cavalcade

Continuing for a mile, we reached the enclosure of the tomb of Khojah (or Khwajah) Rabi, a holy man who is variously reported as having been the personal friend and the tutor of Imam Reza, and whose body, in order to be near that of his sainted companion, was interred in this spot. The tomb is surrounded by a garden, in which there is abundance of trees, and which is entered by a lofty gateway containing rooms

Tomb of Khojah Rabi

[1] This river, (Keshef, old Persian *Kash* = Tortoise) called also Ab-i-Meshed (Water of Meshed) and sometimes Kara Su (Black Water), rises in the Chashmeh-i-Gilas, a marsh between Chinaran and Radkan, and, collecting the drainage of the Meshed Valley, passes by the gorge of Ak Derbend (White Defile) to Pul-i-Khatun (Lady's Bridge), on the Russian frontier, where it joins the Heri Rud, and in conjunction with the latter forms the Tejend.

in arched recesses. From the surroundings it was evident that it is a favourite holiday resort of the people of Meshed, being indeed the only place of any attractiveness in the environs of the city. Thinking that the building also contained a mosque, and was, therefore, of an ecclesiastical character, I did not attempt to enter it, but merely took a photograph from the outside. I heard afterwards that, as with other tombs, any one can visit it who will. The present building is not the original mausoleum, but, as the inscription says, was raised by Shah Abbas the Great on the remains of the earlier structure. A second restoration was now in course of execution; for the building was enveloped in a scaffolding, and workmen were replacing the blue tiles on the exterior of the dome, most of which had peeled off and disappeared. MacGregor spoke of the tile-work, in 1875, as better than any in Persia. But of this, too, a great deal had vanished; and what had once been a magnificent circular frieze below the spring of the dome now existed only in segments and patches. Hard by is buried the father of Agha Mohammed Shah (the founder of the reigning dynasty), Fath Ali Khan Kajar, who incurred the hostility of Nadir Shah, and was beheaded by his orders.

Soon the road passed between dusty earthen walls and over small ditches, the uniform suburbs of the cities of the East. The long line of the city wall now appeared, projecting towers connected by a curtain, and defended by a shallow ditch. Passing through the gateway, where a shabby guard sprang to his feet and presented arms with an ostentatious rattle of his musket, we rode for nearly half an hour through the blank and unlovely alleys that constitute four-fifths even of the proudest Oriental capital; and after crossing the Khiaban, or central avenue of Meshed—more about which will belong to my next chapter—pulled up at a low door, over which a large painted shield displayed the insignia of the British Government and indicated the residence of Her Majesty's Consul-General and Agent of the Viceroy of India. In a minute's time I was shaking hands with Colonel Charles Stewart.

Entrance to Meshed

The march from Kardeh to Meshed is called eight *farsakhs*, but is not in reality more than twenty-four miles. Accordingly, the route from Kelat to Meshed is as follows:

	Farsakhs	Approximate distance in miles
Kelat-i-Nadiri to Vardeh	5	20
Vardeh to Kardeh	7	26
Kardeh to Meshed	8	24
Total . .	20	70

Supplementary Routes to and from Kelat

Kelat to Deregez (*viâ* Archingan 70 miles). Col. Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 210–229; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 63–75.

Kelat to Meshed (*viâ* Kanegosha and Karategan), two alternative routes. (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. Appendix II.

CHAPTER VII

MESHED

Some reverence is surely due to the fame of heroes and the religion of nations.—GIBBON, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

MESHED has in the course of the past half-century been visited and described at greater or less length by several Europeans, among whom Englishmen have been in the ascendant, in merit as well as in numbers. I append a catalogue of their names and publications,[1] so that the reader may know whither to refer for such information as he may desire about particular periods or individual men. If I add one more to the list of these chroniclers, it is because I aspire not to replace, but to supplement their labours. I shall, as far as possible, avoid the repetition of what has been better said by them, believing implicitly in reference to the original source where that is feasible. But it will be within my power both to correct certain errors into which they have fallen, and to impart greater verisimilitude to the picture

Previous chroniclers of Meshed

[1] J. B. Fraser (1822), *Journey into Khorasan*, cap. xvii.; Lieut. A. Conolly (1830), *Overland Journey to India*, vol. i. cap. x.; Dr. J. Wolff (1831 and 1844), *Travels and Adventures* and *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara*; (Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. cap. xiv.; J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Caravan Journeys*, cap. ix.; N. de Khanikoff (1858), *Mémoire sur la Partie méridionale de l'Asie Centrale*, pp. 97–108; *Meshid, la Città santa e il suo Territorio*; E. B. Eastwick (1862), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 200–233; A. Vambéry (1863), *Life and Adventures*, cap. xxvii.; *Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien*; Captain H. C. Marsh (1872), *Ride through Islam*, pp. 98–112; Seistan Boundary Commission (1872)—(i.) Col. Euan Smith, *Eastern Persia*, vol. i. pp. 357–366; (ii.) Dr. H. W. Bellew, *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 360–368; Colonel V. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, cap. x.; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. i. pp. 277–end, with a plan of the city, p. 284; J. Bassett (1878), *Persia, the Land of the Imams*, pp. 221–235; E. O'Donovan (1880–1881), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. cap. xxviii.–xxix., vol. ii. cap. xxx.; P. Lessar (1882), *Petermann's Mittheilungen*, 1884, viii.; Lieut. A. C. Yate (1885), *Travels with the Afghan Boundary Commission*, cap. x. Prior to this century the descriptions of Meshed are short and scattered. But an interesting account of the city in 1741 is to be found in *Voyage de l'Inde à Mekke*, by Abdul Kerim, pp. 48, 70–74, translated into French by M. Langlès.

by bringing it up to date. The fixed residence of an official representative of the Queen in Meshed is alone sufficient to mark an epoch in its history.

History

I may dismiss with the briefest notice the rudiments of knowledge about the holy city. Its name (Mashhad = 'Place of Martyrdom or Witness'[1]) and fame are alike due to the fact that in the ninth century A.D. the remains of the pre-eminently holy Imam Reza, son of Imam Musa, and eighth of the twelve Imams or Prophets, were here interred. Rumour relates, but apparently without any very certain foundation, that, having incurred the jealousy of the Khalif Mamun (son of the renowned Harun-er-Rashid), whose capital was Merv, the saint, then residing at the city of Tus, fifteen miles from the modern Meshed, was removed at his orders by a dish of poisoned grapes; although another tradition represents the holy father as having comfortably died in his bed, or whatever was the ninth century equivalent thereto, at Tus. Whichever be the truth, the body of the departed prophet was interred in a tower in the neighbouring village of Sanabad, where also (a curious corollary to the story of the murder) lay the remains of the Khalif's father, the illustrious Harun. Sanabad gradually became an object of religious attraction and worship, and Ibn Batutah, who travelled hither about 1330 A.D., found the mosque of the Imam in existence, and highly revered.[2] In 1404 the courtly Spanish Ambassador, Don Ruy Gonzalez di Clavijo, passing Meshed on his way to the Court of Timur at Samarkand, left a similar record.[3] Shah Rukh, the youngest son of Timur, subsequently embellished the mausoleum; while his wife, Gowher Shad, erected the magnificent mosque which still exists alongside.

[1] Mashhad is the locative noun of the root *shahad*, to witness.

[2] He says that 'the Meshed of El Reza is a large and well-peopled city, abounding in fruits. Over the Meshed is a large dome adorned with a covering of silk and golden candlesticks. Under the dome, and opposite to the tomb of El Reza, is the grave of the Calif Harun-el-Rashid. Over this they constantly place candlesticks with lights. But when the followers of Ali enter as pilgrims they kick the grave of El Rashid, but pour out their benedictions over that of El Reza.' It is clear from the above that in the fourteenth century Meshed was as much a place of Sunni as of Shiah pilgrimage.

[3] 'Imam Reza lies buried in a great mosque in a large tomb, which is covered with silver gilt. On account of this tomb the city is crowded with pilgrims, who come here in great numbers every year. When the pilgrims arrive, they dismount and kiss the ground, saying that they have reached a holy place' (Hakluty Society edition).

It was not, however, till the accession of the Sefavi dynasty, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that Meshed, as it had now for long been designated, became a centre of world-wide renown. Having established the Shiah heresy as the national creed, it was in the highest degree necessary for the new occupants of the throne to institute some shrine which should divert the flow of pilgrimage and money from Mecca, and appeal to the enthusiasm of the entire Shiah community. Just as Jeroboam set up the golden calves at Dan and Bethel, in order to divert the Israelitish pilgrims from Jerusalem, so the Shahs Ismail, Tahmasp, and Abbas loaded the mosque of Imam Reza with wealth and endowments, visited and sometimes resided in the city,[1] and left it what it has ever since remained, the Mecca of the Persian world. It does not indeed rank first among Shiah shrines; for just as Ali (son-in-law of the Prophet and in succession to him, according to the Shiah canon, the true leader of the faith) and his son, the martyred Husein, are superior in holiness even to the Imam Reza, so their tombs at Nejef (or Meshed Ali) and Kerbela, near the Euphrates, possess a superior sanctity to the shrine of Meshed. But Nejef and Kerbela are both situated on Turkish—i.e. on alien—soil; and unpatriotic would be the soul that, while paying its devotions to those sacred spots, did not also burn with the desire to behold and to offer its prayers at the religious centre of Iran, and to kiss the railings of the Imam's grave.[2] The situation of Meshed, however, so near the confines of Turan, rendered it liable to constant inroad and attack, and in common with all the border cities of Khorasan it has had a stormy and eventful history. In the reign of Shah Abbas (A.D. 1587) it was once taken and sacked by the Uzbegs. It suffered severely during the Afghan invasion of Mahmud. But it revived under the patronage of the conqueror Nadir Shah, who, although after his accession to the throne he eschewed and endeavoured

[1] Abbas the Great is said, upon one occasion, as a proof of his piety, to have walked with his court the entire distance from Isfahan to Meshed, while the Astronomer Royal measured the distance with a string, and returned the total as 199 *farsakhs* and a fraction.

[2] I asked a Shiah *seyid* of Kerbela the order in which the Holy Places of the Moslem faith are esteemed by his persuasion, and his answer was as follows:—(1) Mecca, (2) Medina, (3) Nejef, (4) Kerbela, (5) Kasimein, near Baghdad, (6) Meshed, (7) Samara, on the Tigris, (8) Kum. But a Persian Shiah would rank Meshed after Kerbela. The pilgrimage to Mecca confers the title *Haji*, that to Kerbela *Kerbelai*, and to Meshed *Meshedi*.

forcibly to expunge the Shiah faith,[1] yet often held his court at Meshed, restored and beautified the sacred shrine, and built in the city a tomb both for himself and for the son whom he had blinded in a fit of jealous passion. After his death, Meshed remained in the possession of his blind grandson, Shah Rukh, under whose infirm rule its population, harried by almost yearly invasions of the Uzbegs, sank from 60,000 to 20,000, until at the end of the century he was deposed and tortured to death by the brutal eunuch Agha Mohammed Khan Kajar, the founder of the reigning family of Persia. During the present century Meshed has several times been in rebellion against the sovereign power, having inherited a detestation of the Kajars, recurrent outbreaks of which have necessitated more than one punitive expedition; but along with the rest of the kingdom it has now passed in peaceful subjection into the hands of Nasr-ed-Din.

Size and plan of the city

Meshed is surrounded, as are all Oriental towns of any size, by a mud wall with small towers at regular distances, and projecting bartizans at the angles. The wall was originally nine feet thick at the bottom and four feet thick at the top, besides having a parapet one foot in thickness, but is now in a state of utter disrepair. There was formerly a small ditch or *fausse-braye* below the rampart, with a low parapet on the crest of the counterscarp, and a broader ditch beyond. But the process of decay has merged these structural features in a common ruin, and in most parts they are not to be distinguished from each other. The circumference of the walls has been variously calculated at four, four and a half, and six miles; but any calculation is difficult, owing to the irregularity of the plan.[2] They are pierced by five gates: the Bala Khiaban, or Upper Avenue, and the Pain Khiaban, or Lower Avenue Gate, at the two ends of the main street; the Naugan, Idgah, and Sarab. The ark or citadel, my visit to which I shall presently relate, is situated on the south-west wall.[3]

[1] The attempted restoration of the Sunni creed by Nadir Shah was an act of policy, intended to reunite the Mussulman world from Tabriz to Delhi under the sceptre of a single monarch.

[2] MacGregor's plan (vol. i. p. 284), which was made by Col. Dolmage, is the only one that I know, but is not thoroughly accurate. Eastwick, in riding round the walls and describing the plan of the city, seems, by some strange error, to have reversed the points of the compass, turning north into south and east into west.

[3] For the geographical position of Meshed, *vide* a paper by Major T. H. Holdich in the *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (New Series), vol. vii. (1885) pp. 735–738.

The main feature of Meshed (next to the holy shrines) which endears it to the Persian imagination and distinguishes it from other Oriental capitals, is the possession of a straight street, nearly one mile and three-quarters in length, which intersects the town from north-west to south-east, being interrupted only in the centre by the imposing quadrilateral of the sacred buildings.

The Khiaban

This street is called the Khiaban (i.e. Avenue or Boulevard), and is regarded by the Oriental as the veritable Champs-Elysées of urban splendour. Down the centre runs a canal, or, as we should prefer to call it, a dirty ditch, between brick walls, about twelve feet across, spanned by frail foot bridges and planks. The kerbing and facing as well as the bridges are said to have been originally of stone. This canal appears to unite the uses of a drinking fountain, a place of bodily ablution and washing of clothes, a depository for dead animals, and a sewer. On either side of it is planted an irregular row of *chenars*, mulberries, elms, and willows, in which are many gaps, and the majority of which are very decrepit and forlorn.[1] Then on either side again comes the footway, and then the ramshackle shops of the bazaar, the total width being about eighty feet. The Khiaban is filled in the busy parts of the day with so dense a crowd, that one can only proceed on horseback at a foot's pace, even with outriders to clear the way in front. Everyone seems to be shrieking and shouting at the same time. All classes and nationalities and orders of life are mingled: the stately white-turbaned *mullah*, the half-caste dervish; the portly merchant, the tattered and travel-stained pilgrim; the supercilious *seyid* in his turban of green, the cowering Sunni who has ventured into the stronghold of the enemy; black-browed Afghans and handsome Uzbegs, wealthy Arabs and wild Bedouins; Indian traders and Caucasian devotees, Turk, Tartar, Mongol, and Tajik—an epitome of the parti-coloured, polyglot, many-visaged populations of the East. Conolly, Ferrier, Vambéry, and O'Donovan have left such graphic descriptions of this living kaleidoscope in the Khiaban that I will not strive to emulate their achievements. Perhaps the most novel feature of the boulevard at the time of my visit was a row of lamp-posts, at distances of fifty yards apart, which had just been erected by the Governor.

[1] One writer says that the Khiaban was originally planted with palms; but this I see no reason to believe. O'Donovan is strangely mistaken when he estimates the width of the street as 200 feet.

As soon as we diverge from the Khiaban, we plunge into the familiar labyrinth of intricate alleys, wandering between mud walls, turning odd corners that seem to lead nowhere, occasionally stumbling upon a small piece of bazaar, now emerging upon open spaces and heaps of rubbish. The houses of the wealthier citizens are concealed behind high walls; the poorer hovels are entered by low doorways often below the level of the street. Suddenly we come upon a vast open area, the surface of which is broken into irregular heaps, and littered with broken slabs of stone. This is one of the cemeteries, for a portion of whose hallowed soil a large price is paid by believers, and for a final resting-place in which corpses are frequently transported for thousands of miles. Hard by, masons in their sheds are busy chiselling the memorial stones, of a coarse granite quarried in the neighbourhood; engraving upon their surface a text from the Koran, or some symbol of the craft or status of the deceased. No more permanent or irremovable tombstone is tolerated; for it is essential to the requirements of the restricted area and to the revenues of the shrine that the ground should be constantly re-available for use, and as soon as the covering of an old grave has fallen in a new-comer is interred in its place. Over several of the graves were erected small white awnings or tents, in which *mullahs* are hired by the friends of the deceased to sit and moan prayers, and thus to expedite his path to heaven.

Remainder of the city. Cemeteries

In spite of the number of these cemeteries and the outrageous violation of sanitary laws with which they are managed; in spite of the crowded numbers of human beings constantly packed in the city, and of its frequent and filthy cesspools, the average health of Meshed is superior to that of many Persian towns. Though situated in very nearly the same parallel of latitude as Teheran, and at a lower altitude (3,100 ft. as against 3,800 ft.), its average temperature is lower and its rate of mortality less high. Khanikoff attributes this immunity to its situation on the northern slope of a mountain range, by which it is shielded from the suffocating desert winds. The water of Meshed is abominable and quite unfit to drink, being strongly impregnated with sulphuretted hydrogen. I left my razor standing in a cup for one night, and the next morning it was as black as a steel gun-barrel.

Health of Meshed

Above the level of the rooftops rise several of the *badgirs*, or wind-towers, which are such a prominent feature in the maritime towns

of the Persian Gulf. Their principle of construction is as follows. A tall square or four-sided tower is built from the roof, and is covered at the top, but contains in its sides long vertical slits or apertures, by which the air enters and passes down corresponding partitions in the interior into a room below, where the inmates live in the hot weather, and where there is consequently a perpetual current of air. In still hotter places in the South, these rooms are replaced by *serdabs*, or underground chambers. Another very prominent feature of Meshed is the number of *karaoul-khanehs*, or guard-houses, scattered throughout the city and occupied by small detachments of the regular infantry. They consist, as a rule, of a low verandah with a guard-room behind. The muskets, which are old muzzle-loading smooth-bores, are usually standing piled in front. But as a European rides by, a ragged soldier, in a blue serge tunic and a sheepskin shako, who is probably lounging behind, jumps up, and with a prodigious rattle seizes one of these weapons and presents arms. It is then put down again and the guard resumes his seat.

Wind-towers and guard-houses

MacGregor in 1875 truly remarked that 'there is very little in this city to induce any one to visit it, or stay long if fortune has cast him into it. There is just one building, the Imam Reza's tomb, worth seeing; and that one there is no chance of any European being permitted to see, except at a risk quite incommensurate with the reward.' It is indeed most irritating, as one rides down the Khiaban, suddenly to find the passage barred by an archway in a wall surrounding the mysterious parallelogram that contains the holy places, and shutting it off as inexorably from the Christian's gaze as Aaron's cord between the living and the dead. From the descriptions, however, that have been left by such Europeans as have entered it, and from the accounts that have been given by Mohammedans themselves, we can form a correct idea of what is to be seen within.

The sacred buildings

Immediately beyond the barrier, above the archway of which is a European clock, the street continues to run for 100 yards or more through a crowded bazaar up to the main entrance of the mosques. Here the greatest throng was always congregated, and the busiest barter seemed to be going on. Pilgrims who reside within the enclosure can purchase there all the necessaries of life; while mementoes of their visit are pressed upon them, in the shape of the local manufactures of the city, of amulets

1. The Bast

and trinkets, and of turquoises engraven with sentences from the Koran. The most remarkable feature, however, about this section of the parallelogram is that, belonging to the Imam, it is holy ground, and consequently affords an inviolable sanctuary, or *bast*, to any malefactor who succeeds in entering its precincts. Some writers declare that even Christians, Jews, and Guebres (the Persian name for the Parsis) are permitted to use it for the same purpose; but this I elsewhere heard denied. To a Mohammedan, however, it is a safe refuge from his pursuers, with whom, from the security of his retreat, he can then make terms, and settle the ransom which is to purchase his immunity if he comes out.[1] The idea of sanctuary is of course familiar to the Oriental mind, and is embodied in the Cities of Refuge of the Pentateuch. Nor should it excite the indignant surprise of the English reader, seeing that in our own country and capital at no very distant date a similar refuge for debtors existed in the famous Alsatia between Blackfriars Bridge and Temple Bar, which also had an ecclesiastical foundation, having originally been the precincts of the Dominicans or Black Friars. The Bast at Meshed is so emphatically the property of the Imam, that any animal entering its limits is at once confiscated by the authorities of the shrine.

[1] In Persia the idea of *bast* seems, it is difficult to say why, to have a threefold localisation: (1) In sacred buildings or mosques (compare the 'horns of the altar' in the Jewish tabernacle); (2) in the stables or at the tails of the horses belonging to the sovereign or members of the royal family; (3) in the neighbourhood of artillery—e.g. in the Meidan-i-Tupkhaneh, or Gun Square, in Teheran, and particularly in contact with the big gun which stands outside the palace. Chardin (edit. Langlès, vol. vii. p. 369) says, two centuries ago, that it applied to the tombs of great saints, to the gateway of the Royal Palace at Isfahan, and to the kitchen as well as the stables of the King. The selection of the royal stables and horses as an especial sanctuary would appear to be due to the extravagant attention that has always been paid, in a country where there are superb breeds of horses, and where every man is a horseman, to this part of the establishment of the sovereign. There is a Persian saying that 'a horse will never bear him to victory by whom its sanctity has been infringed;' and Malcolm (vol. ii. cap. xxiii.) quotes a Persian MS., which attributed all the misfortunes of Nadir Mirza, the grandson of Nadir Shah, to his having put to death a fugitive who had taken sanctuary in the royal stables. The MS. adds these interesting particulars: 'The monarch or chief in whose stable a criminal takes refuge must feed him as long as he stays there; he may be slain the moment before he reaches it, or when he leaves it; but while there, a slave who has murdered his master cannot be touched. The place of safety is at the horse's head, and if that is tied up in the open air the person who takes refuge is to touch the head-stall.' In later times, the tail, though perhaps more venturesome, appears to have been as much fraught with protection as the head.

At the end of the bazaar of the Bast, a lofty archway, rising high above the adjoining wall, leads into the Sahn, or principal court of the Holy Buildings. This is a noble quadrangle, 150 yards long by 75 yards wide, flagged with gravestones of the wealthy departed, whose means have enabled them to purchase this supreme distinction, and surrounded by a double storey of recessed alcoves. In the centre of this court stands a small octagonal structure or kiosque, with gilded roof, covering a fountain which is supplied by the main canal, and surrounded by a stone channel constructed by Shah Abbas. The water of this fountain is used for purposes of ablution by the pilgrim as he enters. Upon the four sides the walls between and above the recesses are faced with enamelled tiles; and in the centre of each rises one of those gigantic portals, or *aiwans* (archways set in a lofty rectangular frame), which are characteristic of the Arabian architecture of Central Asia. These arches are embellished with colossal tiles, bearing in Kufic letters verses from the Koran. An inscription on the southern *aiwan* says that it was built by Shah Abbas II. in A.H. 1059. The lower bands of Kufic characters on all the *aiwans* were, we learn from a similar source, added in A.H. 1262. Upon the summit of the western *aiwan* rises a cage, very rashly assumed by Eastwick to be made of ivory, from which the *muezzin* gives the call to prayer.[1] The eastern *aiwan* is that which leads to the Holy of Holies, the tomb-chamber of the Imam; and its special character is indicated by the gilding with which its upper half is overlaid. An inscription upon it says that it was finished by Shah Sultan Husein in A.H. 1085; and some later verses record that it was gilded by Nadir Shah in A.H. 1145 with the gold that had been plundered from India and the Great Mogul. The Sahn contains two minarets, which, according to descriptions, and from what I myself saw from the roof of a bazaar within the Bast, do not appear to be placed in analogous positions on either side of the main entrance. The older minaret, built by Shah Ismail or Shah Tahmasp, springs from the mausoleum itself. When Fraser was here on his second visit in 1834, it had been 'so shaken or damaged, that for fear of its falling they had taken it down.' It was afterwards rebuilt. The second or larger minaret was erected

2. The Sahn

[1] Chardin says that the reason why these cages were constructed for the *muezzins* in Persia was the fear lest from the summit of the minarets they should see too much of female life in the courts of the neighbouring houses.

by Nadir Shah, and rises from behind the opposite gateway. The upper part of these minarets is in each case overlaid with gilded copper plates, and is crowned with the cage-like gallery that is common to the Persian style. The sun flashes from their radiant surface, and in the distance they glitter like pillars of fire.

3. Mosque of Imam Reza

And now we approach the chief glory of the whole enclosure, the mosque and sepulchre of the immortal Imam. I say immortal advisedly, for the theory upon which the shrine and the vast system dependent upon it subsist is that the sainted Reza still lives, and responds miraculously to the petitions of his worshippers. The Hazret, as he is called—i.e. His Highness,—is the host of his guests. He supplies their bodily wants while they remain within his domain; and equally he answers their prayers, and furthers their spiritual needs. It is open to any pilgrim to consult him, and Delphic responses are easily forthcoming in return for a suitable fee to one of the attendant priests. From time to time also the rumour goes abroad that some astonishing miracle has been effected at the shrine of His Highness. The cripple has walked, or the blind man has seen, or some similar manifestation has occurred of god-like effluence.[1]

The tomb itself is preceded by a spacious chamber, whose marble floor is overlaid with rich carpets. Above it, to a height of seventy-seven feet, swells the main cupola, whose gilded exterior [2]

[1] This is no new thing, for, 200 years ago, the French missionary, Father Sanson, narrates and mercilessly analyses the same phenomena. 'Shah Abbas has made this tomb famous by a great many false miracles he caused to be practised there; for, placing people there on purpose who should counterfeit themselves blind, they suddenly received their sight at this sepulchre, and immediately cry'd out, "A miracle;" he procur'd so great a veneration for this tomb of Imam Reza that most of the greatest lords in Persia have desir'd to be bury'd in this mosque; and to which they give great legacies.' Nadir Shah, on the other hand, had a most intense contempt for these manufactured miracles. *Vide* a story related by Malcolm, *History*, vol. ii. p. 51.

[2] A very interesting passage occurs in the narrative of Chardin (edit. Langlès, vol. iii. p. 228), who, being in Isfahan in the reign of Shah Suleiman in 1672, went to the house of the King's goldsmith to see these very gilt plates being made as tiles for the dome of Imam Reza, which had just been destroyed by an earthquake. In the English translation of Lloyd (vol. i. p. 237) it appears as follows: 'These plates were of brass (no—*cuivre*, i.e. copper) and square, 10 inches in breadth and 16 in length, and of the thickness of two crown pieces. Underneath were two Barrs 3 inches broad, solder'd on crosswise, to sink into the Parget (i.e. plaster) and to serve as cramp irons to fasten the tiles. The upper part was gilt so thick that one would have taken the tile to be of massif gold. Each tile took up the weight of 3 Ducates and a quarter of gilding, and

marks the sacred spot to the advancing pilgrim, and gladdens his weary eyes from afar. The walls of this chamber are adorned with a wainscoting of *kashi*—i.e. enamelled tiles, above which are broad bands of Arabic writing in the same material. There is a hum of voices in the building; for servants of the shrine are heard reading aloud from the Koran, *seyids* are mumbling their daily prayers, greedy *mullahs* are proffering their services to the new arrivals; and many are the exclamations of pious wonder and delight that burst from the bewildered pilgrim, as, after months of toil and privation in the most cheerless surroundings, there flash upon his gaze the marbles and the tile work, the gold and the silver, the jewels and the priceless offerings of the famous shrine. 'Encrusted within and without with gold, it is,' says Vambéry, who himself saw it, 'unquestionaby the richest tomb in the whole Islamite world. Although since the date of its first erection it has been several times plundered,[1] the cupolas, towers, and massive fretted work of the interior still contain an incalculable amount of treasure. The walls are adorned with the rarest trinkets and jewels: here an *aigrette* of diamonds, there a sword and shield studded with rubies and emeralds, rich old bracelets, large massive candelabra, necklaces of immense value.' Well may the worshipper, as he enters, bow his head till it touches the ground, before he approaches the main object of his devotion, the sepulchre itself.

The Prophet's tomb

At different times the tomb has been surrounded with railings of gold and silver and steel. The first of these was originally set up by Shah Tahmasp, but was in part dismantled and plundered by the grandson of Nadir Shah. The last was the gift of Nadir himself. Three doors lead to the shrine, one of which is of silver, another of gold plates studded with precious stones, the gift of Fath Ali Shah; the third being covered with a carpet sewed with pearls. Upon the railings round the tomb are hung silver and wooden tablets with appropriate forms

came to about 10 crowns value. They were ordered to make 3,000 at first, as I was told by the Chief Goldsmith, who was overseer of the work.'

[1] By none more than those who should have been responsible for its safety. The two sons of the blind Shah Rukh and grandsons of Nadir Shah in particular could not keep their avaricious hands from the shrine which their grandfather had honoured and embellished. Nasrullah Mirza pulled down part of the gold railing round the saint's tomb, and Nadir Mirza took down the great golden ball, weighing 420 lbs., from the top of the dome; while both brothers freely plundered the lamps, carpets &c., inside.

of prayer and inscriptions. 'Before each of them a little group of the devout is posted, either to pray themselves or to repeat the petitions after the leader of their common devotions. This they do with cries and sobs, as though thus to open to themselves the gates of eternal bliss. It is indeed a singular and sublime spectacle to see how these rude sons of Asia kiss with unfeigned tenderness the fretwork of the grating, the pavement, and especially the great padlock which hangs from the door. Only the priests and the *seyids* are uninfluenced by these feelings of devotion. Their only concern is with the pence which they may collect. They force their way everywhere among the devout, nor do they retire till by felicitations or other good offices they have obtained the desired mite. When the pilgrim, filled with awe, walking backwards, has at last left the building, he has earned for himself the honorary title of Meshedi, a title which he has inscribed on his signet and his tombstone, and which he ever after prefixes to his name as an *agnomen*.'

Other tombs

In the absorption consequent upon visiting the mausoleum of the Imam, the pilgrim probably recks little of the dust of the famous Harun-er-Rashid, which reposes beneath a sarcophagus hard by. Nor, perhaps, will he think much of the tomb of Abbas Mirza, the son of Fath Ali Shah, and grandfather of the present monarch, which also stands beneath the sacred roof. Other tombs and chambers, moreover, there are opening out of the principal shrine, but of minor importance, and these may be dismissed without further notice.

Europeans who have seen the shrine

I now come to a very prevalent error which it is desirable in the interests of truth to expose. It was started by Mr. Eastwick in 1862, when he claimed for himself that he was 'the only European that ever went into the mosque of Imam Reza at Meshed, certainly the only one that entered as a European.'[1] And it has been repeated and aggravated by the new edition of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' which says (*vide* article on Meshed): 'Eastwick was the only European before O'Donovan who penetrated as far as the parallelogram.' Both of these claims are quite without justification. Before the time of Eastwick, Fraser in 1822 went into the shrine and into the tomb chamber itself, and after more than once repeating the Moslem confession of faith and giving the *mullahs* to understand that he

[1] *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. p. 229.

was a convert to Islam (a most questionable proceeding on his part), was allowed to sit for two days in one of the alcoves of the Sahn, in order to make a drawing of its interior.[1] Conolly in 1830 visited all the chambers of the mosque but that containing the tomb itself, and walked daily in the Sahn, where, though recognised, he was free from insult.[2] Burnes in 1832, on his return journey from Bokhara, went into the Sahn, but did not think it prudent to go beyond, his 'judgment conquering his curiosity.'[3] Ferrier in 1845 did exactly the same.[4] Fraser, returning to Meshed in 1834, after the occupation of the city by the army of Abbas Mirza, with which were several English officers, found 'the Sahn open to all Europeans,' but in a state of grievous dilapidation that was afterwards repaired.[5] All these were before the date of Eastwick's visit. But when we come to Eastwick himself, we are surprised to find not only that he did not go into the mosque, in the true sense of the term, at all, but that he did not even go so far as the more cautious of his predecessors in crossing the Sahn. He was introduced by the Mutawali Bashi, or Chief Guardian of the shrine, by a door from the back into one of the recessed alcoves that surround the Sahn, where he sat and gazed at what was passing below. He went no further, and he even went there unawares.[6]

Continuing the narrative since his day and down to that of O'Donovan, we find that in the year following (1863) Vambéry, on the return from his heroic voyage as a mendicant dervish to Bokhara and Samarkand, entered the mosque and visited the tomb chamber in the character which he had so long and successfully worn. About the same time Colonel Dolmage, an English officer in the service of the Shah,[7] who superintended a powder factory near Meshed, penetrated into the interior under the auspices of the Hissam-es-Sultaneh, then Governor-General of Khorasan. Finally, when we come to O'Donovan in 1880, we find that he did not even enter the Sahn, but claims from a doorway outside to have

[1] *Journey into Khorasan*, pp. 472, 511.
[2] *Overland Journey to India*, vol. i. p. 288.
[3] *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. p. 70.
[4] *Caravan Journeys*, p. 126.
[5] *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 211.
[6] *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 224–229.
[7] Colonel, originally Doctor, Dolmage was an Englishman who, after serving as a veterinary surgeon in the Crimean War, came out to Persia and entered the service of the Shah. He subsequently died at Teheran. It was his plan of Meshed that appeared in MacGregor's book, having been purchased by the latter officer for a few *krans*.

looked through into the great quadrangle.[1] This is an achievement which might, I think, be effected without risk at the present time. A European who found his way into the Bast, particularly by some other than one of the two main entries, might without much difficulty succeed in reaching the gates of the Sahn. He might be stared at or followed or mobbed, but he would probably not be attacked. It would be a different thing were he to enter the sacred precincts themselves; though I am one of those who incline to the opinion that in these respects the fanaticism of Orientals is apt to be exaggerated. In the interests, however, not merely of personal safety, but of the reputation of his nationality, which might suffer from detection, it would be foolhardy in a foreigner to make the attempt. I was myself conducted over the roofs of the bazaars to a spot, I believe, within the Bast, where I could see the sacred buildings very well, and was from eighty to a hundred yards distant from the mosque of Gowher Shad, which adjoins that of Imam Reza, and to which I next turn. If I must claim for myself any special distinction, it is the modest one of being the first English Member of Parliament who has entered the walls of Meshed, so far as my knowledge extends.

The second mosque is behind that of Imam Reza, but is situated obliquely to it. Like the other, it has a large court, with two storeys of recessed compartments all round, with soaring tile-covered *aiwans*, and with two great ungilt but tile encircled minarets. On the main façade is an inscription saying that it was erected in the reign of Shah Rukh in A.H. 821. A similar panel on the southern *aiwan* records its reconstruction by Shah Sultan Husein in A.H. 1087. Fraser, who visited it, thought this mosque 'by far the most beautiful and magnificent that he had seen in Persia;' and Vambéry, speaking of its main archway, said:

4. Mosque of Gowher Shad

> It was long before I could determine whether I should award the palm to this gate or to those two in Samarkand and Herat which are of the same style; for it is certain that they all date from the reign of Shah Rukh, if indeed they were not the work of the same architect. It is possible that the Madrasseh Khanym in Samarkand, as also the Musallah in Herat, were more luxurious and magnificent, but I can hardly believe that they were ever more beautiful.

Gowher Shad's mosque hardly, at the present day, sustains this reputation from the outside, though evidently its *kashi* is

[1] *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. cap. xxix.

superb. The dome, which is larger and loftier than that of Imam Reza, is covered with tiles of blue, green, and orange patterns, which have peeled off in places.

Other buildings in the Bast

Entrance is found by one of the archways in the principal Sahn to a *madresseh*, or religious college, which was erected by the munificence of one Mirza Jafir, a wealthy Persian merchant who had made a fortune in India; and it is the third finest building in Meshed, resembling the mosques in structural features and decoration. It was further endowed by its founder with large revenues, which supported fifty or sixty *mullahs*. Also included in the parallelogram are other *madressehs*, courts, lodging-houses, and baths, as well as a great refectory, where the pilgrims are fed at the expense of His Highness (each new-comer being entitled to three days' gratuitous board), at the rate of 30 *mans* or 195 lbs. of rice a day. Here it is said that 500 or 600 meals are served daily to the hungry guests of the Imam.

Library of the Imam

We are indebted to Khanikoff, who was a most scholarly and accurate inquirer, for the following information about the library of the Imam. He says that the date of its foundation cannot be placed earlier than the time of Shah Rukh, the oldest volume being a Koran that was deposited in his reign. The next donations occurred in the reigns of Shah Abbas and Shah Sultan Husein. A catalogue had been drawn up shortly before Khanikoff's visit in 1858, from which he learnt that the library contained 2,997 works in 3,654 volumes, of which 1,041 were Korans (189 printed, and 852 manuscripts, some of the latter of great dimensions and rare beauty), 299 prayer-books and guides to pilgrims, 246 works on general ecclesiastical law, and 221 on that of the Shiah persuasion alone. It is curious to learn that the greatest benefactor of the library was the unlettered Nadir Shah, who presented it with as many as 400 manuscripts.

Revenues of the Shrine

The revenues of the shrine in money and in kind are very large. Fraser says that under Shah Sultan Husein, the last of the Sefavi dynasty, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, they were 15,000 *tomans*; but in 1821 he gives the figures as 2,000 to 2,500 *tomans* (can this be a misprint for 20,000 to 25,000 ?). Bassett, in 1878, gave the total as 40,000 *tomans*, which were then equivalent to 16,000*l*. According to the information supplied to me, they now stand at 60,000 *tomans* (equivalent at

the present rate of exchange to 17,000*l.*) and 10,000 *kharvars*[1] of grain. The landed property of the Imam is scattered all over Persia, and there is a good deal of estate besides in the shape of houses, caravanserais, shops, and bazaars. There are 600 paid servants of the mosque, 100 for each day of the week. The total retinue connected with the holy buildings, and consisting of *mujtaheds*, *mullahs*, *mutawalis*, attendants, menials, and hangers-on, has been estimated at 2,000.

Population of Meshed

The entire fixed population of Meshed stands at about the same (45,000) as it did in the days of Conolly. But how large a part in its life is played by the religious element is shown by the computation that within the year as many as 100,000 pilgrims enter its walls, and that the average number at any time to be found in the city is from 5,000 to 8,000. From these figures, and from what has been said above, some idea may be formed of the vast and potent machinery which is in the hands of the ecclesiastical power, and of the part that it must play in the politics of Meshed. The capital is, indeed, a great collection of peoples, occupations, interests, and intrigues, revolving round the central pivot of the shrine. Just as its middle portion is occupied by the sacred quadrilateral, so the life of the place throbs from the same hidden heart, moving in dark channels of superstition, miracle-mongering, and imposture. Conolly was well within the mark when he wrote of the *mullahs* of Meshed that 'the greater number of these are rogues who only take thought how to make the most of the pilgrims that visit the shrine. From the high priest to the seller of bread, all have the same end; and, not content with the stranger's money, those in office about the saint appropriate to themselves the very dues for keeping his temple in order.'

Government of the shrine

From ancient times the government of the shrine has been vested in the hands of an individual, not necessarily an ecclesiastic, and commonly a layman, know as the Mutawali Bashi, or Chief Guardian. He has ordinarily become, by virtue of his office, the principal personage in Meshed, equalling and often surpassing the Governor-General in influence. It was no mean proof of the strength of the present Shah, that here, as elsewhere, he had secured the due subordination of the ecclesiastical to the civil element by appointing his own brother the Rukn-ed-Dowleh, who was Governor-General of Khorasan at the time of my

[1] 1 *kharvar* = 649 lbs.; 3½ *kharvars* = (approximately) 1 ton.

visit, to the post of Mutawali Bashi as well. It was the first time in history that the offices had been united in the same individual, and in proportion as the occurrence detracted from the ecclesiastical predominance of the clergy, so did it aggrandise the temporal ascendency of the sovereign. Below the Mutawali Bashi in descending grades of authority and repute, extends a hierarchy of inferior *mutawalis*, some of whom are hereditary office-bearers, while others receive their appointments from the Shah; of *mujtaheds*, or doctors of the law, who expound the canonical jurisprudence, and occupy positions of great distinction and influence, receiving in some cases fixed allowances from the Shah; and of *mullahs*, who preach, and conduct the services, and live by what they can extract from the pilgrims. The more eminent *mujtaheds* are regarded as very holy characters. When they enter the mosque to pray, crowds gather behind them to participate in their prayers, and they spend much of their spare time in indiscriminate shouting and weeping. At the time of my visit Meshed was in one of its chronic spasms of religious excitement. The anniversaries of the martyrdom both of Hasan and of the holy Imam were being commemorated. *Taziehs*, or religious plays, were being acted; the holy places were crowded to suffocation; and beaten tomtoms and clamoured invocations made the night hideous. Judging from the noise that he made, there must have been some particularly holy personage living near my quarters in the British Consulate; and freely did I anathematise this insufferable saint, as I lay awake at night listening to his long-drawn lamentations and plaintive howls.

Extent of the quadrilateral

From gate to gate of the Bast on either side, the parallelogram thus enclosed must be at least a square quarter of a mile. The western gate is used as a *nakkara-khaneh*, or band-tower; and from here, as in other Persian seats of royal residence, is sounded at sunset a discordant fanfaronade of cymbals, drums, and horns.

Prostitution

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of Meshed life, before I leave the subject of the shrine and the pilgrims, is the provision that is made for the material solace of the latter during their stay in the city. In recognition of the long journeys which they have made, of the hardships which they have sustained, and of the distances by which they are severed from family and home, they are permitted, with the connivance of the ecclesiastical law and its officers, to contract temporary marriages during their

sojourn in the city. There is a large permanent population of wives suitable for the purpose.[1] A *mullah* is found, under whose sanction a contract is drawn up and formally sealed by both parties, a fee is paid, and the union is legally accomplished. After the lapse of a fortnight or a month, or whatever be the specified period, the contract terminates; the temporary husband returns to his own *lares et penates* in some distant clime, and the lady, after an enforced celibacy of fourteen days' duration, resumes her career of persevering matrimony. In other words, a gigantic system of prostitution, under the sanction of the Church, prevails in Meshed. There is probably not a more immoral city in Asia; and I should be sorry to say how many of the unmurmuring pilgrims who traverse seas and lands to kiss the grating of the Imam's tomb are not also encouraged and consoled upon their march by the prospect of an agreeable holiday and what might be described in the English vernacular as 'a good spree.'

Tomb of Nadir Shah

Here, in the city which he patronised and adorned, was originally laid the body of the great conqueror, Nadir Shah. In his own lifetime he caused the buildings to be raised both for himself and for his son, Reza Kuli Mirza. They were situated about halfway between the mosque of the Imam and the Bala Khiaban gate. Not a trace now remains of their existence. The brutal eunuch Agha Mohammed Khan Kajar, mindful of the source to which he owed his calamity, as soon as he became Shah, gratified the instincts of a long-nurtured revenge by razing the structures to the ground; while the bones of Nadir were removed at his orders to Teheran, and deposited (along with those of his other rival, Kerim Khan Zend) beneath the threshold of the palace, so that whenever he went abroad he might trample upon the dust of the great persecutor of himself and his family. In Fraser's day the desecrated buildings at Meshed were heaps of rubbish. Ten years later Burnes found a crop of turnips springing from the soil which had sheltered the body of the conqueror of Hindustan.

There still exist a considerable number of Jewish families in Meshed, although the practice of their own worship is strictly for-

[1] A *sigheh* or temporary wife may be married for any period from one day to 99 years. Women often prefer being *sighehs* for the full period to being *akdis* or real wives. The *akdi* can be divorced at any time, the *sigheh* not before the end of her contract, except for misconduct. Short-period *sighehs* in the big cities are quasi-prostitutes.

bidden, and is only pursued in secret. The story of their enforced conversion to Mohammedanism in the year 1838 is well known, and has been repeated by more than one traveller. Dr. Wolff, who was twice at Meshed, both before and after the incident, described it in these terms:—

Jews in Meshed

> The occasion was as follows: A poor woman had a sore hand. A Mussulman physician advised her to kill a dog and put her hand in the blood of it. She did so; when suddenly the whole population rose and said that they had done it in derision of their prophet. Thirty-five Jews were killed in a few minutes; the rest, struck with terror, became Mohammedans. They are now more zealous Jews in secret than ever, but call themselves *Anusim*, the Compelled Ones.[1]

Wolff does not add—what is necessary to explain the sudden outburst—that the incidents of the Jewess and the slaughtered dog unfortunately occurred on the very day when the Mohammedans were celebrating the annual Feast of Sacrifice.[2] Superstition and malice very easily aggravated an innocent act into a deliberate insult to the national faith; and hence the outbreak that ensued. There is much less fanaticism now than in those days; but it still behoves a Yehudi, or Jew, to conduct himself circumspectly and to walk with a modest air in Meshed.

Khanihoff is responsible for the statement that there are fourteen *madressehs* and sixteen caravanserais in the city; as also for an enumeration of their names and the dates of their foundation. Any reader who requires information upon these points may be referred to his pages.[3]

Public buildings

I had heard or read a good deal about the native manufactures of Meshed, but was greatly disappointed with such articles as I saw. A more unfavourable hunting-ground for the would-be purchaser can hardly be imagined. The manufacture of damascened sword-blades has long been a trade here, having originally, it is said, been introduced by a colony transported for the purpose by Timur from Damascus. Now, however, that rifles and revolvers have taken the place of swords and

Manufactures

[1] *Narrative of Mission to Bokhara in* 1843–1845, vol. i. p. 239, and vol. ii. p. 72.

[2] The Aid-i-Kurban is held in commemoration of Abraham's intention, according to the Mussulman tradition, to offer up Ismail (Ishmael), not Ishak (Isaac). The animals sacrificed on this occasion are supposed also to act as a propitiatory offering, which will stand the believer in good stead when he comes to the razor-like bridge of Sirat that spans the gulf to Paradise.

[3] *Mémoire sur la Partie Méridionale de l'Asie Centrale*, p. 107.

daggers, there is not the same demand for new blades. Silk and cotton and velvet stuffs are made here, but of a quality greatly inferior to those of Bokhara. There are in the town 650 silk looms and 320 shawl looms. On the other hand, good carpets are procurable, particularly those of genuinely Oriental pattern, close texture, and imperishable vegetable dyes, that hail from Kain and Birjand. The Kurdish carpets are also original, but less artistic. In Meshed itself are forty carpet-looms. Turkoman carpets, jewellery, and weapons were formerly a common object in the bazaars, but are now almost entirely bought up by the Russians in Transcaspia or exported to Europe. Astrabad, near the camps of the Goklan Turkomans, is probably, next to Teheran (whither everything converges), the best place in Persia for procuring Turkoman articles. Old Tartar and even Bactrian coins are frequently to be met with at Meshed. I naturally anticipated that, being in such close proximity to the famous turquoise mines of Nishapur, the bazaars would be well stocked with specimens of that stone. I saw little but rubbish. All the best stones are bought at the mouth of the mines and are exported to foreign countries. Meshed seems to receive the residue, of a price and quality likely to attract the itinerant pilgrim. Nor was I any better pleased with the carved objects, cups, bowls, basins, ewers, which are hollowed with the aid of a very primitive lathe and tools out of a soft slate or steatite that is found in the neighbourhood. There are two varieties of this stone, a dull reddish brown, and a blue-grey. But though previous travellers have spoken in terms of great admiration of these works of art, I failed to appreciate either the material, the shape, or the workmanship.

Wages and prices

At the time of my visit, the scale of artisans' wages was as follows: Carpenters, 3 *krans*, or 1*s.* 9*d.*, per diem; masons, 2 *krans*, or 1*s.* 2*d.*; blacksmiths, 1½ *kran*, or 11*d.*; common labourers, 1 *kran*, or 7*d.* The price of bread was about ½*d.* per lb., of mutton 2¾*d.* Fowls, which had cost ½ *kran*, or 3½*d.*, in the mountains, cost 1 *kran*, or 7*d.*, in the capital. The price of wheat was a little less than 6*d.* a stone, of barley a little less than 4*d.*

There were reported to be 144 private bankers or usurers in the city, with a united capital of 931,000 *tomans*, or 266,000*l.* Two only of these had a capital of 100,000 *tomans* (28,570*l.*); three a capital of 50,000 *tomans* (14,285*l.*) each; and two a capital of

30,000 *tomans* (8,570*l.*) each. The rest were petty money dealers. The New Oriental Bank in Teheran kept an agent at Meshed; but, as they have since parted with their business to the new Imperial Bank of Persia, the latter have taken their place in Khorasan, where there is considerable scope for their transactions. A great many Russian rouble notes (it is said 200,000) were in circulation in Meshed. An English sovereign was worth 3 *tomans* and 3½ *krans*, or, at the normal rate of exchange, 19*s.* 6*d.* Indian rupees fetched their full Indian value of 1*s.* 5*d.*[1]

Banks and Money-lending

While at Meshed I enjoyed an interview with the Governor-General of Khorasan. As I have already indicated, this high official is one of the two surviving brothers of the Shah. His name is Mohammed Taki Mirza, his title the Rukn-ed-Dowleh (i.e. Pillar of the State), and he was then Governor-General for the third time, having filled the post at intervals during the past fifteen years, and occasionally been superseded or shelved, as some other aspirant had gained the ear of the sovereign or been able to offer a higher bribe.[2] He had the reputation of being a mild but timid individual, who shared the family taste for saving, but temporises in politics. His chief minister however, or Wuzir (Vizier), was reported to be a staunch partisan of Russia, with whom his sympathies were notorious.

Visit to the Governor-General

The Ark, or Citadel, in which the Governor resides, stands in the south-west portion of the city, from which it is separated by a large parade-ground or *meidan*. It is defended by a circuit of low walls and towers. Entering a gateway between two towers, above which was a ludicrous daub or fresco of the Lion and the Sun, we rode down a long vaulted corridor into a large court. Here we dismounted, and, passing through an untidy quadrangle with straggling flower-beds, crossed into an inner and smaller court, where were a number of attendants and hangers-on, by whom we were ushered into the *diwan-khaneh*, or reception room, at the upper end.

The Ark

Here the Governor came forward to receive us. He is short

[1] No. 753 of the Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. 1890.

[2] The Rukn-ed-Dowleh has in the spring of the present year (1891) again been ejected, (it is said because of his Russophil tendencies), and has been replaced by Fathullah Khan, the Sahib Diwan, formerly Governor of Fars under the Zil-es-Sultan.

and very fat, but wears an amiable expression, and, although unlike the Shah, has the distinctive Kajar features. His hair was black, but a white stubble ornamented his chin. His dress was the *kolah*, or lambskin bonnet, and the ordinary black large-skirted coat and trousers of the Persian grandee. White cotton gloves covered his hands, which he crossed affably upon his stomach.

Conversation with the Rukn-ed-Dowleh

Our conversation was not of surpassing interest, as the Governor contented himself with civil and conventional replies. I asked him if he thought railways were likely to come in Persia. 'If God be willing, yes,' was the somewhat ambiguous rejoinder. Of the possible lines, he thought that from Teheran to Kum was most likely to be the first constructed. He said that the mineral resources of his province were very great (which is probably true), and comprised gold, silver, lead, copper, and coal. When I asked him whether the people knew anything about the Shah's recent reception in Europe, and particularly in England, he answered 'No; how should they? Only the officials and upper classes know. Three newspapers are published in Teheran, and of one of these 100 copies are brought every week to Meshed. Later on, when the Shah's diary is published, people will read it, and then they will know.'

My interview with His Royal Highness left upon me the same impression that did the conversation of so many of the Persian ministers whom I afterwards encountered—viz. the existence of an abstract willingness for the internal development of their country, but a total absence of initiative, and a passive acquiescence in the *status quo*.

In the succeeding chapter I shall have something to say about the armed forces of the Khorasan province. I may here limit my attention to the garrison of Meshed, which consists of three infantry regiments of 800 each, usually regiments recruited in the Turkish province of Azerbaijan; a precaution which is supposed to preclude any possible fraternisation between the populace and the military. There are reported to be some twenty light field guns in the Ark. But as they are never brought out, as the artillerymen never practise working them, and as the horses are never exercised, they would probably not constitute a very formidable battery in actual warfare.

Garrison

The only two foreign Powers officially represented, or who

have had any cause to be so represented in Meshed, are Great Britain and Russia; and in both cases the appointment is quite recent, and was effected under circumstances that had occurred a short time before my visit, and are worthy of narration. It was Russia who took the initiative in the latter part of 1888. By the seventh article of the Akhal-Khorasan Treaty of 1881, she was entitled to keep agents at the Persian frontier-posts.[1] But there was no mention therein of a Consul or Consul-General; Meshed could not possibly be described as a frontier-post, or as even remotely concerned with the Turkoman question; and the Shah was known to be particularly averse to any such intrusion at the religious capital of Khorasan. Both Russia and Great Britain had for long maintained native agents at the latter place. But such British officers as had been specially employed on political service in these regions, as, for instance, General Maclean and Colonel Stewart, had been careful either to reside elsewhere or to move from place to place, and had never taken up permanent quarters in the capital, where they were always assured that their residence would be attended with personal risk.

Foreign Consuls in Meshed

Russia, however, had decided for some time that her interests in Khorasan required direct and official representation in the city. Accordingly M. Vlassof, Russian Consul at Resht, and a diplomatist widely known for his grasp of Persian politics, was nominated Consul-General by the Czar, and the Shah was informed that he must ratify the appointment. This peremptory manner of proceeding was not calculated to soothe the wounded feelings of the latter, and for some time the *exsequatur* was withheld. Russia, however, is in a position on the north to make it extremely dangerous for Persia to oppose any prolonged or genuine resistance to whatever proposals she may threaten to enforce, and accordingly, after a certain delay, the *exsequatur* was granted, and in the spring of 1889 M. Vlassof was installed at

Appointment of M. Vlassof

[1] The article is as follows: 'With a view to the observance and fulfilment of the stipulations of the present Convention, and in order to regulate the proceedings of the Turkomans residing on the Persian frontier, the Government of His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias shall have the right to nominate agents to the frontier-posts of Persia. In all questions concerning the observance of order and tranquillity in the districts contiguous to the possessions of the High Contracting Parties, the appointed agents will act as intermediaries in the relations between the Russian and Persian authorities.'

Meshed. Such a concession having been made to the Russians could not, of course, be denied to the British, and General Maclean, who had for some time most ably represented the Indian Government on the Perso-Afghan frontier, received simultaneously his appointment as Consul-General, and, arriving at his post a short time before his Russian colleague, was the *doyen* of the limited Diplomatic Corps that had thus been called into being at the capital of Khorasan.

Russian Consulate

The Russian Government had for some time made preparations for this eventuality. Their native agent had acquired a large house, standing in spacious surroundings, in a suitable quarter of the city, and into this abode, well qualified to furnish the official residence of the representative of a great sovereign, M. Vlassof at once moved. The Russian flag floated above the doorway. A small bodyguard of four Russian Cossacks, as well as the Persian guard assigned to both Consuls by the Government, preceded the Consul when he moved abroad, and the native population of Meshed, whose fanaticism turned out to be a very negative quantity, were speedily habituated to the presence of the foreign element which made so brave a display. There can be no question that the presence of a capable Russian official and staff, and the impression produced by ample surroundings and an imposing abode must have done much to augment Russian influence in the capital, and, if that influence is sometimes exercised with an abrupt and imperious insistence, the effect, even though it be the reverse of welcome to those on whom it is produced, will not thereby have been lessened in intensity. A vigorous Russian representative at Meshed is a visible symbol of the great Power whose movements and intentions form the subject of conversation in every Oriental bazaar, and whose ever-swelling shadow, witnessed with a sort of paralysed quiescence by the native peoples, looms like a thunder-cloud over the land.

British Consulate

In one of my 'Times' letters I wrote as follows:—'It is to be regretted that so far the British Government has not been able to house its representative in a similarly becoming fashion. Preparations for such a contingency had not been made, as in the rival case, long beforehand; and the building which now bears the insignia of the British Consulate, and flies the British flag, is one that affords the scantiest possible evidence of the rank and importance of its inmate. It is little short of discredit-

able that the British Consul-General should be compelled to reside in such attenuated and miserable surroundings. An immediate duty is imposed upon the Government to provide for his maintenance in a style and in quarters better fitted to represent to the native mind the prestige of a great and wealthy Power.' I rejoice to have heard since that the Government has taken the same view of the case as I did; and that a sum of money has been granted, sufficient for the purchase of a plot of ground and the

TEMPORARY BRITISH CONSULATE AT MESHED

erection of a becoming edifice thereon. General Maclean, the capable representative of Great Britain in Khorasan,[1] contemplated at first the purchase of a well-wooded and well-watered garden, nearly thirty acres in extent, outside the walls of the city; but my latest information is that this project has been abandoned, and that a property is more likely to be bought within the walls.

[1] General Maclean has since retired (1891), and has been succeeded at Meshed by Mr. Ney Elias, one of the most distinguished members of the Indian Civil Service.

The staff of the British Consulate, when fully organised (it is still in a state of embryo), will consist of the Consul-General, his assistant, and a Vice-Consul. A private guard is provided by two sergeants and three privates of the Indian Corps of Guides, whose picturesque uniform and smart appearance create a favourable impression, while a native guard of one sergeant and six men is furnished by the Persian Government. Attached to the British Consulate is also a body of twenty-two Turkoman *sowars*, mainly Sariks of Penjdeh, who from the earlier stages of the Afghan boundary dispute allied themselves to the British side, and who are now employed upon a private postal service between Meshed and Herat, where their post enters into correspondence with that of the Amir of Afghanistan. Should the latter be in the northern parts of his domains, it sometimes occurs that a message from the Viceroy of India is most easily and expeditiously transmitted to him by this circuitous route. When a proper house with becoming surroundings has been built, the British Consul-General, who is also Agent to the Governor-General of India, thus attended and assisted, will be able to maintain an appearance worthy of the twofold Power which he represents, and positively essential in a country and amid a people where etiquette and display are credited with a virtue amounting almost to salvation.

Staff and appointments

So much for the outward political position at present occupied by the two Powers in Meshed. An immense amount of consular business devolves upon the shoulders of either representative, for both the Russian and British Governments have several hundred subjects residing in or passing through Meshed for trading purposes. In the case of the British Government these will be in the main Hindus and a few Kashmiris trading, *viâ* Bunder Abbas, from Bombay, or occasional descendants of Afghan and Persian families who became British subjects in the earlier years of this century. The Afghans who come to Meshed are willing enough to claim the shelter of British citizenship, a recognition that is in sharp contrast with the haughty exclusiveness maintained in his own dominions by the Amir. The Russian subjects in Khorasan are Armenians, Caucasian Mussulmans, Turkomans, inhabitants of Transcaspia, Sarts, and Bokhariots. In the registration of these subjects and in the prompt attention to their business the Russians possess an indubitable

Consular business

advantage in their passport system, by which the identity, nationality, and claims of an applicant can at once be ascertained. The British have never adopted this most useful of systems, and an immense amount of labour and time is spent in investigating the titles of the claimant to British protection, which are frequently disputed by the Persian authorities, and can only be vindicated with trouble and delay. It is worth while considering whether in Persia, at any rate, the passport system might not advantageously be introduced.[1] It would, I believe, be welcomed by the Persian Government.

There is very little to be seen in the neighbourhood of Meshed. The mosque of Khojah Rabi I have already described. The Musallah, originally built in A.D. 1699 for the celebration of the feast of Kurban, and described by MacGregor as the only ruin of any note about the city, has lost any note that it may once have had by being a total ruin. Visitors will possibly care to ride out to the remains of Tus, the predecessor of Meshed, fifteen miles distant in a north-westerly direction. Persian legend is very busy with the antiquity and history and vicissitudes of this once famous city. The present remains, which are very clearly to be traced, are those of a walled Arab city, quite four miles in circumference, and of a citadel in its north-east corner. In the centre is a large ruined structure under a dome, which was no doubt once a mosque, but is now known as the Nakkara-Khaneh or Drum Tower. O'Donovan, who spent some time in examining and describing the ruins, mistook this building for the tomb of the great national poet Firdusi,[2] and even identified his coffin.[3] The poet's grave lay beneath a far humbler structure which was visible seventy years ago; but had disappeared long before O'Donovan visited it, and been replaced by no more distinctive memorial than a field of wheat.

Tus

Meshed is connected by telegraph, as I have already shown, with Kelat-i-Nadiri on the north, and with Kuchan and Bujnurd

[1] I have since heard that the Afghans have been allowed by the British Government to accept Russian passports through the medium of the Persian officials, a concession which I am unable either to justify or to explain.

[2] Firdusi, born about 940 A.D., died 1021, was employed by Mahmud of Ghuzni to write the history of Persia in verse. The result was the *Shah Nameh*, or *Book of Kings*, in which the poet discharged his duty in 60,000 Pehlevi verses, containing only two Arabic words, although two out of every three words in ordinary usage at the time were of Arabic—i.e. non-Iranian—origin.

[3] *The Merv Oasis*, vol. ii. pp. 14–16. Compare Khanikoff, pp. 31, 109–110.

on the north-west. From Kelat a branch line runs to Deregez. There is further a single wire from Meshed to the frontier outpost of Sarakhs, on the Russian border; but this is usually broken or interrupted, and Sarakhs is, as a rule, cut off from communication with the capital. This line has been linked in the present year (1891) with Russian Sarakhs, on the other side of the Tejend, where there is a military outpost of Russia; the point of junction being in the bed of the Tejend. This brings Meshed into telegraphic connection with Ashkabad and Merv, and further exemplifies the Russian ascendency. There is, at present, no telegraphic connection between Meshed and the south; but a wire has been talked of from the capital to Birjand. The main line between Meshed and Teheran, 570 miles in length, consists of a single wire, *viâ* Nishapur, Sebzewar, and Shahrud. Though it belongs to the Persian Government, it is subsidised and maintained for them by the Indo-European Telegraph Department, who keep an inspector at Shahrud and two signallers at Teheran and Meshed. This staff is inadequate for the maintenance and service of the line, and it is out of order on several days in each month. The Persians were apt at first to invest the telegraph offices with the sanctity of a *bast*, and cases have occurred at Meshed and elsewhere where the premises have been so claimed by fugitives from pursuit or persecution—the underlying idea being that the wire ran directly from the Shah's palace at Teheran, and that they could thus communicate at once with head-quarters.

Telegraphs

In conclusion, I may say that the fanatical hostility to Europeans and Christians for which Meshed was always said to be distinguished appears to have completely disappeared. Precautions, it is true, are still observed by the advice of the authorities; and it was one of the inconveniences of life and residence there that one had to pass through the town on horseback preceded and followed by an escort. This prevents the desultory stroll and 'poking of the nose in every corner' which the European traveller loves, but which is so foreign to the Oriental's notion of dignity and self-respect. During my residence of eight days in Meshed I always moved about on horseback; but I believe that there was nothing in reality to have prevented me from wandering whither I would on foot, and in a few years' time a European will doubtless be as familiar a spectacle there and will excite as little comment as in the streets of Bokhara or in the bazaars of Isfahan.

Attitude towards foreigners

Supplementary Routes from Meshed.

Meshed to Sarakhs (*viâ* Ak Derbend and Pui-i-Khatun, 96 miles). (Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. pp. 56–65; Capt. Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. p. 146 (1876); (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 1–30.

Meshed to Herat (two routes; the most familiar *viâ* Turbat-i-Sheikh Jam and Ghurian, 220 miles). J. B. Fraser (1822), *Journey into Khorasan*, pp. 118–19; Lieut. A. Conolly (1830), *Overland Journey to India*, vol. i. cap. xii.; J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Caravan Journeys*, cap. x. and cap. xxxi.; Capt. Claude Clerk (1857), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xxxi. pp. 45–47; H. C. Marsh (1872), *Ride through Islam*, pp. 113–131; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. i. caps. viii. ix.

Meshed to Seistan (*viâ* Turbat-i-Haideri, Bajistan, Birjand, Lash Juwain). Dr. F. Forbes (1841), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xiv. (1844); Col. Euan Smith (1872), *Eastern Persia*, vol. i. pp. 323–356 and Appendix D; Dr. H. W. Bellew (1872), *From the Indus to the Tigris*, caps. ix. x.; Sir F. Goldsmid (1872), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xliii. p. 65 (1873).

Meshed to Kaahka (Transcaspian Railway), *viâ* Sengiban, Chaksari, Charköi, and Kardeh. Max von Proskowetz (1888), *Vom Newastrand nach Samarkand*, iii. 5.

Meshed to Dushak (Transcaspian Railway), *viâ* Kanegosha, Khanibist, Namisar, Huntalabad, Tamura Pass, Chacha, Karategan. (Private information.)

For other routes, outlined but not described, *vide* MacGregor, vol. ii. Appendix II.

CHAPTER VIII

POLITICS AND COMMERCE OF KHORASAN[1]

> See how this river comes me cranking in
> And cuts me from the best of all my land
> A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out.
>
> SHAKSPEARE, *Henry IV., Part I.*, act iii. scene 4.

Design of chapter

IN this chapter I propose to discuss the political and commercial situation in Khorasan, the latter being a branch of the former subject, at any rate in a country where commerce can be pursued with political objects, where mercantile agents are frequently diplomatic emissaries in disguise, and where the command of trade routes and bazaars is capable of being used as a preliminary to territorial acquisition. I wish to place before my readers the causes connected with these two spheres of action that bring the province of Khorasan within the purview of European politics, and are responsible for the existence of a Khorasan Question. I desire to point out the parts that are or can be played by Great Britain and Russia in the development of that question, and their respective interests in its future settlement. I shall endeavour, from data which I have collected with some trouble, and which are not elsewhere to be found systematically displayed, to indicate what that future is likely to be. First let me explain and define the factors with which I propose to deal.

Khorasan, or the Land of the Sun, is the extreme north-

[1] For writings relative to Khorasan, other than those which have been mentioned or quoted in caps. v., vi., vii., *vide* Sir J. Macdonald Kinneir (1810) *Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*; J. B. Fraser (1822), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. viii. p. 308 (1838); Sergeant Gibbons (1831–1832), *ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 136 (1841); Captain Claude Clerk (1857), *ibid.*, vol. xxxi. p. 37 (1861); R. Lentz, *Eastern Persia and the Herat Territory* (Russian), St. Petersburg, 1868; Lieut. W. J. Gill (1873), *Geographical Magazine*, October 1, 1874; Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 62, 145 (1876); *Proceedings of the R.G.S.*, vol. xx. p. 166 (1876); Lieut.-Col. C. E. Stewart (1880), *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (New Series), vol. iii. (1881), vol. viii. pp. 137–150 (1886); General Petrusevitch, *The Turkomans between the Old Bed of the Oxus and the N. Persian Frontier* (Trans. of Caucasus Branch of Imp. Russ. Geogr. Soc., No. xi.), Tiflis, 1880; A. H. Schindler on the Nomenclature and Legends of Khorasan in the *Academy*, 1885.

eastern province of Persia. Extending from about long. 56 degs. on the west, to long. 61 degs. on the east, or from the Kal Mura River [1] to the Heri Rud, it presents an average width of a little over 300 miles. Its extreme length would be, from its north-western to its south-eastern extremity, a distance of 600 miles; but its average length may be calculated at 100 miles less. Upon the north it is bounded by the great mountain range, the eastern continuation of the Elburz system, which I have already described at length, and by which it is severed from what was once Turkoman, but is now Russian Transcaspian territory. On the south it is bounded and all but cut off from the world by the appalling desert that stretches like a sea to the very outskirts of Kerman.

Province of Khorasan

In this wide extent of territory, which is estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000 square miles, are included the most extreme varieties of physical conformation, of scenery, and of climate. Upon the north appear mountains whose highest peaks are rarely left by the snow, and rise to an elevation of between 12,000 and 13,000 feet. Range succeeds range in this knotted mountain cluster; the intervening valleys, with a mean elevation of 3,000 to 4,000 feet, being the recipients of whatever moisture drains from their sides, the centres of cultivation, and the sites of villages and towns. In contrast to this almost Alpine scenery, the Dasht-i-Kavir, or Great Salt Desert of Persia, one of the most strange and funereal scenes upon which ever fell the eye of man, lays its palsied hand across the middle part. Then towards the south-east ensues a second mountainous plateau, with peaks of 6,000 feet, and lower cultivated valleys. Finally, to redress the balance, comes the Dasht-i-Lut, or Desert of Lut, whose features, though different, are not unfit to be compared with those of the Dasht-i-Kavir.[2]

Natural features

Cultivation here, as elsewhere in Persia, depends upon water supply; the detritus swept down by the streams or torrents depositing a layer of soil upon the sand, which is subsequently

[1] Rising on the south slopes of the Ala Dagh range, the Kal Mura receives the drainage of the Jagatai or Juwain plain, through which it flows in an easterly direction, is then joined by the Kara Su (Black Water), after which it turns south, cuts the main route from Meshed to Teheran at the Pul-i-Abrishum (Bridge of Silk), and after a further course of fifty miles is lost in the Salt Desert.

[2] Descriptions of both these deserts will more properly be given in a chapter upon the Eastern Provinces. *Vide* vol. ii. cap. xxiii.

fertilised by the same agency that originally brought it. A petty torrent named the Kusf gives life to a limited area of cultivation near Birjand in the south; and there are a few scanty confluents of the upper course of the Heri Rud. With these exceptions the rivers of Khorasan are confined to the northern portion of the province, which has in consequence acquired its reputation as one of the granaries of Persia. Here the Keshef Rud, of which I have spoken, drains the Meshed valley into the Heri Rud. Conversely, the Atrek and Gurgan on the western side of the watershed drain towards the Caspian Sea. About midway between the two the Kara Su and Kal Mura, already mentioned, lose themselves in the Kavir. This is the sum total of the rivers of a province that is more than half as large again as the whole of Italy, and not far short of the entire area of Spain.

Rivers and cultivation

The population of Khorasan is as varied as are its physical characteristics. Successive waves of conquest have brought hither specimens of most of the great ethnic divisions of Asia, and, retiring, have left them rooted, in greater or less degree, to the soil. Here, in addition to the original Iranian stock, and to other members of the Aryan family, are descendants of the Mongols who came in the wake of Timur and Jenghiz Khan, Arabs who were borne on the flood tide of Mohammedan conquest, Tartars, Turkomans, and Turks—three really interchangeable names for different branches of the same great family that, in succession to the Mongols, startled the West first with the Seljuk and afterwards with the Ottoman invasion. The 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' in its latest edition, gives the relative proportions of these races in Khorasan as follows:—

Population

I. Iranians . .	=	Tajiks . . .	400,000
		Kurds . . .	250,000
		Beluchis . .	10,000
II. Mongols . .	=	Timuris . . .	250,000
		Hazaras . .	50,000
III. Tartars . .	=	Afshars . . / Kajars . .	100,000
IV. Arabs . . .	=		100,000
		Total . .	1,160,000

But from what I can gather this estimate exceeds at least twofold the verifiable total of the population, which may be set down as between 500,000 and 600,000; the terrible famine of 1872

having inflicted damages from which the province has never recovered.

History

Khorasan has experienced a history of great and stormy vicissitudes. Situated on the borders of Iran, it has been the perpetual theatre of armed struggle, and a favourite battle-ground of races. Its capital cities have alternately excited by their dimensions the bewildered admiration of Arab chroniclers, and have been swept off the earth, as though by a tornado, by the passions of conquerors and kings. It has been the residence of great monarchs, and the nucleus of mighty empires. At one time its name implied a dominion that included Kharezm (Khiva) and Merv on the north, that stretched to the Oxus and embraced Balkh, the mother of cities, of which Herat was a central point, and that extended beyond Kandahar.[1] Later, as limb after limb was torn away, and independent sovereignties were created out of the fragments, its boundaries became more and more contracted, until the kings of Persia would sometimes have found it difficult to say how much they really held of Khorasan. In the early part of this century, desolated by border warfare on the north, inhabited by turbulent chieftains and conflicting tribes, and commonly dependent upon the fluctuating politics and fortunes of Herat, it was the vulnerable spot of the Kajars' dominions, a sort of Ireland to an otherwise fairly united kingdom. Long after it had been forcibly conquered and subdued to the Shah's authority, disorder trembled below the surface, and events might at any moment precipitate an explosion. As late as 1862 Mr. Eastwick wrote :—

> The normal state of Khorasan is war. Petty plunderings, murders, brigandage, small insurrections, executions of five, ten, or twenty robbers take place weekly ; and cavalry engagements, sieges of fortresses or towns, annually, with a considerable war every five or ten years.[2]

It is not indeed till the last ten or fifteen years that Khorasan may be said to have become thoroughly fused, in sentiment as well as in title, with the rest of the Shah's dominions. The present King, who, whatever his failings, has undeniably consolidated his

[1] Of Malek Shah, the son of Alp Arslan, it was even said that 'prayers were every day offered up for his health in Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina, Baghdad, Isfahan, Rhe, Bokhara, Samarcand, Ourgunje, and Kashgar.'—Malcolm, *History*, vol. i. p. 217.

[2] *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. p. 216.

reduced but still compact territories, can boast of a firmer hold upon the province than any previous member of his dynasty, and is as unquestionably sovereign at Meshed as he is at Teheran.

Revenue

In the reign of Fath Ali Shah, about fifty years ago, the revenue of Khorasan was 200,000 *tomans*, and 50,000 *kharvars* grain.[1] In 1875 it was 340,000 *tomans*, and 45,000 *kharvars* of grain. In 1889 it stood at 539,000 *tomans* (154,000*l.*) and 43,000 *kharvars* of grain (two-thirds wheat and one-third barley), and 13,600 *kharvars* of *kah*—i.e. chopped straw:[2] figures which, in spite of the depreciation of the *toman*, show that the productive capacity of the province is on the increase, and also that the extortionary capacity of the Government is better organised and more keen.

Division of the spoil

Of this total, according to a subdivision which is highly interesting, and will afterwards come up for explanation, the Shah received 87,200 *tomans* (24,914*l.*) in cash, and 9,200 *tomans* (2,629*l.*) as the cash equivalent of his proportion of the grain; a total of 27,543*l.* from the province. The remainder was absorbed in pay of troops and civil officials, pensions, &c.

Government

Like every other post or office in Persia, the governorship is as a rule sold to the highest bidder, the price given by the successful purchaser being a fair criterion of the estimated increase or diminution in productiveness and consequent value. The Governor-General, who resides at Meshed, is usually a member of the royal family or some official of high standing and distinction. Subject to his orders are a number of district governors or chieftains, of differing power and influence, ruling over territories that vary in size from hundreds to shires, and from shires to provinces. These as a rule owe their appointments to the Shah, even where the succession is hereditary in a single family, but are responsible in the first place to his deputy at Meshed. Beneath them again is a hierarchy of petty governors, headmen, and mayors, nominated by and responsible to their superiors.

It is in the multiplicity of rival claims and interests among these chieftains, in the variety of races beneath their rule, and

[1] 1 *kharvar* = 649 lbs.; 3½ *kharvars* = (approximately) 1 ton.

[2] These figures correspond very fairly with those in the table, procured from an independent source, which will be printed further on. There the revenue of Khorasan is given as 508,268 *tomans* in cash, 60,123 *kharvars* in wheat and barley, and 12,424 *kharvars* in straw and rice.

above all in the juxtaposition of their extended borders with those of two foreign Powers, neither of whom can be considered as other than hostile—namely, Russia and Afghanistan—that the Khorasan Question finds its birth; and it is upon a consideration of these manifold elements that any attempt either to comprehend or to solve it must primarily be based.

Origin of the Khorasan Question

The greater part of the western and southern limits of Khorasan, not being border districts, but abutting upon other Persian provinces, and being either inhabited by Persians or not inhabited at all, play no part in the problem of frontier policy. This may be said to commence with the Astrabad province, occupying the neck of land between the Astrabad Bay, in the south-east corner of the Caspian, and the district of Shahrud, and also a stretch of fertile soil between the Gurgan and Atrek rivers as far east as the 56th parallel of longitude.[1] Its capital and only city is Astrabad, with a population of 8,000, which is the residence of the Governor. Its port is Bunder-i-Gez, thirty miles distant, on the bay before named. The Governor was till recently Amir Khan Serdar, the Saif-el-Mulk, a young man, who is the brother of one of the Shah's wives. He was said to possess every quality that should disqualify him for the discharge of such an office, and to have been merely sent to Astrabad in order to get rid of him at Teheran. He has since either been superseded or has resigned. The forces of the Astrabad province are nominally 3,800, of whom a garrison of 300 is stationed at the fortified post of Ak Kaleh (White Fortress), eight miles from the capital, on the Gurgan; 2,900 were lately in camp at the same place; and the rest are scattered in different directions, or are not under arms at all; one-fourth of the total nominal strength being a very moderate deduction for absentees. The province of Astrabad, though distinct from Khorasan and not responsible to the Governor-General, cannot be omitted from any discussion of the politics of the larger area, for the reason that it commands the western approaches thereto from the rest of Persia and Teheran, and that it is directly concerned in the solution of three distinct questions, each affecting Khorasan in the closest degree, though only touching it from without. These are the questions of the

Astrabad province

[1] Something more will be said of the Astrabad province, its character, resources, climate, and capital, in a chapter on the Northern Provinces of Persia, to which I refer my readers. Here it is only treated in its bearing upon the political or frontier problem.

Russian naval station at Ashurada, the control of the road from the sea to Shahrud, and the allegiance of the Yomut Turkomans between the Gurgan and the Atrek.

The Russians at Ashurada

A glance at the map will reveal the peculiar physical conformation of Astrabad Bay, and supplies another illustration of the phenomenon that has already been described at Enzeli, where the prevalent westerly gales in the Caspian pile up long bars of sand on the seaward side of shallow *murdabs* or lagoons. Astrabad Bay is a large sheet of water forty miles in length by eight miles in width, protected from the open sea on the north by just such a long promontory or spit of land, projecting for thirty miles from the western coast line and terminating in three small islands, the furthest of which is only separated by a narrow channel from the eastern or Turkoman coast of the Caspian. The bay, therefore, resembles a lake, with the additional advantage of connection with the open sea; and although it has nowhere more than twenty feet of water, and in most parts much less, yet on the shores of the Caspian, which possess so few harbours, it may claim a quite peculiar distinction. In the hands of Persia it is doubtful, judging from analogy, whether it would ever have been seriously utilised for commercial or other purposes. Russia, however, took very good care that not even the opportunity should be afforded to her timid neighbour. Already by the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, confirmed by that of Turkomanchai in 1828, she had stipulated that no armed vessel flying the Persian flag should be allowed upon the Caspian; while to make assurance doubly sure, she herself appeared in force upon the scene about the year 1840 and occupied the island of Ashurada, lying off the extremity of the long peninsula of Mian Kaleh, hereafter described.[1] The plea under

[1] The dates are given as follows by Sir H. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, p. 137:—

1837–1838. Russians first set foot on Ashurada.

1842. Their presence first reported to the Foreign Office by Sir J. McNeill.

1846. Buildings erected on the island, and negotiation opened with the Turkomans. Persia applies to England to aid in obtaining the withdrawal of Russia.

1849. England makes the attempt, but without success.

1854. Persia demands officially evacuation by Russia, but receives the answer that it is impossible, although Russia admits that Ashurada is Persian territory.

1856. Russian position on the island strengthened, and naval force augmented.

1866. The Shah visits Ashurada and confirms the police powers of Russia against the Turkomans.

which she defended her intrusion was the necessity of putting down the Turkóman pirates who infested the southern and eastern shores of the Caspian, and, after their fashion, robbed, pillaged, and carried off their captives into slavery. The Russians do not appear either then or since to have formally disputed the Persian ownership of the island, which is unquestionable; but to have justified their stay as the consignees of police powers which the Persians were incapable of exercising themselves, and which after a time were tacitly recognised by the latter. For this purpose a small naval armament was collected, four or five vessels belonging to which and one gunboat, under the command of a Russian commodore, still lie off the Russian naval station.[1] It is needless to say that the piratical escapades of the Turkomans have long ago been completely quelled. The Russians, notwithstanding, have never thought of giving back their trust, and would now be very much insulted at any suggestion that Ashurada was not their freehold property.

Nature of the island

The island, however, is low, swampy, and most unwholesome. For the last fifty years it has been reported as being slowly eaten away by the sea; and the surrounding conditions have in fact changed so much as to render the descriptions of only half that period ago quite obsolete. Eastwick left a most minute and accurate account of the locality as he found it in 1862.[2] At that date there were two islands, Great and Little Ashurada. The first of these was severed by a channel about half a mile in width from the end of the long promontory of Mian Kaleh (called by the Russians Potemkin), and was about one and one-third mile long by three-quarters of a mile broad. This was the Russian naval and military station. Then came shoal water for half a mile,

1866. Russia prepares to garrison Gez, but is forestalled by Persia.
1869. Russian occupation of Krasnovodsk.
1870. Russia claims the coast down to the Atrek.
1871. Russian occupation of Chikishliar.

For an interesting incident that occurred in 1851, but is not mentioned by Rawlinson, *vide* Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life in Persia*, pp. 215–242. The Turkomans descended upon the island one night, and, catching the Russians drunk or napping, slew some of their number. The Russian Government insisted on the recall of the Prince Governor of Mazanderan, the Shah's own brother, although he could not be credited with the most remote responsibility in the matter. Otherwise, the Czar threatened to withdraw the Russian Legation.

[1] These were reported by a visitor in 1890 to have shrunk into two despatch boats and two or three hulks.

[2] *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 26–43.

followed by the low sand spit known as Little Ashurada, two miles in length. Then came more shoals, with a narrow passage between them, extending to the Turkoman coast.

New island

Since then a third island, which the Russians call Middle Ashurada, has been formed between the other two, while to strike a balance the erosive process has been going on at Great Ashurada to such an extent that the island is now reported to be less than a mile long by only one-third of a mile wide. Upon this space of ground are built the quarters of the commodore, barracks for soldiers, a church, club-house, and the usual appurtenances of a military station.

Change of quarters desirable

In view of the facts here narrated it is not surprising that the Russians, who since the complete subjugation of the Turkomans have next to nothing to do at Ashurada, and have really no defensible *raison d'être* in the place, should have for long turned covetous eyes upon some more secure and salubrious post on the inner line of the bay. More than twenty years ago they are said to have contemplated the seizure of the Persian landing-place of Gez, on the mainland, by offering to garrison it; but in this they were forestalled by the Persian Government. Unable to possess themselves of Gez, which, though a wretched place in itself,[1] the Shah would be in the last degree reluctant to yield, and the occupation of which would signify the beginning of the end, they are rumoured now to be desirous of obtaining a fortified position on the Kara Su (or Black Water), a small river rising about thirty miles east of Astrabad, and flowing into the Caspian about six miles south of the *embouchure* of the Gurgan. Such a position would be equivalent to the occupation of Gez, and would place Astrabad literally at their mercy.

History repeats itself

Before I pass to the question of the reasons for which the Russians cling so closely to their foothold in this unlovely spot, let me call attention to the fact that in their presence there history is merely repeating itself. It is a strange and interesting coincidence, although it is one which I have never seen noticed, that over 200 years ago the island of Ashurada was simi-

[1] Bunder-i-Gez, sometimes also called Kinara, is a miserable collection of huts and sheds on the shore, with a large caravanserai, a Persian Custom House, a few shops kept by Russian Armenians, and the residences of a Russian Consular Agent and a representative of the Caucasus and Mercury Steamship Company. It is about three miles from the village of Gez, which is an ordinary Persian forest-village with over 1,000 inhabitants.

larly occupied, without permission, by a body of Cossacks, and for some time held by them in force. It was in 1668, we learn from the omniscient Chardin,[1] that the Cossacks of South Russia, being instigated by the Grand Duke of Muscovy to attack Persia in revenge for a slight which had been put upon his embassy by Shah Abbas the Great, invaded Mazanderan and sacked his capital, Ferahabad. Thereupon, intending to winter in Persia, they entrenched themselves on the 'peninsula of Mionne Kelle, or Middle-sized Horn, a tongue of land that runs forward into the Caspian Sea about ten or eleven leagues, and abounds in harts, wild boars, wild goats, and other sorts of wild venison.' The Persians promptly attacked them, and, bolder or more fortunate than their nineteenth-century descendants, succeeded in ousting the intruders, who, however, took refuge in Ashurada, and remained there for a time.

Nor is this the only occasion upon which Russian forerunners have appeared upon the scene, or have been within measurable distance of seizing Astrabad. Fifty years later, in 1722–3, Peter the Great, who had a very shrewd notion of the proper strategical positions to be occupied, and who, although his alleged will be apocryphal, entertained very clearly defined ideas of a Central Asian dominion, taking advantage of the disordered condition of Persia consequent upon the Afghan invasion in 1722, and utilising as his plea the robbery and slaughter of a number of his subjects in Persian towns near the border, prepared to invade the country from the north. This project was never carried out in its entirety; although the Russian army, led by himself, advanced in 1722 as far as Derbend. The submission of Gilan and surrender of Baku in the following year were, however, sufficient to extort from the young Shah, Tahmasp II., who was endeavouring to make headway against the Afghan usurpers, a treaty, ceding to Russia Derbend and Baku with their dependencies, and the entire provinces of Gilan, Mazanderan, and Astrabad; in return for which magnificent donation—which by the way the young Shah was hardly in a position at the time to make—the Russian army was to drive the Afghans out of the country.[2] The Russians occupied Gilan for a

Peter the Great

[1] *Coronation of King Solyman III.* (printed as a supplement to his *Travels*) pp. 152–154.

[2] The treaty was dated September 3, 1723. Its terms are given by Hanway, *Historical Account of British Trade over the Caspian*, vol. iii. p. 181. For a more minute account of the Russian occupation, *vide* a later chapter of this volume, pp. 373–5.

while, but were too busy elsewhere to trouble themselves with Astrabad; and thus a second time it slipped out of their possession.

Agha Mohammed Khan

Sixty years later the attempt was again renewed. Forster, the first English traveller who made the overland journey from India to Europe in 1784, and who passed this way, relates an interesting tale of a Russian squadron, whose commanding officer in 1781 commenced the erection of a large fortified building on the shore at Ashraf, the site of the famous palace of Shah Abbas near the coast, about twenty-five miles west of Gez. They had reckoned, however, without their host; for Agha Mohammed Khan Kajar, afterwards Shah of Persia, and at that time engaged in establishing his authority in Mazanderan, soon appeared upon the scene. Expressing great pleasure at what he saw, he invited the Russian officers to dinner, made them prisoners, and only released them on condition of the guns being removed and the fort razed to the ground. He even appealed to the Russian Government for formal amends.[1] Thus ended the third Russian attempt to gain a foothold upon the mainland of Persia in the south-eastern angle of the Caspian. The fourth attempt, which I have sketched, is being pursued with less abruptness and with greater patience. Its solution may perhaps be visible in the time of many now living.

Reasons of Russian activity

Next I come to the reasons which have actuated the Russians in their long-sustained desire to obtain an entrance into this corner of the Persian mainland. It is not that Astrabad of itself provides either the most convenient or a very easy avenue of invasion. In the first half of this century different and more exaggerated opinions prevailed as to its strategical value. If a line be drawn from Baku to India it will be found to pass through Astrabad; and accordingly this was the line of advance that was contemplated both by the Emperors Paul and Napoleon, when they together discussed and planned an overland expedition against India in 1800; and again by General Khruleff when, in the course of the Crimean war, he submitted a similar programme of invasion to the Emperor Nicholas. The immediate objectives were in either case Meshed and Herat; and in those times the best

[1] The most complete account of this incident is to be found in Sir J. M'Neill's *Progress and Present Position of Russia in the East*, pp. 33–4. He says that the Russian officers were thrown into chains and subsequently whipped down to their ships. Compare B. Dorn's *Caspia* (Russian).

route for a European army marching to Meshed or Herat was undoubtedly by Astrabad. But since then the Transcaspian situation has been revolutionised. Russia sits securely where the Turkoman terror formerly reigned. Meshed can be smitten from Ashkabad, and Herat from Merv and Penjdeh, without any necessity for the lengthy land march from the Caspian. Astrabad, therefore, as a point of debarkation, has not the value for Russia that it formerly had. Nor are its own resources sufficient, so far as can be ascertained, to support a very large army in the field, although it is said that, in 1863, a Persian army of 30,000 men remained encamped for eight months in the neighbourhood. Its value is now not so much offensive as defensive. Its eye may be said to look not eastwards, but westwards; and its strategical importance is involved in the second of the questions which I named above, viz. the control of the Shahrud road and the position which it consequently enables its occupant to take up against the rest of Persia and the capital.

The Astrabad-Shahrud position

Astrabad is separated from Shahrud by the Shah Kuh, or main range of the Elburz mountains, which here retain a distinct physical individuality before they are broken up into the manifold ridges of northern Khorasan. The highest peak of this section, fifteen miles south of Astrabad, attains an altitude of 13,000 feet. Across the range there are two passes to Shahrud, a distance by the mule track of sixty-five miles, one of which at least, in spite of the elevation and of the nature of the country, might be converted into an excellent military road.[1] An army marching by either of these and seizing Shahrud, which is absolutely defenceless, would find itself in this position. It would, in the first place, be surrounded by a district of considerable fertility and abundant water supply, capable even in summer of sustaining a large army.[2] Secondly, it would hold the point of junction of the

[1] The two roads between Shahrud and Astrabad (one by the Kuzluk Pass, the other by Ziarat) are described by Lieut. A. Conolly (1830), *Overland Journey to India*, vol. i. pp. 182–184; Captain Claude Clerk (1872), *Proceedings of the R.G.S.*, vol. xvii. pp. 193–194; Colonel B. Lovett (1881), Ditto (New Series), vol. v. pp. 75–84 (1883). The road from Astrabad to Gez (27 miles) is described by E. B. Eastwick (1862), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 45–49; Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 114, 115; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 163–166.

[2] Colonel Val. Baker (*Clouds in the East*, p. 142) said that the plain of Bostam (which is the district surrounding Shahrud, Bostam, three miles distant, being the residence of the Governor) could maintain an army of 60,000 men.

roads from Mazanderan and the sea coast, and from the capital, Teheran. And, thirdly, it would command the sole entry from the west into Khorasan, into the heart of which run two easy roads, the one by Jajarm, Bujnurd, and Kuchan more to the north, the other by Sebzewar and Nishapur due east to Meshed. In other words, the Astrabad-Shahrud position is the key of Northern Persia. Stationed there, an army severs Khorasan from the rest of the world, and can effectually prevent any reinforcement from the capital. North Persia may be likened in shape to a wasp of which the head is at Teheran and the tail at Meshed. The narrow belt between Gez and Shahrud is the wasp's waist. Cut it and the head becomes powerless; while the utmost that the tail can do (and that—not if it is a Persian tail) is to implant a dying sting. It is in the light of the physical configuration of this portion of the Shah's dominions that the presence and the intentions of the Russians at Ashurada have always been invested with such importance. Their interests in this neighbourhood are sufficiently guarded by a Consul at Astrabad, and by Consular agents or representatives at Bunder-i-Gez and Shahrud.

Persian and Russian Turkomans

I pass now to the third or Yomut Turkoman Question, in which Russia again plays a significant part. By the Boundary Treaty of 1881, the Russo-Persian frontier in this quarter was definitely fixed at the Atrek River, from its mouth as far as the junction of the Sumbar at Chat, although it appears that one of their boundary pillars, for some unexplained reason, is still placed south of the Atrek. Moreover, Russian officers have been heard of who since the treaty have crossed the Atrek River with soldiers, and have endeavoured forcibly to collect tribute from the Persian Yomuts on the Gurgan. However, for such an act there can be no excuse in international law, and practically, as well as diplomatically, the Atrek may be taken as the line of division. North of that river are settled the Yomut Turkomans under Russian rule; south of the river are the Yomuts under Persian rule, though nomad camps of the latter are in the habit of crossing the river at certain seasons of the year, and are allowed by treaty to do so in order to change their pasturages. The Russian Yomuts are thoroughly subdued, and, whether satisfied or not with Russian sovereignty, are powerless to revolt. The Persian Yomuts, however, who are subdivided into the Ata Bai and Jafir Bai clans, are far from submitting tamely to the pretensions of

Persian authority, and were during the year 1888–9 in active rebellion. Further to the east are the Goklan Turkomans, a more submissive people, who, in order to escape the hereditary enmity of the Yomuts, have tranquilly accepted the Persian yoke, pay revenue to the Shah's exchequer, and provide him with a body of 300 irregular cavalry.[1]

Rebellion of the Persian Yomuts

The rebellion of the Yomuts began in February 1888, and was not finally extinguished till March 1889. It appears to have been fomented by, if not to have entirely arisen from, the scandalous misgovernment of the Persian authorities. So serious, however, did the movement become that at one time 13,000 Persian troops, under the command of the Governor-General of Khorasan, the Khans of Bujnurd and Kuchan, and the Prince Governor of Astrabad, were in the field against them. Almost incredible stories are related of the cowardice of the Persian troops, large bodies of 1,000 and 2,000 men being checked and routed in open daylight by a few scores, or at most hundreds, of Turkoman horsemen. It is only fair to add that the Persian soldiers were perhaps as much actuated by discontent as by cowardice in these discreditable proceedings. At least one-half of their pay, when it came from Teheran, was pocketed by the Saif-el-Mulk; and to expect these ill-fed, ill-clothed, and unpaid wretches to fight was perhaps more than human. Savage acts of violence occurred on both sides, particularly on that of the Persians, who spared neither the lives of the men nor the honour of the women who fell into their hands. At length the revolt was brought to an end by the familiar Persian methods of treachery and intrigue. The clans were induced to turn against each other; and, finally, the leading Ata Bai chieftain, Haji Nazar Khan, who had been the life and soul of the rising, was enticed into Persian territory and killed. The revolt then collapsed.[2]

Episodes such as this not merely display the lamentable incapacity of the Central Government, but they can have but one ulterior consequence—the encouragement of Russian pretensions on the north. It is well known that that Power claims, and

[1] The weakness of the Astrabad Government is shown by the fact that, although the Goklan Turkomans reside within the nominal borders of theAstrabad province, their tribute is collected and their levies are commanded by the Ilkhani of Bujnurd.

[2] For information about the Yomut Turkomans, *vide* Aucher Eloy (1836), *Relations de Voyages*, pp. 331–36, and notes by Kazi Syud Ahmed, printed in the *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. p. 142 (1876).

expects eventually to exercise, sovereignty over the whole of the Turkoman tribes. Now it is believed that the Persian Yomuts are quite content, if fairly treated, to observe a reasonable allegiance to the Shah in order to escape the heavier taxation of their brethren on the Russian bank of the Atrek.[1] Every fresh disturbance, however, and still more any evidence of the powerlessness of Persia to check it, provide just such an excuse for advance as a Power with aggressive intentions would welcome with avidity; and Persia must be careful that in this critical region she is not found playing into her opponent's hand. Had Russia intended at the time to play a forward instead of a waiting game, she might have easily discovered an opportunity in the recent disorders. That her secret sympathies were not on the Persian side, was shown by the remarkable fact that the insurgent Yomuts were found to be mainly supplied with Russian breechloading rifles and cartridges.

Weakness of the Central Government

From the Astrabad province, with its appanage of acute political problems, we have now crossed into Khorasan proper, and with our faces turned in an easterly direction may pursue our inspection of the frontiers. We pass from the Turkomans to the Kurds, and in the Bujnurd district encounter the first of the Kurdish communities whose ancestors were transplanted by Shah Abbas about 1600 A.D. to the mountain border of Khorasan. I have already in the chapter upon Kuchan described with much fulness the circumstances under which these military colonists entered the country, the conditions of their tenure, and their present relations with the central power; and what I there said will apply to Bujnurd equally with Kuchan. Whereas Kuchan, however, is chiefly peopled with Zaferanlu Kurds, it is the Shahdillu tribe who settled at Bujnurd, and still constitute the large majority of its inhabitants. Like Kuchan, they are ruled by a Khan, bearing the title of Ilkhani, who, though appointed by the Shah, is selected usually in hereditary descent from the reigning family; who collects his own revenues, and furnishes in return a military contribution to the state, and who is generally in a superior position to an ordinary provincial governor. The cavalry contingent supplied by the Ilkhani of

Bujnurd

[1] This is confirmed by the latest news (1891), according to which several hundred Russian Yomuts have crossed into Persian territory, and have voluntarily become the subjects of the Shah.

Bujnurd consists at present of 500 men. His district comprises the upland valley of Bujnurd, contiguous to that of Shirwan and Kuchan, the upper waters of the Atrek, and further south Jajarm in the Isferayin plain.[1]

Kuchan

Of Kuchan I have already spoken. Its military contingent is at present 600 strong.

Deregez

To the north-east of Kuchan, and on the northern slope of the main range—the only Persian possession of any size now remaining on the northern watershed of the Elburz—is situated the little frontier district of Deregez (the Valley of Tamarisks). This favoured spot, which consists of a valley or basin some forty miles long, by thirty broad, is inhabited partly by Kurds, but mainly by Turks or Tartars, relics of old waves of Turanian invasion. Its capital is Mohammedabad, 1,200 feet, where in 1880 O'Donovan met Colonel Stewart, disguised as an Armenian horse-dealer, and lived for three weeks in his society without discovering that he was an Englishman. Deregez is separated from the Aterk by a low range of hills, which have hitherto saved it from Russian absorption; though it has lost several of the villages lying upon the plain below, of which it formerly claimed ownership. Before 1832, it might be considered an independent principality; but in common with the other border states of Khorasan, it was then reduced by Abbas Mirza, and has since remained a possession of the crown, in much the same way and under the same conditions as Kuchan and Bujnurd; although from its position on the extreme boundary, and the relations into which its chief was consequently brought with the Turkomans, the authority of the imperial Government was somewhat delicately and precariously enforced from Meshed. The Khan of Deregez belongs to a ruling family who have inherited the chieftainship from the days of Nadir Shah. Neither he nor Deregez are now of much importance, and his military contribution has been reduced to one hundred.[2]

[1] For descriptions of Bujnurd and its district, *vide* Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, p. 284, *et seq.*; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 93–107; General Grodekoff (1880), *The War in Turkomania*, vol. iv. cap. xvii.

[2] The first Englishman to visit and describe Deregez was J. B. Fraser, in 1834 (*A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. letters ix., x., xi.). For later descriptions, *vide* Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 229–274; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 70–76; E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. ii. pp. 30–65.

In none of these three border districts is there the material for any resistance to aggression from the North. The two Ilkhanis, one of whom I have described in an earlier chapter, and both of whom are important chieftains, may talk very big about opposing Russia, and cannot, in the bottom of their hearts, be animated by other than hostile feelings towards a Power whose propinquity has already shorn them of so much of their ancient prestige. But it is more than doubtful whether either of them would lift a little finger if invasion actually occurred, while a steady influx of Russian presents for a series of years beforehand might be found to have sensibly alleviated the pangs of surrender. Already Russia may be said to have obtained a definite foothold in each. I have described the new military road from Ashkabad to Kuchan, and have shown its strategical importance. An alternative Russian road runs from Geok Tepe over a pass in the mountains further to the west by Germab and Firuzeh to Shirwan, and is continued to Kuchan from that direction. A third road leads up the Atrek to Bujnurd *viâ* Chat from the Russian military station of Chikishliar, on the Caspian. Russia keeps Consular agents (Russian Mohammedans) at Bujnurd, Kuchan, and Mohammedabad. They are supposed to be there in the interests of trade; but, in the intervals snatched from commercial application, are not discouraged from promoting the interests of their country in whatever way a discreet intelligence may suggest.

Attitude towards Russia

Continuing eastwards, we next come to the astonishing natural phenomenon known since the time of Nadir Shah, who made it his stronghold, as Kelat-i-Nadiri. The physical and strategical attributes of this remarkable place have previously been discussed. I have also mentioned that the Persian Government keep here a detachment (nominally) of 500 infantry, scattered at the different vulnerable points, and two guns. The inhabitants are chiefly Turks, and the Governor, sent from Meshed, Haji Abul Fath Khan, lives in a village in the interior, and supplies 150 mounted levies to the Persian border horse.

Kelat-i-Nadiri

For some time past Russia has turned a particularly affectionate eye upon Kelat, and rumours of its cession by the Persian Government have been designedly circulated in order to familiarise the public mind with such a transfer of ownership. To those who deny such intentions on the part of Russia, it will be sufficient to reply that a few years ago she

Russian aspirations

formally offered to give to Persia, in exchange for Kelat, her share of the famous and fertile plain of Moghan on the western shore of the Caspian. The offer was declined. The value of Kelat to Russia consists, as I have before argued, in its command of the head waters of the streams that run down to the Atek; and still more in its position as a central point for controlling the border tribes, and in its prodigious prestige. Persia is far from willing to cede this remarkable point of vantage, and guards it with a jealousy that is in curious contrast to her general apathy and weakness. No stranger is permitted to enter except with a special permit from the Shah, and several Russians, as well as myself, have been baffled in the attempt to penetrate into the interior. Russian policy in these parts is at present directed to claiming more and more of the streams that irrigate her possessions on the plain, and to extending her influence over the border tribes. Little by little she has crept up the mountain skirts from the Atek at the bottom, while disputes about the water supply which, though it fertilises Russian villages, yet flows from Persian sources and through Persian territory, can always be aggravated into an excuse for encroachment. Kelat would provide her with a centre of particular value for either object, and she will remain discontented until she possesses it.

Russo-Persian frontier

In the published treaty between Russia and Persia, which was concluded in December 1881, and which defined the new boundary between Transcaspia and Khorasan, necessitated by the Russian conquests of that year, the delineation of the border which commenced at the mouth of the Atrek, stops abruptly before it reaches the village of Lutfabad, situated in the Atek below the Persian district of Deregez. Lutfabad was left to the Persians; but what is the exact frontier eastwards from this point to Sarakhs on the Tejend is not ascertainable from any published document. It is believed to have been settled by a secret treaty in 1881 or in 1883 between Russia and Persia, to which I shall later on have occasion to refer; and commissioners are reported to have passed over the ground and traced it out. The popular uncertainty, or rather ignorance, upon the point is, however, an excuse for just such acts of encroachment on the part of the stronger power as I have sketched in the preceding paragraph.

At Sarakhs we once again touch a definite boundary in the shape of the Tejend River, which, though known in its upper

course as the Heri Rud, becomes the Tejend upon being joined by the Keshef Rud at Pul-i-Khatun; and, after dividing the Persian from the Russian military outposts at Sarakhs, flows, when there is water in it, in a northerly direction across the desert, where it is spanned by a bridge of the Transcaspian Railway at Tejend or Karibent.

The Tejend

There are two Sarakhs, the Old and the New Sarakhs; and much confusion has been caused both among travellers and politicians by an imperfect appreciation of their different sites and features. Old Sarakhs is on the right or eastern side of the river, and from very remote times was the headquarters of the Salor tribe of Turkomans, who are one of the first subdivisions of that race of whom we hear in history, being mentioned by Arab historians as long ago as the seventh century.[1] The first European in this century of whose visit to Sarakhs we read was the missionary Wolff, who stopped several weeks here in 1831, on his first journey to Bokhara, preaching to the Jews, of whom there was a small colony, and the Turkomans. He passed again in 1844, on his mission of inquiry into the fate of Stoddart and Conolly at Bokhara. In the interval Burnes had spent ten days in disguise at Sarakhs in 1832, on the return from his great journey, and had very narrowly escaped detection. He described the place as a 'small and weak fort almost in ruins, situated on a hillock, with a few mud houses built by the Jews of Meshed;' and said that its Turkoman occupants at that time professed a dubious allegiance to Khiva.[2]

The two Sarakhs

[1] Sarakhs was visited by the Arab traveller, El Istakhri (miscalled by Ouseley Ibn Haukal), in the tenth century. He describes it as distant six *menzil* (stages) from Nishapur, and adds: 'Sarkhes is a city between Meru (Merv) and Nishapour, situated on a level, without any running water but that which comes from Pousheng (which river comes from Heri and runs on to Sarkhes, but in a season of excessive heat the water does not run so far). It is computed that Sarkhes is as large as Meru-al-rud. It is a populous and thriving city; the air is wholesome; the inhabitants drink well-water, and they employ horses or asses in their mills.'—*The Oriental Geography of Ibn Haukal*, translated by Sir W. Ouseley, pp. 219–221. This description of the Tejend tallies exactly with that of modern travellers. When M. Lessar first came to Sarakhs, in 1882, he reported the river-bed to be commonly dry, and from 300 yards to half a mile in width. The Moorish pilgrim, Ibn Batutah, also came to 'Sarakhas' from Meshed *circ.* 1330 A.D. —*Travels*, translated by Rev. S. Lee, p. 96. For other references to Sarakhs by early writers, *vide* Nasiri Khosru (*Sefer Nameh*, p. 6), Mukadessi (*Descriptio Imperii Moslemici*, pp. 312, 313), and Yakut (*Dictionnaire de la Perse*, pp. 307, 308).

[2] *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. pp. 42–56.

Very soon after Burnes' visit, Abbas Mirza, the heir-apparent, who was then prosecuting the reconquest and thorough subjugation of Khorasan, appeared upon the scene with his army, took and destroyed the place, massacred most of its inhabitants, and carried away the rest as prisoners to Meshed;[1] whence they were subsequently ransomed at 4*l.* a head by their Salor kinsmen of Yuletan. Some of them are still to be found at Old Sarakhs; and a colony exists at Zohrabad on the Persian bank, a good deal higher up the river. But the clan has in modern times sunk into comparative insignificance.

Capture by Abbas Mirza

Some time later, it is said about the year 1850, the Persians, in order to secure this frontier post against the merciless ravages of the Tekke Turkomans of Merv, built a huge fort, of polygonal shape, and flanked with twenty-four towers, upon which they mounted a number of decrepit guns, on the left or western side of the Tejend, at a distance of about half a mile from the river. M. de Blocqueville—the unhappy French photographer who accompanied the famous Persian expedition to Merv in 1860, that was cut to pieces at Koushid Khan Kaleh, and who fell into the hands of the Turkomans and remained a prisoner in their tents for a year and a half—passed Sarakhs on his way and described the newly constructed fort.[2] MacGregor was the next visitor, in 1875; and he both gave an account of the fort and its garrison of 700 infantry, a few cavalry, and eleven more or less serviceable guns; and published in his book an illustration and plan.[3] Next, in 1882, M. Lessar, the well-known Russian engineer, at that time employed

New Sarakhs

[1] 'After the fall of Cochoon (Kuchan), Abbas Mirza made for Serrakhs, which he found totally off its guard, and at once invested it. Despising and rejecting an offer of 150,000 and then of 200,000 tomauns of ransom which was offered by the inhabitants, he resolved, cost what it might, to root out this nest of man-stealers. The place was invested, breached, stormed, and taken in little more than a day. The town was given up to plunder, and afterwards reduced to ashes. Many of its inhabitants were slaughtered, and 3,000 of the remainder were carried off prisoners. The booty was enormous—incalculable—perhaps greater than in any capture of recent times. There were literally whole sacks of gold, and piles of rich goods of every sort and kind. It was a true robbers' den upon an immense scale: the amount of specie alone has been vaguely estimated at from 300,000*l.* to 400,000*l.*, and the greater part of this fell into the hands of the soldiery.'—J. B. Fraser, *A Winter's Journey*, &c., vol. ii. p. 29. The above, though a no doubt exaggerated version, is interesting as being almost contemporaneous (1834).

[2] *Tour du Monde*, April, 1866

[3] *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 30–33.

as a prospecting pioneer of Russian advance, later as a member of the Afghan Boundary Commission, and now diplomatic agent at the Court of Bokhara, was at Sarakhs on the surveying tour which first laid bare to European knowledge the country between Sarakhs and Herat. He described the pitiable fright of the wretched, garrison, who, instead of being a terror to the foe, were practically beleaguered themselves, inasmuch as they never dared to sally out, and burnt alarm fires on the watch-towers at night.

Reoccupation of Old Sarakhs by the Russians

Two years later, in April 1884, largely in consequence of the information which M. Lessar had collected, and in pursuit of that effective but indefensible advance that resulted in the affray on the Kushk and the seizure of Panjdeh in 1885, the Russians appeared in force, and occupied the deserted position of Old Sarakhs on the eastern bank of the river. Here they soon constructed a fortified position and barracks; and the resuscitated Old Sarakhs, which I suppose may now be called the Newer Sarakhs, has ever since remained one of their frontier military stations. The only account of it that I have seen since it passed into their hands is that by the Comte de Cholet, a young French officer who rode down this way in disguise in 1888 with Colonel Alikhanoff from Merv. His description (translated) is as follows:—

Strictly speaking to call Sarakhs a town would be somewhat of an exaggeration. It is simply a military post around which are grouped the houses of the officers and of some persons engaged in trade. As the Persians seemed to resent the annexation of the Turkoman tribes who inhabit this neighbourhood, the Russians replied by erecting this advanced post, in which they placed two battalions, one of the first line, and one reserve or garrison, in all from 1,500 to 1,600 men. This was more than enough to teach the Persians that they could never hope to recover the country; at the same time that, upon a really very shallow pretext, it established an important advanced post in the valley of the Tejend, commanding one of the two roads to Herat. Besides a large and excellent barrack, the town consists only of 100 houses, inhabited by the military or civil officials and the merchants. Two streets and two squares—one of which is the scene of a very busy and animated market—divide the town, and constitute a long parallelogram, half a mile in length by 200 yards in width. It is the residence of a *pristav*, or chief of district.[1]

I have in my previous work quoted the important opinion of

[1] *Excursion en Turkestan*, pp. 80–82.

MacGregor upon the strategical significance of the position at Sarakhs, as commanding the approach up the valley of the Heri Rud to Herat.[1] This advantage has now passed entirely from the Persians' into the Russians' hands. The Persian garrison of Sarakhs, which consists of one wing of infantry—about 300 men—and a small detachment of artillery, is practically isolated in the big overgrown fort which it could in no case defend. The telegraph wire from Meshed is usually interrupted or broken; and the Russians have probably only to appear upon the other side of the river and fire a volley of blank cartridge, to ensure a precipitate stampede.

Strategical value

Sarakhs is the extreme north-east point of the Persian frontier, and in fact occupies an angle sharply pushed out into the desert. Here we turn south, following the valley through which flows the Heri Rud, the river supplying the boundary first between Persia and Russia as far as the Zulfikar Pass, and afterwards between Persia and Afghanistan. Here also we touch the northern skirts of a belt of country lying upon or near the border lines, and inhabited by various tribes of mixed origin and alien religion, who, though subjects of Persia, profess a somewhat reluctant allegiance to her rule, and constitute a critical item in the politics of the frontier.

Eastern frontier

It is in the Meshed district which extends to the Heri Rud that we first encounter these foreign elements. Round the capital the Iranian element is in the ascendant; but as we approach the frontier we come across colonies or detachments who belong in race and religion to the Chehar Aimak (lit. Four Settlements), or wandering tribes of the Afghan border.[2] These are the Jamshidis and Hazaras. The former are of Persian origin, but the greater part of the tribe long ago left Persian territory and settled in Afghanistan. The remnant were brought back after the siege of Herat in 1857, established at Kanegosha, near Meshed, and required

Meshed district

[1] *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 121.

[2] The Chehar Aimak were originally, as their name implies, four tribes, viz. the Jamshidi, Firuzkuhi, Timuri, and Taimuni. Later on two other tribes, the Hazara and Kipchak, were included in the designation. The Firuzkuhis, Taimunis and Kipchaks, the two first of whom are said to be of Persian origin, are now not found in Persia. Members of the other four branches are. Dr Bellew's classification is different. He gives the original Chehar Aimak as the Timuri, Taimuni, Dahi, and Suri; the Jamshidi and Firuzkuhi as subdivisions of Timuri, and the Hazaras as synonymous with the Dahi.

to furnish a mercenary force to the Persian Government. A border guard is still recruited from them; but, though of Persian descent and speaking the Persian language, they are credited with a very dubious fidelity. The Hazaras, on the other hand, never were a Persian race. They belong to the Turanian family, as their Mongolesque features, their crooked eyes, and paucity of beard indicate. Some of them are settled in the Meshed district, but the greater number further south at Mohsinabad, in the district of Bakharz. By far their most extraordinary feature is that, though Persian neither in blood, religion, nor affinity, they speak the Persian tongue. They profess the Sunni Mohammedan faith; and although supplying a force of 450 cavalry, entertain feelings of very questionable loyalty to the Sovereign power.

Next in succession to Meshed, on the south, come the border districts of Jam, or Turbat-i-Sheikh-Jam (i.e. the Tomb of Sheikh Jam, a local saint of immense sanctity, who was buried here), Bakharz and Khaf, which are at present united under a single Persian governor of Arab blood, who bears the title of the Nasrat-el-Mulk, and who from the three districts supplies a quota of 1,025 cavalry. The bulk of the population under his rule also belong to one of the Chehar Aimak tribes, but to neither of those hitherto mentioned. They are of Arab origin, and are called Timuris, a name which they are said to have derived from the great Timur, who originally deported them from their native country in a rage because they had plundered his mother when on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and who then handed them over as subjects to an eminent Seyid, to whom also he gave his own daughter in marriage. There are settlements of Timuris in other parts of Khorasan, notably near Nishapur and Sebzewar; but the bulk of the tribe are found in the three border districts, now under discussion. The ill-judged and oppressive policy of the Persian Government has alienated the sympathies of these along with the other nomad tribesmen. Indeed, Persia has almost as much reason in these parts to mistrust her own mercenaries as had the Roman Empire to doubt its legions of Goths and Gauls. I should add that the Timuris, like the Hazaras and Jamshidis, are Sunni Mohammedans.

Districts of Jam, Bakharz, and Khaf

Further to the south lies the extensive and important district of Kain, which includes ten *beluks* or petty governorships, and stretches as far as the desert that separates Khorasan from Kerman.

Kain is ruled by an Arab Amir, in whose family is vested a hereditary chieftainship, and who among the border chieftains of the south occupies a position analogous and even superior to that enjoyed by the Ilkhanis of Bujnurd and Kuchan on the north. Mir Alam Khan, the present Governor, is probably the most powerful subject of the Persian Crown. Now more than sixty years of age, of strong character, and with a formidable reputation for severity, he has cleared his province of the roving bands of marauders, principally Afghans and Beluchis, who used to lay it waste with impunity; and is so big a personage that he requires to be very cautiously interfered with by the Central Power. The Amir was already Governor at the time of the Seistan Boundary Commission in 1872, and did not behave with any excess of civility to Sir F. Goldsmid. However, as the area of his own dominions was at stake, Seistan being a subdivision of his province, there was perhaps some excuse for offence; and he has since been extremely attentive to such Englishmen as have gone his way. He bears a ceremonious title, conferred upon him by the Shah, and holds the rank of an Amir-i-Toman, or Major-General in the Persian army. The sovereignty of the Crown is typified by a detachment of Persian artillery in the fort at Birjand. (The Amir has since died, November 1891.)

Kain

The inhabitants of the khanate are of Persian and Arab descent, and are estimated at not less than 80,000. Formerly the seat of government was the town of Kain; but it has now been transferred to Birjand, a larger unwalled city, with 14,000 inhabitants. Colonel Stewart reports that opium is enormously grown and consumed here, and that hundreds are said to die yearly from excessive indulgence.[1] The military contribu- of the Amir is 700 horsemen, from Kain and Seistan combined; and two regiments of infantry, which are called out in turn, one doing duty in Seistan, while the other is disbanded in Birjand.

Population and capital

Seistan, as I have indicated, is one of the *beluks* or subdivisions of the province of Kain, and is administered by a deputy of the

[1] *Vide* a most interesting paper by Colonel C. E. Stewart, entitled 'The Herat Valley and the Persian Border from the Heri Rud to Sistan,' *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (New Series), vol. viii. pp. 137–156 (1886). Kain has been described by the Seistan Boundary Commission, 1872 (i. Col. Euan Smith, *Eastern Persia*, vol. i. pp. 336–343; ii. H. W. Bellew, *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 320–322), and by (Sir) C. MacGregor, *Journey through Khorasan*, pp. 161, 162. For Birjand, *vide* the same writers on adjoining pages.

Amir, residing at Nasratabad. In 1889 it contributed to the total revenue of Khorasan 26,000 *tomans* (7,429*l.*) in cash, and 24,000 *kharvars* (6,957 tons) of grain. Seistan, however, involves so many independent problems, political, commercial, and strategical, that I propose to postpone its consideration to a separate chapter, where I shall better be able to render justice both to its history and to its future. With the south-east corner of Seistan Khorasan terminates. The melancholy Dasht-i-Lut succeeds; and we then come to the province of Persian Beluchistan, which will more properly fall within the scope of my second volume.

Seistan

It is along the belt of border territory which I have been describing from the Zulfikar Pass to Seistan—a region, as I have shown, inhabited by tribes mainly of non-Persian origin, non-Persian religion, and anti-Persian inclinations—that Russia has conceived the idea of propagating her political influence. Claiming to be the champion of Sunni Mohammedanism, as against the Shiah heresy of the Persians, she appeals to their fanatical instincts.[1] In their irregular levies she sees a possible auxiliary of great military value. In their situation, commanding the flank approach to Herat, and lower down to the Helmund, she sees an opportunity of threatening Afghanistan and of approaching nearer to the Indian Beluch frontier. Upon Seistan, lying midway between Meshed and the sea, she directs a particularly envious gaze, knowing that its possession by a rival Power would be the one step that might checkmate her complete ascendency in Khorasan. Russian native news-writers are maintained at Turbat-i-Sheikh-Jam, Khaf and Kain. Russian emissaries have been heard of prosecuting their explorations in these regions, and a feverish interest is displayed by the Russian authorities in any information relating to the little-known districts that extend in the direction of the British border.

Russian propaganda

In other words, along the entire circumference of Khorasan, from north-west to south-east, occur a succession of points at which Russian interference, influence, or intrigue is being actively pushed forward; and so the Muscovite toils are steadily and surely being wound round the body of the intended victim. Astrabad, Bujnurd,

[1] In 1882 the Governor of the newly-constituted Transcaspian province actually issued a proclamation at Ashkabad to the effect that all the Sunni villages in the Atek belonged to Russia, and should no longer pay tribute to Persia—an exemption from their financial burdens which was eagerly grasped by many. The same policy is now being tentatively pushed southwards.

Kuchan, Kelat, Sarakhs, Khaf, and Seistan are the several scenes of operation, and may eventually supply the requisite doorways of entry. A glance at the map and at the Transcaspian position of Russia, coterminous for 300 miles with the northern border of Khorasan, will show how a situation which the vicinity of a strong Power in possession of the mountains might have rendered extremely critical has, in the face of a neighbour as weak and pliant as Persia, been converted by Russia into an overwhelming advantage.

Influence of the Transcaspian railway

It is scarcely possible indeed to exaggerate the effect which the Transcaspian conquests of Russia, and her subsequent construction of a railway across the desert immediately outside and below the Persian frontier, have had upon the political condition, and will have upon the political destinies of her neighbours. This, however, is a wider question than should fall within the scope of a chapter dealing solely with one province of the Persian dominion; and I therefore propose to defer it till a chapter is reached which shall handle the whole question of Russian influence and policy in Persia, of which General Annenkoff's railway may be described as one of the propelling instruments.[1]

Interior districts

Before I leave the politics of Khorasan, let me revert once again to its administrative subdivisions, and supplement the information which I have given about the border provinces by a brief sketch of its interior districts. I may divide these into two classes: an inner row, or second line, so to speak, of border districts; and districts which have no connection with the frontier at all.

Tabbas

Commencing from the south, where we left off with Seistan, and striking inland from about the same parallel as Kain, we come to the province of Tabbas, which touches on the south that of Yezd, from which it is 200 miles distant. The inhabitants of Tabbas are partly Arabs, partly Persians, and are ruled by a hereditary chieftain of analogous though inferior position to the Khans, Ilkhanis, and Amirs previously described. His name is Mirza Mohammed Bakar Khan, and his official title the Imad-el-Mulk, or 'Pillar of the State'; though it cannot be contended that either in contributions or in individual importance he lends to it any particular support. The country is big and poor, the people in-

[1] *Vide* vol. ii. cap. xxx.

offensive and quiet; and no trace remains of the condition of affairs described by Malcolm at the end of the last century, when the chiefs maintained themselves in practical independence, and their subjects were noted for valour.[1] The Khan provides a contingent of 150 cavalry.

Turshiz

North of Tabbas is the small district of Turshiz, also with a mainly Arab population, and under a Governor responsible to the Governor-General at Meshed. Turshiz is famous for its fruit, which is incomparable, and for its silk, which the disease, that wrought such havoc in Gilan, fortunately failed to touch. It is also reported to have turquoise mines, greatly inferior to those of Nishapur.

Turbat-i-Haideri

Turshiz is really in the third, not the second, line of support; for between it and Turbat-i-Sheikh Jam occurs the district of Turbat-i-Haideri (Tomb of Haider), which is of some strategical importance, as being situated upon the line of advance of any army advancing from Herat by Khaf upon Meshed with a view of cutting off communication between the capital and Seistan. It is peopled principally by Karai Turks, but also by Beluchis, and a century ago was brought to a pitch of extraordinary power and prosperity by a very remarkable ruler named Ishak Khan, who was said to be as good a merchant as he was a soldier, and as accomplished a student as he was an administrator, and who drew from his semi-independent province a revenue of 100,000*l.*[2] Like most of their neighbours the people of Turbat-i-Haideri have said good-bye to the days of fighting and freedom, and are now completely subdued by the Persians. Their country, like Turshiz, is rich in mulberries and orchards; but was terribly decimated both by Turkoman ravages and by the great famine. Turshiz and Turbat-i-Haideri combined contribute two infantry regiments to the armed strength of Khorasan, which will be noticed presently.

The two interior *beluks* of Persia which are not concerned, even in a secondary degree, with frontier problems, are those of Nishapur and Sebzewar. Their governorships are comfortable berths, which are usually bestowed upon some Persian prince—Nishapur, for

[1] *History of Persia*, vol. ii. pp. 143, 144. Mir Husein Khan was then the chief of the powerful ruling Arab family, and, with a population of only 30,000, sustained an army of 2,000 horse and 6,000 foot.

[2] Malcolm (*History*, vol. ii. p. 148) says 100,000 *tomans*, or 200,000*l.* But as he frequently speaks of a *toman* elsewhere as equivalent to 1*l.*, I think that the latter total must be halved. Even this estimate is probably exaggerated.

instance, being at present under a cousin of the Rukn-ed-dowleh, and Sebzewar under his eldest son. I shall subsequently have something to say about both when I come to their capitals on my journey from Meshed to Teheran. Neither district contributes any infantry troops to the Persian army, having seemingly been granted a special exemption after the visit of the Shah in 1868.

Nishapur and Sebzewar

Finally we come back to the large and wealthy district of Shahrud-Bostam, to which I have already alluded in a footnote when speaking of Astrabad, and which is administered by the sole surviving son of Fath Ali Shah. This is only separated by the Elburz from Astrabad; and thus my task is over, for I have now completed the circuit of Khorasan, and supplied a sketch of each of the administrative subdivisions of this most important province.

Shahrud-Bostam

In quitting this branch of my subject, let me sum up the total of the armed strength of Khorasan, of which I have already in passing noticed the majority of the items. The calculation does not of course include the local levies, *Shamkhalchis* (matchlock men, &c.), who might be raised in time of war, but the effective troops who, within a few days' time, could be called out and placed in the field.

Total military strength of Khorasan

INFANTRY (*Serbaz* or Regulars).

i. *Territorial Regiments.*

2 Regiments of Karai Turks levied at Turshiz and Turbat-i-Haideri, 800 each	=	1,600
2 Regiments levied at Birjand, 800 each	=	1,600

(Of these 4 regiments only one wing of each is mobilised at a time, or half of the whole, the other half being disbanded.)

ii. *Extra-territorial Regiments.*

4 Regiments usually recruited in Azerbaijan, 3 of which are always in garrison at Meshed, 800 each	=	3,200
Total .		6,400

CAVALRY (chiefly mercenary).

Irregular (i.e. effective, but not mobilised).

Timuris and Turbat-i-Sheikh Jam	1,025
Jamshidis	300
Hazaras	450
Zaferanlu Kurds (under the Ilkhani of Kuchan)	600
Shahdillu Kurds } under the Ilkhani of Bujnurd . .	500
Goklan Turkomans } under the Ilkhani of Bujnurd . .	300

CAVALRY.—*continued.*

Deregez (Turks)	100
Kelat-i-Nadiri	150
Kain and Seistan	700
Tabbas	150
Various towns (Sebzewar, &c.)	400
Total	4,675
Artillery	200

(20 light field guns in the Ark at Meshed, 2 field guns at Kelat, 6 mounted guns at Sarakhs.)

Infantry	6,400
Cavalry	4,675
Artillery	200
Grand Total	11,275

Such is the alleged effective strength of the Khorasan army. Properly drilled and decently officered, it might be a respectable force. Under existing circumstances it cannot be spoken of without a smile.

Commerce in Khorasan

I now turn to the commercial part played by Great Britain and Russia in Khorasan. For many years past Russia, though a nation with no special commercial aptitudes, has conceived the ambition of controlling the markets of Central Asia. Inherited from Peter the Great, this idea has been prosecuted with a vigour in striking contrast with the listlessness elsewhere exhibited by the same people. It is now a cardinal axiom of Russian politics in the East that commercial must precede political control; and the institution of mercantile agents and middlemen, the opening up of means of communication, and the granting of special exemptions and preferences to goods on their way to or from Oriental markets are invariable features of their Asiatic diplomacy. Khorasan, lying in such near proximity both to the Caspian, of which they possess the monopoly of navigation, and to Transcaspia, which they conquered in 1881, has presented a suitable field for these operations, and may be looked to as typifying the high-water mark of Russian commercial success.

Former British trade with Meshed

Before, however, I pass on to examine the present condition of affairs, let me call attention to the fact, which I have never seen recorded in this context, that the trade between Europe and Khorasan is not of Russian but of British institution, and that 150 years ago English merchants were the first who endeavoured to open up that highway from the Caspian to Meshed

which is now so advantageously utilised by our rivals. I regard the history of British commercial intercourse with Persia as one of the most remarkable chapters in the little-known or forgotten annals of this country; and at a later stage I shall have something to say of the indomitable gallantry with which, in ages when merchants required to wield the sword almost as deftly as the pen, the representatives of English trading companies carried the flag, and the merchandise, and the high name of Great Britain into lands where all risked and many lost their lives in each venture, and whence those that returned were welcomed with no plaudits from crowded halls, and received no medals from royal societies. Among the ideas that fired the imagination of John Elton, the gifted but unstable Englishman, who himself both created and destroyed that revival of the British Caspian trade in the middle of the eighteenth century, whose history has been so minutely recorded by one of the prominent actors in the scene, Jonas Hanway, was that of establishing a British factory at Meshed, and of importing, *viâ* Astrabad, the woollen cloths of London, which were to be exchanged at the capital of Khorasan for the fabled wealth of the East. With what a grim irony we now read the sanguine words in which he recommended his plan to the British Minister at St. Petersburg :—

> The British merchants cannot have any formidable rivals to contend with, or to apprehend, in the trade from Meshed to Bokhara. They can never be supplanted in this trade so long as they secure a passage for their goods through the Empire of Russia, and a freedom of navigation on the Caspian, both of which it will be the interest of the sovereign of Russia to grant to the subjects of Great Britain.[1]

How this too fanciful picture of a generous and unsuspecting Russia and a money-making England failed of realisation will be told later on. Here I will relate only the brief history of its application to Meshed. Hanway himself penetrated as far as Astrabad, in December 1743, with the merchandise which he proposed to transport from thence by caravan to Meshed; but he got no further, for during his stay in the city a rebellion broke out against Nadir Shah, his goods were seized and plundered, and he was within an ace of being sold in slavery to the Turkomans. Two other factors, however, of the Russian or Muscovy Company

[1] *Historical Account of British Trade over the Caspian*, by Jonas Hanway, vol. i. pp. 37–39.

(trading from London) succeeded in reaching Meshed. One of them, Mungo Graham or Graeme, was murdered on his return journey at Semnan in 1743.[1] The other, Von Mierop, resided for two years and three months in Meshed, from 1743–5, but met with little success, for he only sold 22,000 crowns, or 5,500*l.* worth of goods. He returned in safety, but no one else was found to repeat so hazardous an experiment; and within three years' time every British merchant had left the country, only too glad in those stormy times to have escaped with his life.

Later conditions

Such was the history of the first attempt at British trade with Meshed. During this century the shifting of the capital to Teheran, the greater security of communication, and the re-opening of the Bunder Abbas route from the Persian Gulf on the south, have brought Meshed once again within the sphere of British or Anglo-Indian commercial enterprise; while her successive encroachments upon the north have given Russia a more than corresponding advantage in that direction. Earlier travellers have from time to time reported the growing influence of Russian trade in these parts,[2] and Khorasan has, not without apparent justice, been regarded in recent years as irretrievably lost to the British merchant.

Apparent Russian ascendency

At first sight this alarm would appear to be well-founded. A visitor to the bazaars of any of the important towns of Khorasan, from Astrabad to Meshed (such as Shahrud, Sebzewar, Nishapur, Bujnurd, Shirwan, and Kuchan), will find the evidences of Russian influence very obvious to the outer eye. The shops appear to be laden with Russian cottons, calicoes, and chintzes, with Russian sugar, crockery, and hardware, and, indeed, with all the cheaper necessaries of civilised life. Entering Khorasan, either *viâ* Bunder-i-Gez, Astrabad, and Shahrud, or by Ashkabad and Kuchan, these goods flow in a great wave from one end of the province to the other, and completely drown any foreign competition in the native markets. French sugar used to be imported from Marseilles, *viâ* Bombay.

[1] *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 358; vol. ii. p. 24.

[2] Compare Colonel Val. Baker, *Clouds in the East*, p. 305, 'The whole trade of Central Asia is slowly drifting into Russian hands;' and E. O'Donovan, *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. p. 480, 'Russia completely controls the trade of Meshed in European goods, except perhaps in sugar, a little of which comes from Marseilles. Cloths, linen and cotton goods, porcelain, glass trays, lamps, and other manufactured European articles are Russian.'

The trade is now extinct, and no sugar, either loaf or crushed, but Russian is seen. Russian kerosine from Baku commands the market. In 1888–9, 36,000 pouds were imported into Meshed. Lamps, chandeliers, candle-shades, lustres, trays, glasses, tumblers, samovars, teapots, saucers, locks, and cheap cutlery are all of Russian origin, and suggest to the casual observer that the supply of the entire furniture of life has been monopolised by Russian enterprise.

Persian figures

While I was in Meshed, I took such steps as were open to me, by consulting the best authorities, including Messrs. Ziegler's agent, the sole European mercantile house represented there, to ascertain the true state of affairs, and more especially the respective volumes and values of Russian and Anglo-Indian trade. It is well known that in Persia it is almost impossible to obtain statistics, and that such as are with infinite difficulty procurable are too often imperfect or erroneous. Calculations as to the total amount of trade are frequently made from Custom-house returns, which do not necessarily supply a reliable basis of induction. Figures are readily given by European merchants or their agents; but native merchants either do not care to disclose them, or sometimes do not keep them at all. Therefore, of neither the figures which I am about to give, nor of those published by the officials of the British Government, can absolute accuracy be postulated in Khorasan any more than in other parts of Persia. They may be regarded, however, as approximately correct.

My information in Meshed

I was assured by my informants in Meshed that, while the volume of trade in Khorasan was indisputably Russian, the value was still on the side of the English. The cheaper objects which were everywhere visible and which flood the petty retail shops all hailed from Russia, and competition with them was impossible; but the more costly imports, entering Khorasan partly from the west, *viâ* Tabriz, Teheran, and Shahrud, but in far greater quantity from the south, *viâ* Bunder Abbas on the sea, and Kerman, were of British or Anglo-Indian origin, and estimated in £ *s. d.*, it could be demonstrated that Meshed at that moment did a larger trade with Bombay than it did with the whole of Russia. For instance, the customs dues for Meshed for the year 1888 (i.e., the *octroi* collected on imported merchandise) had been bought from the Government for the sum of 50,000 *tomans* (3½

tomans equal to 1*l.*),[1] of which it was calculated that 30,000 *tomans* would be levied on goods from Bunder Abbas, and 20,000 on goods from the whole of the rest of Persia and from Russia, the latter not even amounting to one-half of the lesser fraction.

Report of the British Consulate

This assurance struck me as requiring elucidation at the time; and I have since been able to explain and in some respects to correct it by the much fuller details contained in an admirable commercial report compiled by Consul-General Maclean in the past year (1890), the first that has ever been issued from Meshed or Khorasan, and in itself an ample justification of the presence of a British consular staff in so important a trade centre as Meshed. This publication is contained in the series of Diplomatic and Consular Reports on trade and finance, issued by the English Foreign Office; and will no doubt be the first of an annual series.[2]

Values of British and Russian imports

From this report I gather that the total value of Anglo-Indian goods imported into Khorasan in 1889–90 (the Persian year is counted from the vernal equinox, i.e. from March 21, 1889, to March 21, 1890) was 84,300*l.*, and the total value of Russian goods 110,400*l.* But to the former should certainly be added a considerable portion of the value of the Chinese black and green teas, shipped from Bombay, and no doubt for the most part purchased and brought from China by British merchants. The total value of this Chinese tea was 433,000 *tomans*, or 123,714*l.*; but very nearly the whole of it only passes through Meshed in transit to Bokhara, Khiva, &c., the taste of the Khorasanis being partial to Indian black tea, of which an import of 12,000*l.* is included in the total of Anglo-Indian imports already quoted. The addition thereto of a large fraction of the value of the Chinese tea will explain the otherwise ambiguous statement of my informants.

Anglo-Indian trade routes

Here let me pause to consider and balance the facilities at the disposal of the rival European Powers for trade with Khorasan. Nominally there are three trade routes available for British or Anglo-Indian imports, in practice only two. First is the lengthy overland journey *viâ* Teheran and Tabriz from the Turkish port of Trebizond, in the angle of the Black

[1] Conolly mentions that in 1830 the customs dues of Meshed were farmed for 15,000 *tomans.*—*Overland Journey to India*, vol. i. p. 291.

[2] *Annual Series*, 1890, No. 753.

Sea, a total distance by caravan march of 1,500 miles, and occupying a camel four months of time.[1] Second is the route from Bunder Abbas on the Persian Gulf to Meshed, of which there are two variations: the shorter journey *viâ* Kerman, Rahwar, Nahiband and Tun, a distance of 940 miles, or 40 days by mule and 75 days by camel; and the longer deviation *viâ* Yezd, which is occasionally taken by merchants, because of the greater abundance of transport and the additional chance of finding a sale in the busy mart of Yezd. The third, and by far the most direct and shortest, route for Indian merchandise, would be *viâ* the Bolan Pass by rail to the British frontier at Chaman in Beluchistan, and thence by Kandahar and Herat to Meshed, a distance from the Indian frontier of 30 stages only, or 670 miles. This route, however, which was once a crowded trade artery, has practically been killed by the exorbitant transit dues charged by the Amir of Afghanistan,[2] whose fiscal policy is conceived on the strictest protectionist principles, and is coldly indifferent to the convenience or the commerce of his neighbours. Of the two former or practicable routes, that from Trebizond was utilised by British merchandise in 1889 to the value of 23,400*l.*, that from Bunder Abbas by Anglo-Indian merchandise (excluding the China tea) to the value of 60,870*l.*

Import duties

By treaty between Great Britain and Persia, only five per cent. *ad valorem* can be charged upon British merchandise, at the port or town of entry. Thus British goods will be called upon for this impost at Tabriz (having passed through Trebizond, in transit, duty free), and Anglo-Indian goods at Bunder Abbas. But as in the case of Khorasan there are no British merchants at the destination or at the big towns *en route*, the Persian Custom-house officials take the opportunity of screwing a little more than is their due, and subjecting foreign merchandise to the same system as prevails for native goods, viz. the payment of a customs duty at each large city. Thus British goods from Trebizond after paying their five per cent. at Tabriz will, after passing into the hands of

[1] The freight-charge of each camel-load from Trebizond to Meshed is 27½ *tomans*, i.e. 7*l.* 17*s.*; from Bunder Abbas (*viâ* Kerman) to Meshed, 9 *tomans*, i.e. 2*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.*

[2] The Amir levies 2*l.* 2*s.* upon every cwt., and the cost of each camel-load is further 2*l.* 7*s.* On the Kabul road he is reported to levy 80 rupees (5*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*) on every camel-load of Indian goods in transit to Bokhara. This is not Protection, but Prohibition.

Persian merchants, pay a further two and a half per cent. upon entering Khorasan, or seven and a half per cent. in all. Similarly the total of dues levied on the Kerman route from Bunder Abbas will be about seven and a half per cent.; and by the more circuitous Yezd route nine per cent. The excess above the stipulated five per cent. would be avoided if there were British consignees at the destination. Another plan of the Persian Custom-house officers at the ports is to levy less than the stipulated five per cent. there, but to give no voucher for the sum received; and thus to provide their confraternity in the remaining cities with the opportunity not merely of making up the five per cent., but sometimes of almost doubling its amount.

These are the disadvantages under which British or Anglo-Indian trade labours. Russia has at her command four trade routes: (1) the Tiflis-Tabriz-Teheran line; (2) the Resht-Teheran line; (3) the Gez-Astrabad-Shahrud line; and (4) the Ashkabad-Kuchan line in connection with the Transcaspian railway. The three first have been practically superseded by the last, which is only 150 miles in length, which is being converted along its entire distance into a carriageable highway, and which, in narrating my own journey, I have already described.[1] No words are needed to explain the enormous advantage of which she is the possessor; an advantage with which we are only able to compete because of her inability to supply some of the largest articles of import, such as tea and indigo; and because of the, as yet, superior quality of British manufactures. None the less it is not surprising to find the British consul summarising his opinion of the situation in these words:—

Russian trade routes

> It is obvious that with the Transcaspian railway at Ashkabad, only 150 miles from Meshed, and with both towns linked as they shortly will be by an excellent macadamised[2] road, British goods, having to cross the seas and traverse long, rough land routes cannot hope to compete with Russian goods, even in these provinces of Persia, unless our railway is extended in this direction.

Russia is thoroughly alive to the advantage of her situation,

[1] I have since heard (May 1891) that heavy, springless carts, drawn by two, three, or four horses, have superseded mule and horse traffic on the Kuchan-Meshed section of the road.

[2] I think this word is a misnomer, for I am convinced that were the original MacAdam to be raised from the dead and dropped down on the Ashkabad-Meshed road, he would stand aghast at such a prostitution of his respectable name.

and endeavours to push it by fiscal tactics, which are discountenanced by the gentlemen who call themselves political economists in England, but which are a familiar feature in the commercial strategy of foreign countries, and of the Russian Government in particular. Her own goods pay the regular five per cent. on crossing the Persian borders. But in order to encourage the export of Persian cotton, she allows it a differential preference of ten per cent. over that imported by the Baltic or Black Seas. By a Customs decree of February 1889, Persian goods passing into Transcaspia pay an *ad valorem* duty of two and a half per cent. But by a later decree of February 1890 such goods, if only passing through Transcaspia in transit to Europe, are exempted from all duty whatever, if forwarded by Ashkabad or by any other station of the Transcaspian railway.

Customs duties

Of the Anglo-Indian imports from Bunder Abbas, the largest item, excluding the China tea, is still tea; Indian green tea to the value of 7,140*l.* (mostly in transit to Bokhara), and Indian black tea, which is preferred in Khorasan, to the value of 12,000*l.* Next comes indigo, with a total value of 10,170*l.*, of which more than one-half is in transit to Russian Central Asia.[1] The import duty on this indigo affords an illustration of the cumulative system of taxation before mentioned; for three per cent. is exacted at Bunder Abbas, one per cent. at Kerman, and two and three-fourths per cent. on arrival at Meshed. This, with the two and a half per cent. exacted by Russia, when it passes into Transcaspia, and the further two and a half per cent. levied by Bokhara on the frontiers of that khanate, makes it a somewhat expensive luxury by the time it reaches the Tartar capital. In calico sheetings and shirtings, both grey and bleached, there is a marked preference for British over Russian goods, and of these nearly 12,000*l.* worth are imported *viâ* Bunder Abbas. A considerable quantity of Kashmir shawls, of copper sheeting and tin, and finally of drugs and spices, are the concluding items worthy of mention.

Largest items: 1. Anglo-Indian

The Tabriz-Teheran line brings whatever cottons and chintzes can succeed in holding their own against the cheaper Russian

[1] Indigo is largely used everywhere in Central Asia to dye silk and cotton garments, to stain glass, and to give the colour to those blue and white enamelled tiles which are so familiar a feature in secular as well as religious ornamentation.

imports of the same article. English knives and scissors, crockery and porcelain, of which there seemed to be very little in the bazaars, but which come by this route, are greedily snapped up when offered for sale, though at higher prices than the corresponding articles of Russian manufacture. Simultaneously I found a consensus of opinion that the Russian import of cheap cotton fabrics of which I have spoken had been very much overdone, that the bazaars were now overstocked with these goods, and that they could only be sold at prices which would result in serious losses to their owners. The main feature of the competition between the two countries was undoubtedly this: that all English articles are considered vastly superior in durability and quality; but that the enormous distances which they have to traverse and the high prices which must necessarily be charged, render it almost impossible for them to compete with their rivals. For my part I think it extraordinary, when we compare the two situations (putting aside altogether the articles in which Russia cannot compete, such as indigo, minerals and tea), that Great Britain should still claim so creditable a proportion of the trade. Whether it can be maintained is another question, to which I should hesitate to return an affirmative answer.

2. British

Of the Russian total of 110,400*l.* imported by the Transcaspian railway, cotton stuffs, plain and coloured, constitute nearly one-third. The second largest item is sugar, which has driven every other sugar, French or Indian, out of the market, and is sold in the bazaars at 4½*d.* a pound—a price that is in the main due to the bounties granted by the Russian Government to Russian exporters of the article,[1] and with which it is next to impossible for Indian sugar, even though made from the sugar-cane, to compete. Russian crockery and porcelain, which are almost universal, amount to 11,500*l.*; and the value of Russian hardware is only 1,000*l.* less.

3. Russian

If we turn to the exports of Khorasan, physical considerations will explain the fact that the trade with Russia is vastly in excess of that with India. Exclusive of such Indian goods as pass

[1] One rouble (2*s.*) per poud (36 lbs.) excise duty is refunded on Russian sugar exported abroad. In the case, however, of Central Asia and Persia, the rebate, having served its purpose by completely driving out all other competitors from the market, was discontinued from May 1, 1891.

through Khorasan to Russian territory, the figures of export to Russia (some of course in transit to other European countries) amount to a total of 111,500*l.* Cotton, assisted by the differential preference before alluded to, is responsible for the large figure of nearly 43,000*l.* Wool is credited with about half that total. 5,700*l.* worth of Turkoman and Persian carpets are sent to Europe, not all, of course, to Russian destinations. Finally, out of the total output of turquoises from the celebrated mines near Nishapur, which is estimated at nearly 23,000*l.* annually, over 17,000*l.* were despatched in 1889 by the Transcaspian railway to Europe.

Exports: 1. to Russia

That some idea may be gained of the enormous increase in Russo-Persian trade, due to the prosperous working of the Transcaspian railway, let me compare the figures that I have just given with those of the first nine months of 1886, the railway having only reached Ashkabad in December 1885. From January to October 1886 the exports from Persia to Ashkabad equalled 61,000*l.*, the imports to Persia from Ashkabad 37,000*l.* The totals for 1889 were, as I have shown, respectively 111,500*l.*, and 110,400*l.* In other words the exports have very nearly doubled in the space of three years, while the imports have exactly trebled.

Growth of Russo-Persian trade

Against these imposing figures the export trade to British India can only oppose the modest total of 39,000*l.*, nearly the whole of which is represented by Khorasan opium, intended chiefly for the Chinese market. Ten years ago the total output of opium in Khorasan was only 160 hundredweight. The value of the export, over and above that which is consumed in the province, is now 37,100*l.* to India, as well as 14,300*l.* to Constantinople, or a total of 51,400*l.*

2. to India

In order to complete the survey of the commerce of Khorasan, the figures of Perso-Afghan trade must be added. There is very little difference in the respective values of imports and exports, either country contributing in about equal proportion to the needs of the other. Whereas Afghanistan, however, sends her indigenous sheepskin coats (*poshtins*), pistachios, &c., the bulk of Persian exports are Russian piece goods, sugar, and hardware. The value of the exports from Khorasan into Afghanistan is returned as 18,300*l.*, of imports into Khorasan from Afghanistan as 17,300*l.*

Perso-Afghan trade

Grand total

Adding up the entire totals, we arrive at the following hypothetical estimate of the trade of Khorasan :—

Imports from Russia . . .	£110,400	Exports to Russia and Europe	£111,400
" " India	60,800	Exports to India	39,000
" " Great Britain .	23,400	" " Afghanistan . .	18,300
" " Europe . . .	15,700		
" " Afghanistan .	17,300		
Total of imports .	£227,600	Total of exports .	£168,700

Grand total £396,300.

From this total we must make a considerable reduction, on account of the goods that are reckoned in it more than once, first upon entering the province and then upon leaving it. On the other hand, the figures of export *viâ* Teheran, Tabriz, and Trebizond do not appear. The absence of any figures of the Perso-Bokharan trade does not make as much difference as might otherwise be expected, the Persian exports to Bokhara consisting almost wholly of Anglo-Indian goods, tea, indigo, muslin, &c., which have already been reckoned in the Bunder Abbas importations.

Steps to be taken by Great Britain

Having analysed the present situation, and endeavoured to some extent to forecast the future of foreign trade with Khorasan, it may not be out of place if I here indicate such steps as might with advantage be taken by the British Government, in order to retain and develop that share of the business which they naturally possess, and to prevent an ultimate loss of the remainder. Five such precautionary measures are within the range of practicability, although I fear that their probability is not in each case in the same ratio. British consular officials should be appointed to superintend and protect the principal trade route from the south. When I was at Bunder Abbas there was not a single European in the place, and only an unaccredited and purely unofficial representative of British mercantile interests. A British Vice-Consul might most opportunely be appointed at Kerman, and a Consular agent at Yezd, or *vice versâ*. Secondly, the road running northward from Kerman, *viâ* Rahwar, Nahiband and Tun, which is the principal caravan route from the Gulf to Meshed, might with ease and at a small expense be vastly improved by clearing out and resuscitating the filled-up wells and water-courses by which it was once fertilised. Thirdly, I see no reason why not only should the existing route be

improved, but a new one opened up from the British possessions in Beluchistan to the Persian border, avoiding Afghan territory altogether, and proceeding e.g. from Quetta *viâ* Seistan to Birjand. All of these are feasible measures, and there can be no excuse for any supineness in developing or facilitating such pacific avenues of Anglo-Indian influence. The fourth remedy, which has doubtless engaged the attention of the Indian Government, is an intimation to the Amir of Afghanistan, not on grounds of political economy, for which I suspect that Abdur Rahman Khan would profess a very reasonable contempt, but on the grounds of the avowed wish of the Suzerain Power, that it is desirable to modify a fiscal policy which is injurious to his own subjects, and displeasing to his chief allies. The fifth and last remedy, to which I shall revert at greater length in dealing with Seistan, is the construction of a rival British railroad on the south, to balance the Transcaspian railway in the north, and enable us to compete with Russia in a fair field, and with her own weapons.

Russian covetousness of Khorasan

I now proceed to explain the reasons for which, apart from the legitimate desire for commercial profit, both Powers—Russia and Great Britain—are induced to regard Khorasan with so intense a concern, what is the objective of Russian policy in the comprehensive designs which I have described in this chapter, and what are the counter-interests and responsibilities of this country. The passion for territorial aggrandisement is one which, though it is indignantly repudiated by Russian writers, no one with his eyes open can believe to be other than a dominating influence in the Russian mind. There is a step in the development of every great Power in which the lust for new possessions is in excess of every other sentiment. Russia is now in this acquisitive stage of empire. Great Britain, having passed through it, and having in her day experienced its intoxicating fumes in all their intensity, has emerged into the more sober atmosphere of the conservative stage. In other words Russian interest in Khorasan is the cupidity of the would-be possessor. England, on the contrary, neither aspires to, nor will ever hold, a square yard of the country.

If we inquire the ulterior reasons for which Russia desires the possession of Khorasan, they are not far to seek. Her Transcaspian conquests have brought under her control a region, the greater part of which consists of barren wilderness, and whose

only fertile spots are a series of detached oases at the base of a mountain range. On the other side of that mountain range for a distance of 300 miles extends a country which, in the plains and hollows that separate its manifold ridges, conceals an abundance of wealth, in fruit, in minerals, in produce of every kind, above all in grain. She is like a man camping in a desolate and stony field divided only by a thick hedge from a spacious pasture, where he sees food for himself, fodder for his beasts, comfort and repose for both. What a temptation to break through the hedge and poach on the hidden preserves! Such are the feelings with which the Russians regard Khorasan. They would fain move from Akhal Tekke to Kuchan, from Ashkabad to Meshed. Here they would find supplies that might feed mighty armies, mountain fastnesses invulnerable to attack, a docile population, a resting-ground where new plans of action could be formed, and a base whence they could be set in motion in the future.

Contrast to Transcaspia

It is the latter context—viz., with a view to future political contingencies—that Khorasan acquires a further and definite value in Russian eyes. At present Russian is separated from Afghan territory in Central Asia by Sir West Ridgeway's frontier—an artificial line drawn for a distance of 350 miles from the Heri Rud to the Oxus. This line could, no doubt, at any moment be violated; but no territorial acquisitions of immediate value would result, and the step could only be taken at the risk, nay, with the certainty, of war with Great Britain. How much simpler to slip round the corner and so to turn the enemy's flank! From the Zulfikar Pass to the southern extremity of Seistan, Persia is coterminous with Afghanistan; and a Power established upon the Persian side of that border would command Herat (there is a carriage road of 230 miles from Meshed to Herat), threaten the road by Farrah and Girishk to Kandahar, and be brought to the very banks of the Helmund. Russia settled in Khorasan, and especially in that fringe of border territory which I have been at such pains to describe, has no need to infringe any Anglo-Afghan boundary. The entire western frontier of Afghanistan lies exposed to her influence or assault. Furthermore, in Seistan she comes into close contact with a part of Beluchistan of disputed ownership and unsettled tenure, and is separated by only a short distance from the advanced British frontier in Pishin.

A *pied-à-terre* against India

Finally, having reached that point, she is already half way to the sea; and, her railways once carried as far as Nasratabad, she would begin to felicitate herself upon a port on the Indian Ocean and the long sought outlet in the southern seas.[1]

British interests in Khorasan

The physical conditions which I have expounded, the designs of Russia, of which evidence can be produced incapable of refutation, and the importance of any movements so intimately affecting Afghanistan explain the interest which England is thereby compelled to take in this portion of the Shah's dominions. Those who argue that Khorasan is far from India, and can therefore safely be left alone, repeat the imbecile fallacy that has already been attended with such pitiable results in the past, and that has landed us in our recent position in both Persia and Afghanistan. Afghanistan has often been described as the north-western glacis of our Indian citadel; and to allow an enemy to effect a lodgment undisturbed upon even the outskirts of that glacis is to commit a strategical error of the first importance. British policy in Khorasan is directed to the safeguarding of British—i.e., of Afghan—interests in that quarter; to the maintenance of the political *status quo*—i.e., of the Persian dominion; and more particularly to the watching of those approaches from the south, the freedom of which is indispensable to British commerce, and the control of which by a hostile instead of an allied Power would be an appreciable peril to Hindustan. It is a consolatory fact that General Maclean, the recently appointed Consul-General at Meshed, is also Consul for Seistan. An independent British official should, however, be deputed to the latter place, whose near proximity to the Anglo-Beluch frontier renders it of great importance to British interests, and whose resources, if developed by scientific irrigation and a railway, might make it a nucleus of commercial influence radiating through central and southern Persia, and even counterbalancing Russian ascendency in northern Khorasan.

Finally, let me indicate what I believe to be the attitude of the population of Khorasan towards Russia and Great Britain, and the assistance or the reverse that either Power may expect to meet with in the prosecution of its schemes. Earlier travellers, such

[1] That these designs are not the offspring of imagination, but are seriously entertained by Russia, evidence will be forthcoming, in a later chapter upon Russian Policy in Persia as a whole, to prove.

as Fraser,[1] MacGregor,[2] and Napier, reported a widespread aversion in northern Khorasan to the Kajar dynasty, and a profound disaffection towards the central Government of Teheran.

Persian loyalty

The process of time and the firm rule of the present Shah have obliterated these antipathies, and Khorasan is as negatively loyal as any other part of Persia. By negative loyalty I mean that the rule of the sovereign is passively acquiesced in by the bulk of the people, who of themselves would institute no movement for change; but that this feeling nowhere amounts to a spirit of enthusiasm, nor has kindled the faintest spark of national unity. Whilst, therefore, the people would be extremely unlikely to fight against the Shah, they would be almost as unlikely to fight for him—a position which renders their allegiance a quantity of very precarious value. Against the Afghans, no doubt, who are Sunnis and hereditary enemies, such a feeling, approximating to national unity, might be aroused. But I am not now talking of possible warfare with an Asiatic enemy, but of the designs and encroachments of Russia. If Russia, therefore, were to-morrow to undertake a hostile movement against Khorasan, what might the inhabitants of that province be expected to do?

My answer is that, if the movement were accompanied by the smallest display of military force, they would probably do nothing but sit still and accept the change of masters, in the belief that it was Kismet, and that they might fare, if not the same, at least a little better, and could not fare much worse. The utter rottenness of Persian administration, by which the poor people have been long oppressed without hope of redress, has taught them to turn with eagerness to any alternative that at least promises a change. I am unable to say whether the Russians are personally popular in Persia, not having had the means of ascertaining by personal inquiry on a sufficiently large scale, and having received the most contradictory answers from my several informants.

Russian prestige

[1] *Journey into Khorasan*, cap. xxii. 'During the course of our journey from Meshed, there was nothing that struck me more forcibly than the violent hatred borne by all ranks of people to the reigning family of Persia. They were never spoken of without detestation, and their name appears to be identified with all that is cruel, tyrannical, and unjust.' This was in 1822.

[2] *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. i. p. 253. 'In Khorasan there is another opinion, which is as prevalent as belief in the Russians, and that is contempt of the Kajar. This I have heard expressed over and over again, coupled with epithets the reverse of complimentary.' This was in 1875.

But the reputation acquired by them in Khorasan owing to their liberation of the slaves at Bokhara and Khiva, most of whom were Persians from this province,[1] and their deliverance of the borderlands from the devastating scourge of the Turkomans, combined with the prestige of their numbers and ever forward progress, have predisposed a naturally craven race to regard their advance with mingled resignation and respect. Some would be found to think the change a decided gain. The majority would vote it inevitable. The sympathy of the few, aided by the apathy of the many, would disarm opposition and pave the way for an easy conquest. If it be inquired whether the spirit of religious animosity might not be invoked, and a *jihad*, or religious war, preached against the infidels, the answer must be returned that Russia is not in the least likely to proceed until she has guarded against such a contingency. The religious element is in the ascendant at Meshed, and no doubt exercises a considerable control over the prepossessions of the people. Any fear of violation, either of the shrine or of the endowments by which it is supported, or of the privileges and abuses by which it is surrounded, would unquestionably awaken a feeling of the bitterest hostility. But Russia has never shown anything but a large patience towards the religious scruples and superstitions of her Mussulman subjects. Such suspicions would easily be disarmed; and it is to be feared that the holy *mullahs* and *mujtaheds* of Meshed are not more averse than the majority of their fellow-countrymen to the receipt of bribes. When, therefore, the old Khan of Kuchan told me that all the people of Khorasan would rally and fight for Meshed, I believe him to have been talking nonsense. My impression is that Meshed, if it is destined to fall, will fall without a blow; and that a change of ownership in Khorasan might be effected without the loss of a drop of blood.

[1] I never heard this doubted until I came across a Russian book, entitled *Sketches of Persia*, by P. Ogorodnikof, published in St. Petersburg in 1878. The author was a Russian who had been deputed by the Imperial Geographical Society to join a commercial caravan, conducted by General Glukhofski, to Meshed in 1874; and his utterances were mainly an epitome of the views of a Russian merchant, named Baumgarten, who resided for many years in Shahrud and was seen there by Baker, Napier, MacGregor, and other English travellers. Baumgarten, who presumably knew what he was saying and could not be regarded as a Russophobe, denied that the Khivan release of prisoners had brought any popularity to Russia, and declared that the Persians held the Russians in contempt while cringing to them, and seeking to propitiate them as possible informers to the Shah against their misdeeds and rapacities.

When I credit the Russians with an influence so remarkable, I am not for a moment conceding to them a monopoly of such an advantage. Were the British in a position to exercise the same pressure or ultimately to take the same steps, I believe that they would be received with an acclaim out of all proportion greater than that which might await their opponents. The Russians are in the habit of conducting matters in a somewhat high-handed and dictatorial manner in Persia; and, while such an attitude may inspire alarm and even create respect, it makes no appeal to affection. On the other hand, the franker and more honourable methods of the English have won for that Power a consideration which, in the absence of positive evidences of strength, such as numerous troops and adjacent dominions, is highly meritorious. The Timuri tribes, of whom I spoke, along the eastern border of Khorasan, are known to be extremely friendly to the English; and the nearer we approach to Beluchistan and the Indian frontier, the more does the popularity arising from just and tolerant administration prevail. The Persians are beginning to see perfectly well that the English do not desire a rood of their soil, and that the Russians are bent upon forcible appropriation. But the Russians are near and formidable, and the English are far away and make no visible display of strength. While, therefore, British influence is welcome and meets with encouragement, there is no spirit or party capable of engendering a successful resistance to Russian designs. The Khorasanis, like their fellow-men all the world over, are not above making friends with the mammon of unrighteousness.

Feeling towards England

Supplementary Routes in E. Khorasan.

Meshed to Turbat-i-Haideri. H. W. Bellew (1872), *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 351–7; Col. Euan-Smith (1872), *Eastern Persia*, pp. 353–6.

Turbat-i-Haideri to Bajistan. H. W. Bellew (1872), *Ibid.* pp. 340–9; Col. Euan-Smith (1872), *Ibid.* pp. 349–53.

Bajistan to Kain. H. W. Bellew (1872), *Ibid.* pp. 325–39; Col. E. Smith (1872), *Ibid.* pp. 343–9.

Kain to Birjand. H. W. Bellew (1872), *Ibid.* pp. 309–25; Col. E. Smith (1872), *Ibid.* pp. 337–42.

Farrah (Afghanistan) to Nishapur (*viâ* Birjand, Tun, and Bajistan). J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Caravan Journeys*, pp. 437–8

Farrah (Afghanistan) to Semnan (*viâ* Khur and Tabbas). J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Ibid.* pp. 439–40.

Tabbas to Birjand (*viâ* Tun and Kain). (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. i. pp. 137–66.

BIRJAND TO PAHRI (HERAT) (*viâ* Forg and Yezdun). (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 178–202.

SHAHRUD TO HERAT (*viâ* Turshiz and Khaf). G. Forster (1784), *Journey from Bengal to England*, vol. ii. pp. 221–3. Captain Claude Clerk (1857), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xxxi. pp. 47–54 (1861).

LASH JUWAIN (AFGHAN SEISTAN) TO KERMAN (*viâ* Neh). N. de Khanikoff (1859), *Mémoire, &c.*, pp. 156–86.

SEMNAN TO BAJISTAN AND JUMAIN. H. B. Vaughan (1888), *Proc. of the R.G.S.* (*New Series*), vol. xii.

CHAPTER IX

THE SEISTAN QUESTION

And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan
And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake
Of Zirrah.'

MATTHEW ARNOLD, *Sohrab and Rustum.*

FROM Zulfikar, upon the Heri Rud, the starting point of the new Russo-Afghan Boundary of 1885–7, and the point accordingly where Russian, Afghan, and Persian territory all converge, the frontier of the last-named Power, running due south almost upon the 61st parallel of longitude for a distance of several hundred miles, is either only in part defined, doubtfully defined, precariously observed, or not defined at all. The entire distance from the Zulfikar Pass to the Indian Ocean at Gwetter is 700 miles in a straight line; along which extent Persia is brought into contact with two neighbours upon the east, with neither of whom is she upon the best of terms, viz., Afghanistan and Beluchistan. Disputes are constantly occurring with both of these Powers as to the boundary-line; and encroachments, sometimes ephemeral, in other cases permanent, are made upon territories claimed by the other. Of the three nations concerned, the most acquisitive, strange to say, appears to be Persia herself. She perhaps thinks to console herself for forcible contraction upon her north-west and north-east borders by a little surreptitious expansion here.

Eastern frontier of Persia

The frontier-line of which I am speaking falls naturally into four divisions, in each of which different degrees of stability and differing political conditions prevail. The first of these divisions is the section running from Zulfikar to the northern confines of Seistan, a total distance of nearly 300 miles. Ever since Herat and its dependencies were severed from Khorasan, a more or less recognised boundary has existed between the two countries in these parts; but it has never been defined, and provides material for recurrent disputes, arising as a rule from the contested command or possession of water-courses, the most valu-

1. Zulfikar to Seistan

able and in many cases the sole asset of which Nature can here boast. One of these disputes between Afghanistan and Persia had been raging for some time before my visit, concerning a border district named Hashtadan, on the parallel between Kuhsan and Ghurian. The British, who are usually appealed to on these occasions as umpires, and who have more than once undertaken what is apt to be a very thankless task, were invited to arbitrate; and a decision was given which, I dare say, had what MacGregor thought the superlative merit of dissatisfying both parties. I only allude to it as typical of the incidents that must constantly recur upon a boundary so ill-defined, assisted in most parts by no natural features, and peopled by nomad tribes who care very little for posts or pillars.

2. Seistan

The second section is the frontier of Seistan, as defined by the Anglo-Perso-Afghan Boundary Commission under Sir F. Goldsmid in 1872, which will form the main subject of this chapter. The length of this section from north to south is about 120 miles; but as the new frontier, fixed by the arbitration, pursues a wide deviation to the south-east until it touches the river Helmund, and then turns again in a south-westerly direction, the length of the two outer sides of the triangle thus described is considerably greater than that of the hypotenuse.

3. Perso-Beluch boundary

Third in order comes a stretch of boundary from the southern end of the Seistan frontier, fixed in 1872, to the northern end of the Mekran boundary, demarcated in the previous year; or, in other words, from the Kuh-Malek-i-Siah to Jalk, a distance of 200 miles. This section of the border has never been defined at all. No one knows where or what it is. No two maps colour it alike; and the majority compound for ignorance by obvious conjecture, drawing a straight line in a south-easterly direction from the mountains named above to the neighbourhood of Jalk. Beluchistan is here the neighbour of Persia on the east; but the wandering Beluch tribes who camp upon the frontier own very little allegiance to the Khan of Kelat, and are practically independent.

4. Mekran boundary

Lastly comes the line from Jalk to the port of Gwetter, on the sea, 130 miles in length, which I call the Mekran boundary, because that part of Beluchistan which it divides between Persia and Kelat is known by that name. It was defined under conditions of peculiar difficulty by Sir F. Goldsmid in

1871, but is not uniformly observed. Both these last sections of frontier—viz. the upper and the lower Perso-Beluch borders—will come under notice in a later chapter dealing with the Eastern provinces. They are mentioned here only in order to place Seistan in its proper focus to surrounding conditions.

District of Seistan

I have already, in the preceding chapter, spoken of Seistan as a *beluk* or sub-division of the Persian province of Kain, ruled by Mir Alam Khan of Birjand, who deputes an official to represent him and to command the garrison at Nasr-atabad. Here let me describe the circumstances which have led to its being a Persian possession at all, and which necessitated the despatch of the Boundary Commission in 1872; whilst, in order to make this part of the narrative clear, some sketch will be required, both of the province itself and of its earlier history.

Derivation of the name

The derivation of the name Seistan or Sejestan from Sagastan, the country of the Sagan, or Sacæ, has, says Sir H. Rawlinson, never been doubted by any writer of credit, either Arab or Persian;[1] although it is curious that a band of roving nomads, as were these Scythians, who descended hither from the north in the third century A.D., should have bequeathed a permanent designation to a country which they only occupied for a hundred years. Expelled by the Sassanian monarch Varahran II. (A.D. 275–292) they have long vanished from history themselves; but in the name of the district they may claim a *monumentum ære perennius.*

Its application

At different epochs of history territories of very differing sizes have been called Seistan, according as the dominion of their rulers has been extended or curtailed. In its stricter application, however, the name has always been peculiar to the great lacustrine basin that receives the confluent waters of the Helmund and other rivers, whose channels converge at this point upon a depression in the land's surface, with very clearly defined borders, and a length from north to south of nearly 250 miles. It is certain that in olden days this depression was filled by the waters of a great lake; and, were all the artificial canals and irrigation channels, by which the river-contents are now reduced and exhausted, to be destroyed, I imagine that it would very soon relapse into its primæval condition.[2]

[1] Some English writers, however, have derived it from *saghes*, a wood that is grown locally and is used as fuel by the Persians.

[2] For further information on the Helmund River, *vide* a Paper by C. R. Mark-

The modern Seistan may be said to comprise three main depressions, which, according to the season of the year and the extent of the spring floods, are converted alternately into lakes, swamps, or dry land. The first of these depressions consists of the twofold lagoon formed by the Harut Rud and the Farrah Rud flowing from the north, and by the Helmund and the Khash or Khushk Rud flowing from the south and east respectively. These two lakes or pools are connected by a thick reed-bed called the Naizar, which, according to the amount of water that they contain, is either a marsh or a cane-brake. In flood time these two lakes, ordinarily distinct, unite their waters, and the conjoint inundation pours over the Naizar into the second great depression, known by the generic title of Hamun or Expanse, which stretches southwards like a vast shallow trough for many miles. When the British Commissioners were here in 1872, the Hamun was quite dry, and they marched to and fro across its bed. But in 1885–6, when some of the members of the later Russo-Afghan Boundary Commission were proceeding this way from Quetta to the confines of Herat, it was found to be an immense lake, extending for miles, with the Kuh-i-Khwajah, a well-known mountain and conspicuous landmark usually regarded as its western limit, standing up like an island in the middle.[1] In times of abnormal flood the Hamun will itself overflow; and on such occasions the water, draining southwards through the Sarshela ravine, inundates the third of the great depressions to which I alluded, and which is known as the Zirreh Marsh. This was said at the time of the Commission not to have occurred within living memory, it being a far more common experience to find all the river-beds exhausted than all the lake-beds full; and the Zirreh as a rule presents the familiar appearance of a salt desert.[2] In 1885,

Present condition

ham on 'The Basin of the Helmund,' in the *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (New Series), vol. i. p. 191.

[1] The Kuh-i-Khwajah, known also as Kuh-i-Rustam, is an isolated bluff composed of a crystalline black rock resembling basalt, and rising to a height of about 400 feet above the level of the Hamun, in which it constitutes a famous landmark for many miles. It was a stronghold of the old Kaianian dynasty who ruled Seistan, and is said to have been held for seven years by one of their number against the troops of Nadir Shah. It is also a place of popular resort among the Seistanis, for at No Ruz (March 21) a fair is held there, and the flattened summit is used as a race-course. For further information, *vide* 'Visit to the Kuh-i-Khwajah,' by Major B. Lovett, in the *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xliv. p. 145 (1874).

[2] When Sir C. MacGregor was exploring Beluchistan in 1877, he skirted the

however, a British officer exploring Western Beluchistan found water two feet deep flowing down the Sarshela or Shela, and forming an extensive Hamun in the northern part of the Zirreh, which was said to be over one hundred miles in circumference.

Protean transformations

It will readily be understood from the above description how variable is the face of Seistan, and what a puzzle to writers its comparative geography becomes. For not only do the lakes alternately swell, recede, and disappear—the area of displacement covering an extent, according to Rawlinson, of one hundred miles in length by fifty miles in width—but the rivers also are constantly shifting their beds, sometimes taking a sudden fancy for what has hitherto been an artificial canal, but which they soon succeed in converting into a very good imitation of a natural channel, in order to perplex some geographer of the future. It is not surprising, therefore, that while the country owes to the abundant alluvium thus promiscuously showered upon it its store of wealth and fertility, it also contains more ruined cities and habitations than are perhaps to be found within a similar space of ground anywhere in the world.

Legendary history

Such in brief outline is the physical conformation of Seistan. I will now proceed to its history. From the earliest times there has been something in Seistan that appealed vividly to the Persian imagination. The country was called Nimroz, from a supposed connection with Nimrod, 'the mighty hunter'; it was the residence of Jamshid, and the legendary birthplace of the great Rustam, son of Zal, and fifth in descent from Jamshid. King Arthur does not play as great a part in British legend as does the heroic Rustam in the myths of Iran. For, after all, Arthur was a mortal man (and, if we are to follow Tennyson, almost a nineteenth century gentleman), while Rustam fought

Zirreh Desert on the south for two days and a half without finding a solitary pool of brackish water. 'Nowhere was there the slightest sign of dampness. Everywhere it was the same—nothing but sand, and all the vegetation as dry as bones, crumbling into dust at the least touch.' At length, and with great difficulty, he did manage in one spot to extract a little fluid from the soil; and this was how, in his inimitable unvarnished way, he described it: 'If any should wish to save themselves the trouble of going to Zirreh to fetch Zirreh water, I think I could give a recipe, which would taste something like it. Take, then, the first nasty-looking water you can find, mix salt with it till you make it taste as nasty as it looks, then impregnate it with gas from a London street-lamp, and add a little bilge-water. Shake vigorously, and it is ready for use.'—*Wanderings in Baluchistan*, p. 183.

with demons and jins as well as against the pagan hordes of Turan and Afrasiab. Perhaps our Saint George of the Dragon would be a nearer parallel; and just as we stamp the record of his matchless daring upon our coinage, so do the Persians emblazon the great feats of Rustam upon gateway and door and pillar.

Early history

Seistan emerges into the clearer light of ascertained history in the time of Alexander the Great, when it was known as Drangiana (identical with the land of the Herodotean Sarangians). He probably passed this way on his march eastwards to India; whilst on his return therefrom, though he pursued a more southerly line himself, through Gedrosia (Mekran) to Carmania (Kerman), he despatched a light column under Craterus through Arachotia and Drangiana.[1] Under the Sassanian monarchs Seistan was a flourishing centre of the Zoroastrian worship, and hither came the last sovereign of that dynasty, Yezdijird, flying from the victorious Arabs on his way to his fate at Merv. It was under the succeeding *régime* that the province attained the climax of its material prosperity; and to this—the Arab—period are to be attributed the vast ruins of which I have previously spoken.[2] In the ninth century a native dynasty known as the Sufari or Coppersmiths,[3] was founded by one Yakub bin Leith, a potter and a robber, but a soldier and a statesman[4] who won by arms a short-lived empire that stretched from Shiraz to Kabul, but collapsed before the iron onset of Mahmud of Ghuzni in the succeeding century. El Istakhri, visiting Seistan at this epoch, described it

[1] The great authority on the early history and inhabitants of Seistan is Sir H. Rawlinson's essay, entitled 'Notes on Seistan,' published in the *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xliii. pp. 272–294 (1873). Compare also the excellent and accurate summary of Dr. Bellew, *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 248–262, and *Inquiry into the Ethnography of Afghanistan*, 1891. The chief modern inhabitants of Persian Seistan are the Seistanis, who occupy a servile position among other and dominant tribes; the Kaianis claiming descent from the Kai dynasty of Cyrus; the Kurd Galis, a branch of the Kurds of Kurdistan, who emigrated and established the Malik Kurd dynasty of Ghor, 1245–1383, A.D.; Iranian elements known as Tajik; and Beluchis, of whom the principal tribes in Seistan are the Sarbandi, who were transported by Timur to Hamadan, but brought back by Nadir Shah, and the Shahreki.

[2] For an account of them, and particularly of Peshawaran, *vide* Bellew, pp. 241, 246–247.

[3] *Vide* an article entitled 'The Kings of the Saffariun Dynasty of Nimroz, or Sijistan,' by Major H. G. Raverty, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. liv. (1885) p. 139.

[4] *Vide* Malcolm's *History*, vol. i. pp. 148–152.

as a country of populous cities, abundant canals, and great wealth;[1] among its natural resources being included a rich gold mine that subsequently disappeared in an earthquake. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Seistan, like most of its neighbours, experienced the two successive visitations of those scourges of mankind, Jenghiz Khan and Timur Beg, being turned from a smiling oasis into a ruinous waste, and suffering a murderous blow from which it has never recovered. The Sefavi dynasty repeopled it under the local rule of the ancient reigning family of Kaiani, who claimed descent from Kai Kobad, the first Achæmenian king. But the march of time brought round the fated cycle of injury and desolation; and at the hands both of the Afghan invaders of 1722, and of Nadir Shah who expelled them, it completed its chronic tale of suffering. Remaining a portion of the mighty empire of the Afshar usurper till his death in 1747, it then passed to the sceptre of Ahmed Shah Abdali, the adventurous captain who, imitating his master's exploits, rode off and founded the Durani empire in Afghanistan. From this epoch dates its appearance on the stage of modern politics, and during the last thirty years upon the chess-board of Anglo-Indian diplomacy.[2]

After the death of Ahmed Shah, Seistan continued to pay tribute to his successor, Timur Shah, till his death in 1793. In the break-up of the Durani dominion that followed, it became alternately attached to the fortunes of Herat and Kandahar, the Persian Government having its hands too full elsewhere to be able to attempt its recovery. From about the year 1851, however, after the death of Yar Mohammed of Herat, Persia, taking advantage of the disorder and disunion that prevailed in Afghanistan, began to revive and to press her claims. She now remembered that Nadir Shah, though a Turkoman usurper, had been king of Persia, and that Seistan had paid to him the tribute which it paid to Persian kings before him. Ali Khan, the local ruler, was persuaded to hoist the Persian flag, and received in return a Persian princess in marriage. This was at about the time of the Persian expedition against Herat in 1857

Later history

[1] *Oriental Geography*, pp. 203–209.

[2] An anonymous *History of Seistan* has been written in the course of the last half century in Persian by Reza Kuli Rhan, the most accomplished and voluminous of recent Persian authors.

that brought about war with Great Britain, and resulted in the Treaty of Paris, by which Persia relinquished all claims to the sovereignty of Herat, and all right of interference in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, amid constant protests from the British Government, Ali Khan returned with a Persian military escort to Seistan; and both he and his successor, Taj Mohammed, who applied to Persia for protection when Dost Mohammed appeared in the field against Herat, acknowledged the sovereignty of the Shah. Throughout this period the British Minister was continually protesting against the violation of one clause of the Treaty of Paris, while the Persian Government as continually kept inviting him to take advantage of another, that promised the friendly offices of the British Government in the event of any disagreement with Afghanistan.[1] Shir Ali, too, who had succeeded his father Dost Mohammed as Amir in 1863, was equally anxious that something should be settled. But at that time the ignoble policy of 'masterly inactivity,' of which Lord Lawrence was the recognised champion, was in possession of the field; and the Indian Government was unwilling to recognise the ruler whom it was subsequently obliged to pay. Accordingly, protests and appeals and excuses went on, until at length, in November 1863, Lord Russell, sick to death of the squabble, penned a despatch in which he said that 'Her Majesty's Government decline to interfere in the matter, and must leave it to both parties to make good their pretensions by force of arms;' a frank if not a very courageous subscription to the doctrine that might is right. Taking advantage of this permission, Persia, in 1865–66, marched a force into the country, occupied it, and gradually brought all the Persian inhabitants of the province under her sway, besides tampering with the Afghan allegiance of the Beluchis. The Afghans behaved very quietly for a time; but Shir Ali, who had now established himself firmly upon the throne, and required to be treated with some respect, began

[1] Both clauses occur in Article VI. of the Treaty. The first was as follows:—'His Majesty the Shah of Persia engages to abstain hereafter from all interference with the internal affairs of Afghanistan. His Majesty promises to recognise the independence of Herat and of the whole of Afghanistan, and never to attempt to interfere with the independence of those States.' The second clause ran thus: 'In case of differences arising between the Government of Persia and the countries of Herat and Afghanistan, the Persian Government engages to refer them for adjustment to the friendly offices of the British Government, and not to take up arms unless those friendly offices fail of effect.'

seriously to push his claims. It was at this juncture that, fearing the war to which Lord Russell had lent the *imprimatur* of his suggestion, Lord Clarendon proposed arbitration. The offer was accepted without much enthusiasm on either side, and in 1870 Sir F. Goldsmid, having received the appointment of Chief British Commissioner, left England to carry out the undertaking. Difficulties and delays having supervened, the next year was occupied in surveying and fixing a boundary between Persia and Beluchistan from the sea to Jalk; and it was not till 1872 that the Commission preceeded to Seistan to examine the rival claims upon the spot.

Sir F. Goldsmid's Commission in 1872

The story of the Commission and its labours has been told, partly by General Goldsmid himself and his personal assistant, Major (now Colonel) Euan Smith,[1] partly by Dr. Bellew, the well-known Oriental scholar and authority,[2] who accompanied General (afterwards Sir R.) Pollock, the latter being sent from India, for no very well ascertained reason, as representative of the Viceroy (Lord Mayo). The case was a difficult one by reason of its extraordinary simplicity. The Afghan claim to Seistan was very clear and intelligible; it was based upon ancient dominion, dating from the time of Ahmed Shah, the founder of the Afghan empire. The Persian claim was equally clear and intelligible; it was based upon more ancient dominion still, reinforced by the very cogent argument of recent reconquest and actual occupation. Here were all the materials both for hard reasoning and fine casuistry. The difficulty was enhanced by the behaviour of the two Oriental Commissioners. The Persian, Mirza Maasum Khan, was undisguisedly hostile from the start, and threw every possible obstacle in the way. The Afghan was not much more practicable. Finally, having conducted such local surveys and inquiries as were possible, Sir F. Goldsmid, finding it hopeless to do any business on the spot, was obliged to retire to Teheran, where his arbitral decision, after a good deal of hesitation and cavilling, was ratified by the Shah.

Broadly speaking, General Goldsmid found it advisable to distinguish between two Seistans, which he called respectively Seistan Proper and Outer Seistan.[3] The former he defined as

[1] *Eastern Persia*, Introduction and pp. 225–295.

[2] *Record of the Seistan Mission*, 1872 (Official Publication), and *From the Indus to the Tigris*.

[3] *Vide* his own account in a paper, entitled 'Journey from Bunder-Abbas to

the region between the Naizar on the north and the main lateral canal taken from the Helmund, in order to irrigate Sekuha and the neighbouring villages on the south, and extending from the old and true bed of the Helmund on the east, to the fringe of the Hamun and the Kuh-i-Khwajah on the west. This area he estimated at 950 square miles, and its population at 45,000, 20,000 of whom were Seistanis,[1] 15,000 Persian-speaking settlers, and 10,000 Beluchi nomads. Outer Seistan was the country on the right bank of the Helmund from its lake-mouth on the north to Rudbar on its upper waters on the south. His decision may be summarised thus. He gave Seistan Proper to Persia, and Outer Seistan to Afghanistan. The boundary between the two was drawn as follows: From the Siah Kuh (Black Mountain), which is the eastern boundary of the Persian district of Nehbandan, along the southern fringe of the Naizar to the left bank of the Helmund; thence up the river to a point about a mile above the great *bund* or dam at Kohak;[2] after which it consists of a line drawn from this point in a south-westerly direction to the range Kuh-Malek-i-Siah, which is the northerly continuation of a line of mountains that bound the Zirreh desert upon the west. Here the district of Seistan terminated, and the award was concluded. South of this point is the indeterminate and unobserved line to Jalk which I have previously mentioned.

Partition of Seistan

Hampered as he was by instructions almost incapable of execution, impeded by systematic obstruction, and owing a definite issue only to the foresight which induced him to complete his local surveys before the Indian members of the mission appeared upon the scene, General Goldsmid may be congratulated upon having been able to formulate a decision at all. To the independent observer it undoubtedly appears that the Persians were the gainers by his award; for they

Independent opinion

Meshed by Seistan,' published in the *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xliii. pp. 65–83 (1873).

[1] Sir H. Rawlinson says: 'The true Seistanis are Persians of the purest Arian type. In fact, the only true representatives of the old Arian race to be found in Persia are the Seistanis and the Jamshidis of Herat; the language, physical appearance, and general characteristics of the Persians of the Achæmenian period being better preserved in this outlying corner of the Empire than in any other locality.'

[2] This dam, known indifferently as the Amir's, the Seistan, and the Kohak Bund, is a great dyke built across the river with tamarisk branches, stakes, and rammed clay, in order to divert its principal volume into the Sekuha Canal.

retained the only really valuable and lucrative portion of the country—a portion to which they could establish the double claim of ancient possession and actual occupation. Had the demarkation taken place ten years earlier, when first they pressed for it, there can be no doubt that in the absence of the second of these claims the award would not have been so favourable to them as it ultimately proved to be. Notwithstanding which facts, they professed themselves extremely dissatisfied with the result, and looked upon the partition as an attempt to enrich an English vassal state, Afghanistan, at their expense. The Afghans, on their side, were annoyed at losing the revenue-paying part of the province, and Shir Ali is said never to have forgiven the British Government in consequence. The award has not been adhered to with absolute precision on the spot; but, even if we concede to it a fair amount of success, it still remains somewhat doubtful whether it is wise policy for the Indian Government to undertake these chivalrous but thankless Commissions, which are apt to be misinterpreted by both parties, and usually leave a legacy of odium behind them.

Present administration

The chief town of Persian Seistan is Sekuha (the Three Hills), so called from three clay hills around and in part upon which the town is built. At the time of the Commission in 1872, it consisted of about 1,200 mud huts, not more than half of which were then or are now inhabited. The population is entirely engaged in agricultural pursuits, the town being situated in the most productive part of the province. As I have before said, however, the administrative and military head-quarters are at Nasratabad (called Nasirabad by Goldsmid), where lives the Deputy Governor of the Amir of Kain, and where is stationed one of the two infantry regiments, nominally 1,000, but actually less than 800 strong, which are raised in the entire province; as well as a small force of cavalry and a few guns. Service is for life, and is hereditary in the families supplying the soldiers. They are armed with muzzle-loading rifles of Persian manufacture, and are supposed to get a new uniform every second year. Their pay is reported to be 20 *krans* (12*s.*) and 7½ *mans* of wheat yearly, and when on service in Seistan rations also.[1] The capital of Afghan Seistan is Chakhansur or

[1] These figures, which date from 1886, do not correspond with the general pay of the Persian infantry. *Vide* a later chapter on the Persian Army. But payment is no doubt as haphazard as the system.

Chaghansur (called by Conolly Chuknasoor, and by Ferrier Sheikh Nasoor), situated on the Khash or Khushk Rud, the eastern confluent of the Helmund lagoon.

European travellers

Before the despatch of the English Commission, the number of European travellers who had penetrated to Seistan and had left any record of their explorations was exceedingly small. In 1809 Captains Grant (who was afterwards murdered by robbers on the road between Baghdad and Kermanshah) and Christie (who was killed while gallantly fighting with the Persian army against the Russians at Aslanduz in 1812) and Lieutenant (afterwards Sir Henry) Pottinger were deputed by Sir J. Malcolm, then contemplating his third mission to the Persian Court, to explore Mekran, Beluchistan, and Seistan. The journal of Captain Grant was published twenty years later. Christie's and Pottinger's travels into Beluchistan left the reading public the richer by the admirable book of the elder writer.[1] Leaving Pottinger at Nushki, Christie marched northwards through Seistan to Herat; and an abstract of his journal (which was never separately published) is incorporated as an appendix in Pottinger's work.[2] In 1839 a young English officer, Captain Edward Conolly, accompanied for surveying purposes by Sergeant Cameron, made a tour through the country, and added immensely to the existing store of knowledge.[3] He was followed a few years later by Lieutenant R. Leech, whose less exhaustive but complementary information was published in the same journal.[4] In 1841 Seistan claimed its first European martyr. Dr. F. Forbes, already well known for successful explorations on the north-western frontier of Persia, marched to Meshed, and from there by Turbat-i-Haideri, Birjand, and Tabbas to Seistan, where he was murdered by one Ibrahim Khan, chief of Lash Juwain. A somewhat incoherent account of the incident was given by his personal attendant, and appeared in the 'Journal of the R.G.S.' for 1844.[5] Thirty years later the members of the Boundary Commission, when travelling in Seistan, came across the very murderer, who was then chief of

[1] *Travels in Baloochistan and Sinde.* By (Sir) H. Pottinger. 1816.

[2] Appendix, pp. 406–411.

[3] He published two papers in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*—the first entitled 'Sketch of the Physical Geography of Seistan,' with a map, in vol. ix. (1840), pp. 710–726; the second, entitled 'Journal kept while Travelling in Seistan,' in vol. x. (1841), pp. 319–340.

[4] *A Description of the Country of Seisthan*, vol. xiii. (1844), pp. 115–121.

[5] Vol. xiv.

Chakhansur, and heard a true account of the tragedy. Ibrahim Khan was, it appeared, a savage, semi-lunatic kind of barbarian, much given to *charras* and *bhang* (intoxicating drinks), and he had shot Dr. Forbes while hunting wild fowl on the lake, in a freak of sportive inebriation.[1] About the same time another young officer, Lieutenant Pattinson, approaching the Helmund from the Afghan side, explored its course from Zamindawer to the Seistan Lake. He too was killed a year or two later in an outbreak at Kandahar, following upon the Kabul tragedy. A few years later—viz. in 1845—the French officer Ferrier was in Seistan, of which he has left a description in his interesting book.[2] Khanikoff, the Russian, whose services to science are not enhanced by his jealous depreciation of the labours of any English predecessor in the same field, was here in 1859,[3] and crossed the Desert of Lut to Kerman. This was the sum total of European travellers who had left any record of Seistan prior to the despatch of General Goldsmid and his colleagues.[4]

Political value of Seistan

I now approach the subject to which I have hitherto been leading up, and whose existence I have indicated by the title which I have given to this chapter. The Seistan Question, however, is not the old question of the boundary, or of the rival claims of Persia and Afghanistan. It is the future question of the part, if any, that Seistan is likely to play or is capable of playing in the politics of Central Asia, and in the diplomatic or military strategy of Russia and Great Britain.[5] Inspection of the map with the aid of a pair of compasses will show that the province of Seistan lies about midway between Meshed and the sea. Its situation, therefore, constitutes it a sort of advanced outpost of Khorasan, as well as a *terra media* through which any power desirous of moving southwards from Meshed, particularly any power that is covetous of an outlet upon the Indian Ocean, must pass; and through which must equally pass any power desirous of reaching Khorasan and Meshed from a south-

[1] *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 217–219. Compare *Eastern Persia*, p. 317.

[2] *Caravan Journeys*, caps. xxvii., xxviii.

[3] *Mémoire de la Partie méridionale de l'Asie Centrale*, pp. 153–164.

[4] For a modern account of Seistan, other than that contained in the Reports of the Goldsmid Commission, *vide Globus*, vol. xxxii. pp. 170, 186, 200 (1877); and *Petermann's Mittheilungen* (1873), pp. 149–150; (1874), pp. 59–63; (1877), pp. 66–72; (1878), pp. 25–29.

[5] I have already published a brief but very condensed statement of the case in *Russia in Central Asia*, pp. 379–381.

easterly direction. The former aspect of the case indicates its value to Russia; the latter to Great Britain.

Value to Russia

Seistan presents to Russia a positive and a negative value, of which it is difficult to say which is the more important. Should she at any time find it politic or necessary to absorb Khorasan, the possession of Seistan would give her the whole and not the northern portion only of that province. It would further establish her in a position of close and almost immediate proximity to the advanced Indian frontier in Beluchistan. At present there intervene between her own and the Indian border 500 miles of Afghan territory, which, though presenting not the slightest physical obstacle to advance, are tenanted by wild tribes much attached to their own independence, even if uninspired by any loyalty to their sovereign. In other words, advance through Afghanistan means hard fighting with Afghans by whomever it is undertaken. Solemn engagements would have to be broken, great forces collected, and daily risk incurred, while such an adventure was in course of execution. On the other hand, should a Russian force, desirous—I will not say of invading Hindustan, because we are not at present called upon to discuss any such remote possibility, but of acquiring a position menacing and contiguous to Hindustan, take up its quarters in Seistan, the above-mentioned perils are thereby one and all avoided, no Anglo-Russian compact is violated, no savage Afghans require to be fought. The forward frontier of Russia would be brought over 300 miles nearer to the advanced frontier of India; and the change in position would involve a proportionately greater anxiety, outlay, and peril to the latter. Russia would be unlikely to march even from Seistan against Quetta; but she would have unlimited opportunities from this base of intriguing with trans-frontier tribes, and of nibbling at Beluchistan. How far her position against Afghanistan would be strengthened is also self-evident. Russia in Khorasan means Russia at Herat; and Russia in Seistan would mean Russia at Sebzewar and Farrah as well, the two most important strategical points on the march from Herat to Kandahar.

I do not for the moment lay stress upon the other aspect of the positive value to Russia of Seistan—viz. as facilitating her approach to the southern seas—because I assume that a Russian port upon the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean would no more be tolerated by any English minister or government than would an

English port on the Caspian by any Czar. It is true that Russia turns longing eyes towards a maritime outlet on the south, and that of the two methods by which she can possibly attain thereto, encroachment in a southerly direction from Meshed *viâ* Seistan is one. This fact is of course an addition to the prospective value of Seistan in Russian eyes, but it postulates a condition of affairs so remote, and I would fain hope so inconceivable, that I will not expend words upon its further examination.

Value to Great Britain

The negative value of Seistan to Russia is the inverse aspect of its positive value to Great Britain. In other words, Russia would like to get hold of Seistan herself, in order to prevent Seistan from being got hold of by Great Britain; and because, in the latter event, not only would the ambitious and far-reaching schemes that I have sketched be frustrated, but England would be in a position very seriously to menace the Asiatic status of her rival. Let me explain. I have already in the previous chapter indicated the acute commercial warfare that is now being waged between Russian and Anglo-Indian merchandise in Khorasan. I have shown that the advantage which she derives, and will continue to derive in increasing degree, from the Transcaspian Railway enables Russia to flood the markets of North-eastern Persia with her manufactures, and to undersell her sole competitor, viz. British India, in the bazaars of Meshed. I have shown that a critical epoch has been reached, and that without some help, in the shape of increased facilities of transport or shorter and cheaper trade routes, Anglo-Indian commerce must in the long run be vanquished. The one means by which the latter could compete on nearly even terms with her rival would be by adopting her rival's tactics—by pushing forward a railway on the south to match the Transcaspian Railway on the north, by conveying the manufactures of Bombay as are conveyed the manufactures of Moscow, not solely on mule-back and camel-back over vast distances at crushing expense, but by the potent auxiliary agency of steam. Such a railway starting from India must point, as its first objective, to Seistan.

Strategical importance

The commercial importance of such a line will not, I think, be denied, as bringing India into closer connection with the bazaars of Khorasan. Not less obvious, however, would be the strategical advantage, as enabling England to occupy a flanking position in defence of that Afghan territory which she has undertaken to safeguard, and as preventing those

developments of the Muscovite earth-hunger which I have sketched, and which might be fraught with peril to the harmonious relations between the two empires. Here I will pause; and will not go on to suggest that, if a commanding necessity ever arose, such a position might very effectively be utilised by an Indian army for offence, because I am loth to imagine a situation in which British or Indian soldiers will ever again be required to march in fighting order through Persia, or be forced into a policy of aggressive retaliation. The map, however, will assist the reader to form his own judgment.

Engineering facilities

There remain, however, two questions of practical importance—viz. the engineering possibility of constructing such a line, and the probable returns that might be expected from the country opened up. If the map be inspected, the physical contour of the region will suggest that the most natural, though by no means the shortest, method of reaching Seistan is by the valley of the Helmund from Girishk or Kandahar. The greater part of this distance—namely, that from Hazarjuft below the confluence of the Argandab to Rudbar, a distance of 160 miles—is locally known as the Garmsel, or Hot Region, identical with the Garmsir of Southern Persia. No part of this unhappy neighbourhood has suffered more from the passions of man than the Garmsel. In olden times it was the scene of active cultivation, and the site of busy and populous cities. Brigands, outlaws, and the stormy trail of armies have converted it into a sandy and untenanted desert. But the testimony of those who have explored it, notably of Dr. Bellew, who marched this way from India with General Pollock, is enthusiastic as to the possibilities of recuperation. This is what he says:—

The valley everywhere bears the marks of former prosperity and population. Its soil is extremely fertile, and the command of water is unlimited. It only requires a strong and just Government to quickly recover its lost prosperity, and to render it a fruitful garden, crowded with towns and villages in unbroken succession all the way from Sistan to Kandahar. Under a civilised Government there is not a doubt that Garmsel would soon recover its pristine prosperity, and then this part of the Helmund valley would rival in the salubrity of its climate that of the Tigris at Baghdad. When the curse of anarchy and lawlessness is replaced in this region by the blessings of peace and order, then Garmsel will once more become the seat of plenty. The advancing civilisation of the West must some day penetrate to this neglected corner,

and the children's children of its present inhabitants may live to hear the railway whistle echoing over their now desert wastes.[1]

On the other hand, the children's children, who are probably by now beginning to be born, may live and die too without hearing it at all; and for this reason. A railway down the Helmund means a railway in Afghanistan; and as the Amir of that country has not yet been persuaded to allow a yard of rails to be laid in his dominions, and as, were such permission forthcoming, other and more important schemes would probably be first undertaken, the grandchildren in the Garmsel may perhaps after all not hear the whistle in their time.

Nushki-Seistan line

But there remains another line of advance, shorter because more direct, and free from the above impediment, because it need not run through Afghanistan at all. It must be remembered that the Pishin Railway system of Great Britain has now been pushed forward to a point on the northern face of the Khwajah Amran range, that that range has been pierced by a tunnel, and that the present terminus, Chaman, is on the open plain, less than seventy miles distant from Kandahar. Now a line drawn from this frontier railway, whether at its termination or at some point short of Chaman, to Seistan, will be found to pass through Beluchi—i.e. allied territory solely, and according to the spot at which it strikes the Helmund valley, so would its transit of the desert be extended or abridged. The point of deviation usually suggested is that of Nushki, from which to the Sind-Pishin Railway at Chaman is less than one hundred miles, at Quetta less than ninety, and at Darwaza less than eighty. Across the desert from Nushki to the Helmund no physical obstacles are encountered. From the engineer's point of view the difficulties to be confronted would not be comparable with those so easily overcome by General Annenkoff.

Future of Afghanistan

We can conceive, without anticipating, a condition of affairs under which there need be no rivalry between the Afghan and the Beluchi routes, but which would admit of the best line being followed, through whichever territory it ran; and that would be the free acceptance by Afghanistan of a British protectorate. By some this step has been recommended as the only logical corollary, as assuredly it would be the most

[1] *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 205–206.

practical conclusion, of the previous phases of Anglo-Afghan relationship. Given such a protectorate, and England would not only before long be free to run her iron rails where and whither she pleased in Afghanistan—a line to the Persian frontier being obviously one of the first that in such a case would demand consideration—but, with the Afghans acting in concert with the British, and with Russia and Great Britain (as *ex hypothesi* they would be) coterminous powers, the objections which I have elsewhere so strenuously urged against a junction of the Indian and Russian railway systems in Afghanistan, and which I continue to hold, would be minimised, if they did not disappear. For in such a case, the buffer having vanished, the two empires would stand cheek by jowl in Asia, as do Russia and Germany in Europe; England would be as much committed to defend Balkh or Herat as she is now compelled to defend Portsmouth or Bombay; and the respective railways of the two powers would have a tendency sooner or later to be united. Such a consummation, however, even if realisable, is as yet far distant. It can only arise in the event of an independent Afghanistan—which is the justification and outcome of our present policy—proving to be impossible; and in our inability to venture any prophecy upon data so precarious, our plans must be constructed so as to harmonise with a more immediate future.

Military criticism

When we approach the question of the quality of the country opened up by a Beluchi-Persian railway, presuming it to be constructed under existing political conditions, we advance into a region in which the most conflicting evidence is forthcoming from our authorities. From the strategical point of view there are some who say that such a line would be vulnerable both from the north and west. There are others who find in the deserts on either side of the Helmund, and in the Helmund itself, an ample protection. I am not here concerned to engage in the strategical controversy, because there has probably never been a strategical railway since locomotion by steam was discovered about which the professors have not held diametrically opposite and contradictory opinions. It was so with the Transcaspian Railway, and it would be so with a Nushki-Seistan railway. Nor am I even concerned to discuss the strategical aspect of such a railway at all, because I am not a soldier, and shall probably be told that I am talking of what I know nothing about; although I may, in passing,

confess that to my uninstructed vision the military advantages of such a line would appear to be considerable. I prefer, however, to treat it as a commercial scheme, and to assume that a subscribing public, as well as generals and colonels, wish to be able to form an opinion.

We will suppose, therefore, that our railway has reached Seistan. What will it find, and what will it do when it gets there?

Hostile opinion

There are some who protest that the features of the country are hopelessly unfavourable to commerce or colonisation. They paint lamentable pictures of the physical amenities of Seistan. There is a famous wind called the *Bad-i-sad-o-bist-ruz* (or wind of 120 days), which blows steadily there from a north-westerly direction in the months between March and August, beginning soon after sunrise, abating at midday, and attaining its maximum strength after sunset. There is also a particularly horrible kind of fly that bites and even kills horses by its bite. At times of the year the climate, owing to the extent of marsh water stagnating under the sun, breeds fevers and ague. The face of the country is apt to be flooded; and communication is only kept up by the precarious method of *tutins*, a kind of raft made of reeds lashed together and strengthened by tamarisk stakes.[1] These critics even go so far as to include the whole country in the scope of their truculent denunciation, and to ask wherein lies the beauty or the money value of reed-beds, and sand-hills, and swamps.

Less sweeping, because better informed, and worthy of careful examination (by reason of the unequalled position of its author),

Sir H. Rawlinson

although unfavourable in character, is the opinion that has been expressed by Sir H. Rawlinson. He has written as follows:—

Though possessing great natural advantages, the province of Seistan is, in its present aspect, a wretchedly unhealthy country, only habitable for a few months in the year, and hardly worth the expense of government; while in regard to its strategical value, which is the point of view that has been chiefly regarded in India, great misapprehension prevails. So far from Seistan being, as has been so often stated, a convenient base for aggression upon India from the westward, it is in every respect inferior to Herat for that purpose.[2] To the south and

[1] For a description and illustration, *vide* Bellew's *From the Indus to the Tigris*, p. 227.

[2] This is true; but supposing it is thought desirable by an invader for political

south-east it is bounded by an impassable desert; while to the east it possesses one single line of communication along the Helmund, contracted and ill-supplied, and exposed to a flank attack from the northward throughout its whole extent from Seistan to Kandahar. Supposing, indeed, the Afghans to be in strength at Herat, Farrah, or Zamin Dawer, it would be quite impossible for a Persian army to march along the Helmund from Seistan to Girishk. The only military value of Seistan consists in its abundant supply of camels for carriage; and these animals are for the most part in the hands of the Beluchis, who are Afghan, and not Persian dependents, and who might thus be available for our own purposes, though hardly for those of our enemies.[1]

It is permissible to point out that, although the author of the above paragraph is fortunately still living, it was written at a time (1875) long anterior to more recent developments, and with a view to conditions which no longer exist. The question discussed by Rawlinson in dealing with the strategical controversy is the chance afforded to Persia of invading Afghanistan from the base of Seistan; and this has no relation whatever to the new problem created by the appearance of Russia within striking distance of Herat. A Persian army is now about as likely to invade Afghanistan as it is to march against St. Petersburg. But what Persians or Afghans would not, or could not do, European armies operating from railway bases may, and since 1885 alone it may be said that any previous military criticism upon Seistan has already become obsolete.

Favourable opinions of natural fertility

To the jeremiads of those critics who represent Seistan (parodying the phrase in which Persia as a whole was once described[2]) as consisting of two parts, a desert under water and a desert above water, must be opposed the evidence both of history and of existing facts. If their verdict be true, how comes it that this province was once so famous or its magnificent fertility, its dense population, and its splendid cities? What must be said of the square miles of ruins still encumbering the ground? Fertility in Persia is almost solely dependent upon water supply; and here, alone among Persian provinces, is enough water not merely to fill great canals

reasons to leave Herat alone, or supposing Seistan be added as a base to the already acquired base of Herat, what then?

[1] *England and Russia in the East*, p. 116.

[2] 'Persia consists of two parts: a desert with salt, and a desert without salt.'

as large as rivers, and a network of smaller ditches and dykes, but also very frequently to run to waste in superfluous swamps and lagoons. Let us, however, quote the opinion of eye-witnesses upon the actual capacities of the soil. This is what Ferrier said in 1845:—

Seistan is a flat country, with here and there some low hills. One-third of the surface of the soil is composed of moving sands, and the other two-thirds of a compact sand mixed with a little clay, but very rich in vegetable matter, and covered with woods of the tamarisk, *saghes*, and *tag*, and reeds, in the midst of which there is abundant pasture. The detritus and slimy soil which is deposited on the land after the annual inundation of the Helmund fertilises it in a remarkable manner, and this has probably been the case from time immemorial; at any rate, the number of ruins on the banks would lead one to suppose so.[1]

To this let me add the opinion of Sir F. Goldsmid:—

The soil is of proved fertility. Wheat or barley is, perhaps, the staple cultivation; but peas, beans, oil-seeds, and cotton are also grown. Melons and water melons, especially the latter, are abundant; grazing and fodder are not wanting. By means of the canals in their ordinary course, and by occasional inundations, a system of profuse irrigation is put in force, which, with an industrious and a contented population, should be productive of most extensive grain cultivation.[2]

Finally, to both may be added the testimony of those who have visited Seistan since the Boundary Commission, and who report that its resources have already been wonderfully augmented, and that its capacities of production under a more scientific system of irrigation are enormous. The future of Seistan depends indeed upon the application of hydraulical skill to the course and overflow of the Helmund. The river now runs northward, and spends itself in superfluous swamps. There is nothing in the lie or in the levels of the land to prevent it from being turned southward, and entirely devoted to cultivation.

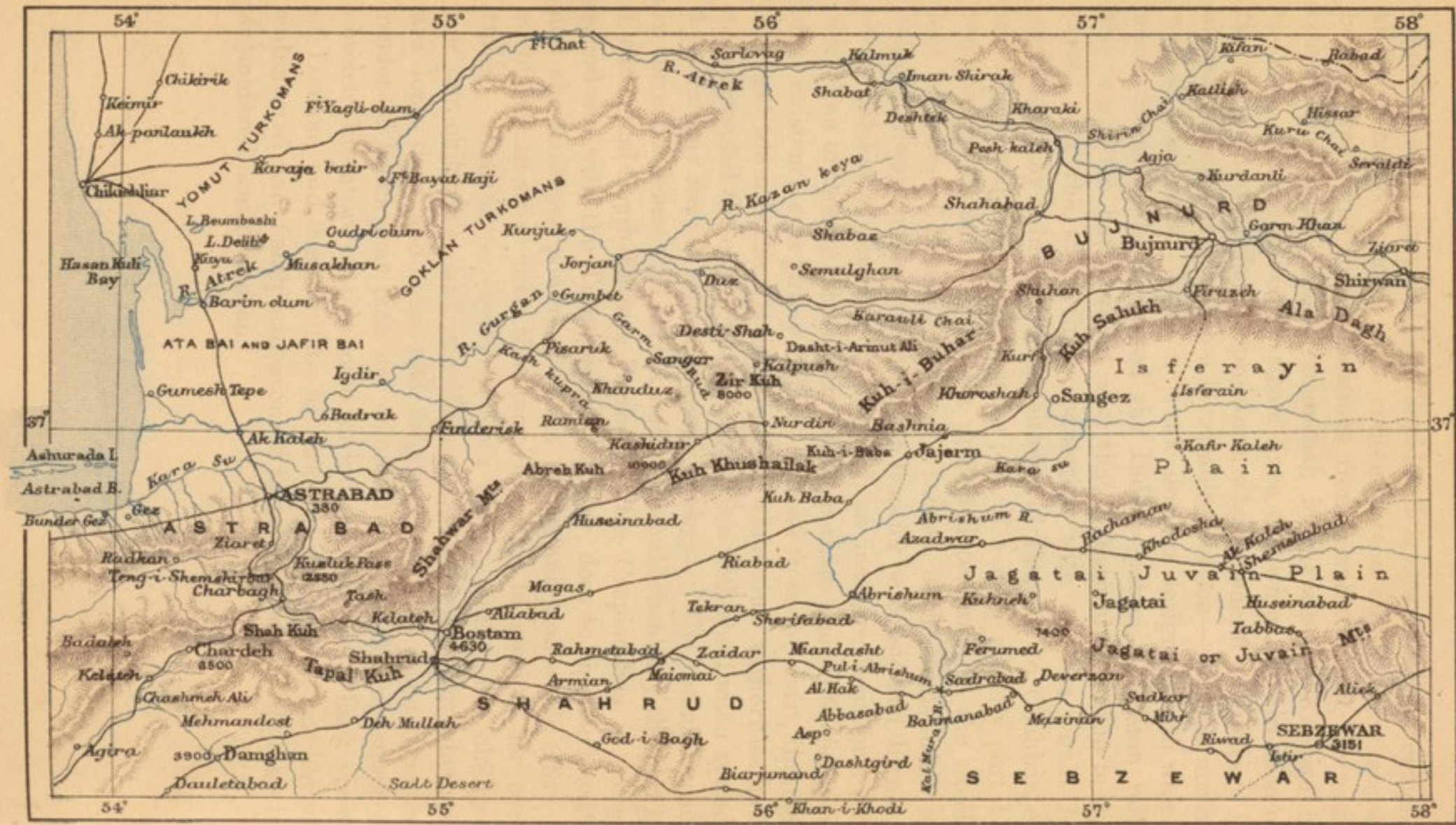
Nor should a concluding but most important consideration be forgotten. Though railways will not come in Persia with the headlong rapidity that some imagine, and though it is not desirable in many parts that they should, yet most of us look forward to a time when there will be some more rapid means of communication between the great cities and trade

A link in a larger chain

[1] *Caravan Journeys*, p. 426. [2] *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xliii. pp. 71, 73.

centres than is provided by dilapidated horses, laborious camels, and sore-backed mules. We contemplate a day when, whatever be the transverse communications from north to south, the main cities in the centre, from Kermanshah in the west to Kerman in the east, shall be united by steam lines, following the direction of the valleys and surface depressions, whose general inclination is almost without exception in a favourable direction—viz. from north-west to south-east. From a trunk line so designed, with which must ultimately be connected the Indian system, a Seistan railway would be but a slight and that a natural diversion to the north. At the same time connection with the sea would be established by a line running either *viâ* Bampur to Chahbar, or *viâ* Regan and Minab to Gwadur; or, if a more easterly port be required in Beluch, i.e. British protected territory, to the excellent harbours of Pusni or Kalmat. Indeed, if the Sind-Pishin or Bolan Railway to the present Indian frontier be considered, because of its liability to destruction by flood, an insecure basis for a forward line to Seistan, the latter might perhaps start into independent existence as a purely Beluch railroad from the coast, through Panjgur towards the Persian frontier, while some authorities have recommended the connection of such a line with the Indian system by a railway from Kurrachi through Mekran. The Indian Ocean, in correspondence with such a railroad, would then play the part to Eastern and South-Eastern Persia that the Caspian Sea, in correspondence with the Transcaspian Railway, does to the north-east; and the combined powers of steam by sea and land would effect a revolution in a few years that may otherwise be awaited for centuries. Perhaps, to employ Bellew's phrase, neither our children nor our children's children will hear the whistle. But when we are long dead and gone and forgotten, may be some itinerant reader of books may pick our volume from the shilling stand of obsolete literature outside some antiquated shop in a back street of London, and congratulate us, even in our graves, on having anticipated and fondly endeavoured to promote what will then be an achieved consummation.

WEST KHORASAN.



Scale of Miles.

0 50 100

F. S. Weller.

Longmans, Green & Co, London & New York

CHAPTER X

FROM MESHED TO TEHERAN

There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn.—DR. JOHNSON, *Boswell's Life.*

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus.
HORACE, *Carm.*, Lib. I. xxxviii.

Postal route between Meshed and Teheran

AFTER the serious political discussions contained in the last two chapters, it will be a relief to such of my readers as have passed through, if they have not altogether evaded, that ordeal, to turn to a chapter with more digestible contents. Having spent eight days at Meshed, I started upon the long *chapar* ride to Teheran. The distance is given by the Persians, and is therefore paid for by the traveller, as 154 *farsakhs.* At the full complement of four miles to a *farsakh*, this would amount to 616 miles; but, though the Khorasan *farsakh* is famed beyond all others for its odious and seemingly inexhaustible length,[1] a compliment in reality to the funereal monotony of the road—the distance (comparing my own estimate with that of previous voyagers) is under rather than over 560 English miles. It is surprising how soon, if a man be riding alone and have nought to distract him but the paces of his steed and the thought of his destination, he can arrive at an approximately correct calculation of the distance he is covering from stage to stage. The route between Meshed and Teheran is divided into twenty-four stages, the post-houses being established at distances varying from fifteen to thirty miles, but averaging twenty-three miles apart. This

[1] 'What a long *farsakh* is that of Khorasan!' says a traveller who has toiled from sunrise nearly to sunset, and who can no longer cling to his jaded horse but by the prong in front of his saddle. 'By the beard of the Prophet,' said one of the party as we neared our halting-ground, 'the road is longer than the entrails of Omar, for my back and my knees have lost their feeling.' There is also a local proverb, worthy of being quoted (Burnes' *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. p. 89), which says that the Khorasani *farsakh* is as endless as the chatter of women, and that he who measured them must have done so with a broken chain.

distance I accomplished in the comfortable time of nine days, doing an average of sixty miles a day, but in reality combining days of seventy miles with shorter spans. This is slow rather than speedy travelling for Persia;[1] and I afterwards became easily habituated to journeys of seventy-five to eighty miles in the day. Telegraph officials and residents in the country seldom do less, and frequently more. The post which goes through from Meshed to Teheran without stopping, but with first claim upon the horses at each station, covers the distance in from five to six days. Dr. Wills reports having ridden from Isfahan to Teheran, about 280 miles, in thirty-nine and a half hours;[2] whilst officers travelling by day alone and resting at night have accomplished 120 miles between dawn and leaving the saddle.

Speed of locomotion

Quick riding is indeed an accomplishment for which the Persians have always been famous, and notable records in which have been achieved even by their kings. Abbas the Great, 300 years ago, rode from Shiraz to Yezd in twenty-eight and a half hours, the Astronomer Royal being commanded to take the time. Malcolm gives the distance as eighty-nine *farsakhs*, or 303 miles;[3] but, though modern measurements have reduced it to 220 miles, it was still no mean performance. Agha Mohammed Khan, the founder of the reigning dynasty, fleeing to Mazanderan on the death of Kerim Khan Zend, rode from Shiraz to Isfahan—a distance, by whatever route, of not much under 300 miles—in less than three days. Fath Ali Shah, his nephew, upon succeeding to the throne, rode from Shiraz to Teheran, a distance of at least 550 miles, in six days. Fraser mentions the case of a Persian, Agha Bahram, who kept the best horses in the country, and who once on the same Arab horse rode from Shiraz to Teheran in six days, rested three days, rode back in five days, rested nine days, and performed the journey a third time in seven days.[4] But the most remarkable, because the most sustained performance of which I have ever read was that of the dragoman who, in 1804, rode from Constantinople

[1] And yet I find a French officer (*Notes de Voyage d'un Hussard*, par le Comte de Sabran, p. 225) who, having accomplished the journey in the same leisurely time in 1888, writes a book to say that General Maclean expressed himself as stupefied with his astonishing performance, and told him that an English officer, who had done the journey in ten days, had fallen seriously ill in consequence! Sir H. Rawlinson once rode it in six.

[2] *Persia as It Is*, p. 296.

[3] *History of Persia*, vol. i. p. 345.

[4] *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 319.

to Demavend (near Teheran), a total distance of 1,700 miles, in seventeen days, with the news of Napoleon's escape from Elba. On the other hand, when there is no purpose in haste, no rider can be so slow as a Persian. If he is not proceeding at a headlong gallop, he affects a dignified crawl; and in the whole of my *chapar* rides I never once met a native who was moving at more than a foot-pace on horseback.

Cost of journey

As this is the first occasion upon which I have required to describe *chapar* riding from personal experience, and as I subsequently rode considerably over a thousand miles by the same means, I may as well here condense whatever of observation or suggestion I have to make upon the subject. I have already in Chapter II. (upon Ways and Means) supplied all necessary information as to cost and procedure. The basis of calculation there laid down will show that for four horses—self, *gholam*, postboy, and baggage (for I duly purchased my own experience by taking on this occasion, but on this only, an extra baggage animal, which cost me many a hard gallop in pursuit as well as a proportionate loss of time)—my journey from Meshed to Teheran cost 600 *krans* or, at the then rate of exchange, about 17*l.*, exclusive of tips to the postboys and payment for the use of quarters at night, amounting to about 2*l.* more, and the cost of food *en route*, which will depend in each case upon the amount of tinned meat carried by the traveller. The journey will not in any case cost over 20*l.* My sole companion and attendant upon this journey was a Perso-Afghan *gholam* (mounted courier or *kavass*) of the British Legation at Teheran, who bore the imposing name of Nadir Ali Khan, and who was well posted in all the tricks of the road.

Minister of Posts

The postal system in Persia, about the inauguration of which I shall have something to say later on, is under the superintendence of a Minister of Posts; but as the present tenant of that office holds two other portfolios in addition, besides being President of the Council, it may be inferred that it is not regarded as one of commanding importance. The Government allows him a certain annual sum for the repair and equipment of every post-house upon the Government roads, as well as an annual allowance of barley and straw as fodder for the horses.[1] The Minister does

[1] Quite recently there were 172 Government *chapar-khanehs*, and the Treasury allowance was 20 *tomans* (5*l.* 14*s.*) a year for each, as well as 10 *kharvars* (nearly 3 tons) of barley, and the same amount of straw, for the horses.

not, however, work the system himself. That would be a shocking violation of all Persian usage. Each road is farmed to a publican, probably some merchant or wealthy person, who pays a certain sum per annum to the Minister for the privilege. He then provides the servants and animals at each station, and makes as much money out of the business as he can; the only check upon his parsimony being the fear of losing his contract in favour of a higher bidder at the end of the year. It is not surprising, therefore, that the post-houses are mostly in a state of extreme and disgraceful dilapidation, or that the horses are among the sorriest specimens of the equine race that were ever foaled. The system is a vicious one, and it is hard to say whether the traveller or the poor brutes whom he is compelled to flog along are the more to be pitied.

Pros and cons of the *chapar*

Let me, however, endeavour to balance the pains and the pleasures, if any there be, of *chapar* riding, so as to arrive at a fair verdict. The system has been variously described by travellers according to their tastes, endurance, and fortune, as an exhilaration, a tedium, or a torture; and there is perhaps something to be said for each opinion. Much depends upon the extent to which the road adopted is travelled upon, and, in consequence, supplied; something upon the season of the year or the weather encountered; a good deal upon the luck of the voyager. The route between Meshed and Teheran is but little traversed (except by pilgrims, who move in *kafilahs*, or caravans), and there are accordingly not above five or six horses, sometimes less, at each station. These I found to be for the most part under-fed, broken-down, and emaciated brutes, with ill-regulated paces, and open sores on their backs that sometimes made it almost unbearable to bestride them. The best that were supplied to me would anywhere else be classified at a low level of equine mediocrity. To ride the worst was a penalty to which any future Dante might appropriately condemn his most inveterate foe in the lower circles of hell. Subsequently, however, upon the Teheran-Shiraz line, which is more travelled upon and better provided, I found a larger number and a superior quality of animals. They were generally tolerable and sometimes positively good; and when I succeeded in covering by their means an average of between eight and nine miles in the hour throughout the day, when they invariably cantered and sometimes galloped, it can be imagined that a day's ride of from seventy to eighty miles may become quite endurable,

and, under favourable conditions of climate, at times almost pleasant. In the last resort, however, more depends upon the fortune of the traveller than upon any other consideration. If he can avoid clashing or competing with the Government post, which has universal priority of claim; if he is lightly equipped himself and does not require many animals; above all, if he can get ahead and keep ahead of any other party of travellers on the same road, he will fare passably well. If he is unlucky in any or all of these respects, he will leave Persia muttering deep and unrepeatable curses against a land of rascals and jades. That this is the more common experience may perhaps be inferred from the fact that the main solace of a European's life in Persia appears to be the desire to cover a specified distance in quicker time than it has ever been done before. A furious competition prevails. Where there is a telegraphic line along the route the wire conveys to anxious ears the news of the rider's progress; and a man is seldom so happy, or leaves so enduring a reputation, as when he succeeds in cutting the record.

The *chapar-khaneh*

At this stage let me describe the *chapar-khaneh*, and its meagre, but peculiar properties. Sometimes in the heart, sometimes on the outskirts of a town or village, sometimes planted in absolute solitude upon the staring waste, but usually in the neighbourhood of water, is to be seen a small rectangular structure, consisting of four blank mud walls surrounding an interior enclosure, with a stunted square tower rising above the gateway, and a projecting semicircular tower or bartizan at each corner. The whole presents the appearance of a miniature mud fort. And such indeed it is intended to be; for in a land till lately desolated by Turkoman forays, and where promiscuous thieving is indubitably popular, every possession, from a palace down to an orchard, has to be safeguarded from attack, as though the country were in a state of open war. Entrance to the *chapar-khaneh* is gained by a big wooden door in the gateway; and when this is closed it is unassailable except by ladders. Riding into the gateway, one observes a low seat or platform against the wall on either side, and two doorways leading into dark and dirty rooms on the ground floor. The gateway conducts into the interior court, which is an open space about twenty to twenty-five yards in length and twelve to fifteen yards in width. In the middle is a *chabutra*, or mud platform, usually occupied by fowls and filth, but

designed for *al fresco* slumbers of the traveller in the summer season. The walls of the court, on two and sometimes on three sides, are pierced with holes or mangers, into which the chopped barley, or *kah*, is placed for the horses, and to which they are tethered in the warm weather. In the interior of the two side walls, however, are long dark stables for winter use, unlighted save by the low door, unventilated, and reeking with accumulated refuse. In one of these, along with the horses, the postboys and attendants

A PERSIAN POST-HOUSE

usually sleep, stretched around a low fire. The interior walls of the court have at one time or another been faced with plaster; but this has uniformly peeled off, and the entire fabric looks what it is—mud. As the weary traveller rides in, the *chaparchi*, or post-house keeper, who sometimes wears the semblance of an official dress, comes out to meet him. Eager inquiries are exchanged as to the supply of fresh horses in the stables; and while these are being gratified or disappointed, the baggage is pulled off the exhausted beasts and piled upon the *chabutra*, and the English rider stretches

himself at full length or boils a cup of broth or tea. His Persian attendant takes a pull at the *kalian*, which is always ready, and the wearied animals, stripped except for their tattered horsecloths, are slowly walked up and down for ten minutes by the postboy, and finally marched off to water. In a quarter of an hour, if lucky, sometimes not for one hour or even two, a fresh batch of horses having been brought out, and the traveller having selected the best for himself, he will remount, and will once again pursue the

A PERSIAN POST-MASTER

uneven tenour of his way. If, however, no fresh animals are forthcoming, or if he has been anticipated by some other voyager, then ensues the most heartrending experience of all. For, after a tedious wait of perhaps two hours, the same miserable brutes that have borne the burden of his last twenty-five miles' stage are brought out again to be urged and flagellated through twenty-five more. I confess that my sympathies were always with the beast rather than with his rider; and considering the pitiless daily, nay, almost hourly, task that is imposed upon these wretched crocks, it was

sometimes a surprise to me that persuasion, however extreme, could extract from them anything more than a hobble.

The *bala-khaneh*

But supposing the traveller to have reached the end of his day's journey and to have arrived at the post-house where he proposes to pass the night, what then? The answer to the question is contained in the projecting square tower above the entrance gateway. Access thereto is gained by stairways of almost Alpine steepness, fashioned in the mud at the angles of the court inside. Clambering up these with difficulty, we reach the flat roof that runs right round the building, and find that the tower consists of a single chamber, which invariably has two, sometimes three, doors (that are never known to shut), and usually a couple of open window spaces in the walls, so that it may literally be said to stand

Four-square to all the winds that blow.

This is the *bala-khaneh*, or upper chamber, specially reserved for the comfort of foreign guests, and within this forlorn and wintry abode, which is not much less draughty than the rigging of a ship, the wayfarer must spend the night. The interior has at one time been plastered and whitewashed. Its only decorative features are a number of shallow niches in the walls, in which Persian visitors have sometimes scrawled the most fearful illustrations, and occasionally, but not always, a fireplace. Of furniture it is absolutely destitute. To have the floor swept clean of vermin, to spread a felt or carpet in the corner and one's sack of straw upon it, to buy firewood and light a fire, to stuff up the open windows and nail curtains over the ramshackle doors—all these are necessary and preliminary operations, without which the dingy tenement would be simply uninhabitable, but which it is sometimes hard work to undertake in a state of extreme stiffness and exhaustion after a long day's ride upon a freezing winter's night. Even so, this aërial roost is sometimes too chill for endurance, and one is compelled to descend and seek refuge in the dank and cellar-like apartments below. In half an hour's time, however, when the work has been done, as the genial warmth begins to relax stiff joints and weary limbs, and as the *samovar* puffs out its cheery steam, a feeling of wonderful contentment ensues, and the outstretched traveller would probably not exchange his quarters for a sheeted bed in Windsor Castle. But it is upon the following morning,

when, aroused at four or five A.M. in the pitchy darkness and amid biting cold, he must get up to the light of a flickering candle, dress and pack up all his effects, cook his breakfast, and finally see the whole of his baggage safely mounted in the dark upon the steeds in the yard below, that he is sometimes tempted to think momentarily of proverbs about game and candles, and to reflect that there are consolations in life at home.

The Persian post-horse

A word more about the Persian post-horse, for a man does not ride from sixty to seventy of these beasts in the space of a few weeks without being driven to generalise somewhat upon the species. The traveller of course selects the best out of a bad lot for himself, but an eye must be kept on the *chapar-shagird*, or post-boy, who knows the 'form' of each animal to a nicety, and who, if left alone, is apt to consult his own rather than his employer's comfort. As you emerge from the post-house, and, after a short walk, try the paces of your new mount, there is a moment of acute suspense. Within 300 yards you know whether your next three or four hours are to be a toleration or an anguish. The pace which, after a little experience, a European usually adopts is a sharp canter alternating with a walk. The Persians, when not cantering or galloping, seem to prefer a rough jog-trot shamble, which on an English saddle is excruciating. In the whole of my *chapar* rides I only twice encountered a horse that could trot in English fashion. The post-boy carries, and each rider must carry, a long whip made of twisted leather with a leathern thong, and appalling are the whacks that are administered by the former, often without exciting the faintest response from his habituated steed. In this place it may be well to remark that, though called a boy, the *shagird* is much more commonly a man. He does not ride upon a saddle, but usually sits perched upon the top of a vast pile of baggage with his legs sticking out on either side; nor does he use reins, but only a single rope or halter attached to one side of the bit. He is supposed to lead the way and to set the pace, but I soon found that seventy miles in the day could never be accomplished in that fashion, and that it was better even in a strange country to lead the cavalcade oneself. As a rule it is difficult, if there is light, to mistake the track; for though there is no road and the route is simply a mule track which crosses plains, climbs mountains, and descends gorges, sometimes, so to speak, a single rut, and sometimes a wide belt of parallel paths,

yet the passage of countless animals has left such impressions upon the soil that the direction to be followed can often be traced in advance for miles. At night a stranger would be lost at once but for the guidance of the post-boy, whose sight and memory are unerring.

Its humours

The best known characteristic of the Persian post-horse is his incurable predisposition to tumble. Most of them have bare knees in consequence, and the first law in mounting is to select an animal with some hair still adorning that portion. I could not make out that either a tight rein or a slack rein had very much to do with the occurrence of this phenomenon, and I ended by concluding that the Persian post-horse has a certain regulation number of falls in the year, which may be distributed either by accident or as he pleases, but the full tale of which some hidden law of necessity compels him to complete. The fact that I rode through the country from the east to the centre and from the centre to the south without a single fall, tended to confirm rather than to invalidate my theory, for there was no conceivable reason why I should be so favoured, except that others would have or had had to pay the price. It became quite a trite occurrence to hear the groan with which my Persian servant riding behind me sank or was hurled on to mother earth; while the *chapar-shagird* would be seriously disappointed at an entire day without a fall. There is this to be said for the instability of the Persian post-horse, that it appears very seldom to be vindicated at the lasting expense of his rider. The number of accidents or injuries that take place in proportion to the number of falls is ludicrously small. Two other tricks I noticed which were widespread and popular. Some of the meanest of the animals would very much resent being mounted, a curious proof that their memories had profited by experience; and the only approach to an accident that I had was when a horse from which I had dismounted ran away as I was putting my foot into the stirrup, and as nearly as possible pitched both himself and me down the shaft of an open *kanat*. The lifting of the right arm, whether with or without a whip, had, further, such a provocative effect upon the memory of these beasts that they would frequently swerve and spin right round to the left. The Persians, if peculiarly disgusted with a post-horse, sometimes revenge themselves by docking his tail, which incapacitates him from further use in a country where a tail is considered *de rigueur*; but this is a spiteful, if not a cruel act,

from which strangers can afford to abstain. Perhaps I shall not inaptly conclude this digression upon the Persian post-horse and postal system if I quote the sententious observation with which Tavernier prefaced his Persian travels more than three centuries ago: 'A man cannot travel in Asia as they do in Europe; nor at the same hours, nor with the same ease.'

General character of road

The road from Meshed to Teheran is one whose intrinsic attraction is so small that no one would ever be found to traverse it but for the necessity of getting from one place to the other. For the entire distance of 560 miles there is scarcely a single object of beauty, and but few of interest. The scenery, at any rate in the late autumn, is colourless and desolate. The road, or rather track, winds over long, stony plains, across unlovely mountains, and through deserted villages and towns. There is frequent and abundant evidence that the country traversed was once far more densely or less sparsely populated, and for that reason more carefully tended, than it is at present. The traveller passes towns which have been entirely abandoned, and display only a melancholy confusion of tottering walls and fallen towers. He observes citadels and fortified posts which have crumbled into irretrievable decay, and are now little more than shapeless heaps of mud. He sees long lines of choked and disused *kanats*, the shafts of the underground wells by which water was once brought to the lands from the mountains. The walls of the cities are in ruins and exhibit yawning gaps; the few public buildings of any note are falling to pieces; rows of former dwellings have been abandoned to dust-heaps and dogs. The dirty, desecrated cemeteries that stretch for hundreds of yards outside every town of any size, in which the tombstones are defaced and the graves falling in, are not more lugubrious in appearance than is the interior, where the living seem to be in almost as forlorn a plight as the dead. The utmost that the traveller can expect in the way of incident—an expectation in which I have already said that I was disappointed—is that his *chapar* horse should tumble down, to break, if not its own knees, at any rate the paralysing monotony of the journey.

Its lessons

But though the route be thus devoid of external attraction, it has a twofold interest, historical and practical. The traveller is not merely pursuing the track that has been worn by countless thousands of pilgrims for at least 500 years, but he is following the stormy wake of armies, and treading in the foot-

steps of great conquerors and kings. And if, in the desolation that gapes around him, he sees no hint or reminder of what these countries once were, at least he is able to form some judgment of what the combined horrors of war, pestilence, and chronic misgovernment —which is worse than either—have done for them, and in this blighted zone of crumbling cities and forsaken homes to read the tale of Persia's long decline.

Table of stations and distances

The following is a table of the stations and distances between Meshed and Teheran: [1]

Name of station	Distance in *farsakhs*	Approximate distance in miles	Name of station	Distance in *farsakhs*	Approximate distance in miles
Meshed . . .	—	—	Deh Mullah . .	4	16
Sherifabad . .	6	22	Damghan . .	6	26
Kadamgah . .	7	29	Ghushah . .	7	23
Nishapur . .	6	17	Ahuan . . .	7	24
Shurab . . .	7	25	Semnan . .	7	24
Zafarani . .	5	18	Lasgird . .	6	22
Sebzewar . .	7	24	Deh Nemek . .	8	25
Mihr . . .	7	32	Kishlak . .	7	26
Mazinan . .	6	20	Aiwan-i-Kaif .	6	21
Abbasabad . .	7	23	Kabud Gumbaz .	7	26
Miandasht . .	6	23	Teheran . .	7	25
Maiomai . .	7	24			
Armian . . .	4	17			
Shahrud . .	7	27			
			Total .	154	559

Before proceeding further it may be well to state that there is an alternative route for the first three stages between Meshed and Nishapur. The postal service and stations being upon the other

[1] This road has been followed and, in part or wholly, described by a long series of travellers, of whom I select only the most eminent or learned:—El Istakhri (900–1000 A.D.), *Oriental Geography*, p. 181; Ruy di Clavijo (1404), *Narrative of Embassy*; Von Mierop (1744), J. Hanway's *Historical Account of British Trade*, vol. i. pp. 357–359; Captain Truilhier (1807), Daussy's *Mémoire Descriptif*; J. B. Fraser (1821–1822), *Journey into Khorasan*, cap. xiii.–xvii.; Captain A. Conolly (1830), *Overland Journey*, vol. i. pp. 194–220; E. L. Mitford (1840), *Land March*, vol. ii. pp. 13–34; Dr. J. Wolff (1831, 1844), *Travels*, and *Narrative of Mission*; J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Caravan Journeys*, pp. 54–115; Captain C. Clerk (1857), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xxxi. pp. 37–45; N. de Khanikoff (1858), *Mémoire, &c.*, pp. 72–97; E. B. Eastwick (1862), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 134–191, 271–295; A. Vambéry (1863), *Life and Adventures*, cap. xxviii.; H.M. the Shah of Persia (1867 and 1883), *Diaries* (in Persian); H. W. Bellew (1872), *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 368–411; Colonel Euan Smith (1872), *Eastern Persia*, vol. i. pp. 366–388; Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East* pp. 142–176; E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. cap. xxii.–xxviii.

or southern route, this, which is a more northerly line, cannot be taken by *chapar* riders. It is, however, frequently adopted by caravans (other than camels), particularly in the summer; as though the road is much worse, and in parts excessively steep, it runs over higher ground (10,720 feet), and through scenery of quite exceptional verdure and beauty. It is a positive surprise to the traveller, within a few miles of the naked rocks and dusty plains of Meshed, to alight upon running water and a wealth of trees. The stages are as follows:—[1]

Alternative line

Name of station	Distance in *farsakhs*	Approximate distance in miles
Meshed	—	—
Jagherk	5	20
Dehrud	6	22
Nishapur	6	18
Total . .	17	60

Colonel Stewart and other friends accompanied me on horseback—after the prevailing Persian fashion, which for polite good-fellowship might be commended elsewhere—for some distance outside the city gate. In deference to another excellent Persian habit, he lent me a horse from his own stables for the first stage; while, in obedience to a third, I proposed only to do one stage on the first afternoon, so as to allow servants and baggage to 'shake down,' and to inure myself for harder work on the morrow. After I had been riding across the level plain for an hour, one of those violent winds arose, which the traveller in the East knows by sad experience, and drove like a hurricane across the land, whirling heaven and earth into one savage thundercloud of dust. Eyes, mouth, and ears were filled and choked with the gritty storm, which was blowing straight in my teeth, and yet was perfectly warm. About seven miles after leaving Meshed we arrived at the base of the mountains, in reality the south-east extremity of the Binalud Kuh, which separates the plain of Meshed from that of Nishapur. The Jagherk-Dehrud road boldly crosses this range; but the postal route avoids so steep a climb by a divergence in a south-easterly direction, and mounts only the lower spurs and slopes.

Departure from Meshed

[1] It was followed and described by J. B. Fraser (1821), E. B. Eastwick (1862), H. W. Bellew and Colonel Euan Smith (1872), and Colonel Val. Baker (1873).

At the crest of each ridge, where the road, now rapidly ascending, topped the rise, grateful pilgrims wending to the holy city had, as they caught sight of the gilded cupola of the Prophet, piled little heaps of stone in pious thanksgiving. The symbolism of these erections is said to be that the pilgrim is building in anticipation a home for the next world, either for the dear departed, or for those who may survive him, or for himself. Every knoll was thickly covered with these emblems of devotion. The topmost of all, where the new-comer first discerns the sacred pile, is known as Salaam Tepe, or Kuh-i-Salaam (the Hill of Salutation); and there is an analogous site upon the Dehrud road.

The piety of pilgrims

Here, as he first comes in sight of his destination, the excited Shiah Mussulman kneels, and strikes his forehead upon the ground, and sobs aloud at the recollection of the indignities that were heaped upon the martyrs of his faith; here he tears off little fragments of his dress, and ties them to a bramble or a bush, in order that the holy Imam may recognise them and plead for him in Paradise; here he unfurls his coloured banner; and here with loud cries of 'Ya Ali,' 'Ya Husein,' and 'Ya Imam Reza,' he presses forward to the long-sought goal. Many times I turned back myself to look, but the entire valley was wrapped in a tornado of dust, the white clouds of which rolled upwards like the smoke of a prairie fire.

At the top of one of these hills is an upright slab of stone, which has been erected to commemorate the piety of a former Governor-General of Khorasan, who was exiled to this post after being both Sadr Azem, or Grand Vizier, and Sipah Salar, or Commander-in-Chief, at Teheran, and who earned a great reputation, particularly with pilgrims, for improving the Meshed road and adorning it with substantial caravanserais. His name still lives, both on the slab of slate and on the lips of many a grateful Meshedi.

Following the telegraph poles, and winding over a succession of bleak but undulating ridges, we passed the caravanserai of Turukh, situated by a stream. The road was thronged with pedestrians, with camels, and donkeys; and I even saw a wheeled vehicle which had stuck fast on one of the hills. At length in a hollow we came upon the domed caravanserai of Sherifabad, erected by the famous Ishak Khan of Turbat-i-Haideri, of whom I have spoken in the chapter on Khorasan, at the beginning of this century. Here it was that in 1831 the eccentric Dr.

Sherifabad

Wolff, travelling for the first time to Meshed, so narrowly escaped being taken a prisoner by a band of wild Hazaras. There is a small village round the caravanserai, and the *chapar-khaneh* stands hard by.

Corpse-caravans

There was no sun in the early morning, and a cold white mist ran shivering along the mountains. Two hours after starting we passed the village and caravanserai of Sultanabad, where my baggage horse, seeing his opportunity, bolted down the intricate alleys of the village, and we had quite a game of hide and seek before we could drive him out again. There were many hundreds of travellers upon the road, chiefly going Meshed-way, and all or nearly all on horseback, a sign of greater affluence than the employment of a donkey. I was on the look-out for coffins of defunct Shiahs on their way to the great necropolis of Meshed; and from the descriptions of previous travellers recognised the ghastly burden as soon as I saw it. Some that I passed were wrapped in black felt, and slung on either side of donkeys. One man, however, was carrying a very long coffin in front of him on his saddle-bow, and must have had moments of strange emotion. Sometimes a regular corpse-caravan is met, which has been chartered to convey so many score of departed Shiahs to their final resting-place. But as frequently an amateur carrier is encountered, who, to pay the expenses of his own journey and leave a little for amusement at the end, contracts to carry the corpse of some wealthier fellow-citizen or friend. It was a long and stony and fatiguing ride to the next post-house at Kadamgah.

Kadamgah

At Kadamgah the Dehrud route from Meshed descends from the mountains on to the plain and joins that upon which I travelled. The name means 'the place of the step,' the tradition being that the Imam Reza halted here on his way to Tus, and, in order to convince the local fire-worshippers of his superiority, left the imprint of his foot upon a black stone, which became a *ziarat gah*, or place of pilgrimage, ever afterwards.[1] Over the sacred spot a mosque was raised, not, as Eastwick says, by Shah Abbas, but by Shah Suleiman, and the sanctity of the site has led to its being peopled by a colony of *seyids*, who are as

[1] There is another Kadamgah near Persepolis, in the province of Fars, so called from the alleged footprint of Ali's horse on a slab of rock. Captain Wells, *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (New Series), vol. v. (1883). Some Sassanian sculptures near Shiraz were also called Kadamgah by the seventeenth century writers.

eminent rascals as are most of their brethren. The mosque stands on a raised platform at the upper end of a large garden, which has once been beautifully laid out in terraces, with flower beds, and tanks, and channels of running water, and which, though in a state of hopeless decay, is still overshadowed by considerable trees. Inside the mosque is a single chamber, entered by a coffered archway, and covered by a large dome. The sacred stone is inside; nor is it surprising to find that the Prophet's footmarks are of more than ordinary size. All these great men had huge feet. I have seen Mohammed's footprint in the Mosque of Omar at Jerusalem, and Buddha's footprint on the summit of Adam's Peak in Ceylon; and in view of their prodigious magnitude I was surprised at the modesty of the Imam Reza in having been content with, comparatively speaking, so temperate a measurement. The exterior of the dome has once been covered with tiles; but all these have been stripped or have fallen off, though bands of a still perfect inscription encircle the drum and adorn the façade. From the garden of the mosque the stream flows down the middle of the roadway past a remarkably stately row of pines,[1] between the *chapar-khaneh* and a large caravanserai. Above the shrine, on a hill some 500 feet above the plain, stand the village and fort of Kadamgah, whilst upon a corresponding hill on the opposite side of the valley which here opens into the mountains, is perched an old fortress.

Plain of Nishapur

An hour after leaving Kadamgah we entered upon the famous plain of Nishapur, whose praises have been sung by so many chroniclers of the past. Its wonders were expressed in multiples of the number twelve. It was said to have twelve mines of turquoise, copper, lead, antimony, iron, salt, marble, and soapstone; twelve ever-running streams from the hills; 1,200 villages, and 12,000 *kanats* flowing from 12,000 springs. Gone, irretrievably gone, is all this figurative wealth; but fertile, though far less fertile than legend has depicted, is still the plain of Nishapur. Not that fertility in these parts, at any rate in the late autumn, bears the smallest resemblance to its English counterpart. There is no visible green except in the square patches, topped with trees, that mark the villages. But these occur at intervals of almost every quarter of a mile, and the

[1] The seeds or cones from which these pines sprang are said to have been brought by a pilgrim from the Himalayas nearly four hundred years ago.

numerous ditches and banks show that the whole country is under irrigation. Its return of the grain sown is said to be tenfold; but the chief local products are now rice, opium, and tobacco. Ferrier, who passed this way forty-five years ago at a more favourable season of the year, spoke quite enthusiastically of its charms. 'Never had I before seen in Persia such rich and luxuriant vegetation; and, as the eye revelled in contemplating it, I could understand without any difficulty the predilection which ancient sovereigns had for Nishapur.'

City of Nishapur

The shattered walls and towers of Nishapur—'the Nisaya or Nisoa blessed by Ormuzd, the birthplace of the Dionysus of Greek legend, and one of the "paradises" of Iran'—with the roof and minar of a lofty mosque looming above them, were visible long before we reached the city. Passing through an extensive cemetery, whose untidy graves were typical of the squalor that environs death as well as life in Persia, and skirting the town wall on the southern side, we came to the *chapar-khaneh*, immediately outside the western gate. The walls of the city, which had at one time been lofty, were in a more tumbledown condition even than those of Kuchan. Great gaps occurred every fifty yards, and whole sections had entirely disappeared. In one place, however, men were at work rebuilding a bastion, lumps of clay being dug out of a trench at the bottom and tossed from hand to hand until they reached the top, where they were loosely piled one upon the other; though what purpose this belated renovation can have been intended to serve, I am utterly at a loss to imagine. An enemy could march into Nishapur as easily as he could march down Brompton Road, and would find about as much to reward him as if he occupied in force Brompton Cemetery.

Its history and fame

The name Nishapur is popularly derived from *nei* (reed) or *ni*=*no* (new) and Shapur, the tradition being that Shapur built the town anew, or built it in what had been a reed-bed. The city was older, however, than Shapur, its legendary foundation being attributed to Tahmuras, one of the Pishdadian kings, fourth in descent from Noah; and its true derivation is from *niw* (the modern Persian *nik*) = good, and Shapur. This town is said to have been destroyed by Alexander the Great, and subsequently rebuilt either by Shapur I. or by Shapur Zulaktaf (the two are constantly confused in Persian tradition), who is further said to have erected here a huge statue of himself, which remained standing till

the Mussulman invasion. Shapur's city, however, was not upon the site of the modern Nishapur, but considerably more to the south-east, where its ruins are still traceable round a blue-domed tomb to the left of the road. Nishapur, which has certainly been destroyed and rebuilt more than any city in the world, rose again under the Arabs, and became successively the capital of the Taheride dynasty, of Mahmud of Ghuzni, when Governor of Khorasan, and of the powerful Seljuk family, whose first Sultan, Togrul Beg, resided here, and brought it to the zenith of its splendour. A long line of eminent travellers testified to its magnificence and renown. In the tenth century, the Arab pilgrim El Istakhri found the city a square, stretching one *farsakh* in every direction, with four gates and two extensive suburbs. In the eleventh century, Nasiri Khosru declared that it was the sole rival to Cairo. An Arab wit said of its *kanats* and its people, 'What a fine city it would be if only its watercourses were above ground and its population underground!' Another writer, Abu Ali el Alewi, recorded that it was larger than Fostat (old Cairo), more populous than Baghdad, more perfect than Busrah, and more magnificent than Kairwhan. It had forty-four quarters, fifty main streets, a splendid mosque, and a world-famed library. It was one of the four Royal cities of the Empire of Khorasan.[1]

Its destructions

But now the cycle of misfortune had come round; and from the twelfth century downwards it may be said that if Nishapur was only destroyed in order that it might be rebuilt, it was no sooner rebuilt than it was again destroyed. No city ever showed such unconquerable vitality. No city was ever the sport of such remorseless ruin. Nature herself assisted man in the savage tenacity of his vengeance, for what a conqueror had spared an earthquake laid low. Three great earthquakes are recorded in the twelfth, the thirteenth, and the fifteenth centuries. The long career of human devastation was inaugurated by the Turkomans, who in 1153 A.D., in the reign of the great Sultan Sanjar, ravaged it so completely that the inhabitants on returning could not discover the sites of their homes. But if the Turkomans had chastised with whips, the Mongol hordes of Jenghiz Khan might be trusted to chastise with scorpions. They fell upon the city with flame and sword in 1220 A.D., under the command of Tului Khan, son of the conqueror; and the appalling measure of

[1] The others were Merv, Balkh, and Herat.

their cruelty is said by a credible historian not to have been filled until they had slain 1,740,000 persons, and razed the city so completely to the ground that a horse could ride over the site without stumbling. Fifty years later, Nishapur was rebuilt, but it would be tedious to relate the vicissitudes of misery through which it has since passed. Mongols, Tartars, Turkomans, and Afghans in turn made it their prey, and gradually reduced it to what in the eighteenth century was reported to be one vast ruin. Upon the death of Nadir Shah in 1747 it held out against Ahmed Abdali the Afghan; but after a six months' siege was taken by him under circumstances which recalled, if they did not equal, the atrocities of Jenghiz Khan. The conqueror, however, was as prudent as he was successful. He restored as ruler to the city the Turkish chieftain, Abbas Kuli Khan, who had resisted him, but whom he learnt to respect, and whose sister he married. The vassal repaid the compliment by life-long loyalty, and by an energetic restoration and adornment of the town. In the time of his successor, in 1796, Nishapur passed tranquilly into the hands of the Kajar usurper, Agha Mohammed Khan, and has ever since remained an appanage of the Persian crown. Fraser in 1821 computed its population as under 5,000, Conolly in 1830 said 8,000, Sir F. Goldsmid in 1872 gave the same figure; the latest estimate is 10,000, which, with the growth that might be expected in a long period of peace, ought not to be excessive.

Tomb of Omar el Khayam

To a great many English readers Nishapur will perhaps be known only as the last resting-place of the Persian astronomer-poet Omar el Khayam (i.e. the tent-maker), whose name and works have been rendered familiar to the present generation by the masterly paraphrase of Fitzgerald, and by the translations or adaptations of many inferior bards. I remember reading in the preface of one of these latter the plaintive request that someone would take the volume and cast it as an offering at Nishapur before the poet's tomb. Had I possessed it, I should certainly have gratified the writer's petition, at the same time that I disencumbered myself of useless baggage by making the offering, although I fear that the condition of Omar's grave would have greatly shocked his English admirers. It stands in a neglected garden, which once contained flower-beds and rivulets of water, but is now a waste of weeds. There is no inscription to mark the poet's name or fame; and it is to be feared that the modern Persians are

as little solicitous of the dust of Omar el Khayam as a nineteenth-century citizen of London might be of that of Matthew Paris or William of Malmesbury.

Nishapur possesses a Telegraph station of the Meshed-Teheran line worked by a Persian staff. It is also the meeting-point of several important roads in addition to the two from Meshed. On the south a road comes in from Turshiz, and on the north a track runs *viâ* Madan[1] (where are the turquoise mines) to Kuchan; while in a more westerly direction stretches the old long-forgotten trade route to the Caspian, which is believed to have been a link in the great chain of overland connection in the middle ages between China and India and the European continent. It ran from Nishapur to the Arab city of Isferayin in the plain of the same name, then struck westwards, and passing through the mountains by the defile known as the Dahaneh-i-Gurgan, through which the river Gurgan forces its way, descended the slope to the Caspian. The stages on this route are recorded in the itineraries of Isidore of Charax, and of El Istakhri, and the caravanserais built by Shah Abbas the Great are still standing, though in ruins.

Roads

About thirty-six miles in a north-westerly direction from Nishapur, on the first of the roads above mentioned, are situated the famous turquoise mines of Madan (i.e. mines), which from their proximity to the better known city have always been called the mines of Nishapur. Though turquoises are or have been found elsewhere in Persia,[2] and, it is sometimes said, in other countries, these may for all practical purposes be regarded as the only mines in the world that are worked or that repay working on a large scale, and as the source of 999 out of every 1,000 turquoises that come into the market. The mines, of which there are an immense number, actually worked, fallen in, or disused, are situated in a district some forty square miles in extent,

Turquoise mines

[1] Described by Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 166–171.

[2] The other turquoise mines of which I have heard or read in Persia are:—(1) Near Turshiz, leased by the Government (1889) for 500 *tomans* a year, but not worked; they are mentioned by Bellew. (2) Near Tabbas, mentioned by MacGregor and Herbert. (3) Near Kerman, mentioned by Marco Polo, Langlès, and Herbert. (4) At Taft, in the district of Yezd, mentioned by Khanikoff, Napier, and Herbert. (5) At Kaleh Zeri, near Basiran, between Birjand and Neh, mentioned by Khanikoff. The mines in the Kerman district are several in number: (α) Those of Pariz at God-i-Ahmer; (β) near Mashiz; (γ) near Shehr-i-Babek. But the stones of all these mines are very pale in colour and of no great value.

which is rich in mineral deposits, there being a productive salt mine, a neglected lead mine, and sandstone quarries within the same area. The turquoises are found in a range of hills, consisting of porphyries, greenstones, and metamorphic limestones and sandstones, at an elevation above the sea which has never exceeded 5,800 feet or fallen below 4,800 feet. They are obtained in one of two ways, either by digging and blasting in the mines proper, which consist of shafts and galleries driven into the rock, or by search among the *débris* of old mines, and amid the alluvial detritus that has been washed down the hill-sides on to the plain. The finest stones are now commonly found in the last-named quarter. The mining, cutting, &c., give occupation to some 1,500 persons, who inhabit the two principal villages of Upper and Lower Madan and several small hamlets in the neighbourhood.

History of working

It is believed that in former times and under the Sefavi dynasty, when Persia touched the climax of her wealth and renown, these mines were worked directly by the State. In the anarchy and turbulence of the eighteenth century they were either neglected or left to the villagers, who extracted from them what they could. As order was re-established, control was resumed by the Government, which throughout this century has farmed them to the highest bidder. Abundant relics, however, exist of the reign of 'every man for himself' that preceded. There was no system or science in the working, and the clumsy and sporadic efforts of individuals have resulted in the roofs and sides of most of the old mines falling in and thus completely choking the most lucrative sources of produce. Moreover, the march of science has itself tended to make the work more unscientific, for gunpowder is now used at random where the pick once cautiously felt its way; and many of the stones are smashed to atoms in the process that brings them to the light.

Financial return

Conolly relates that when Hasan Ali Mirza was Governor of Khorasan the turquoise mines were rented for 1,000 *tomans*, and the rock-salt mine for 300 *tomans* per annum. In Fraser's time (1821), 2,000 Khorasan *tomans* or 2,700*l.*, were asked for the whole mines, and 1,300 *tomans* for the principal mine. In 1862, Eastwick says the rent was only 1,000 *tomans*, or 400*l.* Ten years later the Seistan Boundary Commissioners found the total rent of all the mines to be 8,000 *tomans*, or 3,200*l.*, though in 1874 Captain Napier reported the figures to be 6,000 *tomans*, or 2,400*l.*

The rent remained at 8,000 *tomans* up till 1882, when the Shah very wisely thought that he could make a better bargain. In that year he leased the mines for a term of fifteen years to the Mukhber-ed-Dowleh, Minister of Education, Telegraphs, and Mines, the rent to be 9,000 *tomans* in the first year, and 18,000 *tomans* in each succeeding year.[1] The Minister took a few rich men into partnership, and the versatile and accomplished General Schindler, whose services are enlisted for whatever work of regeneration is contemplated (I wish I could say executed) in Persia, held the post of managing director for one year.[2] This syndicate appears to have found the system of working the mines itself unremunerative; for at the time of my visit I found that they had been sublet to the Malek-et-Tajar, or head of the Merchants' Guild at Meshed—the enterprising speculator who had also undertaken the Kuchan road—and who was paying a rent of 10,000 *tomans*, or 2,850*l.*, per annum as sublessee, himself subletting again to the villagers after the immemorial fashion to which every tenant in turn seems compelled to come back. He had just had a smart dispute with some of his own sublessees, who had discovered some larger and finer stones than he had bargained for, and whose tenancy he had accordingly terminated by the abrupt method of confiscation. In the past year (1890) the output of stones was estimated at not less than 80,000 *tomans*, or 22,850*l.*

It would be quite a mistake to suppose that by going either to Meshed or to Nishapur, or even to the pit mouth, the traveller can pick up valuable stones at a moderate price. Fraser tried seventy years ago, and was obliged to desist from the attempt by the ruthless efforts made to cheat him. Every succeeding traveller has tried and has reported his failure. All the best stones are bought up at once by commission agents on the spot and are despatched to Europe or sold to Persian grandees. I did not see a single good specimen either in Meshed or Teheran, though I

Purchase of stones

[1] Benjamin (*Persia and the Persians*, p. 408), with his usual inaccuracy, says 80,000 dollars, or 16,000*l.*

[2] By far the best account of the mines is to be found in a report written by him (and published in *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, part ii., 1884). The remaining travellers who have visited and described the turquoise mines of Madan are J. B. Fraser (1822), *Journey into Khorasan*, cap. xvi., and Appendix to *Travels South of the Caspian*, pp. 344–346; Alex. Chodzko (circ. 1838), *Revue d'Orient*; N. de Khanikoff (1858), *Mémoire, &c.*, pp. 90–93; Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 166–71.

made constant inquiries. I might indeed, to record my own experience, adopt the very words of Tavernier over two centuries ago:—

> Formerly the Mesched jewellers brought some turquoises of the old rock out of Persia; but for these fifteen years last past there have bin none found. The last time I was there I could only meet with three which were but reasonable. As for those of the new rock, they are of no value, because they do not keep their colour, but turn green in a little time.[1]

Against the proverbial craftiness of the Oriental the would-be purchaser of turquoises must indeed be pre-eminently upon his guard. There is a plan by which the deep azure that should characterise the true turquoise can be artfully retained up till the very moment of sale. The stones are kept in moist earthenware pots or otherwise damp, until they are parted with. The purchaser hugs his *trouvaille*, only to see its colour fade from day to day, until it is turned to a sickly green. The commoner stones are much used in Persia and the East generally for the decoration of bridles, horse-trappings, dagger-hilts and sheaths; though even of the flat slabs so employed I could obtain no decent specimens; while the commonest of all are converted into charms and amulets, Arabic characters being engraved and gilded upon them so as to hide the flaws. A roaring trade in these trinkets is driven with the pilgrims at Meshed.

Deception

From this digression let me now return to my forward journey. The plain of Nishapur is separated from that of Sebzewar (which is 1,000 feet lower) by an undulating range of ugly hills over which the road passes. Fifteen miles from Nishapur, the big caravanserai of Zaminabad is passed, the hills are entered by a low pass, and after a while the post-station and hamlet of Shurab (salt water) are discerned in a hollow. It was during the next stage that my worst *chapar* experience in Persia befell me. The pitiful brute that I was riding smelt so abominably that I could barely sit upon his back, while he himself groaned (for I can call it by no other name) in a manner that testified to his own misery. Removal of the saddle soon showed the seat of mischief in a great open sore; but I only exchanged horses with the *gholam* to discover that his Rosinante was similarly afflicted. It was cruelty to man and beast alike to be compelled to ride these suffering

Zafarani

[1] *Travels*, book v. cap. xii.

skeletons for eighteen miles. A stretch of several miles across the level brought us to the station of Zafarani. There was once a magnificent caravanserai here, reported to be the largest in Persia. The Persians, eager for a fantastic interpretation wherever it can be suggested, explain the title (yellow or saffron) by a legend of a certain rich merchant who, when building the structure, mixed with the bricks some saffron which he had bought out of charity from a poor man, and which was forthwith converted by a miracle into gold dust, that is supposed to have glittered in the bricks ever afterwards.[1] The building, which is said once to have contained 1,700 rooms, besides baths, shops, and gardens (all of which have disappeared), has been attributed by some travellers to Shah Abbas. But Khanikoff very appositely pointed out that the style and the inscriptions in the Kufic character alike referred it to the Arab period, and he conjecturally placed its foundation in the reign of the Seljuk Malek Shah. Upon its ruins a fine modern caravanserai was built by the public-spirited Sadr Azem before mentioned. From Zafarani the road leads across the Sebzewar plain at no great distance from the mountains on the north, until the city of that name is reached. The entire town, whose central street is a very long covered bazaar (newly constructed when Conolly passed through in 1830), must be traversed before we arrive at the *chapar-khaneh*, close to the western gate.

Sebzewar

Sebzewar (i.e. green-having) is the capital of a district of some fertility, which suffered terribly in the famine of 1871, and is only now beginning to raise its head again. Before that year the population of the city was estimated at 30,000. It sank at once to less than 10,000, but is now said to have mounted to 18,000. The town is surrounded by the usual wall of mud bricks, and on the north is commanded by a ruined ark or citadel on a mound. The legendary foundation of Sebzewar, it is needless to say, goes far back into the past, but its historical birth is more justly attributed to the Seljuk dynasty, the style of whose architecture can be detected in certain of its remains. Like most of its neighbours, it has been several times destroyed; Timur completing in 1380 A.D. the operation which Mohammed Shah of Kharezm had left imperfectly done. Whatever of prosperity it subsequently regained was obliterated in true Afghan fashion by the Afghan

[1] Different versions of this legend are related by Fraser, pp. 385–386; Ferrier, pp. 102–103; and Eastwick, vol. ii. p. 180.

invaders in the eighteenth century. The modern city is not a century old, having been rebuilt and fortified by Ali Yar Khan, of Mazinan, one of the rebellious governors in Khorasan in the reign of Fath Ali Shah. A good deal of trade has latterly sprung up in Sebzewar, for it is a considerable centre of cotton cultivation, as well as the local entrepôt for the export of wool: and there is an Armenian commercial establishment in the town whose occupants trade with Russia *viâ* Astrabad and Gez,[1] exporting cotton and wool and importing sugar and chintzes. A coarse cotton cloth is manufactured in the bazaars, and rude copper pots are also fashioned from the produce of three mines in the neighbourhood, which are reputed to be the richest in North Persia and the proper exploitation of which is not unlikely to be undertaken by the Persian Mining Rights Corporation. Sebzewar is also said to be one of the strongholds of the Babis in North Persia.

Minaret of Khosrugird

Almost the only object of interest in Sebzewar to a stranger lies, if a bull may be permitted, outside it. This is an isolated minaret called by the Persians (in their legendary vein) Khosrugird,[2] which stands about four miles beyond the walls of the present town on the west, but was no doubt within the limits of the ancient city destroyed by Mohammed Shah of Kharizm. That any one should ever have been mystified by this tower, which has every feature of Arabic architecture about it, simply because it has lost the mosque which it once adorned, is difficult to believe. Riding out to inspect it in the early dawn, I found the mountain crests both to the north and the south of the town white with freshly fallen snow, the first of the winter. Glorious they looked as the rising sun shone on their glistening caps, and flushed the purples and reds of their lower skirts. O'Donovan, rather irreverently, but with some justice, compared the minaret at a distance to a factory chimney; but this illusion is

[1] This route is now being superseded by the new Ashkabad-Kuchan line of entry into Khorasan, which I have previously described, and which is brought into easy connection with Sebzewar.

[2] It is astonishing that so intelligent an observer as Colonel Val. Baker should have been seduced thereby to speak of this 'curious old minaret of burnt brick *of the time of Khosro*' (*Clouds in the East*, p. 166). He might just as reasonably have attributed it to Edward the Confessor or to Confucius. O'Donovan, too, regards this tall shaft as an unusual feature in Persian architecture, where the call to prayer is commonly given from a balcony; quite ignoring the fact that it was raised in Sunni, and not in Shiah, times. Khosrugird was the chief place of the district of Beihak, identical with the modern Sebzewar.

dispelled as we approach. Then we see it to be a single lofty tower, 100 feet high, of brickwork arranged so as to form an exterior pattern on the surface, converging towards the summit, and adorned with two bands of Kufic inscriptions also in brickwork. The capital at the top is broken, and the shaft has, therefore, an unfinished appearance. It springs from a square plinth of mixed concrete and gravel, the whole of which to a depth of about six feet is exposed, and which stands upon a further terrace about eight feet high, in the corners of which are doors, and which is surrounded by low pillars and a

MINARET OF KHOSRUGIRD

low mud wall encircling the whole enclosure. Fraser ascended the tower in 1822 by an interior flight of spiral steps, and O'Donovan followed his example in 1880. The stairway is now in ruins.

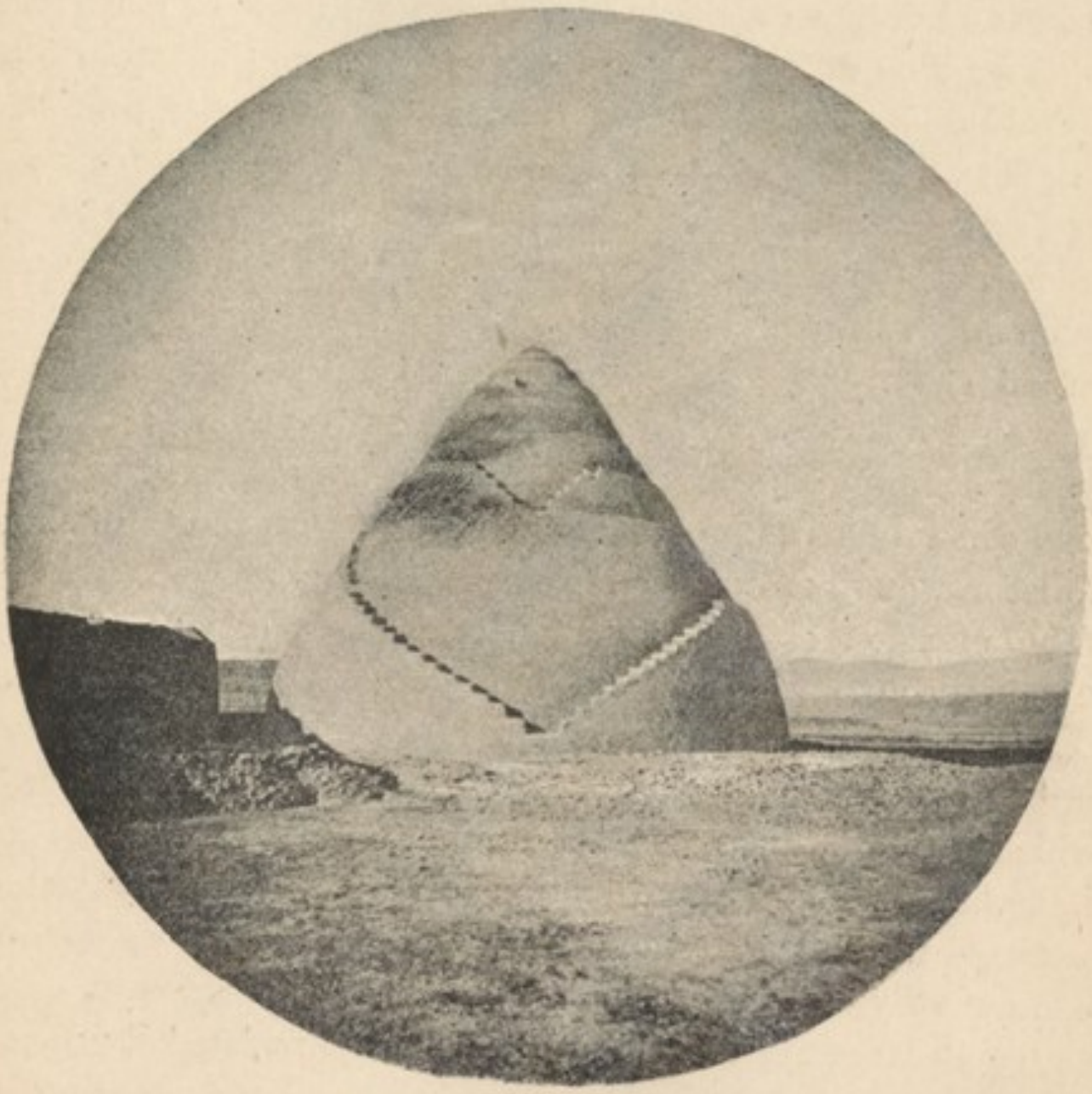
Its history

No traveller who could read the Kufic character need ever have been in doubt as to the history of this interesting relic; for the inscription states that it was raised in the year 505 of the Hejira—i.e. in 1110 A.D.—when Sultan Sanjar ruled in Khorasan, in the reign of Sultan Mohammed, the son of Malek

Shah the Seljuk. It suffered severe injury in the Afghan invasion in 1722, but was subsequently restored by Nadir Shah, and now stands the sole surviving reminder of a city and a splendour that have utterly perished.

Near Sebzewar the country was richly cultivated, especially with cotton. In less than an hour, however, the arable ceased, and in front and around stretched a desolate gravelly plain, in the middle of which in the distance a mountain with double cone stood up and expanded, as we drew near, into a small

Mihr and Mazinan



ICE-HOUSE AT MAZINAN

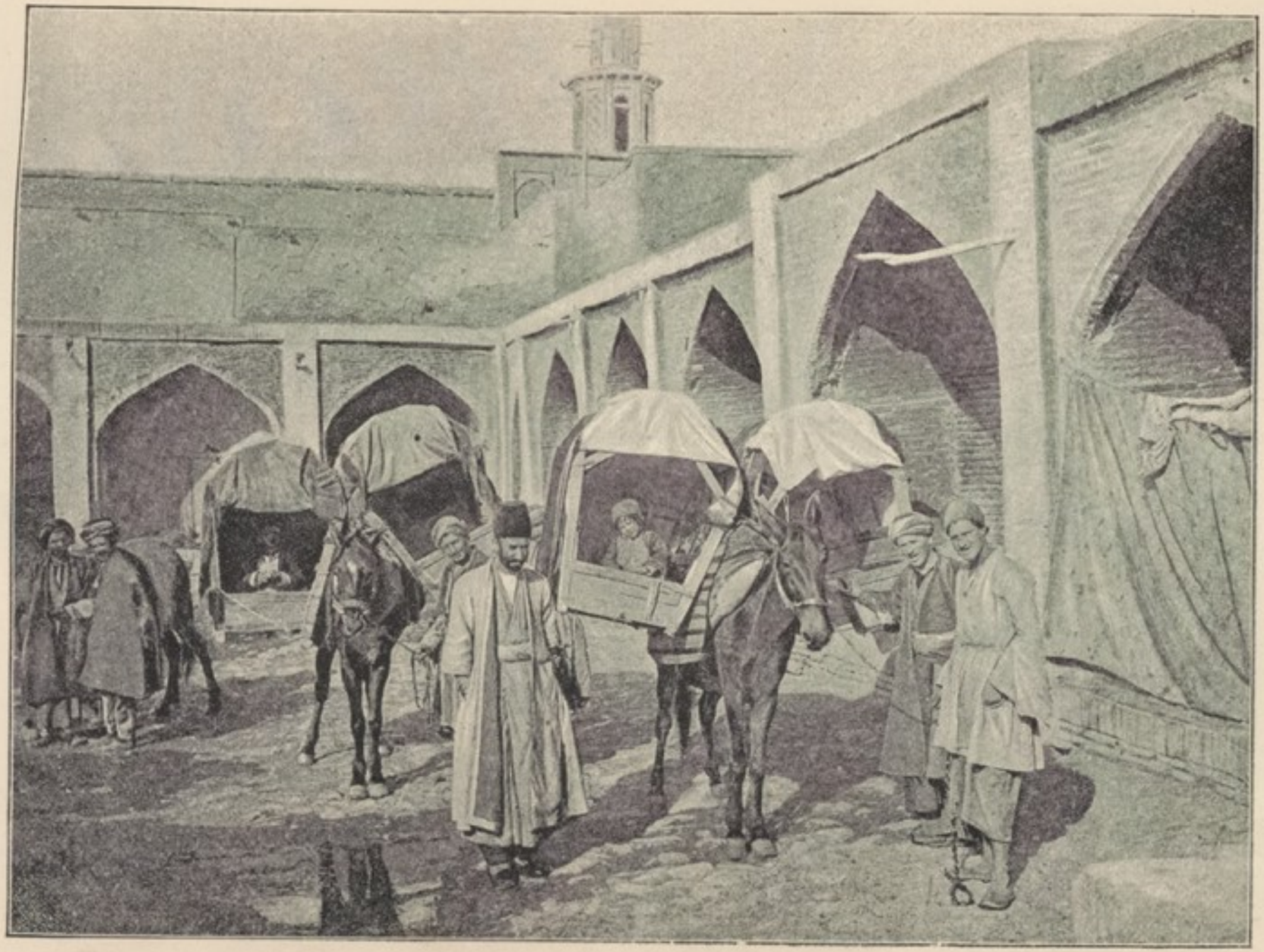
isolated ridge. Leaving this on the left, we turned towards the base of the snowy range on the north, and after a five hours' ride reached the village of Mihr, the first inhabited place that we had seen for over thirty miles. The post-house is in the very centre of the village, down whose main street runs a rapid and brick-coloured stream. Between Mihr and Mazinan I caught my first glimpse of a *kavir*, or salt desert, one of those strange and weird expanses, sometimes hard plain, sometimes treacherous swamp,

which cover so large a portion of the centre of Persia, and about which I shall require to particularise later on. The white patches of sand glittered under a thin saline efflorescence, and at a little distance might have been mistaken for shallow pools. Mazinan was once a place of considerable size, and was itself the centre of a cluster of fortified villages and towns, but was destroyed by Abbas Mirza in 1831, in punishment of a rebel chief. It is now a most miserable spot, full of tumble-down or abandoned houses. A relic of bygone days exists in the shape of a big caravanserai on the outskirts of the village, built by Shah Abbas. A once far finer structure, the work of Mamun, the son of Harun-er-Rashid and murderer of the Imam Reza, is now in partial ruin. All around are the remains of other towns or villages not less dismal or deserted. As I rode out of Mazinan at 5.30 A.M. on an icy morning, the caravans of pilgrims in the two big caravanserais were already astir; and some loud-lunged *seyid* or *haji* would be heard to chant the note of invocation to Allah, which the whole body would forthwith take up in a responsive volume of sound that rang far through the crisp chill air. From the other side of the village came a chorus of similar cries; and with plentiful shouting and discord, another day for the holy wanderers began.

Pilgrim *kafilahs*

The mention of the pilgrims, or *zawars*, of whom I saw so much on each day's journey, and who all but monopolise the Meshed road, tempts me to vary the dull recital of my progress by a slight description of the human surroundings in which it was framed. The stream of progress appeared in the main to be in the opposite direction to that which I was pursuing. Sometimes for miles in the distance could be seen the *kafilah*, or caravan, slowly crawling at a foot-pace across the vast expanse. Then, as it came nearer, would be heard the melancholy monotone of some devout or musical member of the band, droning out in quavering tones a verse from the Koran; sometimes, in less solemn companies, a more jovial wayfarer trolling some distich from the Persian classics. As the long cavalcade approached, it would be seen to consist of every kind of animal and of every species of man. Horses would carry the more affluent, who would be smoking their *kalians* as they paced along; some would affect camels; mules were very common, and would frequently support *kajavehs*,[1] a sort of

[1] The *kajaveh*, which is very small and rocks disagreeably, is a most uncomfortable and almost impossible vehicle for Europeans, whose nether limbs are not



CARAVANSERAI AND KAJAVEHS

wooden pannier, with an arched framework for a hood, in which men as often as women were curled up beneath mountains of quilts. The donkey, however, was the favourite beast of burden. Tiny animals would bear the most stupendous loads, with pots and pans, guns, and water-bottles hanging on either side, and with the entire furniture of a household on their backs; the poultry of the owner perched with ludicrous gravity upon the top of all. It is a common thing for the poorer pilgrims to take shares in a donkey and to vary riding with walking. In the early morning the equestrians would often be seen fast asleep upon their asses, lying forward upon their necks, and occasionally falling with a thump on to the ground. Each *kafilah* would have a *caravan-bashi*, or leader, who not infrequently bore a red pennon fluttering from a lance. It was often difficult to discern the men's faces as they rode by shrouded in huge woollen blanket-coats, pulled up over their heads, while the stiff, empty arm-holes stood out on either side like monstrous ears. But, if it was not easy to discern the males, still less could be distinguished of the shapeless bundles of blue cotton that were huddled upon the donkeys' backs, and which chivalry almost forbade me to accept for the fairer sex. I confess to having once or twice, with intentional malice, spurred my horse to a gallop, as I was overtaking some party of wayfarers thus accompanied: for, to see the sober asses kick up their heels and bolt from the track as they heard the clatter of horse-hoofs behind, to observe the amorphous bundles upon their backs shake and totter in their seats, till shrieks were raised, veils fell, and there was imminent danger of a total collapse, was to crack one's sides with sorely-needed and well-earned laughter. There would usually be an assortment of beggars in every band, who would beg of me in one breath and curse me for an infidel in the next, or of tattered dervishes, who in Mussulman countries are beggars in their most offensive guise.

Not that every company we met or passed were pilgrims on pious mission bent. Far from it. Sometimes we would encounter

inured to the telescopic contractions common in the East. Adam Olearius, the Secretary of the Embassy from the Duke of Holstein in 1637, graphically described his woes as follows: 'The Physician and myself were set in *ketzaweha* upon the same camel, whereby we were put to great inconveniences—one proceeding from the violent motion caused by the going of that great Beast, which at every step gave us a furious jolt; and the other from the insupportable stink of the camels, the infectious smell of whom came full into our noses.'

merchants, absorbed and sedate; sometimes *mullahs* on sleek asses or mules; sometimes officials and soldiers; and sometimes whole families migrating. All classes and all ages were on the road: horsemen and footmen; rich men and poor men; *seyids* and scoundrels—a microcosm of the stately, commonplace, repulsive, fascinating Oriental world.

Others

At night these varied and polyglot elements (for there will be pilgrims from many lands) seek shelter and sleep in the caravanserais erected at intervals of ten or fifteen miles along the entire route. I have so often spoken of these structures that I may here, in passing, describe what they are. The caravanserai is the Eastern inn. But with the name the parallelism ends: for no proud signboard, no cheerful parlour or burnished bar, no obsequious ostler or rubicund landlord welcomes your approach. The caravanserai, perhaps, contains a single custodian, and that is all. The wayfarer must do everything for himself. He stables his own beasts, piles together and watches his own baggage, lights his own fire, and cooks his own repast. As a rule, the building is a vast square or rectangular structure of brick or stone, built in the form of a parallelogram round an open court. The two exterior sides and the back walls are plain, and give the building from a distance the appearance of an immense fort—an idea which is frequently, and with full intention, sustained in the shape of projecting towers at the angles and a parapet above. In the front outer wall, or façade, is a series of large recessed arches, with a seat, or platform, about two feet from the ground. These are frequently used as sleeping-places in the warm weather. A huge gateway opens in the centre, with sometimes a tower and *bala-khaneh* overhead, and leads into the inner quadrangle, which is perhaps fifty yards square, and whose sides are divided into recessed compartments, open to the air, similar to those on the outside wall. In the superior caravanserais a doorway at the back of each of these arches leads into an inner cell, which is occupied on cold nights. Behind these, and reaching to the exterior wall, are long rows of hot, unlit stables, where the animals are lodged, and access to which is gained from the four corners. Such is the ordinary Persian caravanserai. In a few of improved style or recent construction, such as that at Borasjun, near the Persian Gulf—by far the finest that I saw in the whole country—there is a series of upstairs apartments for visitors of higher rank or means; but, as a

Caravanserais

rule, democracy is the prevailing law in the economy of the serai of Persia.

Camels by night

Perhaps the weirdest and most impressive of the many unwonted memories that the traveller carries away with him from such-like travel in the East is the recollection of the camel caravans which he has encountered at night. Out of the black darkness is heard the distant boom of a heavy bell. Mournfully, and with perfect regularity of iteration, it sounds, gradually swelling nearer and louder, and perhaps mingling with the tones of smaller bells, signalling the rearguard of the same caravan. The big bell is the insignia and alarum of the leading camel alone. But nearer and louder as the sound becomes, not another sound, and not a visible object, appear to accompany it. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, there looms out of the darkness, like the apparition of a phantom ship, the form of the captain of the caravan. His spongy tread sounds softly on the smooth sand, and, like a great string of linked ghouls, the silent procession stalks by and is swallowed up in the night.

The poetry of contrast

And how wonderful and ever-present is the contrast in Eastern travel to all life and movement at home! No heavy carts and lumbering wagons jolt to and fro between the farmyard and the fields. No light vehicles and swift equipages dash past upon macadamised roads. Alas! there are no roads; and, if no roads, how much less any vehicles or wagons! Thatched roofs and tiled cottages, lanes and hedgerows and trim fields, rivers coursing between full banks, beyond all the roar and sudden, smoky rush of the train—these might not exist in the world at all, and do not exist in the world of the Persian, straitened and stunted, but inexpressibly tranquil in his existence. Here, all is movement and bustle, flux and speed; there, everything is imperturbable, immemorial, immutable, slow.

Turkoman forays

Between Mazinan and Shahrud, a distance of approximately one hundred miles, intervene four stages, which were formerly known as the 'Stages of Terror.' Here the western extremities of the Khorasan mountains, pushed out in long spurs of diminishing height from the knotted mountain cluster that surrounds the head-waters of the Atrek, descend on to the plain, and the road pursues a winding course through their lower folds and undulations. This entire mountain region was once desolated by Turkoman bandits, and through these valleys and ravines they

dashed down in headlong foray upon the helpless bands of travellers making their way to or from Meshed. Sweeping up whatever they could get, driving off the animals, and chaining a few score of captives to their saddle-bows, they galloped off into their mountain-fastnesses with as much precipitation as that with which they had come. Already, along the route which I have described from Meshed to Mazinan, I had seen frequent proofs of their dreaded presence, in the shape of those small circular towers, dotted all over the plain like chessmen on a chessboard, which, from Ashkabad to Meshed, from Sarakhs to Farrah, and from Shahrud almost to Kum, marked the chosen hunting-grounds of these terrible moss-troopers of the border. In parts almost every field had one of these structures, into which, as soon as a rolling cloud of dust revealed the apparition of the enemy, the husbandman crept by a small hole at the bottom, and, rolling two big stones against the aperture, waited till the scourge had swept past. Similar evidence of the terror they inspired, and of the state of siege which self-preservation imposed upon their possible victims, is forthcoming along the entire belt of country above named, in the rude forts erected in every village as a refuge for the inhabitants. Once behind a mud wall the miserable peasants were safe; but woe betide them if caught in the open country—death or the slave-markets of Khiva and Bokhara were then the certain issue.

Military escort

What the luckless peasant faced every day the timid pilgrim looked to encounter on this fateful stretch of road which I am about to describe. The most elaborate precautions were taken against the danger. An escort used to leave Shahrud and Mazinan twice a month, consisting of a number of so-called foot-soldiers armed with matchlocks, and a mounted detachment accompanying an old gun. At Miandasht the two escorts met and relieved each other. The support of the Mazinan detachment, consisting of 150 matchlock men and twelve artillerymen with their horses, was imposed, in lieu of the ordinary taxes, upon the villagers of that place; and even so late as 1872, when the Seistan Boundary Commissioners passed this way on their return to Teheran, they had to travel with an escort of eighty matchlocks, a 4½-pounder dragged by six horses, and 150 to 200 mounted *sowars*, between Mazinan and Shahrud.

Conolly, Fraser, Eastwick, O'Donovan, and other writers who journeyed with the pilgrim caravans have left inimitable accounts

of the perils and the panics of their pious companions. A Persian is a coward at the best of times: but a Persian pilgrim is a degree worse than his fellows; and a Persian pilgrim in the vicinity of a Turkoman almost ceases to be a human being. There would be long delays and anxious rumours at the beginning; several false starts would be made and abandoned in consequence of some vague report; finally the caravan would venture forth, moving frequently at night, when the darkness added to, rather than diminished, the terror. First would come the matchlock men blowing their matches, and either marching on foot or mounted on donkeys; then the genuine cavalry, with flintlocks and hayfork-rests; next the great body of the pilgrims, huddling as close as possible round the artillerymen and the gun, which was looked upon as a veritable palladium, but of which it is not on record that it was ever fired. Soldiers again brought up the rear, and, wrapped up in dust, confusion, and panic, the procession rolled on. The noise they made, shouting, singing, cursing, praying, and quarrelling, signalled their approach for miles, and, if they escaped, it was the positive worthlessness of the spoil (for a Mussulman pilgrim leaves all his valuables behind him), rather than the hazard of capture or the awe inspired by the bodyguard, that was responsible for their safety. To their fearful imaginations every bush was a vedette of the enemy, every puff of wind that raised the dust betrayed a charge, every hillock concealed a squadron. Loud were the shouts and clamorous the invocations to Allah, and Ali, and Husein, and all the watchful saints of the calendar, when the end of the march was reached and God had protected his own.

Perils and panic of the pilgrims

It is only just to add that, if the panic of a multitude was despicable, the terrors of individuals were not unfairly aroused. Many are the tales that are still told of the capture of isolated travellers or of small bands; and there was scarcely a single peasant in the villages in this strip of country that had not, at some time or other, been pounced down upon in the fields or at the water-springs, and who, if happily he were ransomed after years of slavery, did not bear upon his person the lifelong imprint of cruelty and fetters. Colonel Euan Smith is in error in stating that it was upon this piece of road that M. de Blocqueville, the French amateur photographer who had accompanied the disastrous expedition against Merv in 1860, in order

Tales of capture

to take photographs and paint a battle-scene for the Shah, was seized and carried off, and not redeemed until he had been a captive for fifteen months and a ransom of 11,000 *tomans* (then equivalent to 5,000*l.*) was paid by his royal patron.[1] He was captured in the successful attack made by the Turkomans upon the Persian column while at Merv. It was here, however, that a Persian general in command of 6,000 men, halting behind his column for two or three moments to take a final pull at his *kalian*, was snatched up and swept away in full sight of his troops, and within a few weeks' time was sold for a few pounds in the bazaar of Khiva.

Service of the Russians

Whatever may be said of the designs of Russia on this province of Khorasan, not Persia only, but every traveller between Teheran and Meshed, owes her a lasting sense of gratitude for the service she has wrought in putting an end to this unmitigated curse. It was certainly not for unselfish reasons, nor in the interests of Persia, still less out of pure philanthropy, that Russia undertook her successful campaigns against the Tekke Turkomans of Transcaspia. But here we may afford to ignore motives, and may be content with congratulating both ourselves and her upon the fact. Since the victorious campaign of Skobeleff in 1881, and the subsequent annexation of Akhal Tekke, the Meshed-Teheran road has been absolutely secure. No guard is maintained or needed, the pilgrims have no special ground of appeal to Allah, and the traveller is startled by nothing more serious than the whirr of wings as a covey of red-legged partridges—which abound in these mountains—rises almost from between his horse's legs.

Pul-i-Abrishum

Leaving Mazinan, our road struck northwards towards the hills. In the grey morning light I discerned a numerous herd of wild deer, as large as red deer, at a distance of 300 yards from the track; but the bullets of my revolver had no other effect than to accelerate their disappearance. After fourteen miles we came to the deserted caravanserai and fort of Sadrabad.

[1] It was said that the Turkomans had at first priced the luckless photographer at 3*l.* 10*s.* But as soon as they found out that he was a European, and of some value, their demands rose in a steady crescendo. Meanwhile the Khan of Khiva, hearing that the captive had instruments, and thinking he must be a military engineer, was very anxious to get hold of him to fortify his capital. Colonel Val. Baker gratuitously doubles the ultimate ransom. M. de Blocqueville wrote the history of his adventures in the *Tour du Monde*, April 1866.

As the name implies, these edifices were raised by the great Minister, or Sadr Azem, before mentioned; but the fort and its garrison were practically useless: for the latter were only just strong enough to guard themselves, without turning a thought to the protection of others. A mile and a half beyond Sadrabad brought us to the Pul-i-Abrishum (or Bridge of Silk)—originally built by Nadir Shah, and recently restored—over the Abrishum River (a stream

THE BRIDGE OF SILK

strongly impregnated with salt from salt-springs near its source), which flows down here from the north, and, under the name of the Kal Mura, subsequently disappears into a *kavir* to the south. The Kal Mura is generally regarded as the eastern boundary of Khorasan, and it marked the extreme north-west limit of the Afghan empire of Ahmed Shah Durani in the last century. At the time that I passed, the river-bed, which was about twenty yards in width, was absolutely dry. The rising sun just enabled me to take a photograph, which reveals a very typical Persian bridge, and I then hurried on.

A few miles beyond we came to a spot known as the Chashmeh-i-Gez (or Spring of Tamarisks), where a scanty rivulet supplies a number of little pools and fertilises some patches of grass. This was a notorious and dreaded spot in the old days, for hither came the Turkoman robbers to water their horses after the long mountain ride, and here the luckless voyager was frequently swooped down upon and caught. It was close to this spot that Ferrier had a brush with them in 1845. The end of this stage is the remarkable-looking village-fort of Abbasabad, which rises in tiers upon an eminence, the lofty front being pierced with numerous windows and crowned with ruined battlements. Its inhabitants are the converted descendants of a Georgian colony of a hundred families, who were transported to this spot by Abbas the Great three centuries ago, as a link in his chain of military colonies along the northern frontier. He assigned them an annual allowance in coin (100 *tomans*) and wheat (100 *kharvars*), which after a while was not paid. In the third generation, being forbidden to use the Georgian tongue, they are said to have become Mussulmans; but traces of their mother language have been detected by some travellers in their dialect. During the Turkoman reign of terror there was said not to be a single adult man in Abbasabad who had not more than once been carried away captive.

Abbasabad

A hilly ride over low, barren ridges, and up the gravelly bed of a valley known as the Dahaneh Al Hak, brings us to the squalid village of that name, where a corps of fifty militiamen were once stationed to guard the road. Through similar scenery and over undulating ground we mount 1,000 feet since leaving Abbasabad, and come at length to the magnificent caravanserai of Miandasht[1] (lit. mid-plain), whose lofty embattled walls and projecting towers resemble a vast fortress, and can be seen for miles. This was the central point of the 'Stages of Terror,' and here, one half the peril over, the pilgrims foregathered to exchange felicitations or foment alarms. There is an old caravanserai built by Shah Abbas, whose name appears above the gateway; but the huge castellated structure is a new erection of burnt brick, with a parapet and walls twenty feet high. A courtyard, in which the *chapar-khaneh* is located, connects the two, and water is provided

Miandasht

[1] Conolly called it Meergundusht; Von Mierop, more correctly, nearly a hundred years before, Meondasht.

from three large *abambars*, or subterranean reservoirs, to which access is gained by steep flights of steps.

Beyond Miandasht occurs what was formerly the most perilous part of the journey. The road winds in and out of low passes between rounded knolls, where every turn discloses a hidden hollow, and where every elevation might hide an ambuscade. The hills are bare and stony, or clad only with a diminutive scrub. They are alive with partridges, in pairs or in small coveys of five or six, which were so tame that they ran along the road and crouched till one was within a dozen yards.[1] Here is the peculiarly noted Dahaneh-i-Zaidar, the gully by which the Turkomans usually descended to make their attack, and at its mouth was the small, now dismantled, fort of Zaidar, where was a garrison of fifty regulars. On emerging from the hills we see before us the twin-peaked mountain [2] above Maiomai, and, skirting its northern base, reach the village of that name, where is a fine caravanserai, built by Shah Abbas II., and some superb old *chenars*. It was in the *bala-khaneh* of the posthouse at Maiomai, which I occupied, that O'Donovan was besieged by an infuriated band of Arab *hajis*, and had rather a narrow escape; and it was in the caravanserai that Dr. John Cormick, for many years chief physician to Abbas Mirza, died of typhus in 1833.

Dahaneh-i-Zaidar

The next march, from Maiomai to Shahrud, forty-one miles, used to be the longest in Persia, and has been bewailed by many victims. But, for postal purposes, it has now been divided by the station and *chapar-khaneh* of Armian. The first part of the road, along the base of the same mountain-range, is very stony. Two small villages are passed, each dependent upon a single small rill, whose passage from the mountains can be traced by a thin line of poplars. Armian is picturesquely situated on a hill-side, with an abundant stream flowing down the road just outside the posthouse door, and subsequently fertilising a series of well-kept terrace-plots below the village. The first

Armian

[1] This is the *kabk*, or ordinary red-legged partridge. There are also in Persia the *kabk-i-darah* (variously explained as 'royal partridge,' or 'partridge of the defiles'); the *durraj*, the black partridge of India, commonly called the francolin; the *tihu*, or sand partridge, which, as Fraser said, 'runs like the very devil;' the *jirufti*, or bush partridge; the *kabk-i-chil*, or grey partridge; and the *bakhri-kara*, or *bakir-ghirreh*, the sand-grouse.

[2] Fraser climbed this mountain in 1834, and found two very ancient ruined forts on the highest peaks.—*A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. pp. 154–164.

half of the ride to Shahrud is spent in winding in and out of the lower ranges that gradually dip into the plain of Shahrud, 1,000 feet below Armian. The snowy crown of the Shah Kuh (King Mountain), the highest point of the Elburz between Shahrud and Astrabad, had been before my eyes the whole day, and at its feet, I knew, lay Shahrud. About eleven miles before reaching the latter, the first view is caught of the level plain, some ten miles in width, on which were visible three detached green clumps. The two nearer were unimportant villages, the farthest and largest, nestling at the very foot of the Elburz, was Shahrud. So buried in trees is the town, that, after riding for some time between garden-walls and orchards, I found myself in the main street, almost unawares.

Shahrud

I have already, in a previous chapter, dwelt upon the strategical importance of the position of Shahrud. The town is a great meeting-point of roads, from Herat to Meshed, from Tabbas and Turshiz, from Yezd, from Astrabad and Mazanderan, and from the capital. It is situated in a plain, of whose fertility I could form no just estimate in the month of November, but whose productiveness and abundant water-supply are unquestioned. The Rud-i-Shah (or King's River) flows down the street outside the *chapar-khaneh*, but at this season of the year was little more than a rivulet, and reflected no honour upon its name. The defensive properties of the place struck me as contemptible, and appeared to be limited to a ruined citadel, and to two small mud towers, perched upon a conical hill above the town. Shahrud is celebrated for its local manufacture of boots and shoes, which are said to be patronised by the Shah and the Royal Family; for the redoubtable *shabgez*, or *gherib-gez*, which attacked O'Donovan here but spared me; and as an entrepôt both of the local products of Mazanderan and of Russian imports *viâ* Gez and Astrabad, through the agency of Russian and Russo-Armenian traders.[1] The Russian Caucasus and Mercury Company also keep an agent in the town. Its population is said to be 5,000. There is a Persian Telegraph-station here, and a wire to Astrabad, whence there is further telegraphic connection by Chikishliar with Kizil Arvat and Transcaspia—a line which is much used by the Russian Legation in Teheran in communicating with Ashkabad.

[1] The opening-up of the new trade-route from Ashkabad, *viâ* Kuchan, to Sebzewar is reported to have already caused a considerable falling-off, or, perhaps, I should rather say, transference, in the Russian trade with Shahrud.

Bazaars

Having arrived at Shahrud early in the afternoon, I spent some time in inspecting the town. It contains a large covered bazaar, not thatched, but properly roofed, and with spacious and well-appointed shops. My observations and inquiries tallied exactly with what I had heard at Meshed. All the sugar was Russian, all the tea was Indian, brought from Bunder Abbas *viâ* Yezd. The greater part of the coloured cottons and chintzes were Russian, but the white sheeting bore the name of a Bombay firm, and I saw, not merely a large pile of Manchester glazed calicoes with a Bombay label, but also a number of unbleached cottons direct from Manchester itself. This was a gratifying fact, considering that Shahrud lies within four marches of what is practically a Russian port on the Caspian. I bought some delicious white grapes for a few pence. A wine is made from them in Shahrud.

Bostam

Though Shahrud is the capital of the district of Bostam-Shahrud, it is not the residence of the Governor or the seat of government. The latter is at the town of Bostam, three and a half miles in a north-easterly direction from Shahrud (from which it is concealed by a rocky hill), and higher up the course of the same river. Bostam, a Mazanderani proper name, is a place of superior fertility and luxury to Shahrud. It is, further, a site of great sanctity among Mohammedan pilgrims, for here was buried the famous Sheikh, or Sultan, Bayazid, the leader of a dervish sect, who died, and was interred in the court of a beautiful mosque, now much ruined, in the year A.D. 874. Attached to the same mosque, whose cupola was erected by a Mongol prince in A.D. 1313, is a shaking minaret, similar to those which I shall afterwards describe at Isfahan, and which can be made to vibrate by rocking it at the summit. Colonel Lovett has attributed this phenomenon to the elasticity of the bricks and cement employed, the latter becoming more elastic with age, and has compared it with the kindred phenomenon of slabs of elastic sandstone.[1] There is, further, at Bostam a curious brick tower, whose outer circumference is, so to speak, dog-toothed by a number of salient angles, similar to the tower of which I shall speak later at Rhey.[2]

[1] *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (new series), vol. v. p. 79 (1883). The best account of the buildings at Bostam is that of Khanikoff, *Mémoire*, &c. p. 79.

[2] Fraser (*Journey into Khorasan*, pp. 612–614) describes a very similar tower, with polygonal surface, near Jorjan, on the banks of the Gurgan River. This tower was 150 feet high, 10 yards interior diameter, 52 yards exterior circum-

Deputation from the Governor

Already, upon arriving at the posthouse of Shahrud—which is unique in the possession of a threefold *bala-khaneh*—I had observed unfamiliar symptoms of refinement, in the shape of a druggeted floor and curtained doorways. On my return from the bazaars I was proceeding to make my toilet, and was already in a state of semi-*déshabille*, when, without the slightest warning, I became aware of a further act of official attention. Two Armenians first entered unannounced, both of whom could speak a little French. One was the agent of Messrs. Ziegler in Shahrud, the other of a firm named Tumanianz. I presumed that they had come out of curiosity, as they offered no explanation. But in the East such amenities cannot be resented, requiring rather to be interpreted as tokens of civility. Wherefore I continued my toilet while discussing the trade and commerce of Shahrud. Presently, however, the doorway of the *bala-khaneh* was again darkened, and a trio of Persian officials marched in, while a posse of attendants stood outside. They were succeeded by some menials carrying a tray, on which were two packets of tea and four sugar-loaves wrapped up in blue paper; following whom appeared two other individuals holding by the legs a kicking sheep, while a third balanced a couple of cane-bottomed chairs behind. I really think that I am justified in presenting this to my readers as a spectacle of no mean dramatic effect.

Scene.—A mud room in a Persian posthouse.

Dramatis Personæ.—Englishman in flannel shirt, breeches, and stockings only; Armenian traders; Persian chamberlains; struggling sheep.

Dramatic Accessories.—Sugar-loaves and cane-bottomed chairs.

I now realised that I was the recipient of a formal deputation from the Prince-Governor of Shahrud, who had sent to welcome and to invite me to become his guest at Bostam, and that the Armenians had been despatched as a sort of advanced guard to reconnoitre and interpret. By their aid I was enabled to acknowledge the hospitality of the Governor and to accept his gifts—a process which naturally involved the return of an equivalent present to the deputies. Having pocketed a few *tomans* with much satisfaction, these worthies forthwith realised that no more business was to be done.

ference, and terminated in a lofty pointed cone, in which was a single window. Two belts of Arabic inscriptions demonstrated a kindred origin to the tower of Bostam.

Accordingly, they announced that the hour for repose had arrived, and bowed themselves out. For my part, I slew the sheep and had a capital leg of mutton for dinner.

Shahrud is rather more than the halfway stage between Meshed and Teheran, but it serves to divide the journey into two portions, of which it is difficult to determine which is the less attractive. There is a curious identity between their respective features: for, just as the Meshed-Shahrud section presents two cities of ancient fame, Nishapur and Sebzewar, so the Shahrud-Teheran section displays Damghan and Semnan; and, just as the only structures worthy of observation in the first section are the minarets and towers of Sebzewar and Bostam, so, in the second, we must be content with the analogous monuments of Damghan and Semnan. Finally, to complete the parallelism, just as the first section terminates after threading the famous Turkoman passes, so does the second conduct us, on the penultimate day's journey, through the even more famous Caspian Gates that lead into the Plain of Veramin. Stones, sand, *kavir*, and execrable horses are the common prerogatives of both.

Second section of journey

It was on one of the worst of these brutes that, over a track scarcely less atrocious, I pursued my way to Deh Mullah ('the Village of the Priest'). The *chapar-khaneh* is on the outskirts of the village, which lies a little farther in the plain, and is remarkable only for a huge mound of clay, once crowned by a citadel, whose riven and crumbling walls stand up in melancholy ruin. The ride from Deh Mullah to Damghan is over rather better ground, but is unutterably tedious. On my right hand was the scarped red rampart of the Elburz, rising sheer from the plain, and, like a wall of brass, shutting off the defiles and gorges of that mighty range; and behind them, again, the steamy lowlands of Mazanderan, sloping to the Caspian. On the left, or south, whereas on most maps I see marked a salt desert, or *kavir*, my own notes record that, throughout the entire day's journey, the horizon was bounded on that side, at an average distance of about ten miles, by a range of hills of quite sufficient elevation to appear upon most maps, although I cannot find any trace of them upon the majority of those that I have studied. The road to Damghan passed several villages, one of which, Mehmandost, was evidently a favourite halting-place for travellers, as there were crowds of wayfarers and horsemen in the single street. About three miles from Damghan

Deserted cities

we rode through the ruins of a deserted city, Bostajan. A more sorrowful spectacle than an abandoned town of mud cannot be conceived. The buildings, and roofs, and walls gradually waste away into indistinguishable heaps of clay; but, so compact and solid do these become in the process, that they last for scores, and sometimes for hundreds, of years. Nor is it fair to assume that, along with each deserted city or site, its inhabitants, as an item in the population, have been wiped off the face of the earth. Were such the case, one might be led to infer that Persia, which is now as sparsely peopled as Palestine, was once as densely crowded as China. I believe that this would be a false inference. Just as each great Persian monarch or founder of a dynasty, from Cyrus downwards, has shifted the capital and seat of government, so as to associate a fresh glory with his name, so has each petty governor or chieftain striven to emulate his sovereign by a new urban plantation; and, in a yet lower grade, each father of a family has thought to better himself and to transcend his forerunners by erecting a new abode. It is to this universal instinct, permeating every rank of life, not less than to the ravages of famine, disease, and war, that must be attributed the countless wasting skeletons of tenements and cities that litter the soil of Persia.

Damghan

From a distance of some miles the two minarets of Damghan, the counterparts of that of Sebzewar, rise in view. They stand some way apart, in different quarters of the town. The better preserved of the two, which is mountable and has a small turret of later date at the top, with a door for the *muezzin*, is situated just off the main street of the town, and is in close proximity to a mosque—not, indeed, that to which it was originally attached, but a comparatively modern structure. Like the minar at Sebzewar, it is faced with bricks, so laid as to form geometrical patterns on the circumference, and has, further, a band of Kufic letters in high relief. The two minarets belong to the *imamzadehs*, or tombs of two saints, named respectively Jafir and Kasim; and, for an account of their shrines, as well of a third tomb raised over a saint named Mohammed, the son of Ibrahim, and called Pir-i-Alamdar, I cannot do better than refer my readers to the erudite pages of Khanikoff.[1] Damghan, though a considerable place, even

[1] *Mémoire, &c.*, pp. 74–75. Bassett (*Land of the Imams*, p. 197) commits the absurd mistake of saying that the minars are called Chehil Sutune and Maschide Jam. The former name—i.e. 'forty pillars'—is a common descriptive epithet in

in the present century, is now in a pitiable state of decay. The deserted ruins of a huge square citadel—a room in which used to be preserved and shown as the apartment wherein Fath Ali Shah first saw the light—rise above the cubical domes of the bazaar, but are fast crumbling to pieces. I rode through the bazaar, which consists of a long covered street, far less cleanly and decorous than that of Shahrud. Through the town runs a stream, flowing down from a spring in the mountains called Chashmeh-i-Ali, where is both a summer residence of the Shah, and also a place of pilgrimage, as one of the spots where Ali's charger appears to have stamped so fiercely with his hoof as to leave a permanent indentation in the rock. On a hill-top near this miraculous site a further miracle exists in the shape of a spring, called Chashmeh-i-Bad (or Fountain of the Wind), which, if stirred at certain times, is said to produce a hurricane that blows everything to destruction.[1]

History

Damghan has a twofold historical interest—legendary and modern. It is always supposed to mark the site of the ancient Hekatompylos (or City of a Hundred Gates), the name given by the Greeks to the capital of the Arsacid dynasty of Parthian kings, although, with the exception of a number of mounds and of several underground conduits, built of large slabs of stone, there does not exist, and is not on record as having existed, at Damghan a single remain that could be identified with so illustrious a past. Ferrier, I think erroneously, endeavours to combat this theory by the argument that the City of a Hundred Gates must mean a city in which many roads met, whereas at Damghan there are only two. He, therefore, prefers the Shahrud-Bostam site for that of Hekatompylos.[2] Apart, however, from the fact that more roads meet at Damghan than two, it is by no means certain that the Greeks, when they used this descriptive epithet, referred to city gates at all. The title was equally applied by them to Egyptian Thebes, where it has been conjectured to refer to the *pylons*, or gateways, of the many splendid temples by which the capital of the Rameses was adorned; and it may have had some similar application in the case of the Parthian city.

Persia for large and fine buildings, and would apply to the mosque, not to the minaret. Similarly, Maschide Jam is, of course, the Musjid-i-Jama (or 'Town Mosque'), like the 'University Church' at Oxford or Cambridge.

[1] J. B. Fraser, *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 400; E. B. Eastwick, vol. ii. p. 157; Colonel Val. Baker, p. 138.

[2] *Caravan Journeys*, pp. 69–74.

Dismissing, however, the identity of Damghan with Hekatompylos as a question of purely speculative interest, we may find enough of romance in the history of the town under its modern name.[1] It is needless to say that Jenghiz Khan destroyed it once, or to add that Timur destroyed it again. That was a compliment invariably paid by those rival scourges of humanity to urban magnificence. Don Ruy di Clavijo, passing through Northern Persia on his embassy from the Castilian King to the Court of the Great Tartar in 1404, found still standing at Damghan two towers of human heads set in mud, which, but a few years before, the latter had erected as a trophy. Shah Abbas rebuilt the town and constructed its citadel. Here, in October 1729, Nadir Shah gained his great victory over the Afghan Ashraf, which heralded the final expulsion of the aliens in the following year. Here, in 1763, Zeki Khan, the savage half-brother of Kerim Khan Zend, being despatched to quell a revolt of the Kajar tribe, planted a garden with his prisoners, head downwards, at even distances; and here, in 1796, perished the miserable grandson of Nadir, Shah Rukh, from the effects of the inhuman torture inflicted upon him at Meshed by Agha Mohammed Shah. In the present century Damghan is said to have been finally ruined by a friend, instead of a foe, having never recovered from the encampment here, for three months, in 1832, of the army of Abbas Mirza on its way to Herat. No flight of locusts could have inflicted a more wholesale devastation. The population is reported now to be 13,000. I cannot credit it.

After leaving Damghan the road strikes due west, and traverses first a gravelly, and afterwards a richly-cultivated, plain to Ghushah, a place consisting only of two buildings—a caravanserai and a posthouse, which the exigencies of travel have conjured up in an otherwise untenanted expanse. The only interesting spot passed on the way is the deserted fort of Dowletabad, with a triple wall of enclosure, surrounded by a deep fosse. Sixty years ago Sergeant Gibbons, an Englishman serving in the army of Abbas Mirza, said it was 'one of the best little forts he had seen in Persia.'[2] Its chief, who had held out for some time against the exactions of the provincial Governor, offered Abbas Mirza a bribe

Dowletabad

[1] For early notices of Damghan, *vide* Istakhri, *Viæ Regnorum*, p. 211; Mukadessi, *Descriptio Imperii Moslemici*, p. 256; Yakut, *Dictionnaire Géographique*, p. 233.

[2] *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xi. p. 136 (1841).

of 30,000 *tomans* if he would continue him in the government. The Prince pocketed the money and carried off the chief to Meshed, the local Governor taking advantage of his absence to capture the fort. Like most other places in the neighbourhood, it is now abandoned and is rapidly falling to pieces.

Throughout this day, and, indeed, in all parts of my journey, I passed several of those great tumuli, or barrows, which have so puzzled the traveller in North Persia. They consist of immense circular or oval mounds, from fifty to a hundred feet in height, supporting, as a rule, no traces of buildings, but composed of solid masses of clay, worn smooth by the long passage of time. Local tradition, of course, assigns them to Jamshid—which is tantamount to a confession of utter ignorance as to their origin. By some they have been regarded as the sites of fire-temples, raised in the old days of Zoroastrian worship. I entertain very little doubt that they were mostly, if not all, raised as citadels or forts of defence for villages, long since perished, below. They are invariably to be found upon the plains where Nature has provided no ready means of defence, and where artifice was consequently required to create them. Many still exhibit upon their summits the crumbling, shapeless walls of the mud citadels by which they were once crowned. Good illustrations of this stage of existence are visible at Bidesht, near Shahrud, and at Jajarm, between Bujnurd and Shahrud. Where the tumuli (or *kurgans*, as they are called) are smooth and bare, the superstructure has entirely perished. A long line of these mounds is still traceable along the valley of the Gurgan, starting from Gumesh Tepe (or Silver Hill)—an obviously artificial erection—on the shores of the Caspian, and forming part of a triple line of earth ramparts, attributed to Alexander the Great, which extends as far as Bujnurd. The regularity of their occurrence in some places, as, for instance, between Kazvin and Teheran, has led to the plausible conjecture that they may also have been used as signal-stations, or beacons, from one camp to another. But, in either case, their purpose was military. There seems to be no ground for regarding any of them as sepulchral barrows.

Tumuli

The road from Ghushah lay over a desolate and uncultivated plain, and then gradually mounted, until, having traversed an easy pass in the hills, it suddenly dropped down upon a gloomy hollow, where stood the caravanserai and posthouse of Ahuan. The existing

brick serai was built by Shah Suleiman Sefavi; an older one of stone, attributed to the Sassanid Nushirwan, is in ruins. The name Ahuan, which has apparently much perplexed previous travellers,[1] signifies antelope or gazelle,[2] tradition ascribing to this spot one of the astounding miracles by which the Imam Reza signalised the various stages of his eastward journey to Tus. Here he found a captive female antelope, which, detecting his sacred personality, found speech, and invoked the assistance of the saint on behalf of her motherless young. The Imam bade the hunter release the animal, and himself went bail for her reappearance. The antelope, however, found the joys of home too much for her plighted word, and failed to keep the tryst; whereupon the prophet, being appealed to, 'willed' her back again to her captor, with whom she remained a prisoner, or a pet, ever afterwards. Here the mountain range is entered that separates the plains of Damghan and Semnan. From the highest point of the dividing crest the latter city was visible, twelve miles away, lying like a green splash upon a floor of stones. The descent on the far side, though easy, is very stony, and cantering down was no pleasure. Meeting a closed carriage drawn by four horses, with two postillions, outriders, and a guard, I had a horrible momentary dread that I was in for an *istikbal*, or official entry; but was reassured by finding that the occupant was the *hakim*, or Governor, who presumably was making a tour through his not very extensive dominions.

Ahuan

Semnan is held remarkable in Persia for its extensive and well-irrigated gardens, for its ancient trees, for an old minaret which enables it to compete with Damghan, for a smart and well-preserved modern mosque, for its local manufactures of teacakes and blue cotton pyjamas, for the beauty of its women, and for the unintelligibility of its speech. Perhaps in none of these respects does it quite answer to expectation. There is a great deal of water flowing in rivulets down the smaller streets, which usually serve as watercourses in Persia as well us roadways; but the environs of the town did not appear to profit thereby to the full extent, although a good deal of tobacco is cultivated.

Semnan

[1] Fraser spelt it, Aheaiyoon; Ferrier, Aheeiyon; O'Donovan, Aghivan. Similarly, Ghushah has been rendered Gosbek, Goocheh, Kushak, and Koshaw.

[2] *Ahu* = an antelope or gazelle. Hence *ahubara* (little antelope) is the name for the elegant Persian bustard.

Outside the bazaar is an open space in which there are some venerable *chenars*, and one magnificent veteran is enclosed in the bazaar itself, and protrudes his stupendous bole through the roof. The old minaret is also encountered in the middle of the bazaar, attached to the Musjid-i-Jama, which is in ruins. The tower is one hundred feet high and contains a hundred steps leading to the summit, which is fitted with a prayer-gallery. Earthquakes and age have caused it to slant. Fath Ali Shah's mosque, a little distance away, contains a spacious quadrangle, fifty yards square, and two fine *aiwans*, or recessed arches, set in tile-enamelled frames. Attached to it is a *madresseh*, or religious college. As for the teacakes, when Vambéry asked in vain for them, having heard of their fame as far away as in Herat, he received the truly Persian reply that, so great was the demand for these articles, and so enormous the export, that none were left for local consumption. I did not see the beautiful women any more than Vambéry found the teacakes. Upon the speech I am not qualified to pronounce; but so learned a philologist as Khanikoff, having made fruitless efforts to ascertain something by queries, came to no more definite conclusion than that it was a Mazanderan dialect, enriched by more vowels; whilst a legend relates that a *savant* who was once employed by a Persian monarch to report upon the languages spoken by his subjects illustrated that of Semnan by shaking some stones in an empty gourd before his royal patron.[1] Semnan is reported to contain 4,000 houses and 16,000 inhabitants—a probably altogether extravagant estimate. Jews are prohibited from residing here; but there are some twenty-five Hindu Buniahs engaged in trade, Semnan being the point where a route from Bunder Abbas, *viâ* Yezd and Tabbas, comes in from the south and supplies the northern provinces. A mud wall of the usual character, with flanking towers and gateways, and in the usual state of dilapidation, surrounds the town; and the Governor lives in a fortified *ark* (or citadel) projecting from the city wall on the north-west.

A long stony ascent leads us to one of the few interesting spots on the road between Meshed and Teheran. This is the remarkable man-roost—for I can call it by no more appropriate name—of Lasgird. Here there has once been a citadel, built upon a lofty

[1] *Vide* 'Grammatical Note on the Simnuni Dialect,' by Rev. J. Bassett, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xvi. p. 120 (1884); and 'Bericht über Semnan Dialect,' by A. H. Schindler, in *Zeit. d. M. Gesell.* vol. xxxii. 3.

circular mound to a total height of perhaps eighty feet from the plain. The citadel has fallen into ruin, and the buildings in its interior are a litter of rubbish and bricks. But the villagers have established themselves in the deserted *enceinte*, and, on the very top of the outer walls, have built a double storey of mud houses, which are only accessible by flights of crazy steps from the interior, and the most remarkable feature of which is a ledge or balcony built out from each storey with rude logs of wood plastered over with mud. Upon this rickety platform, which has nothing in the shape of a railing to prevent anyone from falling off, and which is full of holes, the inhabitants appear to live their outdoor life. The place, from a little distance, looks as if a gigantic colony of birds had settled there and built out their nests from the walls, the outer shape of the entire mound resembling a huge cask. It is entered by a steep stairway from the ground; mounting to a small postern, the door of which is a single block of stone swung on a pivot. I entered, and scrambled up the rude flights of steps in the interior, and poked my nose into some of the nests—I cannot call them cottages—in the upper storeys. The women were unveiled and steeped in squalor. The general condition of the tenements was very much like what the domestic economy of a rookery might be expected to be. Here the same dialect is spoken as at Semnan. The citadel is surrounded by a deep, broad fosse, converted into garden-plots, the revenues of which go to swell the endowment of the Imam Reza at Meshed.

Lasgird

After leaving Lasgird the route conducts through a hilly region which has been furrowed by winter torrents into deep gullies and ravines crossed by bridges. Upon descending again into the plain, the village of Deh Nemek (Salt Village) can be seen, at least twelve miles away, in the middle of an unutterably barren and repulsive desert. Few things are more treacherous in Persian travel than the false expectation induced by the sight of one's destination at the apparent distance of a few miles only, or more wearying than the disappointment that follows as the miles lengthen out into *farsakhs*, and the end never seems to come. What, in the distance, had appeared a settlement of two buildings only, turned out to be a village with a good many houses, hidden in a little semi-fertile depression of 'the level waste, the rounding grey.' In the succeeding strip of country—which is not less desolate—we pass, at the villages of Padeh and Aradan,[1] further

Road to Kishlak

[1] Fraser calls this place Heratoo.

specimens of abandoned, though not, as at Lasgird, re-inhabited, citadels on the top of great artificial clay mounds. When originally raised, and crowned with battlements and towers, these *kalehs* must have been imposing structures. They are now in a sort of intermediate stage between the recognisable fort and the indurated bare mound which I have discussed and explained in a preceding paragraph. Beyond Aradan an abundant stream descends from the mountains and separates into many channels, of which I must have crossed twenty in the space of half a mile. Cultivation improves in the same ratio, and at Kishlak (lit. winter quarters), which is *khalisah*, or Crown property, is responsible for the grain and fodder with which the royal stables are supplied at Teheran. This is the district of Khar, so often mentioned in earlier history and travel, and renowned as one of the granaries of North Persia. Here the route turns towards the north-west, and, at a distance of eight miles from Kishlak, enters a range of hills by a path which is commonly identified with, and which therefore raises the question of, the famous Pylæ Caspiæ (or Caspian Gates).

The Caspian Gates

I do not here propose, and I have not the space at my command, to discuss that question at full length. Its essential points may be said to have been argued, if not determined, by the labours of previous writers; and I will, accordingly, refer my readers to the pages of Rennell,[1] Ouseley,[2] Morier,[3] Fraser,[4] Ferrier,[5] Eastwick,[6] and Goldsmid.[7] The Pylæ Caspiæ were the pass through which Darius fled towards Bactria after the defeat of Arbela, and through which he was pursued by the army of Alexander. Information that may help us to identify it is to be found principally in the pages of Arrian and Pliny. The latter says that the pass itself was eight miles in length, and that no fresh water is encountered in a tract of twenty-eight miles;[8] the former reports that Alexander reached it in one day's rapid march from Rhages (Rhey).[9] Now

[1] *The Geographical System of Herodotus*, p. 174.
[2] *Travels in the East*, vol. iii. appendix iii.
[3] *Second Journey* (1814), pp. 364, 365.
[4] *Journey into Khorasan* (1821), pp. 291–293.
[5] *Caravan Journeys* (1845), pp. 59, 60.
[6] *Journal of a Diplomate* (1862), vol. ii. p. 140.
[7] *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xliv. p. 167 (1874).
[8] *Nat. Hist.*, lib. vi. cap. xiv.
[9] *De Exped. Alex.*, lib. iii. cap. xx. I say 'rapid,' because Arrian, when he describes the distance as ὁδὸν ἡμέρας μιᾶς ἐλαύνοντι ὡς Ἀλέξανδρος ἦγε, i.e. 'one day's journey to a man marching as Alexander did,' clearly predicates exceptional speed.

the claimants to the distinction of being the veritable Pylæ Caspiæ are four in number. There is a pass called Teng-i-Shemshirbur, (or the Pass of the Sword Cut—the tradition being that it was hewn in the rock by one slash of Ali's scimetar), on the upper road from the capital to Shahrud, and just under the shadow of the Shahkuh, the highest peak of the Elburz, between Astrabad and Shahrud. This pass is 150 yards long and only 18 feet wide, between two perpendicular walls of limestone. Napier says, 'there can be little doubt that this is the Caspian Gates.' On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Napier is wrong. For, not only do neither the features nor length correspond in any particular, but the Sword Cut Pass is about 200 miles too far to the east. Burnes[1] selected as his candidate the Gaduk Pass in the Elburz, north of Firuzkuh, through which runs the ordinary road to Mazanderan. Among the northern passes leading from Irak Ajemi into the Caspian provinces, those of Sawachi, near Firuzkuh, and the Teng-serenza, just beyond that place, have also been mentioned, both of them being precipitous rocky defiles of a character that might be supposed to justify the name of gates.[2] Morier, however, who visited them, and was at first impressed by the verisimilitude of their features, soon recognised that, in addition to other respects, they failed in the essential element of distance, being ninety miles east of Teheran, and, consequently, not within a day's march even for Alexander. Accordingly, he suggested, and Fraser, Ferrier, and Eastwick have supported with much wealth of argument, the choice of the pass to which my journey has now brought me, between the plains of Khar and Veramin.

This pass is known as the Sirdara, or Ser Dereh, or Sardari, probably Ser-i-dareh (i.e. Head of the Valley). It is entered by a narrow passage or gateway on the south-east, and winds tortuously through a projecting spur of the Elburz range, that here runs forward in a south-westerly direction into the great central desert. My notes represent it as being nearly six miles in length.[3] A salt stream flows down the valley bottom, and encrusts its banks with a white efflorescence. At times the pass opens into a little plain, and then again contracts. In the centre is an old

The Sirdara Pass

[1] *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. iii. p. 111. [2] Morier's *Second Journey*, p. 365.

[3] The extent to which miscalculation of distance is possible when the writer has ridden on horseback, and has perhaps composed his description from memory afterwards, may be judged from the varying estimates of the length of this pass. Ferrier says $2\frac{4}{5}$ miles, Eastwick 4, and O'Donovan 12.

deserted building with towers at the corner, and at the western exit are the remains of two old castles or towers. The place has evidently been strongly fortified and guarded, according to the standards of an age that knew no guns; and this very fact tends to sustain the likelihood of its having been the recognised mountain passage in a bygone day. Furthermore, the distance from Rhey—which is about forty miles—corresponds sufficiently with the reckoning of the classical writers.

Hostile considerations

On the other hand, there remain the considerations, which I feel it impossible to ignore, that the pass itself does not, in its material features, in the least justify the description of *pylæ*, or gates, or the statement of Pliny that it was artificially fashioned, and so narrow in parts as only to admit a cart; that, leading, as it does, through a quite subordinate spur of the main range, it would be surprising that it should have attained a celebrity so far in excess of other, and much more remarkable, defiles; and, above all, that, as it does not conduct directly to the Caspian, but leaves the main range of the Elburz still to be pierced, there appears to be no sufficient reason for its being known as the Caspian Gates.[1] The first, however, of these difficulties is to some extent met and obviated by the suggestion of Sir H. Rawlinson—whose acquaintance with the orography of Persia is unrivalled—that the real Caspiæ Pylæ are not the Sirdara Pass, but a defile in the same range a few miles to the north, known as the Teng-i-Suluk, which he saw and examined in 1835, and whose physical characteristics, although little known, correspond with the accounts of the classical authorities, besides containing a shorter route between Rhages and the Plain of Khar.

The real gates

I cannot help thinking, indeed, that some such solution must be accepted, or at least anticipated, by those who attach a becoming value to the statements of the Greek and Roman writers. Nor can the very important fact be left out of sight, that European travellers, passing northwards from Isfahan to Mazanderan, to the Court of Abbas the Great at Ferahabad or Ashraf, on the Caspian, less than 300 years ago, have left descriptions of the defile or defiles by which they penetrated the Elburz in this very

[1] This difficulty may, perhaps, be met by supposing that the pass, like the Caspian Sea itself, took its name from the tribe of the Caspii, of whom Strabo constantly speaks, and who resided in the neighbourhood. Their name is conceivably preserved in the district of Jasp, west of Kashan.

part, that correspond with sufficient exactitude with the words of Pliny. Starting from Mahalleh Bagh, which a Persian geographer identifies with the Plain of Khar, both Pietro della Valle, in 1618, and Sir Thomas Herbert, accompanying Sir Robert Sherley and Sir Dodmore Cotton, in 1627, proceeded through a defile, which they describe in very similar terms, to Hablah Rud and Firuzkuh, whence they continued their march to the Caspian. Of this defile Pietro della Valle says that, after leaving Mahalleh Bagh, he entered a deep and very narrow valley (*una profonda e angustissima valle*), with lofty mountains on either side (*i monti son sempre altissimi delle bande*), and in some turnings so narrow that to conduct a litter through it was a critical undertaking (*che ci diede fastidio per far passar la lettiga*), and that through this valley flowed a rivulet of salt water. Herbert, in his inimitable phraseology, says: 'The greater part of this night's journey was through the bottoms of transected Taurus, whose stupendious forehead wets itself in the ayery middle region; the fretum, or lane, is about forty yards broad even below, and bestrewed with pibbles; either side is walled with an amazing hill, higher than to reach up at twice shooting; and for eight miles so continues, agreeing with the relation Pliny and Solinus make of it; a prodigious passage, whether by art or nature questionable; I allude it unto nature, God's handmaid.' The description of these writers does not essentially differ from that left by A. Chodzko, formerly Russian Consul at Resht, of the pass which he visited in company with Sir H. Rawlinson, in 1835. He calls it Gardan-i-Sialek, and describes it as a tremendous defile, 2,500 yards long, with bare precipitous rock walls, from 650 to 1,000 feet in height, the passage between them being only thirty feet wide in its broadest and five feet in its narrowest part.[1] On the other hand, it is quite credible that the passes of Pliny, Della Valle, Herbert, and Rawlinson, may not be the same Caspian Gates through which Darius fled and Alexander marched; and that there may be more than one claimant to the title. This is, on the whole, the most probable solution, the Sirdara pass, in the opinion of the most learned critics, corresponding more accurately to the account of Arrian (cf. also Quintus Curtius and Amm. Marcellinus), than does any other pass to the north or east.[2] It cannot, however, to my

[1] *Annales des Voyages*, 1850, Part III.

[2] This view is sustained by the German writers Spiegel, *Eranische Alterthumskunde*, vol. ii. p. 532; Droysen, *Geschichte Alexanders*, p. 257; Tomaschek, *Zur hist.*

mind, conceivably be identified with that of Pliny, nor is it likely to have been the Caspiæ Pylæ to which so much geographical importance was attached by Strabo.

Demavend

It was soon after emerging upon the plateau beyond the pass that an isosceles cone of perfect shape and dazzling whiteness rose in view above the browns and greys of the nearer ranges, and disclosed to my enchanted vision the mighty Demavend. From that day, for over a month, I never, except in the mist of early morning, lost sight of the lordly spectacle, which always overhangs Teheran, and which attended me on my southward ride to a distance of 160 miles. What Fujiyama is to the Japanese, Demavend is to the Persian landscape. Both are ever-present, aerial, and superb. Both have left an enduring mark upon the legends of their country;[1] and if the peerless Fuji has played a far greater part in the art of Nippon than has Demavend in that of Iran, it is because the Japanese, while not inferior in ingenuity, are a vastly more imaginative people.

Aiwan-i-Kaif

Traversing a level, uncultivated plain, we reached the village and posthouse of Aiwan-i-Kaif,[2] fording a rapid but muddy stream which flows over a broad bed outside. The name indicates Portal, or Hall, of Delight, although other derivations have been suggested—viz. Aiwan-i-Kai (i.e. Hall of the Kaianians—tradition interpreting a ruin in the neighbourhood[3] as a palace of

Topographie von Persien, p. 79; and by Schindler, in the publication mentioned at the end of this chapter. The last-named authority has supplied me with the following conjectural identification of Alexander's march: first day, from Rhages to the present Aiwan-i-Kaif, 383 *stadia* or 44 miles; second day, through the Caspian Gates (Sirdara Pass) and Choara (Khar) to the present Aradan, 297 *stadia* or 34 miles; third day to Lasgird, 331 *stadia* or 38 miles; fourth day to Alah, or Germab, 370 *stadia* or 42 miles; fifth day to Frat, near Hekatompylos or Damghan, 417 *stadia* or 48 miles; sixth day, 400 *stadia* or 46 miles to Shahrud, where he found the corpse of Darius.

[1] 'According to the local legends, Demavend, or Divband, i.e. "Dwelling of the Divs or Genii," has been the scene of all the events veiled under the form of myths. Here, say the Persian Mohammedans, Noah's Ark was stranded; here dwelt Jemshid and Rustem, heroes of the national epics; here was kindled the bonfire of Feridun, vanquisher of the giant Zohak; here the monster himself is entombed, and the smoke of the mountain is the breath of his nostrils; here, also, is chained down the Persian Prometheus, Yasid ben Jigad, whose liver is eternally devoured by a gigantic bird. The caverns of the volcanoes are full of treasures guarded by snakes.'—Elisée Reclus, *Universal Geography* (English edition), vol. ix. p. 84.

[2] Ferrier calls it Haivanak or Eiwanee-Keij.

[3] Described by Eastwick, vol. ii. pp. 137, 138.

Cambyses), and Aiwan-i-Key (or Royal Drinking-hall). Whichever it be, the place appeared to me to have no attractions for the modern votaries of Epicurus. A great many of the houses had no occupants, and seemed to have been abandoned; and ill-advised would the monarch be who sought refuge in so squalid a retreat. Between Aiwan-i-Kaif and Kabud Gumbaz (Blue Dome) the River Jajrud descends from the mountains, and was divided at this season of the year into at least twenty-five different channels, straggling over a pebbly bed—in all, quite a quarter of a mile in width. I forded all these, and at Kabud Gumbaz encountered the first returning symptoms of proximity to that civilisation to which I had now been a stranger for nine days, in the shape of a vast pile of letters (the first I had received since leaving England) and a good hack sent out for my use by a friend in Teheran. Right gladly did I speed over the Plain of Veramin, whose ruins, presenting in the distance the appearance of four solitary columns, rose from a mound far away in the hollow of the plain. From a distance of quite ten miles the flash, as of a beacon fire, on the horizon showed where the sun's rays splintered on the golden dome of Shah Abdul Azim. Formerly the caravan route lay past this sanctuary and round the base of the range which separates the plains of Veramin and Teheran. Still is that line followed by the pilgrims, upon whom, whether starting for or returning from Meshed, it is incumbent to call and do reverence at the prophet's shrine; but pack animals and the postal road now both cut off an angle by striking in a due northerly direction over the ridge itself. Mounting to the summit of the pass, the new road winds up and down through dusty folds, until, the northern crest being reached, far down upon the plain that expands below is seen spread out the belt of verdure, topped only by a few edifices, that marks the capital of Persia. Beyond, again, at a distance of about seven miles from the city, rises the abrupt ferrugineous face of the Elburz range, like a prodigious rampart of rusty corrugated iron.

Teheran

The first appearance of Teheran is agreeable after a long journey, but in no sense imposing. As I descended the slope and drew nearer, it was difficult to believe that that green band could shroud a great city with a population of nearly 200,000 souls. The only buildings that rose to any height above the level of the tree-tops appeared to be a large mosque, with four tile-covered minarets, that looked from a distance like painted

organ-pipes, and, upon nearer approach, like sham Corinthian columns; one or two detached towers, and a domed structure whose roof consisted only of skeleton ribs of iron, like the framework in which a schoolroom globe is hung. The latter turned out subsequently to be the Takieh, or Theatre of the Passion Plays, within the precincts of the palace. Outside the walls on the southern side are a large number of brick-kilns, a monopoly of which industry is possessed by the Grand Vizier.[1] Here, too, are the slaughter-houses, the lease of which brings in an income of 2,230*l.* per annum. Entering the fortifications by a gaudily decorated gate at some distance from the populated quarter, I rode quite two miles through the streets before reaching the British Legation, which is situated on the northern outskirts of the city.

Supplementary Routes between Meshed and Teheran.

Teheran to Shahrud (the summer or mountain route, *viâ* Demavend, Firuzkuh, and Chasmeh Ali, 237 miles). J. B. Morier (1814), *Second Journey*, cap. xxiii. Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. p. 62 *seq.* (1876).

Routes between Teheran and Meshed taken by General A. H. Schindler in 1876, and described, with a map, in the *Zeit. d. Gesell. f. Erd. zu Berlin*, 1877, pp. 215-229: 1. Semnan, southern route, *viâ* Frat, to Damghan; 2. Maiomai, northern route, *viâ* Sherifabad, to Miandasht; 3. Miandasht, southern route, *viâ* Khan-i-Khodi and Dashtgird, to Abbasabad; 4. Abbasabad, northern route, *viâ* Ferumed and Jagatai, to Plain of Juwain, and thence south-east, *viâ* Tabbas, to Sebzewar; 5. Nishapur, north-west route, to Madan (Turquoise Mines), and thence south-west, *viâ* Shurab, to Zafarani.

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[1] He pays the sum of 12,000 *tomans* (or 3,430*l.*) a year for the monopoly, and regulates the price of bricks to suit his own pocket. In 1887 there were made two qualities of bricks, good and bad—the good costing, according to season, from 35 to 40 *krans*, the bad 25 to 30 *krans*, per 1,000. There has now been added a third, and worse, quality, and the prices for the three qualities are 45 to 52 *krans*, 35 to 42 *krans*, and 20 to 25 *krans*, per 1,000.

CHAPTER XI

TEHERAN [1]

> Over the utmost hill at length I sped,
> A snowy steep—the moon was hanging low
> Over the Asian mountain—and outspread
> The plain, the city, and the camp below.
>
> SHELLEY, *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto V.

TEHERAN, the modern capital of Persia, has frequently been spoken of by travellers, with some suspicion of contempt, as a new city. In the sense in which they use the word—i.e. in the historical sense—it is by no means a new, but, on the contrary, an ancient city. In another sense—viz. structurally—it was made a new city by Agha Mohammed Shah, a century ago, and still more by his nephew and successor, Fath Ali Shah; and has become a yet newer city—so new that the visitors in the first half of this century would barely recognise it—during the last twenty years. Before I trace the incidents of this twofold renaissance, I propose to say something of the antique, forgotten, but withal not uninteresting Teheran of the past. Research can never be quite wasted upon the origin and youth of a great capital.

An old and a new city

It has been conjectured that the name Teheran is identical with the Tazora that appears in the Theodosian tables as near to Rhages (Rhey). In the tables, however, it is not the Median Rhages, but a place of the same name near Yezd, that is spoken of; and the identity cannot therefore be sustained.

Ancient testimony

[1] I shall not attempt to give, as I have done in the case of previous chapters, any bibliography of Teheran, for the reason that very nearly every foreign visitor to Persia has stayed in the capital and has described his stay. Any reader, therefore, desirous of more ample instruction may be referred to the large bibliography which I propose to publish. Teheran, however, has been much less rich in historians than any other Persian capital; and the information contained in this chapter will, in the main, not be found elsewhere. I may add that the popular etymology which explains Teheran or Tihran as 'the pure' is false. It is an old Persian word which was formerly written with the two-dotted t, and sometimes also Tirun and Tiran.

Whatever its origin, Teheran must have been for long a small and insignificant place, for neither of those indefatigable geographers, El Istakhri and Masudi, whose travels illumine the tenth century, allude thereto, although they have much to say of the adjacent Rhey. The earliest irrefragable mention is in the pages of Abu Abdullah Yakut in A.D. 1179–80. His account, which is borne out by several native historians,[1] represents the primitive Teheranis as troglodytes, living underground in a semi-savage state, at war with their neighbours, and in revolt against the sovereign. However this may be, the locality soon became quite famous for its rivulets and gardens, and a more normal and respectable city sprang into existence. Hamdallah, in the fourteenth century, described it as a town of some magnitude and importance, and as preferable, both for climate and water-supply, to Rhey. Don Ruy di Clavijo, the Spanish ambassador to Timur, halting here on July 6, 1404, delivered himself of a somewhat balancing opinion:—[2]

> The city of Teheran was very large, but it had no walls; and it was a very delightful place, well supplied with everything; but it was an unhealthy place, according to the natives, and fevers were very prevalent.

Shah Tahmasp, the second of the Sefavi dynasty, seems to have been the first to favour it with a royal patronage; but Shah Abbas the Great, having fallen ill there from a surfeit of fruit, vowed he would never enter the place again. By him the province and city were placed under the government of a Khan.

Teheran under Shah Abbas

At this time Teheran was visited by more than one European; and the descriptions of the Italian, Pietro della Valle (1618), and of the Englishman, Sir Thomas Herbert (1627), are so curious as to be worthy of reproduction. I quote from a translation of the former that appears in 'Pinkerton's Travels':—

> Teheran is a large city, more spacious than Cashan, but not well peopled, nor containing many houses, the gardens being extremely large, and producing abundance of fruit of various descriptions, of such excellent quality that it is sought for by all the circumjacent

[1] For a list of them, *vide* a note by M. Langlès, in vol. viii. p. 164 of his edition of Chardin.

[2] *Narrative of Embassy* (Hakluyt Society), p. 98. Watson (*History of Persia*, p. 62) must have been unaware of Clavijo when he wrote that Della Valle was the first European to visit Teheran.

country. The Khan ordinarily resides here. All the streets are watered by a number of considerable streamlets, which, serpentining in the gardens, contribute not a little to their fertility. The streets, moreover, are shaded by beautiful, lofty plane-trees, called in Persia *chinar*; some of them are so extremely thick that it would take from two to three men to clasp them round. Excepting these, Teheran possesses nothing, not even a single building, worthy of notice.

More humorously the English traveller, whose tender susceptibilities appear to have been inflamed by the Teheran ladies:—

Seated is Tyroan in the midst of a large level or plain. The Houses are of white bricks hardened by the Sun. The City has about 3,000 Houses, of which the Duke's and the Buzzar are the fairest; yet neither to be admired. The Market is divided into two; some part thereof is open and other part arched. A Rivolet in two branches streams through the Town, serving withal both Grove and Gardens, who for such a favour, return a thankful tribute to the Gardiner. The inhabitants are pretty stately, the Women lovely, and both curious in novelties; but the jealousies of the men confine the temper of the weaker sex; yet by that little they adventured at, one might see *vetitis rebus gliscit voluntas.*[1]

Under the later Sefavi kings Teheran sometimes became the temporary residence of the Court; a palace was built here by Shah Suleiman; and here Shah Sultan Husein received the Turkish Ambassador. Tavernier incidentally notices, but did not apparently see, the town; Chardin calls it a *petite ville du pays.* It was taken and pillaged in the Afghan invasion, but is mentioned by Hanway (as Tœhiran) in the catalogue of Von Mierop's stages to Meshed in 1744.[2] It was here that Nadir, on his return from India, convoked a meeting of all the priests of religion, with a view to promulgating a new national faith. Here he blinded his son, Reza Kuli Khan, and here that helpless individual was afterwards murdered.[3] Kerim Khan Zend added to and altered the existing Ark or citadel, but did not often occupy it. Ali Murad Khan stayed there while marching against Mazanderan. With the rise of the Kajar dynasty, at the close

Later vicissitudes

[1] *Some Yeares' Travel, &c.* (3rd edit.), p. 206.

[2] *Historical Account, &c.*, vol. i. pp. 357–359. 'Tœhiran is a city enclosed with a wall of earth, which has many round turrets. But the whole is much decayed. Here we found provisions in plenty, and the bread exceedingly good.'

[3] G. A. Olivier, *Voyage, &c.*, vol. v. p. 418; vol. vi. p. 47.

of the same century, the first epoch of the city's political ascendency began.

Made his capital by Agha Mohammed Shah

The seat and cradle of the Kajar family was at Astrabad; but this was too remote and too far situated to the East to suit the expanding ambitions of the eunuch candidate for the throne. For some time, while his fortunes were yet insecure, and while his sovereignty was practically limited to Mazanderan, Agha Mohammed fixed his residence at Sari; but, as he turned his eyes and aspirations southwards, and the dream of a Pan-Iranian kingdom became capable of realisation, a more accessible capital was required. Accordingly, he selected Teheran, and its elevation to metropolitan rank is commonly dated from 1788. It was not till seven years later that his rivals were all removed, and that he found himself firmly seated upon the throne; but what had been perhaps in the first place a choice of necessity remained the selection of prudence. Rebellion had been effectively stamped out of life in the south. The Afghans had ceased for awhile to be hostile or formidable. On the other hand, at Teheran, the successful usurper was within easy reach of his own patrimony and tribesmen; and he was in a better position to watch the only enemy of whom he had real apprehension—Russia. The same considerations, aggravated rather than diminished by the events of the present century, have compelled his successors to endorse his judgment; and, whatever may be said against the site, there is very small likelihood, as long as Persia escapes dismemberment, of Teheran being dethroned from its position.

Its then extent

Agha Mohammed, though he elevated Teheran to the rank of his capital, either had not the taste or did not reign long enough to confer upon it any of the external distinction with which his predecessors on the throne had always striven to adorn their seats of government. Olivier, who was there in 1797, the year of the king's death, reported the city as being little more than two miles in circuit, and as containing a population of only 15,000, 3,000 of whom belonged to the court or army of the Shah. Fath Ali Shah, however, had more regal ideas. Under his rule the city increased in size, importance, and display. In 1807 General Gardanne, the French Envoy, found it containing a population of over 50,000 in winter, though all but deserted in summer, when the Court was away, and the inhabitants had retired to their *yeilaks*, or summer quarters, on the mountains. A very

nearly identical estimate was made by the English travellers Morier and Ouseley, who were at Teheran within the next few years. The former said it contained 12,000 houses, the latter a population of from 40,000 to 60,000, figures which practically coincide. As such, or, at any rate, not very much larger, it remained during the first seventy years of this century, before it experienced the entire renovation at the hands of Nasr-ed-Din Shah, which I shall presently describe.

Its appearance

What, however, was the appearance of the city in this first epoch of modified rejuvenescence? The narratives and the illustrations of a long series of minute and accomplished writers enable us to ascertain with absolute certainty. Planted in the hollow of the plain, and surrounded only by the stark desert, with few or no suburbs, and with clearly-defined outline, stood the city—a fortified polygon, between four and five miles in exterior circuit, surrounded by an embattled mud wall twenty feet high, flanked with circular towers, and defended by a moat forty feet in width and from twenty to thirty feet in depth. The wall was mean and in parts ruinous, the ditch was clumsy and broken down —in both respects, that is to say, profoundly Persian. Six gates of somewhat gaudy construction, adorned with glazed tiles, admitted to the interior, where 'the streets were narrow and filthy, with uncovered drains in the middle,' and where the only building of any pretentiousness was the citadel, or ark, in the northern part of the town. This contained the Diwan-khaneh-i-Shah, or Dar-i-khaneh (i.e. the Royal Palace). Beyond the city walls the country palace of Kasr-i-Kajar, built by Fath Ali Shah, upon an eminence to the north, was the sole object that relieved the brown monotony of the surrounding plain. Demavend soared loftily over all—the one noble feature in the landscape. Such was the Teheran that met the eyes of Malcolm and Harford Jones and Ouseley, and the long train of soldiers, diplomatists, and writers, who, escorted by brilliant cavalcades and equipped with costly presents, marched up hither from the Gulf in the first decade of the present century, to court the superb graces of Fath Ali Shah.

Old British Mission

Up till the year 1870 this, with few alterations, remained the Teheran with which a wealth of writers has made us familiar. In this circumscribed city the British Legation, or Mission, as it was called, was situated in the southern part. The grounds originally belonged to one Mohammed Khan, the Zam-

PANORAMA OF TEHERAN

burakchi Bashi, or Commander of the Camel Battery, which was one of the favourite military toys of Fath Ali. Upon this individual his sovereign bestowed that especial mark of confidence for which Persian monarchs have always been famous, by inviting him, *sponte suâ*, to part with his property, which was forthwith transferred to the English Elchi. Sir Gore Ouseley built upon it a commodious house, whose Italian portico and pillars were a perpetual record of Europe in the heart of Asia. The Russians originally occupied a Legation in another part of the town, but, after the assassination of their Minister, Grebayadoff, in 1828, they moved for greater security into the precincts of the Ark. Until its disappearance, or rather expansion, in the years 1870–2, this transitional Teheran was in every respect an Oriental city—contracted, filthy, shabby, and what the French so well denominate as *morne*.

Nasr-ed-Din Shah, among other titles to distinction, may claim to have made his city a capital in something more than the name.

New Teheran

After being twenty years upon the throne, it appears to have occurred to him that the 'Point of Adoration (*Kibleh*) of the Universe' was framed in a somewhat inadequate setting. Accordingly, Teheran was suddenly bidden to burst its bonds and enlarge its quarters. The old walls and towers were for the most part pulled down,[1] the ditch was filled up, a large slice of surrounding plain was taken in, and, at the distance of a full mile from the old enclosure, a new rampart was constructed upon Vauban's system, copied from the fortifications of Paris before the German war. A good deal of the money sent out from England by the Persian Famine Relief Fund in 1871 was spent in the hire of labour for the excavation of the new ditch, which has a very steep outer profile, and for the erection of the lofty sloping rampart beyond. There is no masonry work upon these new fortifications; they are not defended by a single gun; they describe an octagonal figure about eleven miles in circuit; and, I imagine, from the point of view of the military engineer, are wholly useless for defence. Their main practical service consists in facilitating the collection of the town *octroi*. Nevertheless, Teheran can now boast that it is eleven miles round, that it has European fortifications, and twelve gates; while its interior features have developed in a corresponding ratio.

[1] They are still standing or traceable in parts, particularly along the south-west face of the old town.

That the city has yet much to do before it realises the full aspirations of its royal Haussmann is evident as soon as we enter the gates. These consist of lofty archways, adorned with pinnacles and towers, and presenting from a distance a showy appearance, which has caused to some incoming travellers paroxysms of delight. A closer inspection shows that they are faced with modern glazed tiles, in glittering and frequently vulgar patterns, depicting the phenomenal combats of Rustam, or the less heroic features and uniform of the modern Persian soldier. After entering the gates, where a guard is stationed, we are again in the open country, for on most sides the city has not yet grown up to its new borders, which embrace a large extent of bare, unoccupied desert. This passed, a ride through squalid suburbs brings us to the more central and pretentious quarters of the town. At every turn we meet in juxtaposition, sometimes in audacious harmony, at others in comical contrast, the influence and features of the East and West. A sign-board with *Usine à Gaz* inscribed upon it will suddenly obtrude itself in a row of mud hovels, ostentatiously Asiatic. Tram-lines are observed running down some of the principal thoroughfares. Mingled with the turbans and *kolahs* of the Oriental crowd are the wide-awakes and helmets of Europeans. Through the jostling throng of cavaliers and pedestrians, camels, donkeys, and mules, comes rolling the two-horsed brougham of some Minister or grandee. Shops are seen with glass windows and European titles. Street lamp-posts built for gas, but accommodating dubious oil-lamps, reflect an air of questioning civilisation. Avenues, bordered with footpaths and planted with trees, recall faint memories of Europe. A metalled and watered roadway comes almost as a shock after weeks of mule track and rutty lane. Strange to say, it does not appear to be mistaken by the inhabitants for the town sewer. We ride along broad, straight streets that conduct into immense squares and are fringed by the porticoes of considerable mansions. In a word, we are in a city which was born and nurtured in the East, but is beginning to clothe itself at a West-End tailor's. European Teheran has certainly become, or is becoming; but yet, if the distinction can be made intelligible, it is being Europeanised upon Asiatic lines. No one could possibly mistake it for anything but an Eastern capital. Not even in the European quarter has it taken on the insufferable and debauched disguise with which we are familiar in the hideous streets of Galata and

The interior

DOWLET GATE

Pera. Its most distinctive features retain an individuality of their own, differing from what I have noticed anywhere else in Central Asia. Jeypore is sometimes extolled as the finest specimen of a native city, European in design, but Oriental in structure and form, that is to be seen in the East. The 'rose-red city' over which Sir Edwin Arnold has poured the copious cataract of a truly Telegraphese vocabulary struck me, when I was in India, as a pretentious plaster fraud. No such impression is produced by the Persian capital. Though often showy, it is something more than gilt gingerbread; and, while surrendering to an influence which the most stolid cannot resist, it has not bartered away an originality of which the most modern would not wish to deprive it.

In the northern part of the new town, but outside the line of the old walls, is situated the principal square or public place of Teheran. This is known as the Tup Meidan or Meidan-i-Tup-Khaneh—i.e. Gun Square or Artillery Square, from the fact that it is surrounded by the artillery barracks, and that it contains a park of rusty cannon, dating from an obsolete past. The length of this fine *meidan*, which is cobble-paved, is 270 yards, its width 120. On the longest, i.e. the northern and southern, sides, it is surrounded by low one-storeyed buildings, where the guns are housed and the men quartered; on the western side is the Arsenal, in front of which some twenty-five venerable smooth-bores, 24-pounders, and wholly useless, rest upon their ancient carriages. The eastern face is entirely occupied by a fine building with an ornamental plaster façade, which is now tenanted by the Imperial Bank of Persia. In the middle of the square is a great tank, fenced round by an iron railing, with some cast-iron statuettes, and with four big guns planted at the corners and covered with tarpaulins. Its most distinctive features, however, are the gateways by which it is entered or left, and which are regarded by the Persians as triumphs of modern architectural skill. They are certainly, as the accompanying illustration will show, very imposing and original structures, and, with their light arcades and fantastic fronts, present a handsome appearance from a distance, though a closer scrutiny of the coarse tile-work with which they are faced is apt to destroy the illusion. Of these gates the two principal and most striking are those which lead from the two southern angles of the square, opening on to streets which skirt the outer wall of the Ark, or citadel, on either side, the entire intervening

The Tup Meidan

space being occupied by its courts and buildings. From the south-east corner the Nasirieh Gate leads down to the eastern entrance to the palace and to the bazaars. From the south-west corner the Dowlet Gate conducts to the Khiaban-i-Almasieh (or Avenue of Diamonds), from which the western or public entrance to the Ark and palace is gained. Upon this gate, when the Shah is in Teheran, floats the royal standard.

Other meidans

Two other *meidans* are worthy of notice. One is the Meidan-i-Mashk, a vast open space, over a quarter of a mile in length, which is used as a Champ de Mars, or parade-ground, for the garrison, and where I witnessed a military display which I shall afterwards describe. This *meidan* is a little to the north-west of the Tup Meidan, and is reached by a gateway opening out of the so-called Street of Ambassadors, which leads from the north-west angle of the Gun Square. The remaining square, called the Meidan-i-Shah, is outside the gardens of the Ministry of War, and the more southerly portion of the palace enclosure. It contains a large tank in the centre, and a colossal brass gun, known as the Tup-i-Murvarid, or Cannon of Pearls, which has always been an especially sacred *bast*, or sanctuary, for the fugitive criminal, a veritable 'horns of the altar,' in Teheran. Successive chroniclers of the capital have given different and inconsistent accounts of this monster cannon, some alleging that it was brought by Nadir Shah from Delhi, where it was originally decorated with a string of pearls near the muzzle, others that it was cast by him in Persia. Sir R. K. Porter says that it was the same gun that Chardin saw in the *meidan* at Isfahan; but, as I cannot find that Chardin saw or described any particularly big gun there, I am loth to accept this explanation. Elsewhere I have read that the gun was cast by Kerim Khan Zend at Shiraz, and that, having been kept for some time under cover in an *imamzadeh* there, it acquired a sacred character, which it has retained since its removal to the Kajar capital. Jehangir Khan, the late Minister of Fine Arts, informed me, however, that, according to Persian historians, this cannon is one of the Portuguese ordnance captured by the allied Persians and British at Ormuz in 1622.[1] Whatever be the truth, its

[1] This version has already been given by Mme. Serena (*Hommes et Choses en Perse*, p. 54), although she proceeds, quite gratuitously, to make Ormuz 'a port in the island of Muscat in the Persian Gulf'; Muscat being neither in the Persian Gulf, nor an island, nor the site of Ormuz.

semi-sacred character is unimpeachable. An artillery guard is stationed hard by, and barren women make a pilgrimage hither, and pass beneath the gun, in order to promote the object of their desire.

The most distinctive feature, however, of this smaller *meidan* is the great arched gateway leading from it, and used as the Nakkara-Khaneh (or Drum Tower), whence, every evening, at sundown, is discoursed, from prodigious horns, kettle-drums, cornets, and fifes, the appalling music which is an inalienable

Nakkara-Khaneh

DRUM TOWER AND CANNON OF PEARLS

appurtenance of royalty in Persia, and is always sounded at sunset from some elevated gallery or tower in any city blessed with a royal or princely governor. Over two hundred years ago it used to disturb the slumbers of Tavernier and Chardin at Isfahan, where it was sounded at sunset and at midnight; the truth being, as the former writer sagaciously observed, that 'the musick would never charm a curious ear.' It is commonly supposed that this practice is a relic of the old fire or sun worship, that luminary being saluted both at its rising and setting by respectful strains. Whether this be so or not I cannot say. What is certain is that it has for long

been an Oriental attribute of royalty; and, in a letter from the French traveller, Bernier, written in 1663 from the Court of the Great Mogul at Delhi, where there neither was, nor, so far as we know, ever had been, fire-worship, I have come across the following passage, describing the practice as it prevailed there and then, in terms which exactly fit the sonorous and portentous discord which is evoked every evening by the band of brazen-lunged youths to whom I used to listen with a sort of horrified fascination at Teheran:—

> Over the great gate there is a large raised place which is called Nagar Kanay, because that is the place where the Trumpets are, or rather the Hoboys and Timbals that play together in consort at certain hours of the day and night. But this is a very odd consort in the ears of an European that is a new comer, not yet accustomed to it; for sometimes there are ten or twelve of these Hoboys, and as many Timbals that sound all at once together; and there is a Hoboy which is called Karna, a fathom and a half long, and of half a foot aperture below; as there are Timbals of brass or iron that have no less than a fathom in diameter, whence it is easie to judge what a noise they must needs make.

Bernier goes on to say that at first he found this royal music quite insufferable; but that afterwards it was very pleasing in the night time, when it seemed 'to carry with it something that is grave, majestical, and very melodious.' Verily *de gustibus non est disputandum.* The same practice is still kept up by some of the native princes in India.

British Legation

From the Tup Meidan, as I have indicated, two streets run in a northerly direction towards the outer walls. These streets or avenues—for they are planted with poplars—are regarded as the crowning glory of modern, being, in fact, the nucleus of European, Teheran. The more westerly of the two, known to the Persians as Khiaban-i-Dowlet, has been sometimes described as the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, from the fact that the representatives of several foreign Powers have acquired residences upon it. Of these, by far the most spacious and imposing is the Legation which shelters the representative of Her Britannic Majesty. At the distance of nearly half a mile from the great square, a fine gateway, upon which Her Majesty's initials are carved in stone, conducts on the left hand into a large wooded enclosure, where nothing at first is visible but a dense growth of trees, interspersed with winding pathways and

runnels of water. This delightful grove, which, as the result of only twenty years' growth, shows of what the Persian soil under irrigation is capable, conceals the main building of the Legation, as well as four other substantial detached houses, accommodating the various secretaries. The principal structure is a low building occupying three sides of a court, and terminating at one end in a campanile, or clock-tower, of Byzantine design, in which a large clock tells the time after the English fashion and according to the hours of the English day. On one side is the Chancellery; in the centre are the reception-rooms and Minister's quarters; on the other side are the spare rooms. The building opens by a verandah at the back on to a lovely garden, where swans float on brimming tanks of water and peacocks flash amid the flower-beds. The design was the work of Major Pierson, R.E., of the Indo-European Telegraph Department, who may be credited with a very successful result. The coolness and seclusion of the entire enclosure is one of the most agreeable and uncommon features in Teheran. The Turkish Embassy and the Legations of several others of the Great Powers are in the same street, or near at hand. Russia, however, is elsewhere accommodated; the residence of her Minister being, as I have pointed out, in the older portion of the town, near the bazaars. In the same quarter as the British Legation are situated the establishment and chapel of the American missionaries. The Armenian church, where British subjects used to be interred, and which contains the tomb of a son of Sir Walter Scott, was near the former British Mission in the old city.

The Ark

To a stranger, possibly also to a native, the most interesting portion of Teheran is the great quadrilateral, containing the Ark or Citadel, and occupying a space of probably nearly a quarter of a mile square on the southern side of the Tup Meidan. Since the demolition of the old town there is nothing in the appearance of this enclosure to identify it with a citadel in the ordinary acceptation of the term; for, although it is surrounded by mud walls, it is in no sense fortified, and is now merely a vast collection of courts, gardens, and buildings, the greater part of which appertain to the Royal Palace. Let me, therefore, attempt to give some description of the latter, so far as its somewhat haphazard and unmethodical interior arrangements will admit. Parts of the building remain in exactly the same state as they were, when viewed in the opening years of the century

by the successive envoys of the British and Indian Governments. But the major part of the enclosure does not now answer to their description and has been so much altered by the reigning Shah in the reconstruction of the past twenty years, as to need a fresh historian.

The Palace

Upon entering by a modest and wholly undistinguished gateway from the Khiaban-i-Almasieh, the visitor finds himself in a small irregular courtyard, planted with trees. From this he is conducted into another and larger paved court, in the centre of which is a long raised *hauz* or tank, the water lapping noiselessly, in the Persian style, over the level brim. On either side of this is a paved causeway, beyond which are flower-beds and rows of poplars, planes, and pines. The entire upper end of this court is occupied by a handsome building, the centre of which, when the heavy curtains that shield it are raised, is open to the public gaze, disclosing the Talar or throne room, and the famous white marble throne, standing upon a dais in the centre. Upon this throne on certain public occasions, and particularly at the festival of No Ruz or New Year (March 21), the Shah displays himself to the people in a fashion not essentially different from that in which Darius and Xerxes appeared in royal state before their subjects in the *talars* of Persepolis 2,300 years ago.[1]

Takht-i-Marmor

On either side of the throne room, and opening into it, are apartments sumptuously decorated in the Persian style with mural ornamentation and oil paintings. In these the ministers and honoured guests are entertained with coffee and *kalians* before and during the royal levées. The Talar itself is a spacious chamber, whose flat ceiling is set with mirror panels, and whose walls are embellished with the *aineh-kari* or mirror work, small facets ingeniously and artistically fixed in plaster, so as to produce a thousand angles and coruscations, in which the Persians are so undeniably clever; and with oil paintings of the various princes of the Kajar family. Round the lower part is a dado or wainscoting of alabaster carved in relief, and adorned with painted flowers and birds. In the centre of the room stands the Takht-i-

[1] These open throne-rooms are, however, far older than either Darius or Xerxes, and are one of the most ancient accompaniments of Eastern royalty. We read of Solomon in 1 Kings, vii. 6, 7, that 'He made a porch of pillars, and the porch was before them; and the other pillars and the thick beam were before them. Then he made a porch for the throne where he might judge, even the porch of judgment.'

Marmor, or white marble throne of Kerim Khan Zend, wrought of marble of Yezd, and brought from Shiraz.[1] This great structure, which does not in the least degree resemble a throne according to Western ideas, but might rather be compared to an elevated platform surrounded by a pierced marble balustrade, rests upon low twisted pillars and upon the shoulders of grotesque figures representing *jins* or *divs*. Two steps supported by recumbent lions lead up to it, and the throne itself consists of a two-fold terrace, upon the back part of which, supported by a pearl-embroidered cushion, sits, or rather kneels (this being the Persian substitute for sitting), upon State occasions the King of Kings. In front of the throne is a place for a fountain, running water being another of the appurtenances of Eastern royalty.[2] The roof of the front part of the throne room, where it is open to the garden, is sustained by two immense columns with deep spiral flutings, also of Yezd marble, and constructed by order of Kerim Khan for his palace at Shiraz.

A passage from the court of the Talar leads into another and larger court, where is the main and State entrance into the palace.

The Museum

It was under a threshold, opening out of the arcade between the two, that were deposited by Agha Mohammed Shah the bones of Nadir Shah and Kerim Khan,[3] that he might have the exquisite luxury, as he passed in and out, of trampling upon the dust of his hereditary foes. Here are a large doorway, and a broad flight of carpeted steps, leading up between great bronzes and porcelain vases to the State apartments. As I mounted them three times during my stay at Teheran, and became familiar with the rooms to which they conduct, I may here describe the latter. At the top of the staircase is the Shah's library, a small room which has been neatly fitted, after the

[1] There is an illustration of it, from a photograph, in Benjamin's *Persia and the Persians*, p. 222, and a superb engraving of the whole Talar in P. Coste's *Monuments Modernes de la Perse*. Some writers have supposed this also to be an Indian throne, and to have belonged to Nadir's spoil. Others have declared that it was wrought of Maragha marble. In Kerim Khan's day it stood in the *talar* of the palace, that is now the office of the Indo-European Telegraph in Shiraz, from whence, along with the fluted columns, it was removed by Agha Mohammed Shah to Teheran.

[2] The symbolism of this custom is variously interpreted either as signifying light, and being, therefore, of good omen, or as typifying the main source of wealth in a thirsty land, and being consequently a mark of luxury.

[3] Those of Kerim Khan were said to have been afterwards restored to their original resting-place.

European manner, with bookcases behind glass doors, and in which I saw several well-bound European books. It is reported to contain many Arabic MSS. of inestimable value. Upon the left hand at the top is the entrance to the new Museum, a great hall or gallery, constructed after the return of the Shah from his first visit to Europe in 1873, to contain not only the Royal Regalia, but also the vast collection of *objets d'art* and curiosities, which the generosity of foreign crowned heads, or his own whims, have enabled him to amass during a reign of over forty years. This extraordinary chamber, which with its contents alternately resembles an Aladdin's palace, an old curiosity shop, a prince's wardrobe, and a municipal museum, consists of a long parallelogram, crowned by a series of low domes, with plaster decorations in white, blue, and gold, there being a number of deep recesses, terminating in windows along one side; while the partition between these recesses, and the remaining walls of the room, are fitted with glass cases, in which are displayed, side by side, treasures of priceless value and the most unutterable rubbish. The central part of the chamber, which is, in part, tile-paved, contains a number of immense porcelain vases, mostly from Europe, candelabra, lustres, armchairs covered with a thin plating of real gold, etc., whilst upon tables or under glass cases are disposed with some slight effort at arrangement, but in ludicrous juxtaposition, Swiss musical boxes, Persian antiquities and specimens, meteorolites, European purchases or presents, and heads of game shot by His Majesty.

Crown jewels

Perhaps the objects in this bizarre collection that most attract the stranger are the infinity of gems, cut, uncut, or set in every variety of fashion, that are seen behind the glass panels. Here are the enamelled and bejewelled arms of the great Sefavi kings, here the swords of Timur, Shah Ismail and Agha Mohammed Shah, here the magnificent Abbas' coat of mail. A square glass case contains a vast heap of pearls, four or five inches deep, into which one can plunge the hand and spill them in cascades and handfuls. Upon a separate stand appears the globe of jewels which was constructed out of his loose stones by the reigning Shah, at a cost (exclusive of the gems, provided by himself) of 320,000*l.*, and which is looked upon as the artistic *chef d'œuvre* of his reign. Its alleged value, with the stones (75 lbs of pure gold, and 51,366 gems, weighing 3656·4 grammes) is 947,000*l.*

It is a little difficult to determine the respective countries amid the flash of the various stones; nor does the artist appear to have been as good a cartographer as he was a craftsman. However, as well as I could discern, the sea is composed of emeralds, England and France of diamonds, Africa of rubies, India of amethysts, and Persia herself of the national stone—turquoises.[1] I can imagine the day when some future and less economical sovereign, or possibly even some conqueror from the north, shall handle this glittering plaything in a more practical spirit, and shall perhaps desire to ascertain by personal experience the worth of the constituent elements into which his curiosity may suggest that it should be again resolved. At the upper end of the room, beneath glass cases, are a number of royal crowns, dating from the Sefavean days to modern times, prominent among them being the mighty head piece, pearl-bedecked, and with flashing *jika* or aigrette of diamonds in front, which is worn by the King at No Ruz, and was so familiar an object upon the head of Fath Ali Shah, as depicted in the illustrations, English and Persian, of the early part of the century. Here, too, is a superb tiara, manufactured by order of the present Shah, in Paris. The number of jewelled swords, scabbards, epaulettes, and cups, vases, boxes and *kalians*, is enormous, while in separate glasses repose huge, solitary, uncut gems. At the upper end of the chamber stands a throne of modern shape, if not of modern construction, viz., a lofty chair exquisitely enamelled and completely covered with rubies and emeralds. I shall have something to say presently about the history of this beautiful work of art. I was informed that the Shah, when he uses this hall, as he not infrequently does, as an audience chamber to the Ministers and Foreign Representatives at No Ruz, prefers to stand near the lower end of the hall to occupying the throne itself. Upon the walls on the right hand side of the room are displayed a heterogeneous collection of the treasures or trifles which the august traveller has brought back from Europe. Here are suspended the ribbons and stars of a multitude of orders, including the Garter, and an imposing array of Russian decorations. Elsewhere are arrayed gorgeous sets of silver-gilt plate, enamelled snuff-boxes, gold and silver

[1] Of the remaining gems, M. Orsolle (*Le Caucase et la Perse*) says that the ruby which marks Demavend was the last jewel torn from the miserable Shah Rukh by the myrmidons of Agha Mohammed Khan; and that the diamond which marks Teheran was found upon the body of Ashraf, the last Afghan king, by a Beluchi, who presented it to Shah Tahmasp II.

vases, a case containing photographs of the English Royal Family, dating from the Shah's first visit in 1873, specimens of filagree work, and a number of objects in ivory and bone, ranging from the most delicate Chinese workmanship to a collection of sixpenny toothbrushes (classification, with a vengeance!). From the walls depend a number of mediocre or execrable oil paintings, and large panels of glazed tile-work, representing different scenes in the life of the present sovereign. The three finest jewels possessed by the Shah are said to be a huge uncut ruby, once the property of Aurungzebe, which shimmers at the top of what is called the Kaianian crown; a large diamond, set in a ring, which was sent by George IV. as a present to Fath Ali Shah, and was said by the gossips to have opened at once the gates of the capital and the heart of the monarch; and beyond all the Daria-i-Nur, or Sea of Light, the sister diamond to the Kuh-i-Nur (Kohinoor), or Mountain of Light, which is the property of the British Crown. Both jewels are said to have descended from Timur to Mohammed Shah, the puppet whom Nadir spared at Delhi, but whom he considerately relieved of all his chief valuables, including these diamonds and the Peacock Throne. Upon Nadir's death, the Kuh-i-Nur went with Ahmed Shah Durani into Afghanistan, and descended to Shah Shuja, from whom it was taken by Runjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab, whence it passed by conquest into the possession of the English Crown. The Daria-i-Nur remained in Persia, and has been worn by its successive sovereigns. Fath Ali Shah immortalised his own vanity at the same time that he considerably lowered the value of the stone, by causing to be scratched upon it his own name.[1] He was in the habit of wearing it in one of the *bazubands* or armlets which he bore upon State occasions, between the shoulder and elbow; but it is also sometimes worn in a belt, and in other settings. I asked to see this jewel, but it was shut up in an iron box that lay upon the seat of the elevated throne: and it appeared that in the absence either of the key or of the Grand Vizier, I think the latter, it could not be shown.

Such, as well as I can remember them with the assistance of

[1] I have read in different works that the stone was valued at 200,000*l.*, and also that its value was depreciated to the extent of 1,000,000*l.* by the act of Fath Ali Shah; statements from which it is difficult to strike out a mean of truth. It weighs 186 carats.

my notes, were the chief contents of the Royal Museum.[1] In a country that is always bewailing its lack of money, and which cries aloud for the regeneration that might so easily spring from the construction or repair of roads, bridges, caravanserais, and other elementary public works, it can excite but one feeling to see all this impotent wealth piled up, secreting beneath a glass case that which should serve to populate entire districts and to enrich great communities. How much worse is it when we know that the treasures here displayed do not stand alone, but are supplemented by hoards of specie and bullion stored in the vaults below, which the lowest estimate values at three millions sterling and the highest I will not say at what figure. Patriotism need not be so very difficult an attribute in royalty, when it is able to stop short of the treasure-house and the money-bags.

Below the Museum are a number of vaults, known as the Chinee-Khaneh, or Porcelain Room, where vast quantities of Sèvres, Dresden, old Worcester, and other porcelain are stored, the gifts of European sovereigns to the present and preceding kings. There is also an Aslaheh-Khaneh, or Armoury, containing curious arms, and the Shah's rifles and fowling-pieces; and a gallery wherein is hung a large collection of the paintings of the late esteemed artist, Abul Hasan Khan Ghaffari, styled the Sani-el-Mulk. These last-named apartments I did not see.

The alleged Peacock Throne

On the other side of the top of the staircase is a room, sometimes called the Council Chamber, in which I was admitted to a private audience by the Shah. It was empty on all the occasions when I saw it, save for an object standing in the corner by the window. This was the Takht-i-Taous or celebrated so-called Peacock Throne, said to have been brought by Nadir Shah from India in 1739–40, and identified by a long consensus of writers (I know of no divergent opinion) with the famous Peacock Throne that stood in the Diwan-i-Khas at Delhi (where its site is still shown) and that was the main ornament of the glittering court of the Great Mogul. From a study of all the extant authorities bearing upon the question, I had come to the conclusion that this claim could not be substantiated, and that the throne at Teheran, exquisite work of art though it be,

[1] Sir H. Jones, in 1810, estimated the value of the Persian Crown Jewels at 15,000,000*l.* (*Mission to Persia*, vol. i. p. 384); Lord Pollington, in 1865, at 40,000,000*l.*–50,000,000*l.*! (*Half Round the World*, pp. 229–232).

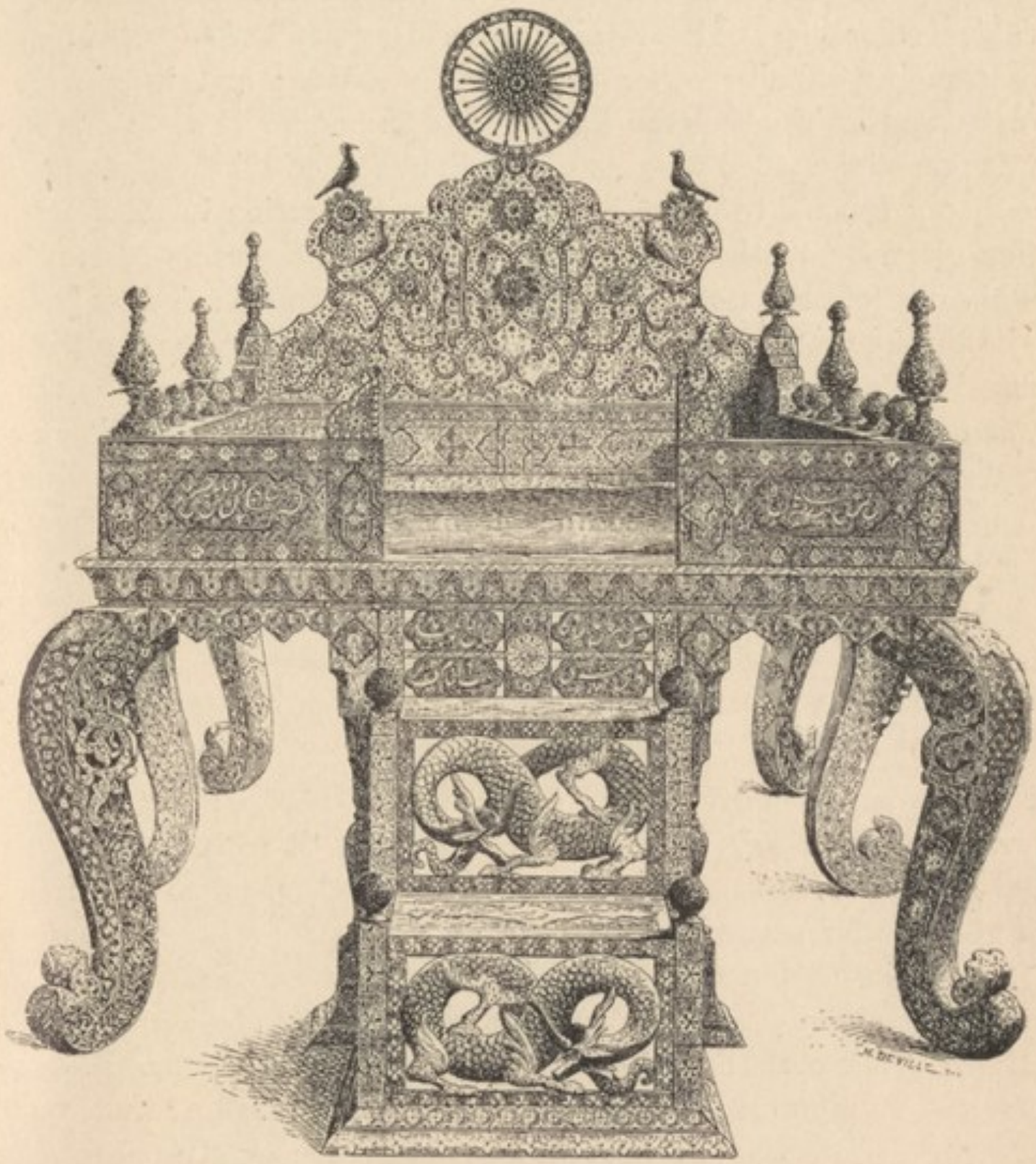
was a fraudulent pretender to the honour of having supported the majesty of the Great Mogul. Let me deploy the chain of reasoning by which I had arrived at this conclusion. The standard reference to the original Peacock Throne at Delhi is contained in the well-known description of the French jeweller Tavernier, who visited that capital in the year 1665 in the splendid reign of Aurungzebe. He wrote as follows:—

> The largest throne, which is set up in the hall of the first court, is in form like one of our field beds, six feet long and four broad. The cushion at the base is round like a bolster; the cushions on the sides are flat. The under part of the canopy is all embroidered with pearls and diamonds, with a fringe of pearls round about. Upon the top of the canopy, which is made like an arch with four panes, stands a peacock with his tail spread, consisting all of saphirs and other proper coloured stones. The body is of beaten gold enchas'd with several jewels, and a great ruby upon his breast, at which hangs a pearl that weighs fifty carats. On each side of the peacock stand two nosegays as high as the bird, consisting of several sorts of flowers, all of beaten gold enamelled. When the king seats himself upon the throne there is a transparent jewel with a diamond appendant of eighty or ninety carats, encompass'd with rubies and emeralds, so hung that it is always in his eye. The twelve pillars also that uphold the canopy are set with rows of fair pearl, round, and of an excellent water, that weigh from six to ten carats apiece. This is the famous throne which Tamerlane began and Cha Jehan finish'd, which is really reported to have cost 160 million and 500,000 livres of our money.[1]

Now contrast this with the Persian claimant to the title. I have purposely caused to be reproduced an engraving of the Takht-i-Taous at Teheran, in order to accompany and elucidate my argument. It is certainly a platform, or, as Tavernier calls it, a Field-bed Throne; as were the majority of those employed by the sovereigns of the East. It is further a sumptuous and a beautiful work of art. The entire fabric is overlaid with a plating of gold, which is exquisitely chiselled and enamelled, and is absolutely encrusted with precious stones, among which rubies and emeralds are the most prominent. Seven bejewelled legs sustain the plat-

[1] *Travels in India* (edit. 1678), book ii. cap. viii. p. 122. Hanway (vol. ii. cap. x.) says that the Peacock Throne and nine other thrones, as well as several jewelled weapons and utensils, were valued at nine crores of rupees, or 11,250,000*l.* The *Nadir-Nameh* (History of Nadir) valued the Peacock Throne at 2,000,000*l.*: Scott at 1,000,000*l.*

form, access to which is gained by two steps, decorated with salamanders. An elegant balustrade containing inscriptions in panels runs round, and the lofty back, which is one mass of gems, rises to a point in the centre whereupon is fixed a circular star of diamonds, with scintillating rays, made to revolve by a piece of



THRONE OF FATH ALI SHAH

mechanism at the back. On either side of the star are two bejewelled birds, perched on the edges of the back-frame, and facing each other. Now there is in the fabric thus delineated and reproduced above very little except general shape that tallies with Tavernier's detailed description. There is no trace or sign of a canopy, or of the means by which a vanished canopy could

have been added to the existing throne. Above all there is no peacock.[1]

Testimony of Bernier

At this stage, however, I felt compelled to remember that Tavernier, while particularly describing the Peacock Throne, had also left on record that 'The Great Mogul has seven thrones, some set all over with diamonds, others with rubies, emeralds, and pearls;' and that Hanway had reported Nadir as carrying off nine other thrones in addition; and it might be therefore that the Teheran throne, though not *the* Peacock Throne, was one of the rifled thrones of the Emperors of Hindustan. Such a theory seemed to find a momentary corroboration in the description given by another Frenchman, Bernier, in the same century, of a throne (clearly not *the* Peacock Throne of Tavernier) at Delhi. The throne that he saw was supported by six high pillars or feet of massive gold, set with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. Its value was estimated at forty millions of rupees (a rupee at that time was equivalent to half a crown) or to sixty millions of French livres. And yet, to maintain the confusion, this too was a Peacock Throne, for he added:—

> The art and workmanship of this throne is not answerable to the matter; that which I find upon it best devised are two peacocks covered with precious stones and pearls, which are the work of a Frenchman called —— that was an admirable workman.

Nevertheless, this could not be the Teheran throne; for the latter has seven legs; nor was an acute observer like Bernier likely to have committed the error that Morier did, and mistaken its winged supporters for peacocks.

What history says

In this dilemma, but with the growing conviction that the modern Takht-i-Taous had a very shadowy connection, if any at all, with the plundered treasures of Delhi, I turned to contemporaneous records. I found in Malcolm[2] that Nadir Shah was so fond of the real Peacock Throne of the Great Mogul that he had an exact duplicate of it made in other

[1] Morier, who saw Fath Ali Shah seated in audience upon this throne in 1809, described it with no great accuracy. He said, 'On each side of the back are two square pillars, on which are perched birds—probably intended for peacocks—studded with precious stones of every description, and holding each a ruby in their beaks' (*First Journey*, p. 191). Now, no one who really inspected them could possibly mistake the birds for peacocks; nor are there (now at any rate) rubies in their beaks.

[2] *History of Persia*, vol. ii. p. 37.

jewels. This left two Peacock Thrones to be demolished between his death and the end of the last century, a catastrophe which in the anarchy and violence of those times would have been in itself no unlikely occurrence; but it left the Takht-i-Taous unexplained, as under no circumstances could the latter be described as a duplicate of Tavernier's original. Now, however, I came across a passage in Fraser's 'Khorasan' in which he mentions that an old Kurd told him in 1822, that 'when Nadir Shah was murdered and his camp plundered, the Peacock Throne and the Tent of Pearls fell into our hands, and were torn in pieces and divided on the spot.' Any Kurd might certainly have been trusted to handle such an object as the Peacock Throne in the unceremonious manner here described, and, assuming the veracity of this particular Kurd, I witnessed with some delight the disappearance of the real Peacock Throne, or one of the two, from the scene.

Deposition of the usurper

A phrase in Morier's account had now set me thinking that the Takht-i-Taous at Teheran must be a modern structure after all. In the same passage which I have quoted in a footnote, he adds: 'It (i.e. the throne) is said to have cost 100,000 *tomans*' (equivalent at the beginning of the century to about 100,000*l.*);[1] herein clearly implying that an account or a tradition of its cost prevailed at Teheran, which was far more likely to be the case with a new than with an old fabric, and which was extremely unlikely to have been the case with an object carried off in plunder from a remote country seventy years before. At this stage, accordingly, I referred my doubts for solution to Teheran itself, and after an interval of some weeks was interested and (I may confess) rejoiced to hear, on the authority of the Grand Vizier and the former Minister for Foreign Affairs,[2] that, as I suspected, the Takht-i-Taous is not an Indian throne at all. It was constructed by Mohammed Husein Khan, Sadr (or High Priest) of Isfahan, for Fath Ali Shah when the latter married an Isfahani young lady, whose popular sobriquet, for some unexplained reason, was Taous Khanum or the Peacock Lady. The King is further said to have been so much delighted with the throne, that it was made a remarkably prominent feature in the

[1] I understand, however, that it is now valued at nearly 200,000*l.*

[2] When I was in Teheran I had in vain asked the same questions of the custodian of the treasury, and of every Persian official whom I met, but without eliciting any satisfactory response.

ceremonies that commonly ensue upon marriage. Here, therefore, at one fell swoop, toppled down the whole of the brilliant hypothesis, which has sustained scores of writers, and provided material for pages of glowing rhetoric. From the same authorities I learned that the original Peacock Throne of Nadir Shah (i.e. the survivor of the two facsimiles) was discovered in a broken-down and piecemeal condition by Agha Mohammed Shah, who extracted it along with many other of the conqueror's jewels by brutal torture from his blind grandson Shah Rukh at Meshed, and then had the recovered portions of it made up into the throne of modern shape and style, which now stands at the end of the new Museum in the palace at Teheran, and to which I have alluded in my description of that apartment. In this chair, therefore, are to be found the sole surviving remnants of the Great Mogul's Peacock Throne, and the wedding present of Fath Ali Shah must descend from the position which it has usurped in the narrative of every writer in this century, without exception, who has alluded to it.

Oriental taste

Beyond the room in the palace containing this beautiful impostor, which, with a respectful iconoclasm, permissible, I hope, to the student of history, I have endeavoured to depose from its false pinnacle, extend a series of chambers of some size, but no merit, exhibiting an extravagant and often farcical contrast of the Oriental and European. Illustrations, snipped from the English illustrated newspapers appear side by side upon the walls with photographs of the Shah and his little boy favourite, the Aziz-es-Sultan, and with inferior copies of Italian oil-paintings. Here is a picture of the Paris Exhibition and the Eiffel Tower; there a deplorable oleograph of an Alpine village, both hung in a room adorned with Persian plaster-work and spread with Persian carpets. I noticed here, what I observed in the other palaces that I visited, that the Oriental intellect seems to derive a peculiar gratification from the display of duplicates. Thus, the King's son, the Zil-es-Sultan, has, in his town residence, a long row of facsimile portraits of himself hanging upon a single wall. Similarly, in the royal abode, I noticed in one place two large copies of a semi-nude Venus or Magdalen of the later Italian school, absolutely identical, hanging on either side of a doorway; and the same phenomenon was constantly repeated. The impression left upon me by an inspection of many modern Persian residences of

size and magnificence, was this: that whereas the Persian taste, if restricted to its native art or to the employment of native styles, seldom errs, the moment it is turned adrift into a new world, all sense of perspective, proportion, or beauty, all æsthetic perception, in fact, appears to vanish; and in proportion as its choice will have been correct and refined amid native materials, so does it become vulgar and degraded abroad. I am sometimes not sure that our own countrymen can escape the same impeachment, particularly when I observe rich Englishmen triumphantly carrying away from Japan the gaudy embroideries that are made *for them alone*, and which no civilised Japanese gentleman would admit into his house.

The Gulistan

The rooms of which I have been speaking look out on to a vast garden court, which is entirely surrounded by the various buildings of the palace, and which I consider to be by far the prettiest and most effective portion of the entire enclosure. This great garden is divided by paved avenues and gravel paths into flower beds, tanks, and extensive lakes. Magnificent pines and cypresses, as well as the more familiar plane and poplar, line its alleys and create a pleasant shade. It is called the Gulistan or Rose Garden. Little iron bridges cross the numerous channels, often lined with blue tiles, down which the water runs in perpetua motion; the pools are alive with fish and decked with swans and waterfowl; elegant kiosques are seen amid the trees. It was in this lovely garden, and under an entrancing sun and sky, that I witnessed a royal Salaam, or Levée of the Shah, to which I may devote a few words in passing. It was the replica, on a smaller scale, of the great ceremonial that takes place at No Ruz.

Royal Levée

The theory of the Court Levée in Persia is not that the subjects attend upon, or are introduced to, the sovereign, but that the sovereign displays himself to his awestruck and admiring subjects. Accordingly, the two central and essential attributes of the scene are the monarch being gazed at on the one side, and the audience gazing on the other. Very little else transpires, and not more than half-a-dozen persons play any other part than that of statues during the ceremony. I will describe, however, exactly what takes place. Upon entering the palace I was conducted to a chamber where the regulation coffee and *kalians* were served. Soldiers and officials were pouring pell-mell into the palace on every side. Bands were aimlessly tuning up or playing

in different corners. Officers in every variety of uniform were marshalling troops in every variety of disorder. *Mirzas* (i.e. government clerks) and accountants were hurrying to the scene of action. The royal executioner, clothed in red, was stalking about, while some attendants carried the *fellek*, a red pole about eight feet in length with a double loop or noose of cord attached to the middle, into which are fixed the upturned soles of the culprit condemned to the bastinado. He was the Persian counterpart of the roman lictor with his axe and rods. The members of the Royal or Kajar tribe were all congregated together, and wore the old court costume, which was obligatory on all alike at the beginning of the century, and which consists of a lofty and voluminous Kashmir (more probably Kerman) turban, big, flowing Kashmir cloaks, and the well-known red leggings, or *chakshurs*, which the English ministers and plenipotentiaries were obliged to pull on over their breeches when attending the audiences of Fath Ali Shah, but of wearing which they were ultimately relieved by treaty. Here I was met by the Lord Chamberlain, or master of the ceremonies, known as the Zahir-ed-Dowleh (Supporter of the Government), a young man of magnificent stature and singularly handsome countenance, who belongs to the Kajar House, and is married to a favourite daughter of the Shah. This gorgeous individual was clothed in a resplendent white frock coat and trousers beneath his Kashmir robe of state; a jewelled sword hung at his side; a portrait of the Shah set in diamonds depended from his neck; and he carried a silver wand or staff of office. I was conducted to a room next to that in which the Shah was about to appear, the uplifted sashes of both apartments opening on to the garden, where, on the broad, paved pathway running in front and down the central alleys between the tanks and flower beds, were disposed in order the various participators in the ceremonial. A little to the right of the middle spot stood the Naib-es-Sultaneh, the third son of the Shah and Commander-in-Chief of the army, standing at the head of a long line of field-marshals and generals. His bosom blazed with decorations, and was crowned by a light-blue ribbon that might have been mistaken for that of St. Patrick. Next to him, also in field-marshal's uniform and with a tiny sword, stood the diminutive favourite of the Shah, whose features had become so familiar in Europe during the royal journey of the preceding summer. Next in order, and accentuating the ludicrous contrast, came a tottering

veteran, the oldest field-marshal in the Persian army; then a row of full-blown generals; finally, the officers of the so-called Cossack regiments, including two Russians. In front and in the middle stood alone the former Ilkhani of the Kajar tribe, a white-bearded elder, once out of favour with his sovereign but long since reconciled.[1] Behind stood the solid and forbidding figure of the Kawam-ed-Dowleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs; and beyond again the various functionaries, each in his due rank and position. The whole of the assemblage was now arranged, every man stood shoulder to shoulder with eyes fixed in front, and absolute silence prevailed.

The Shah

Suddenly a cry was raised. The Shah appeared in the room adjoining that in which I was placed and took his seat upon a gilded chair in the window. His principal ministers accompanied him and stood in the background. As the King appeared every head was bowed low, the hands outspread and resting upon the knees. Bands struck up the royal air in different parts of the garden, and guns banged away at a slight distance. The Ilkhani of the Kajars now, acting as spokesman of the entire assembly, exchanged formal compliments with the King, who spoke in short, brusque sentences in reply. Then a *mullah*, standing behind, recited in a loud voice the *Khutbah*, or prayer for the sovereign. This done the Poet Laureate advanced, and, pulling out a sheet of paper, read a complimentary ode. Meanwhile the bands went on playing different tunes in different parts, and the guns boomed noisily outside. When the ode was at an end, the Shah rose from his chair, and slowly stalked from the chamber; the troops, with very little attempt at precision, slouched past the windows; and a waving mass of helmets, plumes, and turbans was seen disappearing through the garden entrance. Such is a Levée as held by H.I.M. Nasr-ed-Din Shah at Teheran.

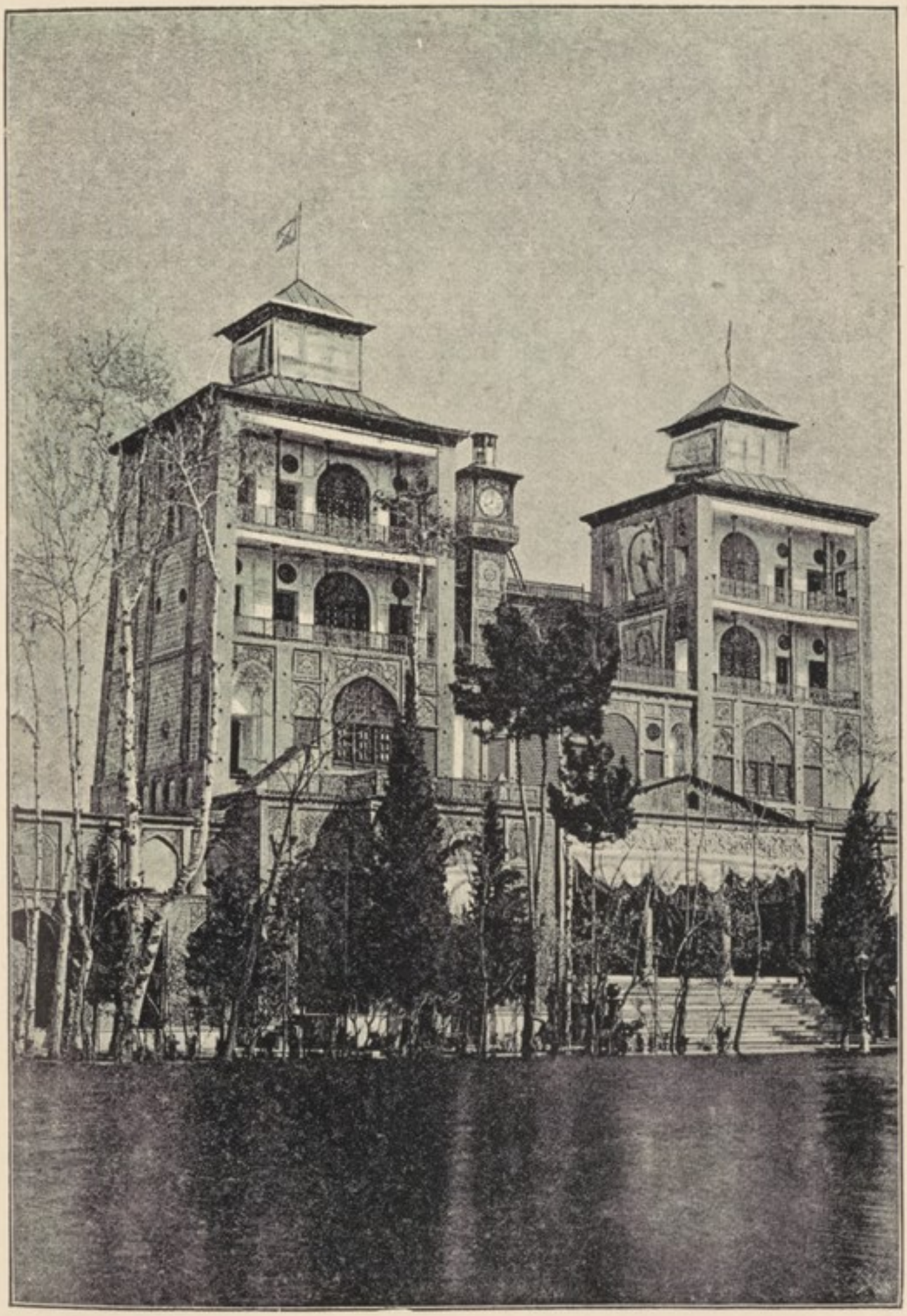
Upon another occasion I was conducted over the rest of the palace (with the exception, it is needless to add, of the *anderun*,

[1] He was the son of the wife of Haji Mirza Aghassi, the eccentric dervish prime-minister of Mohammed Shah, and, as an especial favourite of his step-father, lived in princely style. Upon one occasion the present Shah, then Heir Apparent, was going in pilgrimage to Shah Abdul Azim, when he saw an immense and gorgeous cavalcade approaching, which he took to be that of his royal father. Respectfully dismounting, he awaited the arrival of the cortège on foot. Great was his disgust when he discovered that the central figure was only the Ilkhani of the Kajars. In deference to his complaints, the too sumptuous nobleman was banished to Baghdad.

or private apartments). Among the many apartments which I saw, and to which my previous general description will apply, I will only here notice the Naranj-khaneh or Orangery; a particularly pretty building, with water flowing down a blue-tiled channel in the middle between double rows of orange trees. It was from here that a passage led into the old *anderun*; the new ladies' quarter being on the other side of the palace enclosure.[1] At the further end of the Gulistan, on the eastern side, rises the great twin-towered pavilion called the Shems-el-Imaret, or Sun of the Palace, which is such a conspicuous object from the exterior of the palace on the side of the bazaars. This remarkable structure, which is, in my opinion, a triumph of fanciful architecture, is built in the form of two towers, sloping inwards towards the top, and terminating in two elegant kiosques. A slender clock-tower, with a European clock, rises from the roof between the two. On the outer or street side—for it is built upon the exterior wall of the Ark—its surface, which is entirely covered with brilliantly painted tiles, is unrelieved by a single window, lattices of pierced brickwork answering that purpose. On the inner or garden side it possesses a number of balconies and stained-glass windows, while a large Italian portico in the centre opens on to a flight of steps leading down to the edge of an extensive lake. This beautiful pavilion was begun by the Shah twenty-five years ago, and is certainly a very creditable specimen of the fanciful ingenuity that still lingers in modern Persian art. I had thought from the blank outer walls and from the air of mystery that surrounds this building that it must at least contain the royal harem; but this was not the case. Strangers are sometimes admitted to the interior, in some of the chambers of which are to be seen yet other among the many costly presents that have been sent to the Shah and his predecessors by European sovereigns. Here, for instance, are the Gobelin tapestries, representing the Crowning of the Faun and the Triumph of Venus, that were given by Louis Philippe to Mohammed Shah; and here is the great mechanical clock, with moving figures and peacocks, that was intended as a present from the Queen to the Emperor of China, fifty years ago: but, either having been rejected by him or never having got as far, was bestowed upon the Persian monarch.

Shems-el-Imaret

[1] There stands in the court of the Royal *anderun* a great plane-tree, called the Chenar of Abbas Ali (origin of name unknown), which is held in great veneration as an object of pilgrimage.



SHEMS-EL-IMARET

At the further extremity of the Gulistan rises the extraordinary circular structure, the arched ribs and girders of whose open roof I had seen from a distance as I approached Teheran, rising above the low level of the housetops. This is the Takieh, or Theatre, built for the annual performance of the Tazieh, or Passion Play of Persia.[1] I entered and looked around. The building was entirely empty, save for some chained beasts, a curious use to which to put so consecrated a structure. It consists of a great rotunda, in the centre of which is a circular stone platform, mounted by steps and ramps (for the animals employed in the play). This is the stage. An open passage runs round, succeeded by five tiers of stone seats, which, on the occasion of the performances, are packed with veiled women. Between these, numerous gangways lead to arched passages, through which the actors come in. On one side is a lofty marble *mimbar*, or pulpit, i.e. a small platform at the head of a steep flight of steps, whereon stands the *mullah*, who directs or interprets the ceremonies. Above the stone tiers rise three stories of loggias, or boxes, with fanciful brickwork and light arcades.[2] Some of these, which conceal the ladies of the Royal harem, are shielded with green lattice screens. From the upper rim of the building rise the great arched and iron-bound traverses of the roof. It was originally intended to

Takieh

[1] I was not in Persia during the month of Moharrem, when, in every great city, if not in every town throughout the country, this famous religious tragedy—which reproduces and commemorates the martyrdoms of Hasan and Husein and their devoted followers—is performed. I shall therefore say nothing of that which I did not see. Admirable accounts of the Tazieh, however, have been left by most visitors to Persia; notably J. P. Morier (1811), *Second Journey*, pp. 175–184; A. Vambéry (1863), *Life and Adventures*, cap. viii.; A. H. Mounsey (1865), *Journey through the Caucasus*, pp. 311–315; C. J. Wills (1866–1881), *In the Land of the Lion and Sun*, cap. xxvi., and *Persia as it is*, cap. xxiv.; S. G. Benjamin (1883–1885), *Persia and the Persians*, cap. xiii. For more particular information *vide* A. Chodzko, *Le Théâtre en Perse* (Revue Indépendante), Paris, 1844; *Théâtre Persan, Choix de Teaziés*, Paris, 1878; Comte A. de Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies de l'Asie Centrale*, cap. xiii.–xvi., 1865; Sir L. Pelly, *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*, 1879; Ed. Montet, *La Religion et le Théâtre en Perse* (Revue de l'histoire des Religions), Paris, 1887; *Le Théâtre en Perse*, Geneva, 1888; *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, April, 1890; Matthew Arnold, *A Persian Passion Play* (in Essays in Criticism); Ethé, *Persische Passionspiel* (Morgenländ. Stud., p. 174); and E. Renan, *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire Religieuse*, Paris, 1884.

[2] So great is the demand for these boxes that the Crown revenues are swollen by the annual sum of 420*l.*, paid as rent for the yearly performance by the leading courtiers and noblemen.

cover the whole with a dome, the Shah, it is said, having been so much impressed with the Albert Hall in London, as to long for a reproduction in Teheran; but the substructure was found to be inadequate to the burden. Accordingly, these spans were thrown across and awnings are stretched over them when the play is acted in the heat of the day; the precise counterpart of the *velarium* of the Roman amphitheatre. As the drama is prolonged into the evening, light is gained from thousands of candles fixed in lustres against the walls. The electric light was introduced for a time, but is said to have been abandoned or to have proved a failure.

The remainder

Such are the main features of the Royal Palace at Teheran.[1] I have described them at some length, as they are eloquently typical of the life of mingled splendour and frippery, and of the taste, half cultured and half debased, of the Persian monarch and, it may be said, of the Persian aristocracy in general. It is shocking, for instance, to our eye, but not to a Persian's, to see this beautiful garden, which Nature has co-operated with ingenious art to render pleasing, surrounded by hideous daubs of Persian soldiers painted upon the plaster walls, with the exaggerated disregard of all verisimilitude or proportion that might be expected of a street urchin who had stolen a brush and a pot of paint. In different parts of this building must be stored away an infinity of presents and works of art in addition to those which I saw. For in this century alone the various embassies who competed so gallantly, and it must also be said so extravagantly, for the favour of Fath Ali Shah, brought with them a mass of European objects and curiosities, from panelled coaches down to mechanical toys, not one tithe of which are exposed to view in the State apartments. Many, no doubt, have never been looked at since the day on which they were presented; or, having been playthings for a week, have been relegated to lumber rooms for a lifetime.

Mosques

For a great capital Teheran is singularly destitute of those immense religious edifices, whether mosques or *madressehs*, which tower, too often in a state of utter ruin, above the housetops of most Oriental towns. The reason is that, only having become a capital, so to speak, in later life, the city has found no patron to endow it with the great structures that have immortalised the seats of government of earlier kings. Fath Ali

[1] The best description of the Palace that I have seen is by Orsolle, *Le Caucase et la Perse*, cap. xvi.

Shah, it is true, built the Musjid-i-Shah, a mosque crowned by a small gilt dome; and other edifices of some importance, but no distinction, are to be found in the Musjid-i-Madr-i-Shah, or Mosque of the King's mother, and the Madresseh-i-Khan-i-Mervi. It has been reserved, however, for the present reign, for the wealth of a subject, and for the decade not yet complete, to raise a fabric which, however far it may fall below the exquisite artistic beauty of earlier monuments of the Mohammedan style, is yet calculated, by its ambitious design and vast extent, to confer a lustre upon the epoch and the men that produced it. This is the yet unfinished Musjid-i-Sipah Salar, or mosque of the Commander-in-Chief, whose four lofty and glittering minarets, entirely covered with bright tiles and terminating in florid capitals, looked to me at a distance like immense organ pipes protruding through the trees. This building, or rather range of buildings, for it includes both a mosque and a *madresseh*, or college, was commenced by the late Mirza Husein Khan, the statesman who negotiated the Reuter Concession of 1872, and who, after being successively Sadr Azem (Grand Vizier), Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Sipah Salar, died in comparative exile as Governor-General at Meshed. With the endowments which he bequeathed for the purpose, the incomplete works have been resumed by one of his surviving brothers, Yahia Khan, the Mushir-ed-Dowleh, of whom I shall have something to say later on, and are now slowly approaching completion. I went over the buildings, which are on a very grandiose scale. A lofty archway leads into a quadrangle, in whose centre is a large tank. On the right is the principal façade with the four minarets; an immense dome was being constructed over the prayer-place in its interior. Opposite the entrance is a smaller recess, now used for purposes of devotion, but opening into a long, vaulted prayer-chamber, with four rows of stone pillars, fifty in all, and a broad, shallow *mihrab*, or prayer-niche, tile-adorned, at the end. In a corner of the building a library was being fitted with wooden shelves, elegantly carved; and outside was a tank for purposes of drinking or ablution, with an iron railing and taps all round. The effect of the entire range of buildings is spacious and handsome, and the gaudy enamelled tiles give it a brave appearance. It does not require much discrimination, however, to realise how ineffably inferior are these modern specimens of the ceramic art of Persia to the exquisite productions of an earlier age; or how, neither in

design, execution, nor glaze, do they deserve to be considered works of art at all.

Bazaars

The bazaars of Teheran occupy a very considerable space in the old city; although, in common with the rest of the capital, they have experienced a much-needed renovation in the reign of the present king. The main entrance is from the street opposite the Shems-el-Imaret, and conducts, through an open courtyard containing a pool of water, and known as the Meidan-i-Sebz, into the dim, vaulted arcades which are so familiar to the wanderer in Eastern lands. The Teheran bazaars are vaulted throughout with a succession of low brick domes, and open frequently upon small courts or squares. They contain a number of spacious and well-built caravanserais; and there are few objects of Eastern use or consumption—from a saddle-horse to a tea-tray,—which cannot be there procured. European merchandise is exhibited on every other stall, and one of the first and most obvious discoveries is, that Persia clothes itself from Europe. Another of the most widely-spread but unintelligible of modern Persian tastes is abundantly illustrated, and can be inexpensively gratified, in the Teheran bazaars. This is the fondness, which seems to permeate all classes, from the Shah downwards, for lustres, candelabra, candle and lamp shades, and glass vases or ornaments of every conceivable description. I never entered a Persian prince's or nobleman's house without encountering a shop's window full of these articles, as a rule proudly stacked, as though they were rare treasures, upon a table; and I imagine that a Persian would have no hesitation in pronouncing the Crystal Palace to be the *maximum opus* of the world's architecture. I shall say nothing about the manner of shops or mode of selling, about the division of trades or scenes of barter, in the Teheran bazaars; for the reason that they are the same as in every other town in the East, and have been so frequently described as to be familiar even to those who have not seen them. I will merely say that, in arrangement, width of passage, size of shops, and general structural convenience, they are in advance of almost any Oriental bazaar that I have elsewhere seen, though inferior to those which I afterwards saw at Isfahan and Shiraz, and which may also be seen at Tabriz; but that, as a field of exploration for the curio-hunter or stranger, they are the most disappointing in the East. The vendors ask the most impossible

prices, and exhibit a stolid indifference to the offers of the would-be purchaser. The sale of curiosities, carpets, and stuffs is almost wholly conducted by *dellals*, or itinerant dealers, who bring their stores on donkey-back to the residences in the European quarter. From them must be procured the silks, brocades, or velvets, the metal work or enamel work, the embroideries or carpets, the painted mirrors or pen-cases, which the collector may wish to take back to Europe. The foremost among these *dellals*, alike for the quality of their wares and the scale of their prices, appear to be the Jews. But the passing traveller will find it difficult to procure anything of much value, the rarities being commonly bespoken in advance by resident customers, and some weeks being required before a fresh stock can be collected by the dealers among their private clients. Such a place as a shop whither, after European fashion, one can go and see a large variety of articles spread out, before making one's choice, is unknown in Persia.

Street life

The street scenes in Teheran are not to be compared, from the artistic point of view, with those that may be witnessed either in the great Indian cities or in the old capitals of Central Asia. With the Kajar Dynasty, a hundred years ago, came in a new and soberer fashion in dress as well as a change of rulers. The turban has gradually disappeared and is worn only by merchants, *hajis*, *seyids*, and *mullahs*. The flowing robes and daring colours of the East, such as one may see alike in Benares and Bokhara, have been exchanged for tight-fitting garments of European or semi-European cut, and for neutral tints such as dark blues, browns, greens and greys, with a very plentiful admixture of uncompromising black. There is manifold jostling in the streets and bazaars, and everywhere are the contrast and variety so inseparable from Asiatic life, and from a crowd where three out of four men are mounted; but there are not the kaleidoscopic change and glitter that bespeak the true and unredeemed Orient. A good deal of colour, however, as well as of noise, is lent to the street life of the capital by the number of soldiers, in every variety of uniform, who are seen lounging about the streets, and by the military bands, which play in the public squares,[1] their favourite tune being the

[1] In 1887 an entire set of instruments for a band of sixty persons was presented by the British Government to the Shah; but the Persian bands having been taught to play French instruments, which are in a different key or pitch, they were relegated to the Museum.

so-called 'Royal Air,' which has considerable merits, and was, I believe, composed by the French bandmaster, M. Lemaire. Soldiers in Prussian helmets, soldiers in sheepskin shakoes, soldiers in cloth busbies, soldiers with sartorial reminiscences of nearly every army in Europe, are encountered on all sides. Very apparent too are the city police, about 300 strong, organised and commanded by an Italian, Count Monteforte, who, after being an officer in Bomba's army at Naples, retired to Austria, and was passed on either by the Emperor of that country, or, more probably, by himself, to the service of the Shah. They are constantly to be seen hanging about the guardhouses which are scattered through the town, and their black uniform, with violet velvet facings, is decidedly smart and picturesque. Queerest, however, and most parti-coloured of the street figures of Teheran are the *shatirs*, or royal runners, who precede the Shah whenever he goes out, running in front of his horse or carriage. They strike a stranger, unacquainted with the Court history of Persia, with amused astonishment, their costume being an apparent cross between that of a liveried servant and a harlequin at a pantomime. They wear white stockings, green knee-breeches, a red coat with large skirts and green breast-facings, and a tall erection upon the head, surmounted by a sort of coloured crest like a cock's comb. In their hand they carry a staff or wand. Some writers have too hastily attributed this amazing uniform to the fanciful taste of His reigning Majesty: therein at once exaggerating the fancy and ignoring the conservative instincts of that monarch. As a matter of fact, this dress is a faithful reproduction of that which was worn by the *shatirs* of the Sefavi kings in the halcyon days at Isfahan, two and three centuries ago; and what is apt to look ridiculous in a semi-modernised court and capital was, no doubt, in thorough keeping with an age and a ceremonial of almost barbaric splendour.[1]

[1] For an interesting illustration of this uniform as worn by the *shatirs* in the days of Fath Ali Shah, *vide* an admirable engraving from a drawing by J. P. Morier (*Second Journey*, p. 387), representing the entry of the Shah into Teheran in 1815. Dr. Fryer, in 1676, described their costume thus: 'The Shotters are the only men who wear Plumes of Feathers in their Turbats, small Bells about their Wastes, Truncheons in their Hands, Horse-Cloaths over their Shoulders, richly Embroidered on Scarlet, Packthread Shoes on their Feet, and close Jerkins with Breeches below their Knees' (*Travels in Persia*, p. 232). In the Sefavean days, however, the *shatirs* were much more than ornamental royal lacqueys. They were members of a guild in which no one could graduate as a master *shatir*

Estimates of the population of Teheran vary between poles as remote as is the case with every statistical calculation in Persia.

Population

I was informed, however, that the most reliable computation, determined upon a joint reckoning of the births and deaths in the city and of the amount of food brought for consumption into its bazaars, fixed the present total at from 200,000 to 220,000; though, on the other hand, some old residents would not admit a larger figure than 175,000. Twenty years ago, before the structural changes of which I have spoken were commenced, the most generous estimate of the total was 120,000—a fact which is in itself the best justification of the policy of the royal Ædile. The capital is said to contain about 4,000 Jews, possessing ten synagogues and several schools, and engaged for the most part in trade, as dealers, vintners, and physicians. Here, as elsewhere in Persia, the Jews are obliged to walk circumspectly; but they are not subject to the outbreaks of religious fanaticism which sometimes occur farther south, in the more bigoted atmosphere of Isfahan and Shiraz, and of which I shall require to speak when writing about those cities. There is also a large colony of Armenians (1,000) in Teheran, with two churches of their own, to which I have before alluded; but the Persian Armenian will also more appropriately come up for discussion when I treat of the settlements in Azerbaijan and at Julfa. There are further said to be several hundred Parsis, or Guebres, in the capital, mostly engaged in correspondence with their mercantile head-quarters at Yezd and Kerman.

without a test that would startle even a modern University sprinter. The aspirant to the honour was required to run on foot and fetch twelve arrows, one by one, from a pillar at the distance of one league and a half from the palace gate of Isfahan, the entire distance to be covered between sunrise and sunset being, therefore, 36 leagues, or 108 miles. The day fixed for the ceremony was a great public holiday. Everyone, from the sovereign downwards, was interested in the success of the candidate. Ministers and grandees galloped at his side to encourage him; every variety of fruit and provision was eagerly offered to him by the sympathetic crowd. Chardin witnessed and described one such ceremony on May 26, 1667, when the successful *shatir* took nearly fourteen hours to cover the distance. But he mentions another runner who, in the reign of Shah Sefi, did it in twelve hours.—*Travels* (edit. Langlès, vol. iv. p. 35; edit. Lloyd, vol. ii. p. 153). *Vide* also Tavernier, book iv. cap. v. The *shatirs*, as a class, were an institution of much earlier origin. They are mentioned by the Venetian Josafa Barbaro at Tabriz, 200 years before Chardin, in 1474; and are undoubtedly a legacy from far older times. In 1st Kings i. 5, we read: 'Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared himself chariots and horsemen, and *fifty men to run before him*.'

The gardeners of the British Legation were once almost wholly recruited from this class.[1]

But by far the most startling consequence of the new order of things is the increase in the number of Europeans now resident in the capital. As late as 1851 Mr. Binning reported that the only European foreigners were the staffs of the various Legations, a few officers in the army (the majority having left because they could not get their pay), two or three French and Italian shopkeepers, and an Englishman employed by the Shah to translate the foreign journals to him and to edit his own pet newspaper. In 1865 Mr. Mounsey found this total swollen to fifty. But at the time of my visit, in the autumn and winter of 1889, it was estimated to have risen to nearly 500 persons. The increase is not in the official element. They—i.e. the diplomats, the officers of the Telegraph Department, a few Austrian and Russian officers in the army, and one or two other employés of the Persian Government—remain at about the same figure. So, it may be said, do the missionaries, the merchants, and the few globe-trotters who may be annually driven by a vagabond fancy to Teheran. It is in the large number of speculators, small traders, would-be concessionaries, wandering *chevaliers d'industrie, et hoc genus omne*—all the goodly crew, in fact, who live to illustrate the phrase that 'where the carcase is, there will the eagles [surely a mistranslation for vultures!] be gathered together'—it is in these that the main increase has taken place; and in time we may expect the streets of Teheran to present as many models of the sartorial degradation of Europe as do those of Cairo or Constantinople. The elements of this polyglot, but, unfortunately, monochrome, society are necessarily thrown somewhat together; and in their idiosyncrasies, foibles, combinations, rivalries, and projects is to be found an inexhaustible fund of local gossip, as well as almost the sole source of non-political interest.

European element

There is but one Embassy at Teheran—that which is occupied by the representative of the Sultan: a compliment which could hardly fail to be exchanged between the two great Mohammedan Powers. Europe is, however, represented by

Foreign Legations

[1] Guebre, which means 'infidel,' and is the same as Giaour, is, of course, not their own name, but only a term of opprobrium applied to them by the Mussulmans. Until 1882 they paid a special *jezieh* or poll-tax to the Persian Government; but, through the intervention of the British Legation, this invidious tax was repealed.

six Legations—those of Great Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Austria, and Italy. A Belgian Minister Resident was also expected at the time of my visit, and a Dutch Chargé-d'Affaires had been appointed by his Government. America sent a Minister Resident for the first time in 1883. Most of these diplomats possess comfortable residences situated in large and well-shaded compounds, similar, though inferior, to that belonging to the British Minister. I could not ascertain that, with the exception of the British and Russian Ministers and the Turkish Ambassador, they have much, if anything at all, to do; and, to the majority of their number I should imagine that the post offers itself either as an honourable exile or as an interesting repose.

Advantages and disadvantages as capital

Teheran has been much abused as a capital. It has been attacked for having no river—which is true, although of such Persian cities as are better endowed in that respect it must be said that, during four-fifths of the year, the river is seldom more than a streamlet. Lady Sheil went so far as to declare that, as a capital, it had nothing whatever in its favour. I do not agree with these opinions. Looking at the question mainly from a political point of view, I am disposed to think that Teheran is about the best capital that Persia could produce, and that Agha Mohammed Shah showed to the full his statesmanlike foresight in selecting it as his seat of government. The objections to the present site are mainly advanced on sanitary grounds. The water supply is indubitably meagre and costly, an attempt to divert the River Karij to the city having been abandoned,[1] and the entire needs of the population being dependent upon *kanats* dug from the Elburz. Situated, moreover, in the hollow of the plain, it is said that the infiltration of the surrounding moisture causes malarial fevers, which have already produced an increase in the recorded cases of typhoid. It is further said that the drainage is atrocious, which is probably true of all Persian towns. At Teheran the system adopted has one advantage, which, if not conducive to health, is, at any rate, less obnoxious to the senses than the paraded abomination of other Eastern cities. Each house is

[1] This attempt was made by Haji Mirza Aghassi, the eccentric minister of Mohammed Shah, who had a passion for public works, and it was successfully executed. Upon his commencing a similar experiment with the Jajrud on the Eastern side, the complaints of the villagers of Veramin at the loss of their water supply caused the works to be abandoned; as also were those of the Karij, after the fall of the Haji.

provided with a shaft, sunk into the ground to a depth of thirty or forty feet, from the bottom of which four lateral shafts run into the soil. When all these are filled, the whole is closed and sealed up. This certainly does not sound very nice: but between Oriental systems of sewerage it would be difficult to discriminate.

Political merits

On the other hand, the city is situated at an altitude of 3,800 feet above the sea; during the greater part of the autumn, winter, and spring months the climate is delightful; and, when the scorching heats of summer begin to prevail, there is an easy and rapid retreat to the mountain-slopes, where life under tents and the trees, though not exhilarating, is endurable. But the grounds upon which I should prefer to rest my defence of the site are political. Here, too, adverse critics have declared that the city lies exposed to Russian attack and invites aggression. I do not agree. Teheran is nearly 500 miles by road from the Russian frontier at Julfa, on the Araxes, whence, as conducting to the north-west capital, Tabriz, an invasion would doubtless begin; and, if Persia did not stop Russia before those 500 miles were passed, she would never stop her anywhere. The sole remaining alternative on the north is the Resht-Kazvin route, crossing the main range of the Elburz, than which an army posted for purposes of defence could not solicit a better position. If, on the other hand, as I have argued in my chapter upon Khorasan, invasion were to come from the north-east quarter, how much better would the Shah be able to meet it from Teheran, than from Isfahan. The choice of a capital must, however, in the main, be determined, not by its exposure, or the reverse to a single possible enemy, but by its central or centralising position, and by its ready command of the routes leading to the most valuable provinces of the kingdom. It is in this respect that Teheran is so admirably placed. Situated but little more than midway between the eastern and western capitals, Meshed and Tabriz, it commands the important provinces of which they are the governing centres. At the same time, it is in close proximity to, and in easy yet defensible communication with, the northern maritime provinces, for which it may hereafter require to strike a blow. Lastly, it stands as a sort of advanced outpost to the elder capitals of Isfahan and Shiraz, upon which, in the event of disaster in the north, it would always be possible to fall back. So far, therefore, from thinking that Persia would be the better or the stronger for a change of capital to a more southerly site, I

should regard such a movement as the voluntary abandonment of a strategical position of no mean advantage, and as an encouragement to Muscovite cupidity.

Race-course

Among other semi-European attractions of Teheran at the time of my visit was the possession of a racecourse and an annual race-meeting. It is true that in neither respect were European standards rigorously maintained. For instance, there was no turf; but, as a Persian horse seldom, if ever, treads upon turf in the course of a life-time, it would clearly have been superfluous to humour him on this solitary occasion. The gravelly plain outside the city, which is flat enough and big enough to race upon for a whole day without stopping, accordingly answered the purpose very well. Nor was there a 'ring' at Teheran, betting being an imprudent venture when the winner was so uniformly apt to be drawn from the stable of the sovereign. The jockeys were small boys, clad in loose trousers and coloured tunics. The races were of various lengths, the most important being the longest, which completed the circuit of the wall no fewer than six times. Eastwick, who has left the most minute account of the Teheran race-meeting that I know,[1] measured the course, and found it to be two miles minus thirty and a half yards in circumference; so that eleven and three-quarter miles was the length of what I might call the 'Cup course' at Teheran. This distance he saw covered in what seems to me the very respectable time of twenty-six minutes twenty-nine seconds. It must be remembered that in a country where all movement is on horseback, and where very long distances require to be covered by that means, endurance is of greater average value than speed. Nor do the Persians, so far as I know, advance the ludicrous defence of short-distance speed-tests with which we are familiar in countries nearer home—that they are indispensable to improve the breed of the native animal.

Negaristan

In no respect are Teheran and its environs more peculiar, and in no fashion can the nature and circumstance of Eastern royalty be better typified, than in the number of royal palaces and country seats which may almost be said to crowd the suburbs of the capital. It is as though all the present and past royal residences in the neighbourhood of London—Kew, Hampton Court, Chiswick, and Greenwich Hospital, were kept for the sole use of the sovereign, and in his or her absence were allowed to fall

[1] *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. i. pp. 263–270.

into unarrested decay. Of these Persian palaces the one that is best known in history is the Negaristan (or Picture-gallery) built by Fath Ali Shah,[1] and the favourite country resort of himself and his colossal seraglio. In those days the Negaristan was more than half a mile outside the walls of the contracted Teheran, whose history and disappearance I have chronicled; but the more ambitious projection of Nasr-ed-Din Shah has brought it well within the limits of the modern city; whilst his mercantile instincts have lately induced him to sell the grounds in plots for building sites. In the early part of the century it was described as a lovely retreat, with umbrageous gardens, interspersed with *imarets* (pavilions), *kolah Feringhis* (octagonal kiosques, so called because their shape was supposed to resemble a Feringhi's, or European's, hat), cascades, and tanks. Sir R. K. Porter, who visited and described it in 1818, went into positive raptures over its beauty. It was a '*Hortus Adonidis*,' a 'bower of fairy-land,' 'the very garden of "Beauty and the Beast,"' whilst the palace itself was 'an earthly imitation of the houris' abodes.' And when the susceptible baronet came to the bath-room, his poetical transports could scarcely find words in which to depict the image of the sporting naiads and the uxorious monarch looking on. The place is never occupied by the present Shah, and is now fast falling to ruin. The name was given to it in consequence of the contemporary oil-paintings by which it was, and still is, adorned. Fath Ali Shah never built or occupied a palace anywhere without immortalising himself, and his regiment of sons, and his crown and jewels and throne, and, above all, his wasp-like waist and ambrosial beard, in canvas, upon the walls. There are two such paintings in the Negaristan. One is a somewhat undistinguished picture of the Shah and some of his sons, but the more widely known is an illustration of the monarch surrounded by his sons and chief ministers of State, seated upon the Takht-i-Taous, and receiving in solemn audience the plenipotentiaries of European Powers. The Shah and his sons occupy the end of the apartment, and upon either wall advance to his presence two long lines of life-size figures—fifty in all; those in the place of honour, nearest the sovereign, being the rival representatives of Great Britain and France. An historical anachronism appears to have been perpe-

[1] Tancoigne says that the original building was built for Abbas Mirza by his minister Mirza Buzurg.

PAINTING OF FATH ALI SHAH AND SONS

trated here, with a view of representing, not so much a single incident, as the events of an entire period. Accordingly, Sir John Malcolm, Sir Harford Jones, Sir Gore Ouseley, and the French General Gardanne, all figure in the pictures, being recognisable both by their uniforms and their features. The Englishmen's dress consists of a three-cornered cocked hat, laced red coat with huge skirts, white breeches, and the then obligatory Persian red stockings pulled up above the knee. These paintings, which possess the very highest historical importance, and which in so dry a climate have been admirably preserved, were the work of Mohammed Hasan Khan, one of the most eminent artists of the period. As works of art, whilst violating all laws of perspective and all requirements of light and shade, they are yet admirable also, and, in their stiff angularity of pose, suggest no unfair idea of what was then the most rigid and ceremonious Court of the East.

In an upper chamber of the same pavilion, Mirza Abul Kasim, the Kaimakam,[1] or Grand Vizier, of Mohammed Shah (the father of the present monarch), was strangled in 1835, by order of his royal master, who therein followed an example set him by his predecessor, and set one himself that was duly followed by his son. It must be rare in history to find three successive sovereigns who have put to death, from jealous motives only, the three ministers who have either raised them to the throne or were at the time of their fall filling the highest office in the State. Such is the triple distinction of Fath Ali, Mohammed, and Nasr-ed-Din Shahs.

An adjoining pavilion was devoted to the *anderun*, or ladies' quarter; and here the visitor is conducted to a subterranean bath-room, in the centre of which is a circular pool, lined with blue tiles, whilst at the extremity of the chamber is an inclined plane of polished marble,[2] down which it is understood that the shiftless naiads, over whom Sir R. K. Porter waxed poetical, used to slide into the arms of their royal adorer, and were by him pitched into the pool—a feat of no common exertion, con-

Bath-room

[1] He was the son of Mirza Buzurg, also known as the Kaimakam, who was the great Minister of Abbas Mirza, the Prince Royal at Tabriz. When Mirza Buzurg died, his son succeeded to his position and title with Abbas Mirza, and, upon the latter's death in 1833, with Mohammed Shah. But his haughty and imperious demeanour rendered his fall certain.

[2] Binning (*Two Years' Travel*, vol. ii. cap. xxix.) made the discovery that this slide was sheeted with zinc; but no one else has ratified the discovery, or will.

sidering that it is at some distance. I will refrain from reflections about the 'vanished peals of laughter and the songs once warbled by ruby lips,' leaving such flights of the fancy to the late American Minister in Persia, who was well qualified to bear the vacant mantle of Sir R. K. Porter.[1]

Kasr-i-Kajar

Outside the walls the most conspicuous eminences and the most advantageous sites have likewise been monopolised by the palace-building craze of the Kajar dynasty. Of these edifices the most prominent in any view of Teheran is that known as the Kasr-i-Kajar (Castle of the Kajars, irreverently transliterated by the English sergeants who came to Persia in the first quarter of the century to instruct the native army, as 'Castle Cadger'), or Takht-i-Kajar—i.e. Throne of the Kajars. It is situated upon an elevation about two miles to the north of the modern walls. From a distance this building has a most imposing appearance, for it rises from a base of foliage in a number of white tiers, one above the other, culminating in a sort of castle at the top.[2] The Persians entertain the most grotesque notions of its architectural importance, and have been known to assert its superiority to Windsor Castle or Versailles. A nearer approach dissipates the fond but foolish illusion. It is then seen to merit comparison with a European palace, whether of sovereign or of subject, about as appositely as might a harbour bumboat with a man-of-war; the successive tiers consisting only of earthen terraces faced with brick, and once adorned with lakes and fountains, which, like most such things in Persia, have gone to ruin. The palace at the top contains a variety of pictures of scenes and persons dating from the time of Fath Ali Shah, and in one of the pavilions in the grounds is, or was, a portrait of the English 'Beau Brummel' of Persia, Istarji, or Strachey, who accompanied Sir John Malcolm's Mission, and created such an impression as an Adonis that Fath Ali Shah composed an ode in his honour and had his picture painted for most of his palaces here and at Isfahan. In the Kasr-i-Kajar he was framed between the mythic heroes, Zal and Afrasiab—an apotheosis which I am not aware that any other Englishman has ever attained. When the King moved with the

[1] *Persia and the Persians*, p. 78.

[2] Illustrations of the Kasr-i-Kajar appear in the works of Malcolm, Morier, Ouseley, etc.; but by far the best are a number of plates in P. Coste's sumptuous work, *Monuments Modernes de la Perse*, Pl. lviii., lix., lx.

pick of his harem in the summer months to Sultanieh, the rest of the ladies were left behind in this castle. He is said to have contented himself with the modest total of one hundred upon these occasions, but Persian tradition fixes the number of the disconsolates as seven hundred.

Other palaces, or summer villas, or shooting-boxes of the Shah,

PALACE OF ESHRETABAD

on the northern side of the capital, are Sultanetabad, 600 feet above Gulahek on the hill-slope, a building constructed by the present Shah, and adorned with Persian frescoes of European, and particularly of English, scenes, among which may be noticed the Lobby of the House of Commons, the interior of a fine London restaurant, and the nave of a cathedral; showing that His Majesty has most accurately discerned the three leading influences

Other palaces

in the lives of Englishmen;[1] Eshretabad, a very pretty place, of which I give an illustration, where the main pavilion is occupied by the Shah, and seventeen smaller pavilions, situated round a lake, by the ladies who accompany him (a creditable reduction from the standards of his great grandfather), and where also is to be seen a painting of Fath Ali seated in durbar with the foreign ambassadors before him; Niaveran, or Nioberan; Agdasieh, near Niaveran; Nejefabad; and Suleimanieh, of which I have spoken in Chapter II. These are all in the immediate neighbourhood of Teheran, and the majority of them are situated on the hill-slope known as Shimran,[2] a cultivated belt extending for a length of about twenty miles along the base of the great scarp of the Elburz, that towers like a prodigious natural rampart above the plain of Teheran on the north. Fath Ali Shah set the example of retreat to this cooler, because more elevated, site; and the large number of trees and gardens which have been planted in consequence of its since universal adoption is said to have had a very appreciable effect in lowering the temperature and increasing the rainfall of the capital.

One result of the royal partiality for suburban residences has been the construction or the improvement of the roads that lead thereto from the city. A very passable road, planted for the most part with trees, leads to Gulahek on the north; and another such road, affording the solitary carriage-drive of Teheran, conducts between stiff rows of poplars in a straight line north-east, towards yet another villa, known, from the rocky eminence on which it is placed, as Doshan-Tepe (or the Rabbit Hill). The rock is an ugly excrescence from the plain at the distance of three miles from the city; and the palace is from the outside a yet uglier excrescence upon the rock. It is, however, a favourite hunting-lodge of the Shah's when he goes shooting in the neighbouring mountains, which are kept as a royal preserve. At the foot of the rock is a large and shady garden, where, in a long row of cages or dens, are kept the wild beasts of the Shah's menagerie. The animals themselves struck me as fine specimens, but they were badly housed, and their number was small. The popularity of the place, however, as

Doshan-Tepe

[1] Excellent descriptions of this palace are given by Stack (*Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. pp. 155–157), and Orsolle (*Le Caucase et la Perse*, pp. 283–5).

[2] The popular etymology—Shem-i-Iran, i.e. Light of Iran—is again absurd. Shimran is an old Persian word, the origin and meaning of which are unknown.

a sort of Iranian Jardin des Plantes, or Zoo, is evidenced by the rent of 500 *krans* per annum exacted by the crown from the lessee of a small coffee-house at the entrance of the garden. In the neighbourhood of Doshan-Tepe are two other royal shooting-boxes, Kasr Firuz to the south, and Surkheh Hissar to the north. Further to the east is a more considerable hunting-lodge on the banks of the Jajrud.

British Legation at Gulahek

The Shah, as I have indicated, is not the sole patron of the slopes of Shimran. His sons and the nobility in general have followed the royal example, and there are many tasteful and beautiful residences perched on the hill-sides or hidden in the valleys. Of these, by no means the least agreeable is the summer residence of the British Legation in the village of Gulahek, about six miles from the northern gate of the capital, and said to be 700 feet higher in elevation. The seignorial rights of this village—the lordship of the manor, in fact—were presented by Mohammed Shah to Sir John Campbell in 1835; the grounds and garden, in which stand the Minister's residence, were the gift of the reigning sovereign. Under the terms of these concessions the villagers of Gulahek, which consists of about 100 houses, enjoy quite peculiar privileges, being exempt from the obligations both of conscription and of the billeting of troops. Their assessment is payable to the British Government, and is levied by the Legation. Petty jurisdiction is exercised among them by a village *kedkhoda* (or headman), who is nominated by the British Minister, and is responsible to the member of the Legation invested with Consular functions. As at Teheran, there are more than one edifice in the enclosure belonging to the Mission; but the main building alone is of any size. This is supplemented by a great Indian durbar-tent, which is pitched outside and serves as a dining and drawing room during the summer months. The surrounding garden is a dense thicket of trees, and, though not comparable with what we style a garden here, is yet far better adapted to the torrid climate, from which its shade in the summer affords an invaluable protection. The recent purchase of a neighbouring garden, with its water-supply (every gallon of the precious fluid having a well-ascertained and costly market value), has added to the attractions of a residence without which it would be impossible for the staff of a European Legation to remain at the capital during the hot months. Russia is similarly favoured in the possession of the

village of Zargandeh, a little to the north-west of Gulahek, for which they claim analogous privileges. The French lease a residence at Tejrish, a mile higher up the mountain, where, in the court of an *imamzadeh*, is what claims to be the largest *chenar* in Persia. The Turks own grounds in the same neighbourhood. The Germans were till recently tenants of the English in Gulahek, and now live at Dizashub. The Austrians are leaseholders at Rustamabad.

Demavend

Before I quit the northern outskirts of Teheran I must pay the tribute of one more parting paragraph to the mighty mountain-sentinel Demavend. The shapely white cone, cutting so keenly and so high into the air, becomes so familiar and cherished a figure in the daily landscape, that on leaving Teheran and losing sight thereof (which, if he be journeying in a southerly direction, he does not do for 160 miles), the traveller is conscious of a very perceptible void. Demavend is a volcano, not, as some have said, wholly extinct, but rather in a state of suspended animation. There is no record of eruption during the historic period, but columns of smoke are sometimes seen to ascend from the fissures, particularly from the Dud-i-Kuh (or Smoky Peak) on the southern side. It is very strange that no mention is made of the mountain by Chardin, whose keen vision overlooked but little; or by Pietro della Valle, who passed almost at its base. Hanway, in 1744, speaks of it as 'the great mountain Demoan on which the Persians say that the Ark rested.' The first to accomplish the ascent—the Persians having always believed and declared, like the Armenians in the case of Ararat, that it was not to be climbed by mortal man—was Mr., afterwards Sir, W. T. Thomson, in 1836. The French naturalist, Aucher Eloy, met Thomson coming down from the top, and himself ascended a few days later. Since that date Demavend has been frequently ascended by members of the various Legations in Teheran, the climb being neither difficult nor dangerous, but intensely fatiguing. For long an irreconcilable divergence between the trigonometrical and other calculations of its height, arrived at by different travellers or men of science, prevailed, the estimates ranging from 14,500 to 21,500 feet. General Schindler, as the result of a combined trigonometrical and barometrical measurement, gives the true altitude as 19,400 feet.[1] From the summit, which

[1] 'Notes on Demavend,' from *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (new series), vol. x. pp. 85–89 (1888); *vide* also 'Accounts of Ascent,' by W. T. Thomson, in 1836,

MOUNT DEMAVEND

consists of a crater filled with snow and ice, a horizon of 50,000 square miles is unrolled in clear weather. This is what Mr. Stack, in 1881, had to say of the view:—

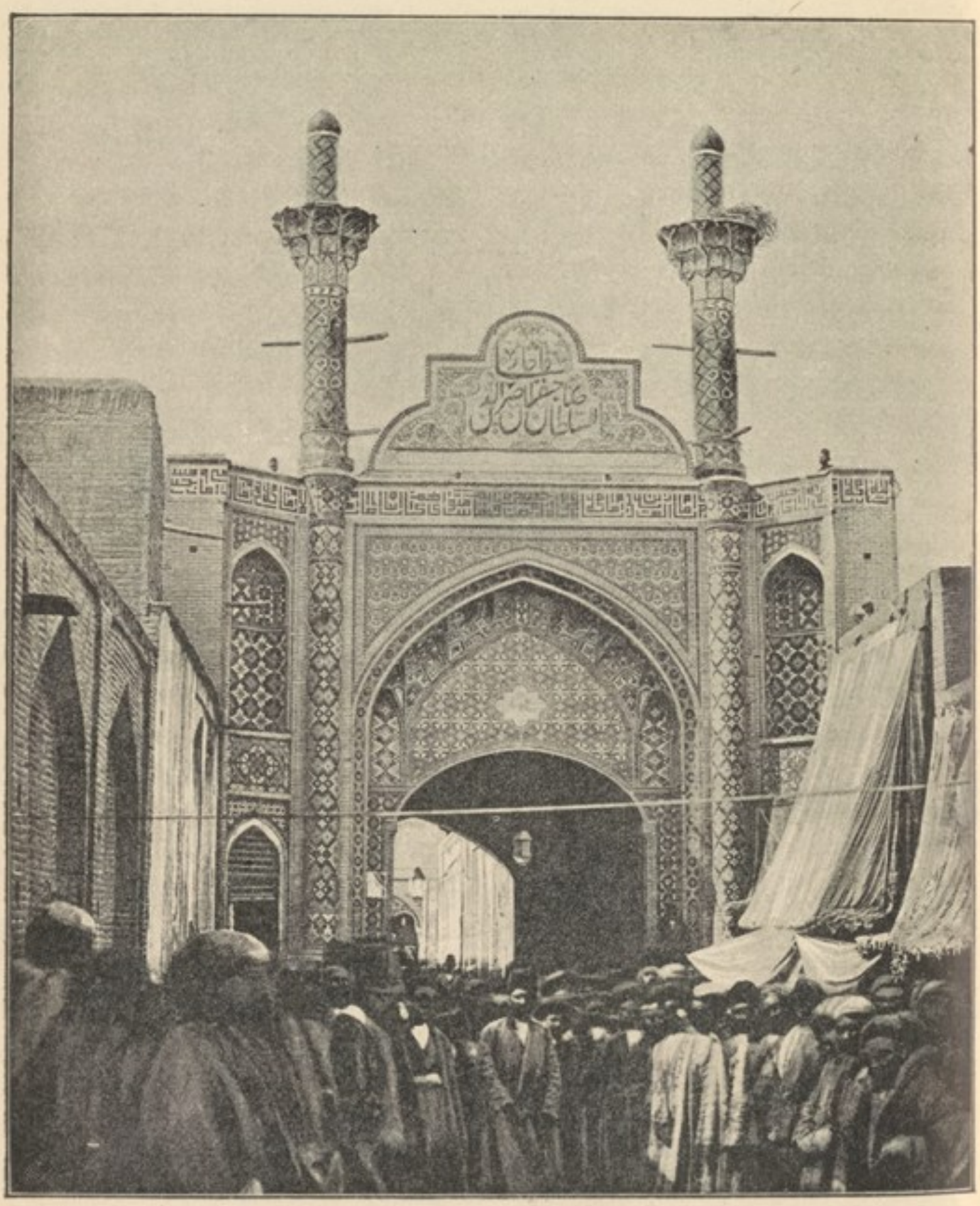
The crater is some 200 yards in diameter, girt with a ring of yellow rocks of nearly pure sulphur, exhaling a pestiferous smell. The hollow is entirely filled up with snow. From the rocks Teheran can be seen, and the Kohrud Mountains 160 miles south of it; the Great Kavir can be dimly perceived through its haze of heat to the south-east; while to the north—a faint blue field under the horizon—stretches the Caspian behind the cloudy forests of Mazanderan. On the right hand and on the left were mountains of from 10,000 to 12,000 feet in height; we over-looked them all with their thinly-scattered snows. But what a lifeless prospect! Teheran so many miles away, and all the rest mere desert and crag and desolation, with here and there a village lost on the bare mountain-side.

Southern environs

I now pass to the environs of Teheran on the south, and shall conclude this chapter with some brief notes about the sole localities that there invite attention—viz. the shrine of Shah Abdul Azim, the remains of Rhey, or Rhages, and the ruins of Veramin. A Persian city—much more a Persian capital—is ill off that cannot boast of some noted *imamzadeh*, or saint's tomb (literally, descendant of an Imam), to serve as an object of pilgrimage and magnet of attraction. Teheran is thus endowed in respect of the mausoleum and sanctuary of Shah Abdul Azim. Reposing beneath a golden-plated dome, whose scintillations I had seen from afar while riding towards the city, the remains of this holy individual are said to attract an annual visitation of 300,000 persons. I find that most writers discreetly veil their ignorance of the identity of the saint by describing him as 'a holy Mussulman, whose shrine is much frequented by the pious Teheranis.' It appears, however, that long before the advent of Islam this had been a sacred spot, as the sepulchre of a lady of great sanctity, in which connection it may be noted that the shrine is still largely patronised by women. Here, after the Mussulman

Journal of the R.G.S. vol. viii. p. 109; by R. T. Thomson and Lord S. Kerr, in 1858, in *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* vol. iii. p. 2; by R. G. Watson, in *ibid.* vol. vi. p. 103; and by E. Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. cap. vii. For further information, *vide* a learned lecture by Dr. Tietze, 'Vulcan Demavend,' in the *Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, 1878; and Frh. v. Carl Rosenburg, 'The Lar Valley and Demavend' in *Mittheil. der K. und K. Geogr. Gesell. Wien*, 1876, pp. 113–142. Compare Sir W. Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. iii. pp. 328–334; and De Filippi, *Viaggio in Persia*, p. 267.

conquest, was interred Imamzadeh Hamza, the son of the seventh Imam, Musa el Kazim; and here, flying from the Khalif Mutawakkel, came a holy personage named Abul Kassem Abdul Azim, who



ENTRANCE TO MOSQUE OF SHAH ABDUL AZIM

lived in concealment at Rhey till his death in about 861 A.D.[1] Subsequently his fame obscured that of his more illustrious pre-

[1] This is the account given by the Persian Kitab-i-Majlisi, quoting Sheikh Najashi, quoting Barki.

decessor. Successive sovereigns, particularly those of the reigning dynasty, have extended and beautified the cluster of buildings raised above his grave, the ever-swelling popularity of which has caused a considerable village to spring up around the hallowed site. The mosque is situated in the plain, about six miles to the south-south-east of the capital, just beyond the ruins of Rhey, and at the extremity of the mountain-spur that encloses the Teheran plain on the south-east. A narrow-gauge line of rails—the only railroad in working order in Persia—runs from a station near the southern gate of the city to the shrine, which is also approached by a tolerable cart-road. Of the railway I shall have occasion to speak hereafter. At a short distance from the terminus—for the line goes no farther—we come to the portal of a covered and crowded bazaar, leading down to the main gateway of the mosque. But the warning of a chain stretched across the entrance teaches us that this bazaar is *bast*, or sanctuary; and, where the Mohammedan criminal of the deepest dye can enter and abide with impunity, the Christian visitor must pass aside. By skirting the bazaar it is possible, however, to arrive at a side court of the mosque, adjoining the main quadrangle with the minarets and the golden dome, and into this no one seemed to object to our entering. To any but a Mussulman visitor there is nothing to be seen except the crowd.

Ruins of Rhey

Far more interesting than the sanctuary or the worshippers of the saint are the famous, but fast-disappearing, ruins to which it stands in such close proximity. I shall not here discuss the question whether the remains still visible at Rhey are those of the famous Rhages or not. That they are those of the Arabian Rhey there can be very little doubt; but whether the latter occupied precisely the same site as the Parthian and the Achæmenian Rhages is perhaps more open to question. Sir H. Rawlinson is, I believe, inclined to identify the latter with certain of the ruins in the neighbourhood of Veramin; nor is it out of keeping with the traditions of most Oriental cities of any great size that they should at different epochs of their lifetime have occupied different sites. Leaving the vexed question, however, to the *savants*, I shall here, in narrating the history of Rhages, or Rhey, assume the identity of the two names.

First comes the mythical period, starting from a legendary foundation by the patriarch Seth, and illumined by other great

traditional names. This we may dismiss. In the Vendidad, however, occur the names of Ragha and Varena among the stations in the wanderings of the Aryans, which have an undeniable resemblance to Rhages and Veramin. Next comes what may be termed the nebulous period, of which little definite is known, but echoes of which, loud though uncertain, have echoed down the galleries of time. The Rhages of this period was contemporary with Babylon and Nineveh, and was reported to be a great city containing over a million souls. This was the Rages to which the Tobias of the Apocrypha set forth from Nineveh, guided by an angel in disguise, to recover the ten talents deposited with Gabael by his father.[1] This, too, is supposed to have been the Ragan of Judith,[2] where Nabuchodonosor smote Arphaxad in the mountains. It is mentioned in the Behistun inscription as the place where the troops of Darius son of Hystaspes captured the rebel Mede Phraortes. Hither too came Alexander, in pursuit of Darius, on the eleventh day of his march from Ecbatana (Hamadan). The city is said to have been rebuilt by Seleucus Nicator, and in the succeeding century to have been made his capital by Ashk, or Arsaces, the founder of the Parthian empire, about B.C. 250. Finally comes the third, or historical, period, dating from the Arab conquest, when, if we are to believe one tithe of what Arab and Persian histories have related, it was a most phenomenal place. One such chronicler, a native of Rhey himself, fired by a patriotism which exulted in the lordly manipulation of figures, has left on record that the city contained 96 quarters, each with 46 wards, each with 40,000 dwelling-houses and 1,000 mosques, and in each mosque 1,000 lamps of gold and silver, the total population amounting to 8,000,396 persons. By other writers it was termed the First of Cities, the Spouse of the World, the Market of the Universe. Of more certain knowledge are the facts that it was the birthplace and one of the favourite residences of the renowned Harun-er-Rashid; that it was captured by Mahmud of Ghuzni from the Buyah dynasty in A.D. 1027; that it became one of the two great cities of the Seljuk sovereigns, the residence and the sepulchre of Togrul

Ancient Rhages

[1] *Tobit*, i. 14, ix. 5.

[2] *Judith*, i. 5, 'King Nabuchodonosor made war with King Arphaxad in the great plain, which is the plain in the borders of Ragan;' and *ibid.* v. 15, 'He took also Arphaxad in the mountains of Ragan.' It has been conjectured, if the book of Judith is to be regarded as historical, that this refers to the campaign of Darius against Phraortes.

Beg, and one of the capitals of Alp Arslan, the Great Lion.[1] In the tenth century El Istakhri had declared it to be the most flourishing city in the East after Baghdad, and had eulogised the hospitality and politeness of its people;[2] but in his discriminating praise we may find a sufficient corrective of the arrogant boastings to which I have previously referred. Now fell the twofold catastrophe which, throughout the East, wherever of population, of pride, or of opulence great examples were to be found, is associated with the names of Jenghiz Khan and Timur. The troops of the former took the city by storm in A.D. 1221, on which awful day, says a local historian, '700,000 respectable persons' were slain. In the next century the Great Tartar completed the work of destruction; and Don Ruy di Clavijo, passing in 1404, found it 'a great city, all in ruins; but there appeared towers and mosques; and the name of the place was Xaharihrey (i.e. Shahr-i-Rhey).[3] The town, however, revived sufficiently to become one of the seats of government of Timur's younger son Shah Rukh; and here his grandson, the nerveless Khalil Sultan, who bartered an empire for the love of the fascinating Shad-el-Mulk (Delight of the Kingdom), lived a fitful career of romance, and died. From the death of Shah Rukh the final decline of Rhey may be traced; and succeeding centuries have witnessed the steady decay and obliteration of its remains, until they have reached the sorrowful condition in which they may now be observed.

Its ruins

The fullest and most accurate account of the existing ruins of Rhey is to be found in the pages of Ker Porter,[4] accompanied by a careful plan. Some of the walls and towers traced by him cannot now be so clearly defined, the lapse of time, the advent of the railway, and the unexhausted inclination of the Teheranis, when they are in want of bricks to build a house, to get them from Rhey for nothing, having combined to still further reduce the great heaps of *débris* which mark the site. Porter traced the remains of a strong citadel on a projecting rocky ridge above the

[1] Rhey was one of the places whose surrender was coolly demanded of Alp Arslan by the Roman Emperor Romanus Diogenes before he would consent to parley with the Seljuk sovereign. The latter's reply was the vigorous campaign which resulted in the capture of the vainglorious Cæsar.

[2] *Oriental Geography*, p. 176.

[3] *Narrative of Embassy* (Hakluyt Soc.), p. 99.

[4] *Travels*, vol. i. pp. 358–364. Compare also Sir W. Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. iii. pp. 174–199.

plain. This was, no doubt, the arx, or acropolis, and its outline can still be satisfactorily determined. Below this was a lower fortified *enceinte*, or citadel; and encircling this, upon the plain, was a vast space surrounded by fortified walls, with its entrances masked by three great square towers, the whole forming a triangle with the arx as its apex. Such, briefly stated, appears to have been the form of the fortified part of ancient Rhey. At present the line of walls has resolved itself into prodigious mounds of broken brick and clay, from which coins have constantly been recovered, and to which visitors to Teheran are in the habit of going out with a spade or shovel for an afternoon's private excavation. They seldom return without some fragment of exquisite tile-work, still gleaming with that flame-like iridescence which is a perished secret of the past, but which is indescribably beautiful even upon the minute chips and splinters that are, as a rule, the sole reward of the spade. I am not aware that any scientific or systematic excavation has ever taken place in the mounds of Rhey, and it is one of the tasks which I should consequently recommend to the labours of archæologists.

There are, however, other and more substantial relics of the ancient city. The most conspicuous of these is a great circular tower, locally known as the Nakkara-Khaneh (or Drum-tower) of Yezid, which too ardent writers, with no apparent justification, have identified with the sepulchre of Togrul Beg, and with the mausoleum of the lovers Khalil Sultan and Shad-el-Mulk. It is a great fabric, built of brick, entirely hollow inside, and roofless, from sixty to seventy feet in height and one hundred and twenty feet in exterior circumference, the outer surface being broken into a series of projecting angles, similar to the towers which I have previously noticed at Jorjan and Bostam. Around the summit is, or, rather, was, a cornice decorated with a Kufic inscription. This structure has unfortunately been subjected in the last few years to a restoration so complete that it now presents the appearance of a brand-new fabric. The surrounding ground has been converted into a garden, with tanks and trees, and a stairway, constructed in the wall, leads to the summit. From this point some idea may be gained of the outline of the ancient city. At a little distance to the east, and at the foot of the mountain, stands a second ruined tower with Kufic cincture, of which, as it has not been restored, I present a photograph. Above this are the remains of a stone citadel, on the rock.

Tower of Yezid

One relic there used to be at Rhey of the famous period of the Sassanian kings. This was a semi-obliterated bas-relief of a figure mounted on horseback and armed with a spear, which was sculped on a smoothed surface of rock, above what I have called the arx. The globe-crowned headdress and the style left no

Rock sculptures

RUINED TOWER AT RHEY

doubt as to the period of the sculpture, though insufficient to warrant an identification with any individual among the monarchs,

whose likenesses at Naksh-i-Rustam and Shapur I shall describe later on. In the latter part of Fath Ali Shah's reign, however, this bas-relief, in the true spirit of Persian restoration, was effaced to make way for a sculpture representing the long-bearded monarch spearing a lion; and no one now seems to be aware of the history of this wanton palimpsest.[1] At some distance lower down, another smoothed surface of rock, rising above a pretty pool known as the Chashmeh-i-Ali (or Fountain of Ali), exhibits Fath Ali Shah seated in high relief, with his Court—a nineteenth-century imitation of the Sassanian model, which has also been copied by Nasr-ed-Din Shah on the road through the Elburz into Mazanderan, and of which it is difficult to say whether it is more pompous or absurd. An adjoining panel exhibits the same sovereign under a parasol, holding a falcon upon his wrist. This is the sum total of what is to be seen at Rhey. In a desolate valley of the mountain-range at whose feet it lies is situated, at a considerable elevation, the circular 'Tower of Silence,' or place of exposure of the Parsis of Teheran. Like its well-known namesakes at Bombay, it consists of a hollow tower, in which the bodies of the dead are exposed upon ledges, to be devoured by birds of prey; but, unlike the structures of Bombay, its interior can be seen by climbing to a higher point of the mountain.

Between thirty and forty miles in a south-easterly direction from Teheran are the remains of yet another dead capital, Veramin.

Veramin

The present town is dominated by the walls of a great mud fort, flanked with bastions and sloping inwards from the base. It was this great structure (of which there is an excellent likeness in Mme. Dieulafoy's book) which I had seen upon the summit of its mound while riding towards Teheran across the northern skirts of the plain of Veramin, and which the fickle light had transformed into huge detached pillars of mud. The village also contains the ruins of what was once a most noble mosque, attributed to Sultan Abu Said, the son of Sultan Mohammed Khodabundeh (i.e. Slave of God), whose tomb I have mentioned at Sultanieh. Scattered about the plain are other great *kalehs*, or similar earthen fortresses, with towering walls of unbaked bricks

[1] *Vide* E. Flandin, *Perse Moderne*, plate 30. Illustrations of the original are given by Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. iii. plate 65, and W. Price, *Journal of Embassy*, p. 37; and the fact of the mutilation is mentioned by Fraser in 1834, *Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 49. Nevertheless Stuart, who wrote in 1835, Lady Sheil *circ.* 1850, Binning in 1851, and Ussher in 1861, all mention and describe the Sassanian bas-relief, which it is therefore clear that not one of them had ever so much as seen.

fused into a mass as solid as cement and as imperishable as stone. Among these Eastwick characterises as the most remarkable a great artificial mound at Asiabad, 200 feet high, 350 feet long, and 300 feet broad, on whose summit are the remains of what is said to be an old fire-temple, built with unbaked bricks with alternate layers of stone, and rising to a maximum height of nearly forty feet. A third *kaleh*, known as Kaleh-i-Iraj (Rhages?), near the village of Jafirabad, encloses with a thick mud wall, fifty feet high, a space, according to Eastwick, of 1,800 yards by 1,500, or nearly a square mile.[1] The date and era of these prodigious structures are unknown and disputed; there is no hazard in referring them to a remote antiquity; but, whatever their age, they recall a past when Persia was more powerful and more populous, even if less pacific or secure, than now; and their silent witness accentuates the pathos of the country's ruin.

[1] Eastwick's is the best account of these ruins, vol. i. p. 282. For Veramin proper I recommend A. Chodzko's narrative in *Annales des Voyages*, 1850, Part III., and Mme. Dieulafoy's *La Perse*, pp. 140–154.

CHAPTER XII

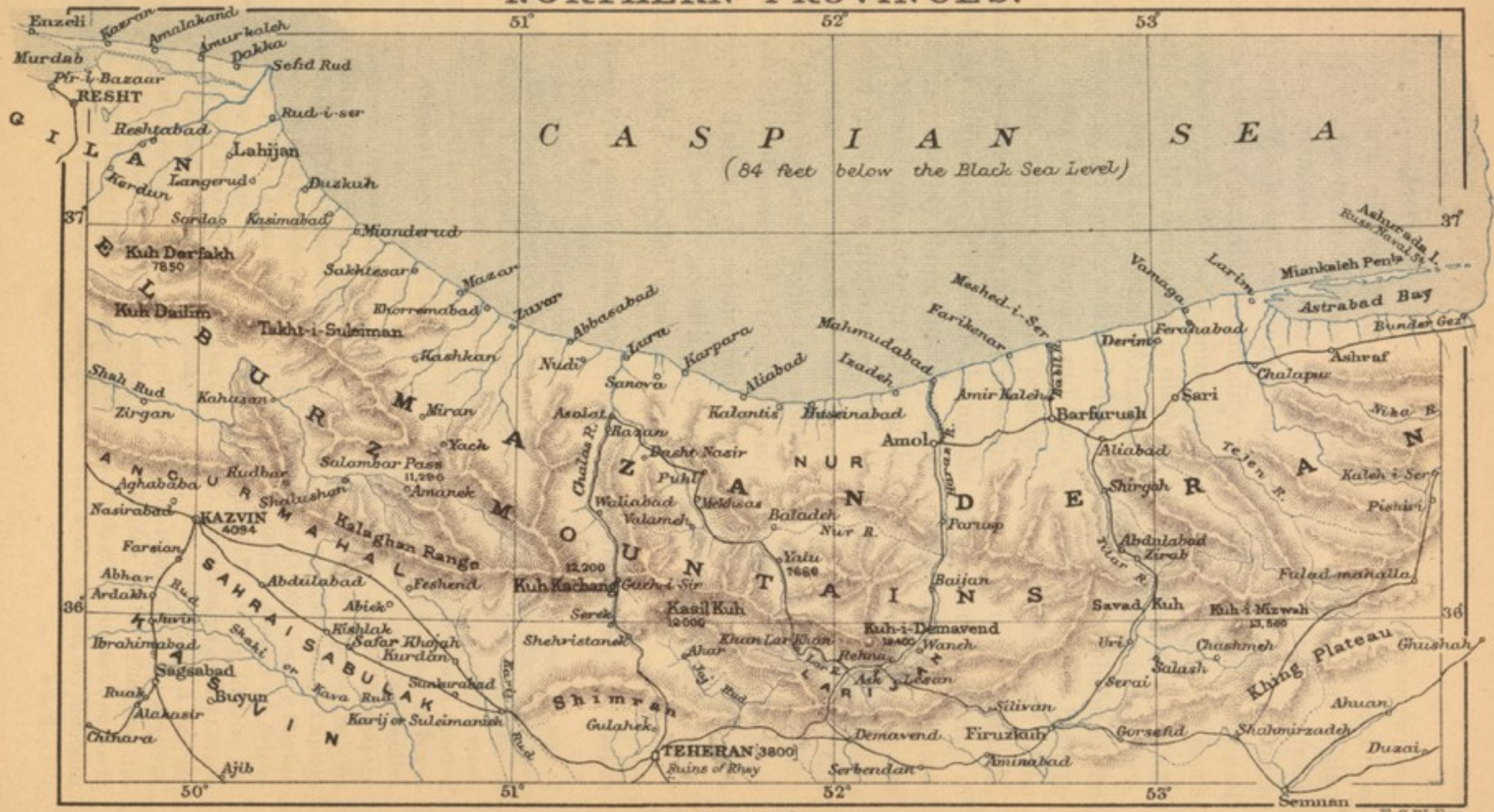
THE NORTHERN PROVINCES

For the King of the North shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come after certain years with a great army and with much riches.'—*Daniel* xi. 13.

Mazanderan and Gilan

In Chapter II. I have disembarked the newcomer to Persia at Resht, or rather at Enzeli, in the south-west corner of the Caspian, and have conducted him from thence to the capital; in Chapter VIII. I have begged his company as I ranged over the whole of Khorasan from the Herat border in the east, to Astrabad in the west; in the last chapter I have shown him the plain of Teheran, bounded on the north by the stupendous barrier of the Elburz Mountains. But on the far side of those mountains, where their northern skirts descend in wooded flounces to the Caspian, and between Resht and Astrabad, extends a range of country, marked by so strange an individuality, and so unlike anything else that is to be seen in any other part of Persia, that a work professing to treat of that country as a whole would err seriously in omitting any notice of it. Readers who have followed me so far will have pictured, and have justly pictured Persia, at least in the winter months, as for the most part a colourless, waterless, and treeless expanse, where wide deserts, with whose monotony the eye aches, roll their sandy levels to the base of bleak mountains, whose gaunt ribs protrude like the bones of some emaciated skeleton through a scanty covering of soil. And yet within a few miles at the most of this cheerless scene, severed by a single but mighty mountain range, lies another Persia, so rich in water that malarial vapours are bred from the stagnant swamps, so abundantly clothed with trees of the forest, that often a pathway can scarcely be forced through the intricate jungle, so riotous in colour that the traveller can almost awake with the belief that he has been transported in sleep to some tropical clime. These extraordinary characteristics, and this amazing change, are exhibited by the northern maritime provinces of Mazanderan and Gilan. Mazanderan signifies *Maz*

NORTHERN PROVINCES.



Scale of Miles.

10 0 50 100

F. S. Weller.

Longmans, Green & Co., London & New York.

(a Pehlevi, or old Persian word for mountains) and *anderun* (within, the inner part, whence its application to the women's quarters in a house), i.e. the hollow between the mountains and the sea. Gilan has been commonly said to be derived from a word signifying mud; and this would certainly be appropriate to a region in which that is the chief tangible commodity, and which an experienced and sympathetic traveller has summed up as 'moist, muggy, villainous Gilan.' But this derivation is disputed by some professors, though I am not aware that they have found anything to suggest in its place. The name is, no doubt, adapted from the Gelæ, who inhabited the south shores of the Caspian, and who bequeathed a title both to the sea, the country, and the principal local manufacture.[1] The characteristics of these two provinces are so similar, if not identical, a slight difference of latitude being the only serious disparity to which they can lay claim, that I propose to treat them in conjunction. Mazanderan starts in the neighbourhood of Astrabad on the east, and runs for a distance of 220 miles along the coast to an unimportant river, which is the boundary of Gilan. From this point Gilan continues round the south-west curve of the Caspian for a further distance of 150 miles, terminating in the mountain district of Talish. It is this transmontane maritime belt, 370 miles in length and with a breadth varying from twenty to sixty miles, with which I am called upon to deal.[2]

[1] Marco Polo (cap. iv.) called the Caspian 'Mer de Gheluchelan' (i.e. Ghel ou Ghelan), and the silk 'Ghelle.'

[2] As the provinces of Mazanderan and Gilan stand apart from the rest of Persia in their physical features, so they do in the literature to which they have given birth. I append here, therefore, for the benefit of such travellers or students as wish to make a special study of this part of the country, a small chronological bibliography of the principal works which I have found relating thereto. General mention of the two provinces is of course frequent in larger works upon the whole of Persia. For journeys through the country irrespective of more general observation, *vide* the routes printed at the end of the chapter. Pietro della Valle (1618), *Viaggi* (Let. iv.), or *Les Fameux Voyages, &c.*; Sir Thomas Herbert (1627), *Some Yeares' Travels*, p. 170, *et seq.* (3rd edit.); Captain P. H. Bruce (1722–3), *Memoirs*; Two English Gentlemen (1739), *Journey through Russia into Persia*; Jonas Hanway (1743–1744), *Historical Account of British Trade over the Caspian*, vols. i. and ii.; S. G. Gmélin (1771–1772), *Histoire des Découvertes*, vols. ii. and iii.; R. Hablizt (1773–1774), *Bemerkungen gemacht in der persischen Landschaft Ghilan* (St. Petersburg, 1783); G. Forster (1784), *A Journey from Bengal to England*, vol. ii.; Colonel Trézel (1805–1806), *Voyage en Arménie, &c. d'Amédée Jaubert*; Sir W. Ouseley (1812), *Travels in the East*, vol. iii. cap. xvii.; J. B. Fraser (1822), *Travels on the South Banks of the Caspian* (*passim*); (1834), *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. Letters xv., xvi., xvii.; Colonel W. Monteith

When discussing the political and strategical aspects of the Astrabad-Shahrud position in Chapter VIII., I undertook to say something more upon a future occasion of the former city and of the province of which it is the capital. Politically, Astrabad looks in the main towards Khorasan and the East. Physically, it must be classified with the Caspian provinces, to which in climate, vegetation, and character of inhabitants, it bears the closest resemblance. Furthermore, any visitor to Mazanderan is so likely either to start from Astrabad, if he be coming from the East, or to end his journey there if he have started from Teheran, that some mention of its features seems to be appropriate in this connection.

Astrabad Province

Astrabad city[1] (i.e. the town of either *astra* star, or *aster* mule), sometimes called by the Persians Dar-el-Muminin or Gate of the Faithful, from the number of Seyids living there, is said by Fraser, who is incomparably the best authority upon the Northern provinces, to have been founded by Yezid ibn Meklub, or Muhallab, an Arab chief of great celebrity, and general of the armies of the Omeyah Khalif Suleiman about 720 A.D.[2] Its subsequent history is somewhat obscure. Of course it was levelled in the universal cyclone of Timuride destruction in 1384 A.D. In later history it became famous as the headquarters of the Kajar

History of the City

(1831), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. iii.; Colonel W. K. Stuart (1836), *Journal of a Residence in Persia*, cap. x. xi.; Major D'Arcy Todd (1836), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. viii. pp. 102–108; A. Eloy (1836), *Relations de Voyages*, pp. 416–451; Sir H. Rawlinson (1838), *ibid.*, vol. x. p. 1; A. Chodzko (1839), *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages*, 5me série, vols. xx., xxi.; W. R. Holmes (1843), *Sketches on the Caspian Shores*; F. A. Buhsé (1848), *Annales des Voyages*, 1851, part iv.; N. de Khanikoff (1859), *Journal Asiatique* (1862); Keith Abbott (1859), *Proceedings of the R.G.S.*, vol. iii. p. 390; E. B. Eastwick (1860), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii.; M. Guilliny (1866), *Essai sur le Ghilan* (*Bull. de la Soc. de Géogr.*); G. Melgunof (1868), *Das Südliche Ufer des Kaspischen Meeres, oder die Nordprovinzen Persiens*; Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*; Dr. Tietze (1875), *Zeitschrift der Ges. für Erdkunde*, Vienna, 1875; B. Dorn, *Caspia* (Russian), 1875; Captain Puschin (1877), *The Caspian Sea* (Russian); Colonel B. Lovett (1881–1882), *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (new series), vol. v. (1883) and *Consular Report*, No. 36, 1882.

[1] For accounts of Astrabad city *vide* Jonas Hanway (1743–1744), *Historical Account*, vol. i. p. 165, &c.; J. B. Fraser (1822), *Travels on the South of the Caspian*, cap. i.; W. R. Holmes (1844), *Sketches on the Caspian Shores*, caps. xiv., xv. E. B. Eastwick (1860), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 50–59; (Sir) C. MacGregor (1875), *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. ii. pp. 161–163; E. O'Donovan (1880), *The Merv Oasis*, vol. i. cap. x.; Colonel B. Lovett (1881), *Consular Report*, No. 36, 1882.

[2] The *Encyclopædia Britannica* antedates the reign of Suleiman by one hundred years, and turns his general's name into Yezzen-ibn-Messlub.

Tribe, one branch of whom was settled here, and at the fort of Ak Kaleh on the Gurgan; and one of whose chieftains raised the standard of revolt against Nadir Shah and seized the town in January 1744, while Hanway happened to be residing there, innocently bent upon the quixotic task of conducting a large trading caravan to Meshed, and attracting to the English net the commerce of Central Asia. Nadir Shah took summary vengeance upon the rebels, and ordered the Kajar stronghold of Kaleh Khundan in the city to be razed to the ground. The subsequent rise and ascendency of the Kajar tribe brought Astrabad into a prominence that it had not before enjoyed; but in this century the members of that tribe have been dispersed in positions of mark throughout the country; whilst Astrabad has acquired another and more sinister importance as the armed outpost against Turkoman attack. Of this desultory guerilla warfare I have before spoken. Its significance has usually been thought sufficient to justify a Royal Governor at Astrabad, and the province has suffered in proportion.

Present appearance

The town is at once one of the most picturesque and ragged in Persia. The circuit of its mud walls, flanked with round towers and defended by what was once a deep ditch, is about 3½ miles; through which four gates admit to the interior. But walls, towers, and ditch are in a state of like decay; the forest has encroached almost to the outskirts of the city, and a jungle of brambles and briars, the favourite haunt of the wild boar, fills the moat and assails the ramparts. Nor does the city occupy the whole of the interior space; for here, too, are deserted and overgrown patches more frequented by wild animals than by man. Nevertheless, the town is most picturesquely situated; the wooded slopes of the Elburz descending almost to its gates; and the outlook from its walls extending over a thick forest for twenty miles to where, on the west, the Caspian glitters on the horizon; and on the other, or north-eastern side to the Gurgan or Wolf River,[1] and the sandy flats of the Turkomans desert. More picturesque, however, than its own surroundings is the town itself. Its thatched or red-tiled houses, with roof of high pitch and wide projecting eaves, the tiles being laid on reeds supported on rafters,

[1] It was from the Gurgan that the ancient Hyrcania was named; the roots *hyrc* and *gurg* being identical in old Aryan. Hyrcania comprised the Gurgan plain as far as the Atrek, Astrabad, and the greater part of Mazanderan.

present a spectacle in singular contrast to the cubical parallelograms of mud with which Persian urban architecture has hitherto familiarised us. At Astrabad, too, the walls are often of stone or burnt brick, mud being unable to resist the abnormal dampness of the climate. Many of the houses in the neighbourhood are built on platforms raised by poles to a height of from two to three feet from the ground, in order to escape the excessive moisture; and many have pleasant verandahs beneath the eaves.

Shah Abbas' causeway

The streets are stone paved, a still surviving relic of the days of the Great Abbas; and the famous causeway or Sang farsh (lit. stone carpet), built by him to facilitate communication through these northern provinces to which he was so much attached, emerges from the western gate. From here it ran right through the forest, passing the various palaces and cities which he created or enlarged in this locality, to a place named Kiskar in the western part of Gilan. It was composed of big roughly hewn blocks of stone, sometimes nearly a foot square, and dwindled from a width of fifteen feet at Astrabad to from eight to ten feet as it penetrated further into the jungle.[1] None the less it was once a magnificent work, and worthy of the monarch who ordered its construction. It has now in parts entirely disappeared; elsewhere the stones have been broken up, dislodged, or tossed hither and thither, and the road is a perilous succession of pitfalls and quagmires. On the other, or south-eastern, side of Astrabad it reappeared and conducted to the foot of the pass leading to Shahrud and Bostam. From the summit of this pass began what may be described as its second section, which ran in an easterly direction, *via* Jajarm to a point near Chinaran, about fifty miles from Meshed. In no part of this extended length has it ever been repaired; and, where it still exists, the roadway gapes with a three hundred years' ruin.

Population of Astrabad

Astrabad is said to contain a population of 8,000 persons, and the surrounding villages 23,000. The Governor's palace is in the Ark or citadel, a considerable but ruined structure in the south-east angle, built by Agha Mohammed Shah in 1791. The remaining public buildings are of no importance. There is the proper allowance of one reputable shrine, viz., the sepulchre of Abdullah, a brother of the Imam

[1] Hanway, however, 150 years ago, says that 'in some parts it was over twenty yards broad.'—vol. i. p. 291.

Reza, who appears to have graciously distributed his relations in the places which he could not patronise himself. This is situated outside the walls on the north, a little to the west of the Ak Kaleh gate. Six *madressehs*, or colleges, communicate a stinted and obsolete education to such pupils as take advantage thereof; but the *vakf* or religious endowments, in which the place is rich, sustain a dissolute crowd of *mullahs* and *seyids*, who appear to be a curse to any spot which they afflict with their sanctity.

Local industries

Soap boiling and the manufacture of gunpowder are the chief local industries. The former is conducted in a very rude and clumsy fashion, the potash employed being extracted from a plant that grows on the banks of the Atrek; nor is the article, when manufactured, of a character or quality that has ever warranted exportation. Gunpowder is made of sulphur brought from Baku, nitre from Meshed, and willow charcoal locally procured. A certain amount of felt carpets are also made, compounded of a mixture of camel's hair, goat's hair, and sheep's wool, beaten together into a solid mass.

Peasant life

The abatement of Turkoman ravages has resulted in the bringing under cultivation of a much larger area than heretofore in the province of Astrabad. The soil is so extraordinarily productive that emigrants from a great distance, even from Afghanistan, come and settle here. The climate is gentle; fuel is abundant; there is no lack of water; and the land has merely to be scratched in order to produce a manifold return. Wheat, barley, and rice are the chief crops; and the rent of land under grain cultivation is only about 8*s.* an acre. Partition of property in equal moieties between the male and female members of the family is here the law of landed inheritance; and accordingly, the several properties, not large at the commencement, have shrunk into narrow plots, some fields of six acres having not less than nine partner landlords. 'This state of things,' as Colonel Lovett said in his Consular Report, 'tends not only to impoverish the country, but is a fruitful source of the indolence and apathy that characterise the inhabitants of this province, and also accounts for the rarity of handicraftsmen.' Many of the villages encountered in the forest or in the open clearings are curious places, surrounded by impenetrable bramble hedges; and the homesteads of the peasants, 'constructed of split poles, wattle, and mud dabbing,' thatched or tiled, and elevated above the ground, suggest

reminiscences of countries very far removed from Persia. Rice is the staple of every-day consumption, and an adult male is said to consume ten ounces at breakfast, twenty-two ounces at lunch, and twenty-two ounces at supper; which, on the whole, is not a bad performance.

Maritime provinces

From the Astrabad province and city, which have merited a somewhat minute particularisation, I turn to the adjoining provinces of Mazanderan and Gilan. And here I shall first give an account of those natural features and products which they share in common, before turning to individual cities or sites. I have already pointed out that these provinces consist of a strip of country rising from the shores of the Caspian, itself eighty-five feet below the sea level, to the summits of the Elburz, possessing a mean elevation of 12,000 to 13,000 feet. It may readily, therefore, be conjectured that a region, however narrow, that embraces so many zones of climatic influence, will not admit of a single classification. It should rather be divided into four belts or sections, which may be thus distinguished and described.

1. Sea-coast

First comes the maritime edge of these provinces, where they are lapped by the waves of the Caspian. And here we are at once confronted with a phenomenon of remarkable but uniform occurrence, allusion to which has been made in an earlier chapter. The wash of the surf and the violence of the prevalent north and north-western winds on the Caspian have combined to pile up along this stretch of shore a long chain of sandhills, sometimes from twenty to thirty feet in height, and from 200 yards to a quarter of a mile in width. On the inner side of these sandhills the rivers descending from the mountains, surcharged with alluvial deposit, have, in their inability to force a way to the sea, outspread themselves in low morasses and lagoons, where the waters chafe idly to and fro, or lie stagnant, a nursery of humid and poisonous exhalations. In cases where the current has with difficulty cleared a way for itself to the sea, the incoming resistance of the surf creates an outer bar, which renders the lake useless for purposes of navigation. These *murdabs*, or dead waters, succeed each other along this entire fringe of coast, the most notable examples being the lagoons of Enzeli at the western, and of Astrabad at the eastern extremity, between which occur the cognate *murdabs* of Lengarud and Meshed-i-Ser. The inner banks of these

backwaters are overgrown with a dense jungle of alders, ashes, planes, poplars, willows, and such timber as loves a saturated soil. Through this jungle the rivers and streams come down from the mountains, furrowing a bed that is alternately a swamp, a torrent, or a quicksand, and in the rainy season spreading themselves out into sluggish morasses. Pestilential vapours rise from the rotting vegetable matter; every manner of reptile infests the swamps, and a cloud of mosquitoes and insects spins in the air.

2. Jungle and arable

From the very brink of these maritime lagoons the jungle stretches inland to the mountain base, which is sometimes at a distance only of two miles, at others of twenty. Through the dense undergrowth the stranger picks his way with the aid of a guide, by intricate pathways known to the villagers only. And yet in the heart of this malarial forest clusters of cottages are hidden away beneath the trees; and every now and then occur considerable clearings devoted to the cultivation of sugar, cotton, or rice. No European could live for long in these damp low levels, where there is no elasticity in the air, and an ever-present sense of suffocation; but their native population is sedentary, and though liable to rheumatism, ague, dropsy, ophthalmia, and other eye diseases, does not appear to be hereditarily stunted or weak. What the acclimatised Mazanderani or Gilani, however, can stand, is perilous even to other Persians. There used to be a proverb which, parodying a well-known Italian saying, might be translated: *Vedi Gilan e mori*; and over two hundred years ago we find Tavernier and Chardin recording that 'The air is so unwholsom that the People cry of him that is sent to Command here, Has he robb'd, stolen, or murder'd, that the King sends him to Guilan?' Fraser, after penetrating for a second time, in 1834, from end to end of this maritime belt, could pass no more lenient verdict upon it than this:—

> Bengal in the rains, Demerara in the wet season, Bombay in the monsoon—these were the recollections that suggested themselves to my mind; and yet I think Mazanderan far more unpleasant than either.[1]

From the marshes and jungles of the plain, however, we pass to a region of surpassing beauty and splendour. The skirts of the Elburz descend in great wooded slopes and buttresses towards the sea; and between their spurs lie the most romantic glens and ravines. It is difficult to count, much less to classify, the

[1] *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 464.

immense variety of forest timber that clothes these spurs and valleys with its shaggy mantle. The trees are mostly deciduous; and there have been reported by different travellers, the oak, elm, plane, maple, ash, lime, box, walnut, beech, juniper, yew. Wild vines wreathe the tree-stems and clamber among the branches. Wild hops, wild figs, plums, pears, and apples abound. Wild strawberries are met with everywhere; and while honeysuckle, wild briar, and roses deck the undergrowth, in which are seen laurels, hawthorn, and box, the forest floor is carpeted in spring time with primroses, violets, and other sylvan flowers. It will be observed that this flora is in no sense tropical, but is such as might be encountered in any southerly temperate zone. The comparison, therefore, with the East or West Indies, which is naturally suggested by the climate, is in reality a faulty one. The vegetation is rather that of Southern Europe, to which special atmospheric conditions, presently to be explained, have superadded a humidity rarely met with out of the tropics. Wild animals abound in this region, just as they do in the low-lying jungle and on the greater altitudes. Tigers of great size are common, and play havoc with the cattle, though they rarely attack a human being. Leopards, wolves, bears, wild boar, jackals, lynxes, different varieties of deer, wild sheep and wild goats, are among the larger game, and in the Turkoman desert wild donkeys and gazelles; pheasants and woodcock among the smaller; whilst in the morasses and on the lagoons, as I have previously indicated in speaking of Resht, are to be found swarms of wild fowl, duck, and snipe.

3. Forest belt

It is in this third belt, and principally on its lower slopes, that occur the towns and largest centres of population. Hidden, one may literally say buried, amid the trees, they are entered by the traveller almost before he is aware that he has left the forest. It is difficult for him to say whether he is in a village or in a great town, so overtopped and submerged is everything with the foliage, not merely of natural plantation, but of orchards and gardens rich in every variety of fruit. I have already mentioned the wild fruits that grow unasked in the wooded depths. In cultivated ground may be produced oranges, lemons, citrons, pomegranates, peaches, melons, medlars, quinces, and olives. In fact, it would be difficult in temperate regions to name a tract more favoured by Nature for purposes of production. It is in country of this character that the silkworm was cultivated, and

Towns and cultivation

the silk spun, that first brought Persia within the range of European commerce, and that made Gilan the most famous to foreigners among Persian provinces. Well might Sir Anthony Sherley, the adventurous English knight-errant who entered the service of Shah Abbas in 1600, write of it as follows:—

Gheylan is a country cut off from Persia with great mountaynes hard to passe, full of woods (which Persia wanteth, being here and there onely sprinkled with hils, and very penurious of fuell, onely their gardens give them wood to burne, and those hils, where are some faggots of Pistachios, of which they are well replenished); betweene those hils there are certaine breaches rather than valleyes, which, in the spring when the snow dissolveth, and the great abundance of raine falleth, are full of torrents. The Caspian Sea includeth this countrey on the east, betweene which and the hils is a continuing valley, so abounding in silke, in rice, and in corne, and so infinitely peopled that Nature seemeth to contend with the people's industry, the one in sowing of men, the other in cultivating the land; in which you shall see no piece of ground which is not fitted to one use or other; these hils also are so fruitfull of herbage, shadowed by the trees, as they show, turned towards the sea, that they are ever full of cattell, which yieldeth commoditie to the countrey by furnishing divers other parts.[1]

Finally, above the wooded zone, rise the naked heights of the mountains, covered with a scanty pasture, frequently veiled in mist, and with snow-streaks rarely absent from their summits. Thus from the steaming vapour bath by the sea's edge to the eternal frost and ice of Demavend, every gradation of climate and atmosphere may be encountered, alternately enervating the system and filling it with brisk vitality. In the upper ranges, tremendous *kotals* or rock-passes are met with, as stiff and neck-breaking as any in Persia. In the open places of the forest zone and on the slopes of the mountains above are the *yeilaks*, or summer quarters, to which all the richer folk retire from the plains and lowlands in the heat, and to which the nomad villagers who are dependent upon herds and flocks, drive their cattle for summer pasture.

4. Bare mountains

A very large proportion of the population is, therefore, migratory in character; and with them are mingled other wandering tribes, who have become village-settlers, but whom the summer heats tempt to wander again; whilst in Gilan bands of gipsies are not rare. Of the two provinces, Gilan is said to be the damper, and its people less vigorous and brave; but I cannot

Population

[1] Purchas' *Pilgrims*, vol. ii. lib. ix. cap. 2.

convince myself that there is any genuine distinction between the two. Fraser, the most competent authority to follow, said that he had expected to find the inhabitants wretched, puny, and diseased; but that, on the contrary, they were stout, well-formed, and handsome, the children being particularly beautiful. Of the two, he reported the Mazanderanis as the darker and swarthier. Holmes said that the sedentary population near the sea were sallow and sickly; and I am sure it would be surprising if they were anything else. The Mazanderanis have been commonly denounced as the Bœotians of Persia, and the taunt of Mazanderani *yabus*, or pack-horses (for which, too, the province is famous), has been levelled at their heads. Here too, however, Fraser comes to their rescue, reporting them as quiet and inoffensive, but brave and good soldiers, at least in their own climate, outside of which they are now never employed. The population of the two provinces suffered terribly from the plague of 1830–31, in which it was estimated that two-thirds were swept away. Epidemics of small-pox and other diseases have ravaged the district since, and it is only latterly that it has begun again to hold up its head. The totals for each of the two provinces are variously estimated at from 150,000 to 250,000; but I doubt if the data for correct enumeration have ever been collected. The natives are said to be descended from the ancient Medes, and speak a dialect of Persian, which differs slightly in the two provinces, and a third form of which, with more Pehlevi words than in either of the others, is spoken in the highlands of Talish.[1]

Like their surroundings, and like themselves, the costume of the peasantry in Gilan and Mazanderan differs from that which is worn in the cities and plains of the interior. Their *shulwars*, or pyjamas, are frequently made of a woollen stuff called *chakah*, which is better adapted than cotton to resist the thorns. On their legs they wear bands of webbing rolled round and round, called *pai tava*, or *tua*, the counterpart, and perhaps the eponymous forerunner of the Kashmir *putti*. Their sandals, or *charuks*, are made of raw hide fastened over the instep and ankle by a thong. On the head they wear, not the felt egg-shell of the Persian peasant, but a shako of sheepskin. Their costume, in fact, is not unlike that worn by the Kurds in the mountain-border

Dress

[1] As long ago as the tenth century El Istakhri said: 'In Taberistan they have a peculiar dialect, neither Arabick nor Persian; and in many parts of Deilman (Dilem) their language is not understood.'

of East Khorasan. The entire outfit is said to cost from sixteen to eighteen shillings. The men are frequently equipped with bill-hooks to clear a way through the jungle.

Influence of the Caspian on climate

To anyone who has been, as I have, in other parts of the Caspian, or who knows of the temperature that there prevails in the winter months, the contrasts between the northern and central and the southern shores, as I have here depicted them, in climate, in flora, and in fauna, is so great as to be almost amazing, and far greater than can be accounted for by the mere difference of latitude. Khanikoff well expressed the phenomenon thus exhibited in the following terms, which I have translated :—

If we compare the arid and sorrowful uniformity of the saline plains on the north shore of the Caspian with the luxuriant and almost tropical vegetation on its southern coast, we are struck with the contrast presented by the development of organic nature upon the two borders of the same inland sea. In the north the donkey can scarcely withstand the rigour of the climate ; in the south the tiger of Bengal is a common animal. Near Astrakhan it is all that the grape can do to ripen ; in the Gulf of Astrabad, on the semi-island of Potemkin, the palm-tree grows wild, and sugar-cane and cotton are cultivated with success. Finally, every year the northern parts of the sea are fast bound in ice ; whilst, before they have had time to melt, everything is in full bloom on the coasts of Gilan and Mazanderan.[1]

The explanation of this seemingly strange phenomenon is, no doubt, that the vapour-charged clouds arising from the Caspian, and drifting southwards under the effect of the prevalent winds, impinge against the crests and slopes of the Elburz, and descend in mist and rain on to the lowlands sloping below. Khanikoff thinks that the dissolvent process is furthered by currents of hot air flowing in a north-westerly direction from the Great Central Desert, and that, when these meet the northern blasts, they melt in soft rain. Certainly the rainfall in the Caspian provinces is as ten to one compared with that in other parts of Persia ; and rain is liable to fall, not at certain seasons of the year only, but almost at any time.

Produce

The staple produce of Mazanderan is rice, cotton, and sugar. The staple produce of Gilan once was silk. As Richard Chenie, one of the factors of the British Moscovy Company, wrote home in 1563, 'The King of Gillan, where as yet you have had no traffique, liveth al by marchandise.' Since it

[1] *Mémoire*, etc., p. 71.

was this silk traffic that brought Persia into mercantile contact with Europe, that prompted the interchange of embassies and the framing of treaties in the sixteenth and later centuries, and that made Persia wealthy and famous; and since, moreover, it is only recently that it may be said to have permanently declined, I shall take advantage of this opportunity to give a short *résumé* of this interesting page of Persian history, only treating of the subject in so far as relates to Gilan and Mazanderan, and reserving for a later chapter on the Commerce of Persia, its international application in bygone ages.

History of Silk trade

The romantic story of the introduction of the silkworm from China into Europe in the reign of the Emperor Justinian, about 550 A.D., is one of the favourite anecdotes of history. The first mention of its cultivation in the northern provinces of Persia that I have come across, is in the pages of the tenth century pilgrim, El Istakhri, who travelled from Rhey to Sari, the capital of Mazanderan, and spoke of the silk which was produced in great quantity in the province called Taberistan, the ancient name for the Elburz region in these parts. Three centuries later we learn from Marco Polo that the merchants of Genoa, then at the height of its commercial renown, had recently brought the Caspian within the far-reaching sphere of their trade, and had begun to export 'the silk which is called Ghelle.' In the middle of the sixteenth century the Moscovy Company, through its agents, Anthony Jenkinson and others, made that courageous attempt to open up a British Caspian trade through Russia, whose dramatic annals I shall afterwards relate. It was the silk of Gilan in quest of which they came. In the succeeding century the main channel of export of this product was in Dutch hands from the Persian Gulf. Early in the eighteenth century, Peter the Great, who fully understood the part that commerce can be made to play in schemes of imperial aggrandisement in the East, endeavoured to divert the entire northern export into Russia, by an arrangement with the Armenian traders of Baku. After a while this conspiracy broke down and the Russians attempted the business themselves. In 1725 Peter was about to enter into an engagement with a company of English merchants, being willing even to invoke foreign aid in order to gain his end, when he sickened and died. Then ensued the second brief, but gallant, experiment on the part of a small band of English merchants, headed by Elton

and Hanway, the history of which will also come under notice in my second volume. Since then, no direct endeavour has been made forcibly to divert the traffic into this or that channel, although the conquests of Russia in the early part of the present century have rendered it inevitable that the greater part of the exports of northern Persia should pass through her hands.

Table of produce and value

Sooner than weary my readers with a long-drawn and statistical narrative of the state of the Silk trade of Persia, and of northern Persia in particular, during the last 250 years, I have preferred to arrange in tabular fashion the principal information with which my reading has supplied me as to the produce and value of that trade at different dates within this period.

Date	Authority	Produce of all Persia	Value	Produce of Gilan	Value	Produce of Mazanderan
1637	Olearius	20,000 bales of 216 lbs. each	2*s.* 6*d.* or 2*s.* 8*d.* per lb. in Persia	8,000 bales	—	2,000 bales
1670	Chardin	22,000 bales of 276 lbs. each	10 to 12 million *livres*	10,000 bales	—	2,000 bales
1744	Hanway	—	—	30,000 *batmans* of 12 lbs. each	12–18 crowns, *i.e.* 3*l.*–4*l.* 10*s.* per *batman*; 30–40 crowns, *i.e.* 7*l.* 10*s.*–10*l. circ.* 1750	—
1771	Gmélin	—	—	—	—	1,500–1,600 *batmans*
1822	Fraser	—	—	60,000 *shahmans* of 14 lbs. each	6½–8 *tomans, i.e.* 3*l.* 12*s.*–4*l.* 8*s.* per *shahman*	—
1836	Fowler	—	—	1,800,000 lbs. (Gilan and Mazanderan)	2,000,000*l.*	—
1839	Chodzko	—	—	90,000 *shahmans* of 13 lbs. each	—	—
1840	Chodzko	—	—	110,000 *shahmans*	—	—
1843	Holmes	—	—	1,300,000 lbs.	—	—
1844	Sheil	—	—	1,000,000 lbs.	450,000*l.*	—
1864	—	—	—	2,190,000 lbs.	1,000,000*l.*	—
1865	—	—	—	1,230,000 lbs.	667,000*l.*	—
1866	Stolze & Andreas[1]	—	—	612,500 kilogr.	743,000*l.*	—
1867	Do.	—	—	503,400 kilogr.	507,000*l.*	—
1868	Do.	—	—	403,400 kilogr.	451,000*l.*	—
1869	Do.	—	—	323,800 kilogr.	302,000*l.*	—
1870	Do.	—	—	418,100 kilogr.	399,000*l.*	—
1871	Do.	—	—	350,400 kilogr.	286,000*l.*	—
1872	Do.	—	—	286,600 kilogr.	221,000*l.*	—
1873	Do.	—	—	347,400 kilogr.	225,000*l.*	—
1874	Do.	—	—	644,700 kilogr.	330,000*l.*	—
1875	Do.	—	—	245,400 kilogr.	105,000*l.*	—
1876	Do.	—	—	262,000 kilogr.	215,000*l.*	—
1877	Churchill	—	—	210,000 lbs.	123,000*l.*	—
1878	Do.	—	—	704,700 lbs.	135,000*l.*	—
1882	Stolze & Andreas	—	—	177,000 kilogr.	—	—
1885	Benjamin	608,000 lbs.	—	7,000 *shahmans* of 65 lbs. each	—	35,000 lbs.
1886	Herbert	—	—	6,000 bales as above	—	—

[1] These figures are copied from the British Consular Reports of Mr. Churchill, but the authors append the just observation (*Petermann's Mittheilungen*, 1885,

Restricting our observations to Gilan alone, in the absence of sufficient data upon which to base any more general conclusions, we notice the lamentable falling off in production between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, consequent upon the anarchy that succeeded the overthrow of the Sefavean kings. In Hanway's time Gilan only furnished one-eighth of the total output in the days of Chardin. At the close of the century, the firm hold of the Kajar family upon the northern provinces re-established security and brought with it a revival of trade. During the first half of the present century the progress continued without intermission. Sir J. Sheil, when British Minister, wrote in about the year 1850, 'Silk is the great staple of Persian commerce, particularly of foreign traffic, which enables it to pay for a portion of its imports from abroad.' He spoke of attempts that had been made by English merchants to introduce improvements in the preparation of the silk, but which the normal supineness of the Persians and their reluctance to abate one jot or tittle of archaic routine, had rendered unavailing.[1] In 1864, the very year in which, as the above figures show, the climacteric of production was touched, disease appeared for the first time. By the year 1869, its ravages had made such serious inroad that the value of the annual output had sunk to one-fifth of the figure at which it stood five years before. From this attack the silk trade of Gilan has never recovered. Eggs from Khorasan and eggs from Khanikin in Turkey were tried, but with no success. Eggs were brought all the way from Japan, but without much better results. In despair at bad season succeeding bad season, the peasants have turned their attention to other crops. Tobacco was started as an experiment in 1875. An impulse was given to the olive cultivation of Rudbar near Resht. In the central silk-growing districts of Persia, opium has been largely adopted as an alternative, and has produced most gratifying results. But in the northern provinces rice has proved the most popular and remunerative substitute; and in a country where new ideas and improved methods penetrate so slowly as in Persia, it is doubtful whether, at least in Persian hands, the silk industry will ever permanently

History of decline

p. 21) that they cannot be accepted as absolutely reliable, and are sometimes totally at variance with the contemporaneous estimates to be found in the Consular reports from Tabriz. 1 kilogramme = approximately $2\frac{1}{5}$ lbs.

[1] Note H. to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia.*

revive. Under other auspices, a different tale might very likely soon be told; for the disease having been expelled, and the soil and climate remaining what they formerly were, there is no valid reason why so lucrative an industry should either be abandoned or should cease to flourish.

Present area of production

At present the silk-worm is cultivated, in addition to Gilan and Mazanderan, in Azerbaijan (where in 1885 the crop was 32,500 lbs.), in Khorasan (16,250 lbs.), and in the central district of Persia, whose chief marts are Kashan, Isfahan, Yezd, and Kerman (13,000 lbs.). In the two latter cases, the produce is wholly, or almost wholly, required for local consumption, and it is from Gilan and Azerbaijan alone that the export now takes place to Russia, and still more to Marseilles. The native manufactures in which Persian silk is employed are velvets, brocades, satins, and sarsenet, as well as plain silk, and silk mixed with cotton. Since pure silk is forbidden by the Koran, such of the Persians as are sticklers for that somewhat neglected code of precepts, salve their consciences by wearing silk with the slightest admixture of cotton. Of the modern fabrics that I saw in the above-mentioned towns, I admired the velvets of Kashan the most. Old Persian velvets and velvet brocades are superb, but are very difficult to procure in pieces of any size. Silk carpets are still made to order at Kashan and Sultanabad, and are as magnificent and as costly as heretofore; but, unless carefully watched, the manufacturer flies to the use of cheap aniline dyes, and the artistic value and durability of tone of the fabric are irretrievably ruined.[1]

Mode of cultivation

Before I quit the subject let me very briefly describe the manner in which the silk cultivation is conducted in northern Persia. In the month of April the natives, and chiefly the women, take the eggs, attached to a sheet of paper, and expose them to the warmth of the human body by wearing them beneath their clothes, next to the skin. After the lapse of three days the eggs are hatched and the caterpillars appear. They have before them a life of about forty days, which is spent in alternate

[1] In addition to information contained in Consular Reports, let me recommend for a study of the Persian silk trade an essay by A. Chodzko, *De l'élève des vers à soie en Perse* (Paris, 1843); W. R. Holmes, *Sketches on the Caspian Shores*, pp. 96–104; S. G. Benjamin's *Persia*, pp. 414–422; and a paper on 'Silk Production in Persia' in the *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Nov. 19, 1886. For the figures of production in 1889, *vide* a later chapter on the 'Resources of Persia.'

spasms of excessive gluttony and stupefied repose. The periods of feasting, however, last from seven to ten days, the intervals of torpor not more than two. After the first ten days the worms are transferred to a *tilambar*, or platform, covered with a thatched shanty and reared at a height of about five feet from the ground, where, in the intervals of voracity, they are stuffed to repletion with mulberry leaves. After about forty days they become fat, full, and nearly transparent, in which uncomfortable condition they exhibit a desire to climb up a number of branches placed vertically in the shed, and to spin their cocoons. This goes on for ten days, during which time the *tilambar* is hermetically closed. At the end of that time it is again opened, the boughs are removed, the roof is found to be entirely covered with beautiful cocoons; and while some of these are spared to develop into moths for breeding purposes, the bulk are taken down, the chrysalis is killed by exposure to the sun, or immersion in boiling water, and the silk is unravelled and wound off on reels. The survivors come out as full-blown moths in a fortnight, when the female, having done her duty by laying from 100 to 300 eggs, pines, and incontinently expires.

Other resources

In addition to the valuable products of their cultivated area, Mazanderan and Gilan are endowed with gratuitous sources of wealth, of which but little, and that unsystematic, advantage is taken by the Persians. There are considerable mineral resources in the two provinces, of which I shall speak in a future chapter on the resources of the whole country. Much of the timber that is grown on the mountain slopes is well adapted for ship building. It was utilised for that purpose by John Elton, the ingenious English shipwright of Nadir Shah, who was commissioned by that monarch to construct for him a flotilla on the Caspian. Timber from Mazanderan was even hewn and ordered to be transported across the whole of Persia to the Gulf, in order to repeat the experiment there. Boxwood has been exported from the Caspian provinces in some quantity to Russia and England. But no system or science of forestry exists; and the timber which might produce a large annual revenue is either apathetically neglected or mischievously destroyed.[1] Nor is the sea much less rich in money-making properties than the land. The mouths of

[1] In 1886 the monopoly of wood-cutting in Gilan was purchased by a Russian for two years for 50,000 *tomans* (16,000*l.*). In 1890 it stood at 17,000 *tomans*.

the principal rivers, especially the Sefid Rud, and the marine lagoons. swarm with a variety of fish, sturgeon, salmon, mullet, trout and carp. At the mouth of the above-named river nearly 4,000 fish have sometimes been taken in the day at the height of the season, whilst in the Enzeli lagoon 300,000 carp have been netted in a single day. At the time of my visit the entire fisheries on the south shore of the Caspian were leased to a Russian for 65,000 *tomans* (18,500*l.*) a year; and from the export both of dried fish, and still more of caviar to Russia, he was said to make a large annual profit by the speculation.

Revenue

The revenue of these two provinces has been peculiarly fluctuating, according as it has followed the ups and downs of their material progress or decline. Fraser in 1822 found the revenue of Gilan, from customs and land-tax, to be 200,000 to 210,000 *tomans*, or 110,000*l.* to 115,000*l.* Ten years later Monteith returned it as 300,000 *tomans*, whilst, after a further decade it had, according to Holmes, reverted to the original figure. Sir F. Goldsmid has given the revenue (in 1874) as 440,000 *tomans*. The 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' quoting from an obsolete report, gives 105,000 *tomans* as the revenue of Mazanderan, and says that no surplus is left therefrom for the treasury, the entire receipts being consumed in military and administrative expenses. I do not find that this is the case. In 1888–89 the revenue of Mazanderan was 139,350 *tomans* in cash, that of Gilan 345,000 *tomans*. The expenditure in the former province on government dues, cost of collecting, public buildings, &c., was only returned at 4,590 *tomans*; in the latter it was 24,430 *tomans*. What proportion actually reached the Royal Exchequer it is impossible to determine.

History

Shut off by the mountains from the rest of Persia, and differing therefrom in climate, character, and interests, the Caspian provinces have necessarily played a somewhat independent part in history. The imagination that finds both its stimulus and satisfaction in the legendary period of a nation's life, not unnaturally located the heroes of Persian myth in the sublime uplands. There they fought their battles and triumphed, the very beasts of the forest taking their side in the conflict; there Rustam vanquished the Div Sefid, or White Demon; an inferior order of men, predestined to a just servitude, inhabited the maleficent regions below. The part played by these provinces in classical

history, and in the campaigns of Alexander, may be traced by reference to the title Hyrcania in a Classical dictionary. In the Christian Era they appear only at fitful epochs upon the public stage. During the Sassanian period and the first centuries of Islam, Mazanderan formed part of Tapuristan, the modern Taberistan. About the year 900 A.D. Mazanderan was given by the Khalif Mutadhid (or Mutazzid) to Ismail Samani, the founder of the Samanid dynasty of North Persia and Bokhara, as a reward for his services in conquering the rebellious Amr bin Leith, the brother and successor of Yakub bin Leith, already mentioned in the chapter on Seistan. In the fourteenth century we find an independent Seyid dynasty ruling in Mazanderan. When Anthony Jenkinson and his fellow pioneers opened the British Caspian trade with Persia in the middle of the sixteenth century, they speak of a king of Gilan, who was only in nominal dependence upon the Sefavi Shahs. This state of halting subjection developed into actual rebellion in the reign of Shah Abbas, who, in 1593, ordered a general massacre in Gilan. Mazanderan, however, as his mother's birthplace, was a special favourite with Abbas. Here he built a series of magnificent palaces, whose wasting ruins I shall presently describe; here, in sight of the Caspian and in a retreat where no enemy could either follow or disturb him, he loved, when not at Isfahan, to reside. So anxious was he to raise the maritime border to a higher level of prosperity and cultivation, that here, as elsewhere, he pursued his favourite policy of colonisation on a gigantic scale; transplanting 30,000 families of Christians from the Turkish border in order at one and the same time to depopulate the regions which were yearly ravaged by the Ottomans, and to apply a fresh and vigorous industry to the most neglected part of his dominions. Chardin gives the following quaint description of the aptitudes of the country for the novel immigrants:—

> It is sayd to be a perfect right country for the Christians; it abounds with wine and hog's flesh, two things which they mightily like; they love to go to sea, and they will traffick with their brothers, the Muscovites, by the Caspian Sea.[1]

Abbas, however, had failed to reckon with the Mazanderani climate, which quarrelled as fatally with the new comers as it did with the worthy English ambassador, Sir Dodmore Cotton; for, as

[1] *Travels* (edit. Lloyd), vol. ii. pp. 8–11.

Chardin goes on to relate, 'The malignity of the air was so cross to his designs and projects, that, about 1630, the 30,000 Christian families were reduced to 400.' The Italian Pietro della Valle, who visited the Court of Shah Abbas in Mazanderan, was very much smitten with the ladies of that province. 'The women,' he wrote, 'were in my eyes perfectly beautiful; and I had full opportunity of judging, as, unlike other Mohammedans, they never cover the face, but converse freely with man. In addition, they are affable and exceedingly obliging.'

Russian invasion

I have previously spoken of the Cossack descent upon Mazanderan that occurred in the year 1668. Fifty years later the Russians made their first determined attempt, in the closing years of Peter the Great's reign, to occupy the southern shores of the Caspian. Such conflicting versions of this episode have found their way into books about Persia, that I will briefly relate, so far as can be ascertained, what actually occurred. The best authorities are Jonas Hanway, who was in the country within a few years of the event; G. Forster, the first overland traveller from India to England, sixty years later; Captain P. H. Bruce, an Englishman serving in Peter the Great's army during the first Persian Campaign; Dorn's 'Caspia' (in Russian); and a work by M. Fonton entitled 'La Russie dans l'Asie Mineure.' From a collation of these several sources we may reconstruct the narrative of events as follows. In 1722, Peter sent an ambassador to the Persian Court at Isfahan to demand redress for serious damage done to the property of Russian merchants by the Lesghians, then in constant revolt against Persia, in the town of Shemakhi. The envoy, arriving at the capital, found that Shah Sultan Husein had been deposed, and that Mahmud, the Afghan usurper, was on the throne. The latter replied that he could not accept the responsibility, and that the Czar had better safeguard his own trade. Peter, who was never slow at accepting a hint, at once assembled an army of 30,000 veterans at Astrakhan, embarked in July 1722, and sailed against Derbend, which yielded to his arms. He was proceeding to advance upon Baku and Shemakhi, when he was met by the Ottoman ambassador with the threat that, unless he withdrew (the Turks also laying claim to the entire Caucasus), he would find a Turkish as well as a Persian war upon his hands. He then retired for the winter to Astrakhan, leaving a garrison at Derbend and a fort on a river further south, which was presently attacked by the Afghans

and destroyed. In the course of the winter, the Persian chief of Gilan sent an agent to Astrakhan offering to surrender Resht, which was then besieged by the Afghans, to Russia. Overjoyed at this windfall, Peter despatched another army early in 1723. Resht opened her gates to the new-comers, and the greater part of the province of Gilan passed into Russian hands. In July of the same year, Baku, after suffering a bombardment from the sea, also capitulated. The young Shah Tahmasp, who meanwhile was striving to make headway against the Afghans in the north, now thought it time to enter a claim of nominal ownership over his fast-shrinking dominions. What weakness, however, rendered him unable to dispute, policy suggested that he should amicably concede. Accordingly, an ambassador was sent to Peter, and the terms of a bargain, which in all probability neither party had any idea of keeping, were embodied in a treaty of alliance that was signed on September 3, 1723. It contained four principal articles. The Czar was to drive out the Afghans from Persia, and to reinstate Tahmasp on the throne. In return the Shah was to cede to Russia in perpetuity the towns and dependencies of Derbend and Baku, as well as the provinces of Gilan, Mazanderan, and Astrabad. He further undertook to furnish camels and provisions for the Russian army of invasion. Finally, full liberty of commerce was guaranteed between Russia and Persia.[1] The Russians, as has been shown, had occupied Gilan even before the treaty was signed, and the agreement in that respect was little more than a ratification of the *status quo*. They do not appear ever to have set foot in Mazanderan or Astrabad, having their hands full elsewhere, or realising the doubtful policy of such a proceeding. In 1725 Peter the Great died, and his schemes of Oriental aggrandisement were temporarily shelved. In the same year the Russian forces took Lahijan, the second town to Resht in the province; but they advanced no further to the east. Basil Batatzes, the Greek merchant, whose travels I have cited when speaking of Kelat, was in Gilan during the period of the Russian occupation and had an interview at Resht with General Levasoff, the Russian commander.[2] Finally, about the year 1734, 'the Russians, then involved in domestic commotion and intrigue, were compelled to evacuate their Caspian dominions, with only a permission to hold

[1] Hanway, *Historical Account*, vol. iii. p. 181.
[2] *Nouveaux Mélanges Orientaux* (Paris, 1886), lines 933–950.

a resident at the seaport of Enzeli for the management of the silk trade of Gilan.' This is Forster's version. Hanway, who was in Gilan within ten years of the evacuation, assigns as the true reason the pernicious effect of the climate. 'The warmth and dampness of Ghilan, together with the unwholesome fruits, rendered that province the grave of the Russians, for which reason the Empress Anne very prudently consented to evacuate the country in 1734, without drawing any advantage from it.'[1] Watson, quoting from a writer in 'Blackwood's Magazine' (vol. xxi.) says that Astrabad and Mazanderan had already been restored to Persia by a treaty concluded at Resht in 1732; and that a further treaty restored Gilan in 1735—statements which, if correct, would absolutely dispose of any claim that Russia may subsequently have felt disposed to make on the ground of the original concession. There is a fourth version of the epilogue, which may be supposed to reflect the view that might commend itself to a patriotic Persian, whose *amour propre* could admit neither the voluntary occupation, nor the peaceful retreat. According to this version Nadir Shah, having obtained the throne, sent an imperious ultimatum to the Russian commander, that unless the Russians disappeared from the scene, he (Nadir) would send his *ferashes* (lit. carpet-spreaders), to sweep them into the sea. It is the obvious sequel of this story, which is probably of later construction, that the Russians embarked with great precipitation, and were no more seen. In 1746 the only relic of their occupation of the coast strip was a factory at Enzeli, and a commercial agent at Derbend.

Later history

That Shah Tahmasp himself attached very little validity to the treaty with Peter the Great, had already been shown in 1730, in which year he made a grant of Mazanderan, along with Khorasan, Seistan, and Kerman to Nadir, as a reward for the expulsion of the Afghans. The condition of the two maritime provinces during the latter part of Nadir Shah's reign, the oppression and misery and ruin that everywhere prevailed, are admirably depicted in Hanway's pages, from which we learn how a national hero soon transformed himself into an intolerable curse, for whose removal men prayed almost in public. In the anarchy consequent upon Nadir's assassination, a local chief named Hidayet Khan raised himself and the province of Gilan to a position of practical independence. When Kerim Khan Zend attained the

[1] *Historical Account*, vol. i. p. 12.

throne, he left Hidayet Khan in charge of Gilan, exacting only an annual tribute. The chief kept a large army, and observed great state. It was during his rule that the Russian traveller Gmélin visited Resht, and travelled in the Caspian provinces. Meanwhile, in Mazanderan and Astrabad, the wily Kajar eunuch was organising the strength and the following that were shortly to place him upon the Persian throne. Sheikh Vais, the son of Ali Murad Khan Zend, who held the throne for four years, from 1781–85, was despatched by his father to crush these pretensions, and to recover Mazanderan. Though at first successful he was deserted by his followers and compelled to retire. When Agha Mohammed had finally triumphed, Hidayet Khan of Gilan was foolish enough to resist the successful usurper, and paid the penalty with his life. Since then Gilan and Mazanderan have remained in secure and undisputed possession of the Kajar reigning family, and have commonly provided governing billets for the sons or relatives of the sovereign.

Palaces of Abbas the Great. Ashraf

I have already spoken of the partiality displayed by Shah Abbas for Mazanderan, and have alluded to the royal residences which he there constructed. Let me say a few words more about them before passing on. The monarch was here visited and seen by the garrulous Italian Pietro della Valle, and by the ingenious Englishman, Sir Thomas Herbert, and their contemporaneous narratives are still extant. A century later, Hanway described the ravages of a hundred years' decay. In the present century, the tale has been carried down to modern times. These palaces were several in number. The principal were located in a situation of great natural beauty at Ashraf, about five miles south of Astrabad Bay, and with an exquisite outlook over the sea. Shah Abbas' causeway, running in a westerly direction from Astrabad city, passed the village of Gez, and conducted thence, a distance of twenty-six miles, to Ashraf, whose title signified the Most Noble. Here the Great Abbas set about building himself a sort of northern Isfahan, whose palaces and gardens should rival those of the southern capital. Pietro della Valle was there in 1618, while the king's palace was the only completed structure, and the town was still in the bricklayers' hands. Nine years later, on May 25, 1627, in the same palace, which Herbert described as 'pretty large and but newly finished,' the King received in public audience Sir Dodmore

Cotton, ambassador from Charles I., and his own accredited envoy Sir Robert Sherley. This is how the ever-amusing Herbert describes the scene:—

At the upper end sat the Pot-shaw [i.e. Padishah], beloved at home, famous abroad, and formidable to his enemies. His grandeur was this: Circled with such a world of wealth he clothed himself that day in a plain red callico coat quilted with cotten, as if he should have said His dignity consisted rather in his parts and prudence than *furtivis coloribus*, having no need to steal respect by borrowed colours or embroideries. Cross-legg'd the Pot-shaw sat; his sash was white and large; his waste was girded with a thong of leather; the hilt of his sword was gold, the blade formed like a semi-circle, and doubtless well tempered; the scabbard red; and the Courtiers, *regis ad exemplum*, were but meanly attired.[1]

Originally there were six different royal establishments at Ashraf; five of which were contained within one large wall of circumvallation. Of these the most famous was the Bagh-i-Shah, or King's Garden, laid out with stone terraces, and canals, and cascades, and adorned with *aiwans*, or open halls, the largest of which, called, like that at Isfahan, Chehel Situn, or Forty Pillars, terminated the principal vista. Terraces, and cascades, and halls have all gone to utter ruin, but the garden is still a glory, with its gigantic cypresses and orange trees. The Chehel Situn was accidentally burnt down in the time of Nadir Shah, and was replaced by a flimsy structure, itself in equal ruin. Other gardens and palaces were the Bagh-i-Harem, or Garden of the Seraglio, the Bagh-i-Tepe, or Garden of the Hill, which contained the Hummum, or warm baths, the palace of Sahib Zeman, or Lord of the Age, and the Khelwet, or private palace and garden. A paved way with streams and waterfalls led from this enclosure to the Imaret-i-Chashmeh, or Pavilion of the Fountains, making the sixth royal residence at Ashraf. The old stone pavements have vanished, the slabs having been broken or stolen for the sake of the iron clamps cemented by lead, and the entire precincts are a wilderness of ruin.[2] Half a mile from Ashraf the grandson and successor of Abbas, Shah Sefi, built a palace for his daughter, upon a lovely wooded eminence, and called it, after himself, Sefiabad. Like its predecessors it has perished; and a hunting lodge, built many years ago by

[1] *Some Yeares' Travels* (3rd edit.), p. 185.

[2] For the palaces of Ashraf, *vide* Gen. J. von Blaramberg, *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben.*

the present Shah in its place, is within measurable distance of a similar dissolution. The town of Ashraf was peopled by Shah Abbas with a colony of 7,000 Armenians, some of whose descendants still inhabit the place along with a mixture of Persian and Turkish descent. During the last twenty years it has experienced quite a revival, owing to the trade with Russia that has sprung up from the port, or rather roadstead, of Meshed-i-Ser.

Ferahabad

Twenty-six miles from Ashraf on the north-west, at a distance of about three miles from the Caspian and on the banks of the Tejen river, are situated the ruins of another city and palace of Abbas, known as Ferahabad. Pietro della Valle declared that the circuit of the walls was equal to, if not greater than, that of Rome or Constantinople, and that the city contained streets of more than a league in length. In this palace died Shah Abbas in January 1628, in the forty-third year of his reign and the seventy-first of his age. Forty years later the palace, which, according to Chardin, was 'a wonder of art that deserved a kind of perpetuity,' and 'wherein was kept a vast treasure of dishes and basins of porcellane or china, cornaline, agate, coral, amber, cups of crystal of the rock, and other varieties without number,' was plundered by the Cossacks and destroyed; and the worthy knight sorrowfully adds, 'Everytime I think of the magnificence and delightfulness of that place, I cannot but lament its hard fate.'[1] Fraser, in 1822, examined and carefully described the ruins of Ferahabad, which he declared to be vastly inferior to those of Ashraf, in extent as well as in magnificence, and to indicate only a temporary rather than a permanent abode. It is curious that the king should have ventured upon two such similar designs in such close proximity to each other; but it is also characteristic of the whims of a monarch, who shared to the full the capricious irresponsibility that has always been a feature of despotism in the East. Ferahabad is now a miserable village, which no one turns aside to visit.

Cities of Mazanderan

From the palaces I turn to the cities of Mazanderan, few in number but distinct in individuality, which I shall treat in the order in which they are encountered if journeying upon Shah Abbas' causeway from Astrabad, namely: Sari, Barfurush, Amol. Of all of them it may be said that in their situation, amid forest or jungle and on moist and luxuriant plains,

[1] *Coronation of King Solyman III.*, pp. 152–154.

in their architecture, which is similar to that already described at Astrabad, and in their population, which is easily distinguished from the Persian of the centre and south, they are *sui generis*.

Sari

Sari, thirty-five miles from Ashraf, is the old capital of Mazanderan, and has been identified by D'Anville and Rennell with the Zadracarta of the ancients, where Alexander halted for fifteen days and offered sacrifice. Be this as it may, it was the capital and residence of the independent sovereigns who ruled in this region in the later Middle Ages. The more modern city was also selected as his capital by Agha Mohammed Shah in the days when he was still fighting for the throne, and when his dominions did not extend much beyond Astrabad and Mazanderan. He built the palace, which still exists in a ruined condition, and which contained pictures of the battles of Shah Ismail and Nadir Shah. In the early part of the present century, Sari was reported to contain from 30,000 to 40,000 inhabitants; and as late as 1874 Captain Napier was told that the total was 16,000. It is not now supposed to contain much over 8,000 persons, business having migrated to Amol and Barfurush. The streets are stone-paved and the town has a picturesque appearance. When Hanway was here in 1744, he left on record that 'there are yet four temples of the Gebres, or worshippers of fire, made of the most durable materials. These edifices are rotund, of about 30 feet diameter, raised in height to a point near 120 feet.'[1] Herein there can be no doubt that the excellent merchant was hoodwinked either by the ignorance or the deceit of his informants; for these four (there were only in reality three) towers, so far from being Parsi fire-altars, were merely *gumbaz*, or sepulchral towers, erected in the Arab period in memory of eminent saints. Fraser in 1822 found all three still standing. The largest was called Gumbaz-i-Selm-wa-Tur, and was a hollow, circular, brick tower, 100 feet high, with two belts of Kufic inscription and a conical roof. It was believed to be the tomb of Hasan-ed-Dowleh, a descendant of the Buyah or Dilemi sovereigns in the fifth century of the Hejira. The two other *imamzadehs* were attributed to Yahia and Ibrahim, the sons of the Imam Reza. Since Fraser's day all three have been destroyed, or partially destroyed, by earthquakes.

Barfurush, the modern commercial capital of Mazanderan, is situated twenty-six miles west of Sari and ninety miles north-east

[1] *Historical Account*, vol. i. p. 292.

of Teheran. Three centuries ago it was a mere village; but its admirable position and the improved communication both with the capital and the sea, have combined to make it the most considerable town on the Caspian sea-board. Little more than a century ago (1771) Gmélin found it a poor place, in no wise resembling a capital. And yet Fraser, in 1822, would have us believe—the sole instance, so far as I know, in which his judgment was seriously at fault—that it had grown within that space of time into a great city, as frequented as Isfahan, and with a population alleged to consist of 300,000, but accepted by him as 200,000 persons. He went into positive ecstasies over 'the spectacle of a city purely mercantile, governed by a merchant, with no khans or nobles, peopled entirely with merchants, mechanics, and their dependents, and prosperous and happy far beyond any in Persia.' The people were as respectful and polite as their town was admirable, and the bazaars, a mile in length, were as excellent as the town.[1] Twelve years later Fraser returned to find that the scourge of the plague had fallen in the interval upon this earthly paradise of cities, and that the fanciful population of the previous decade had fallen to 30,000. Since then it has partially recovered, although it is to be feared that the halcyon days of Fraser's imagination will never return. Napier, in 1874, reported its population as 50,000 (a greatly exaggerated estimate), its streets as clean and well paved, its shops as well built, and its bazaars as full of European goods. The town is situated in the level country about halfway between the base of the mountains and the sea, and though surrounded by rich rice, sugar, and cotton plantations, is so buried in forest trees as to be invisible from the exterior. In the summer it is almost deserted by its inhabitants, who fly to the mountains. On an island in a small lake or tank between the town and the river stands a dilapidated villa belonging to the Shah. The Russians keep a Consular agent here to superintend their trade with the Caspian. There has for long been a considerable number of Jews resident in Barfurush, where they are engaged in retail trade. A furious outbreak against them took place in 1866 and is recorded by Mounsey.[2] It was suppressed by the vigorous action of the Shah; but public opinion prevented him from inflicting condign punishment upon the authors.

Barfurush

[1] *Travels South of the Caspian*, cap. vii.
[2] *Journey through the Caucasus*, pp. 273–282.

Fifteen miles from Barfurush is the port or roadstead of Meshed-i-Ser, at the mouth of the river Babil. Here the Russian steamers of the Caucasus and Mercury touch in their circumnavigation of the Caspian, and there is a very considerable trade, both export and import, principally with Astrakhan. The harbour accommodation is of the most meagre description, or, rather, does not exist. The rival influences of river and wind have, in a manner before described, created a formidable bar which no effort is made to pierce or dredge. The steamers are obliged to lie out in the offing at a distance of between two and three miles from the shore; and passengers and cargo, as at Enzeli, can only be disembarked in calm weather, when they are transferred to native, flat-bottomed barges. 'The coast here is a line of low sandhills, overlooking a steep and narrow beach of dark-grey sand. There are no shells on the shore, no birds in the air, no seaweed, no fish, nothing but green water-snakes, tortoises, and frogs.'[1] There is a Persian Custom-house at Meshed-i-Ser, and a lighthouse, with no light. The only other edifice worthy of notice is an *imamzadeh* of a brother of Imam Reza, who appears to have strewn his dead relatives about this neighbourhood as thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa.

Meshed-i-Ser

Amol, the third town of Mazanderan, and the present residence of the Governor of the province, is, unlike Barfurush, but like Sari, a place that has figured in history. In the time of Yakut it was the first city in Taberistan; and it long retained a celebrity for its cotton and carpet manufactures. It is situated on the banks of the Haraz, about twenty-three miles west of Barfurush, the river being crossed outside the town by a very old stone bridge, between 80 and 100 yards long and not more than a yard in width. Gmélin, 120 years ago, found the population of Amol to be only 800 persons, but 50 years later Fraser, still in his generous mood, reported from 35,000 to 40,000, although on his second visit in 1834 the place was 'a ruin, a desert—the streets grown with jungle, and not a soul to be seen.'[2] The population now is said to be about 8,000. There are the ruins here of a mausoleum, erected by Shah Abbas, over a Seyid, called by Fraser Mir Buzurg, who was his mother's ancestor, and raised

Amol

[1] Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. p. 202.

[2] Compare *Travels South of the Caspian*, cap. viii., with *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 453.

himself to the throne of Mazanderan in the fourteenth century, but whose real title was Kawam-ed-Din. In the neighbourhood, also, are a number of the square or circular towers with conical roofs, which local ignorance has attributed to the fire-worshippers, but which were the familiar sepulchres of holy men in the first centuries succeeding the Arab conquest. The town is so overgrown with jungle and orchards as to be collectively invisible.[1]

Railway to the sea

Within the last three years an attempt has been made to connect Amol with the Caspian by rail—the second of the two only railroads in Persia—and to open up a new commercial route with the capital. This speculation has been undertaken by one Haji Mohammed Hasan, the Master of the Persian Mint, who conceived the idea of monopolising the carrying trade between Teheran and the Caspian by creating a quicker and shorter route than that which runs from Amol to Barfurush, and thence to Meshed-i-Ser. Accordingly, he obtained a concession from the Shah—the first step in any public undertaking in Persia—and, selecting as his port of debarkation the *murdab* of Mahmudabad, at the mouth of the Haraz river, twelve miles due north of Amol, he built a fine caravanserai and shops there (which, when I was in the country, were unoccupied), he imported rails and engineers from Belgium, and he laid a single line of rails to Amol, which was to be in connection with a horse tramway for a distance of some miles beyond. Of the engineering quality of this enterprise I shall require to speak in a later chapter upon Railways in Persia. I may here limit myself to remarking that the newly-created port is as bad, if not worse, than any on the Caspian, there being the familiar bank of shingle and sand between the *murdab* and the sea, and vessels requiring to lie off at a distance of some miles and to land their cargoes in lighters. The line was badly laid, and the proprietor soon quarrelled and parted with his Belgian engineers. Quite lately, however (October 1890), Haji Mohammed Hasan appears to have found a new field for his energy, for I hear of a large factory in course of erection by him at Amol, which is to contain wood-working machinery and a powerful sugar-cane press, the labour being directed by a Russian engineer. To this indefatigable Persian

[1] The most exhaustive account of Amol is to be found in Sir W. Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. iii. pp. 295–316.

must at least be conceded the merit of energy, which, in any form of public undertaking, is so rare in Persia as to deserve encomium even if ill-judged or misplaced.

New road to Teheran

A new road from Amol over the main range of the Elburz to Teheran, was constructed by order of the Shah in 1877–78 by General Gasteiger Khan, an Austrian engineer officer in the Persian service. The total distance is about 120 miles, and the places passed en route are Parus, Shahzadeh, Raineh (or Rehna), skirting the Eastern base of Demavend, Imamzadeh Hashim, Ah, and Jajrud. The scenery is superb, alike amid the lower elevations and the wooded glens and valleys, and on the rugged and savage heights. Of the former, Stack (in 1881) wrote the following description, which I think it only fair to quote as a set-off to my own occasional jeremiads upon the sullen sterility of the normal Persian landscape :—

> Our march to Amol was the loveliest I made in Persia ; but, indeed, one could hardly believe that this was Persian scenery, with its forest paths and meadow glades, and broad river bordered by tall and leafy growth of oaks. I thought of the leagues of brown or black desert, the bare sand-ridges, the salt hills, white and crimson and green, the dry, clear air, and the bold and sharply-defined forms and colours that I had seen during my wanderings in Persia till now ; but here was an atmosphere laden with soft, invisible vapour, and all the shapes of mountain and valley were rounded or clothed with vegetation, hiding the bare outlines of the rock, and all the colours were the blue and white of the cloud-flecked sky above, and varied shades of green all around us.

Between the village of Bund-i-burideh and Raineh, in one of the narrowest parts of the mountain defile, through which the road runs, is a great rock sculpture of Nasr-ed-Din Shah on horseback facing the spectator, with ten ministers in full uniform standing five on either side of him. The figures are life-size, and raised in relief about three inches, and the likenesses are undeniably good. I saw the original full-size cartoon in the Royal College at Teheran. The tablet is bordered by a metrical inscription, which sounds the praises of His Majesty and commemorates the making of the road. The idea is a somewhat belated and turgid imitation of the Sassanian model; but apart from the absurdity, the execution is in this case creditable.

Of the towns of Gilan, the only one worthy of mention (with

the possible exception of Lahijan, on the Lengarud), is the capital, Resht, of which I undertook in Chapter II. to say something in this connection. It is the first town which most travellers see in Persia, and the last also to which the majority bid farewell. Situated in the low, swampy ground at a slight distance from the sea, it has always been an unhealthy spot, from which Europeans would willingly fly. It was originally buried in jungle, after the fashion of the other cities which I have described. The Russians, during their occupation 160 years ago, cleared the surrounding timber for a distance of 15 miles, as far as the mountains; but a good deal has sprung up since. Its position as the capital of the chief silk-producing province of Persia, and as the natural outlet of export trade, very early secured it a prominence, which has rendered its name one of the most familiar of Persian titles to English ears, and which has left its record in the pages of many travellers,[1] British, Russian, and French. Consuls or Vice-Consuls were here from an early period, to safeguard the commercial interests of their several countries. The near vicinity of Russia, and her predominance in the Caspian, have naturally given her a commanding position; the more so as she has a large number of subjects, chiefly Russian-Armenians, in Resht and Gilan, and as she is understood to own several villages in the neighbourhood by right of mortgage. Nevertheless, the best days of Resht have passed. Early in the century, while the silk trade was at its zenith, its bazaars exhibited a curious congeries of different nationalities: Armenians, Jews, Europeans, Buniahs from India, and even Povindahs from Afghanistan. Fraser, who, at the close of his first journey in 1822, experienced an unprovoked and vexatious imprisonment here, escaping on foot only to be recaptured and brought back under circumstances of great indignity—estimated its population at that date as from 60,000 to 80,000. It was almost annihilated by the plague in 1830–31, which swept like a tornado, carrying everything before it, over the natural fever-beds of the maritime border; and in 1834 was only 'the ghost of its

Towns of Gilan—Resht

[1] For Resht in 1717 *vide* John Bell's *Travels*, vol. i. pp. 134–136; in 1744, Hanway's *Historical Account*, vol. i. pp. 279–281; in 1771, Gmélin, *Histoire des Découvertes*, vol. ii. p. 426, etc.; in 1822, Fraser's *Travels South of the Caspian*, pp. 148–155; in 1843, Holmes's *Sketches on the Caspian Shores*, cap. vi.; in 1861, Eastwick's *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. p. 1; in 1881, E. O'Donovan's *Merv Oasis*, vol. i. p. 317.

former self.' The silk trade, however, which continued to flourish till the last twenty-five years, enabled Resht to raise its head more quickly than any of its neighbours. It was a flourishing town in the middle part of this century, and many English travellers have occasion to recollect the hospitality of the firm of Ralli, who kept a large establishment here, and maintained a country house in almost European style. With the collapse of the silk trade they disappeared, and the fortunes of Resht experienced a sensible decline. The counterbalancing increase, however, in the cultivation and export of rice and cotton have caused it to revive, and the population is now calculated at from 25,000 to 30,000. The situation of Resht as the chief maritime outlet on the north, must always render it an important place, quite apart from the trade of the province whose capital city it is. For instance, in 1878, the last year in which published statistics are accessible, the exports to Russia from the province of Gilan, *viâ* Resht, equalled 192,000*l.*; while the exports from the rest of Persia through the same Custom-house were only 4,000*l.* less; the internal trade between Resht and the Persian interior amounting to 143,000*l.* in the same period.

Possible improvements

Anyone who has followed me so far, will by this time be expecting the statement, that considerable as is the trade of Resht, it might be increased and, in all probability, doubled, did the Persians take the most elementary steps to expedite or facilitate its transit. It is safe to say that in no other country in the world would the main avenue of mercantile entrance and exit be left in so miserable and chaotic a condition. The bar at Enzeli, the entrance to the Murdab, or Lagoon, the anchorage therein, the ascent by creek to Pir-i-Bazaar, the road to Resht, are so many successive and undisputed obstacles to freedom of intercourse. In any other country the bar would have been dredged, steamers would have been admitted into the lagoon, jetties would have been built for lading and unlading therein, the creek would have been deepened and widened, or a canal constructed to Resht itself. Above all, the marsh and forest roads would have been kept in good repair. The question of railway communication with the interior is one that has frequently been mooted, and was once on the verge of being put into execution, the embankments being built, and even the rails being laid for the distance of a few miles from Resht; but this is a subject which I must reserve for a later chapter. The only

plausible excuse which Persia can offer, apart from her congenital inability to help herself, is the fear that she may have felt of providing, by any of the means above indicated, an easier path of invasion to a hostile power, or, in other words, to Russia. Such a fear is, perhaps, venial, but I do not think that it constitutes either an honourable or a valid excuse. The power that designedly fosters its own weakness, ultimately perishes of the atrophy thus engendered. Moreover, Russia can march so easily into Persia from other quarters that her power of aggression would be but little augmented by the removal of obstacles from one out of many channels of invasion.

Russian designs upon Gilan and Mazanderan

And thus I am brought to the question, with which I will conclude this chapter, of the alleged designs of Russia upon the northern provinces, and of the probable place allotted to them in her political horoscope. There can be no doubt that ever since the temporary occupation of Gilan in the reign of Peter the Great, Russia has turned a regretful and covetous eye upon the Persian possessions to the south of the Caspian Sea. It is also a matter of common knowledge that, on occasions when the Shah has shown too marked a disposition either to independent or to Anglophile action, he has been significantly reminded of that bygone incident, and has been threatened with its repetition. It is further true that Russia could land her forces either at Resht or at Gez without, in all probability, incurring any armed opposition. Lastly, it is rumoured that in the famous secret memorandum drawn up by General Kuropatkin, now Governor-General of Transcaspia, in 1885, and generally accepted as the official scheme for a Russian invasion of India, the incorporation of Gilan and Mazanderan, as well as of Azerbaijan and Khorasan, are treated as indispensable preliminaries upon the Persian stage of operations. There is therefore abundant ground for believing that Russia regards these particular provinces with a not wholly disinterested vision. Sir Justin Sheil, himself a British Minister in Persia, and consequently well-informed, echoed and confirmed the general impression when he wrote:—

> That Gilan should have been long coveted by Russia is not surprising. Everything contributes to make it a desirable possession; its situation relative to Russia, its wealth and improvable qualities, its defensible position—mountains on one side, the sea on the other, swamps and jungles all over the province.[1]

[1] Note H to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life in Persia.*

On the other hand, it is well to pause for a moment and consider whether the movement, if contemplated, would be either so advantageous or so simple as at first sight appears. Let it be remembered that there is not in the same parallel of latitude a more unhealthy strip of country in the world. The Russians were expelled by the climate before. Gilan has proved a graveyard to most Europeans whose lot has cast them there. In the fifth trading expedition of the British Moscovy Company to North Persia in 1568–1574 A.D., five of the English factors died of illness and two were murdered in the space of five weeks. Sir Robert Sherley and Sir Dodmore Cotton succumbed in the manner already related in 1627. When Elton and Hanway revived the British trade with the Caspian in the eighteenth century, five out of the fifteen Europeans engaged in the traffic died at Kazvin between 1740 and 1744. In the latter year we hear of *all* the Europeans in Resht as very ill with agues, distemper, &c. The recent occupants of the British and Russian consulates at Resht tell a similar tale. It may, therefore, be accepted that for Europeans an occupation in force or a colonisation of either Gilan or Mazanderan would be an extremely risky experiment. Any such invaders would be compelled to seek the higher altitudes, and to leave the lower levels to the acclimatised indigenous population. Such a partition might be possible, in the event of the absolute quiescence of the latter; but it might also become in the highest degree perilous if the natives resisted a foreign usurpation, and profited by the extraordinary natural advantages for defence of their jungles, and defiles, and mountains.

Perils of the climate

It may be averred without fear of contradiction that a more difficult country either to carry or to hold in the face of armed opposition can nowhere be found. Fraser, who twice traversed it from end to end, summed up its strategic properties in the following language :—

Perils of the country

Certainly I never saw, nor can I imagine, a stronger or more impracticable country in a military point of view than these provinces. Roads, i.e. made roads, there are none, except the great Causeway made of old by Shah Abbas, and this has now so nearly disappeared that it requires a guide to find it ; and even when found it would be useless, for military purposes, from the numerous breaks and gaps in its course, and from the impenetrable jungle which surrounds it on all sides, and affords cover for all sorts of ambuscades and surprises.

The surface where not cultivated consists of natural or artificial swamps, overgrown with forest trees and thorns, particularly bramble bushes of incredible luxuriance, and perfectly impervious. Indeed, these brambles are called by the inhabitants the 'Pehlewanhâ Mazunderanee,' i.e. the heroes or guardians (lit. wrestlers) of Mazunderan, and well do they deserve the appellation.[1]

Monteith, who was a practical soldier, said, 'If only the Persians were united, nothing ought to be more desired by them than attack from the Caspian.' Indeed, in the present state of communications, it should be as easy for a comparatively small body of well led troops, with proper dispositions, to repel any incursion from the Caspian, as it would be to repel a storming party from the Great Pyramid. Disembarkation, to begin with, is difficult, cumbrous, and lengthy. An invader should find his work cut out for him ere ever he set foot on land. But, even supposing him to have landed, the swamps and jungles of the lower levels should whistle with bullets and pullulate with ambuscades;[2] whilst, if the lowlands were either surrendered or seized, there would remain the ambush of the forest, the covert of the deep ravines, the invulnerable vantage points of rocky pass and precipitous ledge. For an army whose advance was seriously and systematically contested, to cross the Elburz would be no mean achievement of warfare. Finally, supposing resistance to have been either abandoned or overcome, and the country to have been occupied by the enemy, his continued stay there should be made a daily and nightly persecution by a peasantry, or still more a native militia, familiar with the country and inured to guerilla warfare. All these perils are based upon the hypothesis of an unwelcome intruder, and a population or an army pledged to defend its homes. If neither of these conditions be realised in North Persia, and it may be rash to assume their possibility, there will remain no reason why Russia should not occupy Gilan and Mazanderan

[1] *A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 468.

[2] This was what actually happened in 1804 in the early stages of the first Russo-Persian war, when Zizianoff, the Russian Commander-in-Chief, planned a descent upon Gilan, with a view of threatening the capital. He landed his troops at Enzeli, but, not finding boats enough to convey them across the lagoon to Resht, was compelled to march round the shore through the swamps and jungle. From these secure recesses the natives harassed the Russian column with musketry fire, and threw it into such confusion that the order was given to retreat, and the attempt was ignominiously abandoned.

to-morrow. Ehrenbreitstein itself would be powerless if its garrison lounged unarmed on the ramparts and left open the gates.

Routes in the Caspian Provinces.

Teheran to Gez—(*viâ* Raineh or Rehna, Baijan, Amol, Barfurush [Meshed-i-Ser], Sari, Ashraf).—Colonel W. K. Stuart (1836), *Journal of a Residence*, cap. xi. Captain Hon. G. Napier (1874), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. xlvi. pp. 118–129. E. Stack (1881), *Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. cap. vii. viii.

Teheran to Amol (*viâ* Firuzkuh, Shirgah, Sari, and Barfurush).—Sir W. Ouseley (1812), *Travels*, vol. iii. cap. xvii. Major D'Arcy Todd (1836), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. viii. pp. 101–108. Colonel W. K. Stuart (1836), *Journal of a Residence*, cap. x. Capt. R. Wilbraham, *Travels in* 1837, caps. xxxviii.–xlii.

Teheran to Astrabad (*viâ* Firuzkuh, Shirgah, Sari, Ashraf, Gez).—(Sir) A. Burnes (1832), *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. vii. pp. 105–114. E. B. Eastwick (1862), *Journal of a Diplomate*, vol. ii. pp. 60–101. Colonel Val. Baker (1873), *Clouds in the East*, pp. 70–77.

Teheran to Firuzkuh (*viâ* Ahar, Serek, Waliabad, Asolat, Arsinkiru, Oz, Baladeh, Khan Lar Khan, Ask, Arjumand).—Colonel B. Lovett (1881–82), *Proceedings of the R.G.S.* (new series), vol. v. pp. 58–75.

Firuzkuh to Astrabad (*viâ* Chashmeh Kabud, Salash, Fulad Mahalla, and Chardeh).—Colonel B. Lovett (1881–82), *ibid.*

Resht to Amol (*viâ* Lahijan, Lengarud, Rud-i-Ser, Abbasabad).—W. R. Holmes (1843–4), *Sketches*, cap. vii. ix.

PEDIGREE OF THE KAJAR DYNASTY,[1] 1891

FATH ALI KHAN. Chief of the Kajars. Put to death by Nadir Shah 1728

MOHAMMED HUSEIN KHAN. Rival of Kerim Khan Zend. Killed in Mazanderan 1758

- AGHA MOHAMMED SHAH. Reigned 1795–7. Assassinated 1797
- HUSEIN KULI KHAN. Put to death by the Turkomans 1763
  - FATH ALI SHAH. Reigned 1798–1834. Died Oct. 1834
    - MOHAMMED ALI MIRZA. Governor of Kermanshah. Died 1821
      - MOHAMMED HUSEIN MIRZA. Governor of Kermanshah 1821–35
      - IMAM KULI MIRZA (Imad-ed-Dowleh). Governor of Kermanshah
    - ABBAS MIRZA. Vali-Ahd. Died 1833
      - MOHAMMED SHAH. Reigned 1835–48. Died Sept. 1848
        - NASR-ED-DIN SHAH. Born July 1831. Began to reign Sept. 1848
          - MUIN-ED-DIN MIRZA. Declared Vali-Ahd 1849. Died Nov. 1856
          - MOHAMMED KAZIM KHAN. Declared Vali-Ahd 1856. Died June 1858
          - MASUD MIRZA (Zil-es-Sultan). Born Jan. 1850. Governor of Isfahan and Yezd
            - JELAL-ED-DOWLEH. Governor of Yezd 1890
          - MUZAFFER-ED-DIN MIRZA. Born March 1853. Declared Vali-Ahd 1858
            - MOHAMMED ALI MIRZA (Itezad-es-Sultaneh)
            - MELIK MANSUR MIRZA (Choua-es-Sultaneh)
            - ABUL FASL MIRZA
          - KAMRAN MIRZA (Naib-es-Sultaneh). Born July 1856. Governor of Teheran, Minister of War, and Commander-in-Chief
          - NASRET-ED-DIN MIRZA (Salar-es-Sultaneh). Born May 1882
          - MOHAMMED REZA MIRZA (Rukn-es-Sultaneh). Born Feb. 1883
          - HUSEIN ALI MIRZA (Yamin-es-Sultaneh). Born 1890
            - SULTAN AHMED MIRZA (Asad-es-Sultaneh). Born June 1891.
        - ABBAS MIRZA (Mulk Ara). Formerly resided in exile at Baghdad. Now at Teheran. Late Minister of Commerce
        - ABDUS SAMED MIRZA (Izz-el-Dowleh). Governor of Hamadan 1883. Minister of Justice 1885
        - MOHAMMED TAKI MIRZA (Rukn-ed-Dowleh). Governor of Khorasan
      - BAHMAN MIRZA. Governor of Azerbaijan. Banished. A Russian pensioner
      - SULTAN MURAD MIRZA (Hissam-es-Sultaneh). Governor of Khorasan 1851–9, and of Fars
      - HAMZA MIRZA (Hishmet-ed-Dowleh). Governor of Khorasan 1859. Led disastrous expedition against Merv in 1860. Died in 1882
      - ARDESHIR MIRZA. Governor of Azerbaijan
      - FERHAD MIRZA (Motemeded-Dowleh). Governor of Fars 1877–82, and Azerbaijan
        - Motemed-ed-Dowleh. Governor of Fars 1889
      - KHANLAR MIRZA. Governor of Arabistan and Luristan. Commanded against the British at Mohammerah in 1857.
    - HUSEIN ALI MIRZA (Firman Firma). Governor of Shiraz. Rebelled against Mohammed Shah. Defeated and died 1835
      - REZA KULI MIRZA, TIMUR MIRZA, WALI MIRZA — Visited England 1837
    - ALI MIRZA (Zil-es-Sultan). Governor of Teheran. Reigned for one month in 1834 as Adil Shah. Died 1854
    - SULTAN MOHAMMED MIRZA (Saif-ed-Dowleh). Resided at Baghdad
  - HUSEIN KULI KHAN
- SADIK KHAN. Put to death by Fath Ali Shah 1798

[1] In this pedigree I have only mentioned the more important male members of the Royal Family in each generation. Considering that the Kajar sovereigns in this century have each given birth to a male progeny varying in numbers from ten to sixty, it would be futile, if not impossible, to construct a complete genealogical table.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SHAH—ROYAL FAMILY—MINISTERS

Where the word of a king is there is power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?—*Ecclesiastes*, viii. 4.

I NOW approach the discussion of the political conditions under which Persia at present subsists. In a country so backward in constitutional progress, so destitute of forms and statutes and charters, and so firmly stereotyped in the immemorial traditions of the East, the personal element, as might be expected, is largely in the ascendant; and the government of Persia is little else than the arbitrary exercise of authority by a series of units in a descending scale from the sovereign to the headman of a petty village. The only check that operates upon the lower official grades is the fear of their superiors, which means can usually be found to assuage; upon the higher ranks the fear of the sovereign, who is not always closed against similar methods of pacification; and upon the sovereign himself the fear, not of native, but of foreign opinion, as represented by the hostile criticism of the European Press. In the earlier part of the Shah's reign an indigenous controlling influence existed in the power of the clerical order. But the gradual reassertion of the civil authority, at which the present Shah has constantly aimed, and the introduction of lay administration of Church property, have considerably detracted from the former power of the *mullahs*; and, except in places where a spirit of fanaticism either exists or can easily be kindled, such as Meshed and Isfahan, their prejudices, which are invariably enlisted on the side of reaction, cannot be regarded as a serious deterrent upon the prerogative of the sovereign. The Shah, indeed, may be regarded at this moment as perhaps the best existing specimen of a moderate despot; for within the limits indicated he is practically irresponsible and omnipotent. He has absolute command over the life and property of every one of his subjects. His sons have no independent power,

The personal element in Persian Government

[1] In this pedigree I have only mentioned the more important male members of the Royal Family in each generation. Considering that the Kajar sovereigns in this century have each given birth to a male progeny varying in numbers from ten to sixty, it would be futile, if not impossible, to construct a complete genealogical table.

and can be reduced to impotence or beggary in the twinkling of an eye. The ministers are elevated and degraded at the Royal pleasure. The sovereign is the sole executive, and all officials are his deputies. No civil tribunals are in existence to check or modify his prerogative. Enormous, therefore, is the importance attaching to the character of the individual in whose person is concentrated such a wealth of plenary powers.

The Kajar Dynasty

Nasr-ed-Din Shah, as I have before said, is not a Persian, but a Turk, by descent, and is the fourth sovereign of the Kajar Dynasty which has occupied the throne of Persia for close upon one hundred years. The Kajars, whose family history has been written by more than one Persian biographer, and has even been translated into English,[1] are not content with any more modest descent than from Japhet, the son of Noah. Even if we question the authenticity of so illustrious a pedigree, it is yet indisputable that for 700 years the Kajar tribe have been heard of in history. A chieftain of that race ruled the country from Rhey to the Oxus, as deputy for one of the Mongol descendants of Jenghiz Khan. Timur is said to have banished them to Syria, but afterwards to have suffered them to return. Later on they espoused the cause of the Sefavi Shahs and assisted in raising them to the throne, in return for which service they were included in the Kizil-bash or seven Red-Head tribes, so called from the scarlet head-covering which they were permitted to wear. According to one account the mother of Shah Ismail himself was of Kajar blood.[2] Under his successor, Shah Tahmasp, we hear of a Kajar governor of Kandahar, and of a Kajar ambassador to the Porte, demonstrating the prominence to which the tribe had already attained; whilst in the reign of Abbas the Great their power had become so considerable that that monarch found it expedient to divide them into three branches, whom he settled respectively in Merv and Khorasan to fight against the Tartars, in Georgia to fight against the Lesghians, and on the Gurgan and at Astrabad to fight against the Turkomans. The latter became the main Persian settlement

[1] *The Dynasty of the Kajars*, translated from an Oriental Persian MS. by Sir Harford Jones Brydges, 1833. Compare Morier, *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. vii. p. 231.

[2] So says Mr. Watson in his *History of Persia*; but I have always understood that the mother of Shah Ismail was Martha, the daughter of Uzun Hasan, chieftain of the White Sheep, and his Christian wife Despoina, who was a daughter of Kalo Johannes Emperor of Trebizond.

of the tribe, whose chieftain, Fath Ali Khan, a little more than 150 years ago, having been made joint Commander-in-Chief with Nadir Kuli Khan, by Shah Tahmasp II., was speedily put out of the way by the ambitious soldier of fortune,[1] thereby bequeathing to his posterity a blood feud which was not satisfied until Nadir's descendants had all been removed by death or torture, and a Kajar sovereign was firmly seated upon the throne of Persia. Agha Mohammed Shah, the grandson of Fath Ali Khan, could not himself perpetuate the race, having at an early age been made a eunuch by order of Adil Shah, the nephew and successor of Nadir. But his nephew, Fath Ali Shah, to whom he transmitted the crown, and his successors after him, have proved so extraordinarily prolific of male offspring that the continuity of the dynasty has been assured; and there is probably not a reigning family in the world that in the space of one hundred years has swollen to such ample dimensions as the royal race of Persia. The Kajars have, indeed, been mainly distinguished for five characteristics, which have been uniformly noticeable in the princes of the blood: a genius for paternity, a fairly high level of intelligence, handsome features, sporting instincts, and a remorseless economy. How true a Kajar is the reigning monarch will be evident as I proceed.

Nasr-ed-Din Shah. His appearance

Since his two visits to England in 1873 and 1889 the personality and many of the idiosyncrasies of the Shah have become familiar to the British public. Nasr-ed-Din (Defender of the Faith) was the eldest son of Mohammed Shah, and was born on July 17, 1831. Consequently, he is now just sixty years of age. Upon his father succeeding Fath Ali Shah in 1834 (Abbas Mirza, Mohammed's father, and for so many years Vali-Ahd or Heir Apparent, having died in the previous year), Nasr-ed-Din became Vali-Ahd and, after the fashion of the Persian Royal Family, was, at the early age of twelve, made nominal Governor of Azerbaijan, residing at Tabriz. In that province, at Deran near Urumiah, he was seen in 1835, and described as follows by Colonel Stuart, who accompanied Sir H. Ellis as private secretary on his mission to Teheran:—

The Walee Ahud was, like his uncle, seated at an open window. I never saw so beautiful a child. The expression of his countenance is mournful, and the poor thing was evidently shy. We were given

[1] He was buried in the Mausoleum of Khojah Rabi outside Meshed: *vide* Chapter VII.

sherbet, sugar candy, and tea, presented by servants who knelt. The ablutions of the Walee Ahud were carefully performed after he had drunk his tea. He wiped his little chin, where, Inshallah, his beard will be, with most dignified gravity.[1]

And again in 1836 :—

The little prince is grown since we last saw him. He has a beautiful but mournful cast of countenance, and was terribly bored, most likely, poor child.

As a fact, the Vali-Ahd was very much neglected by his father, over whom the young prince's mother had ceased to exercise any charm. He lived in very difficult circumstances, often being compelled to borrow money in order to pay his daily expenses. Mohammed Shah favoured his younger son, Abbas Mirza, then styled Naib-es-Sultaneh, who retired from the country soon after his elder brother ascended the throne, and only returned to Persia in later years after a long exile at Baghdad.

So much for the Shah in his early years. Soon after reaching man's estate, his appearance was described by Mr. Binning in terms which hardly ratify the promise of his childhood :—

The Shah is now (1851) in his twenty-second year, but looks older. His complexion is very sallow, and his countenance, though not disagreeable, cannot be pronounced handsome. He wears moustaches, with but the rudiments of a beard.[2]

In middle life, the Shah's appearance is so familiar throughout Europe as to need no lengthened description, and may be judged of from the illustration which accompanies this text. The Kajars are a handsome race, and if Nasr-ed-Din cannot equal the majestic appearance of his great-grandfather, Fath Ali Shah, or even of his grandfather, Abbas Mirza, both of whom were famous for their long-bearded beauty, his mien and deportment are, at any rate, kingly and pleasing. He, and his sons after him, have abandoned the fashion of the beard that was set by his Kajar predecessors, and have reverted to the shaven cheeks and chin which we see in the portraits of most of the Sefavi sovereigns. Though sixty years of age, the Shah is erect, active, and robust, making the most of a middle stature, and walking with a slow step and a peculiar jaunty movement of the hips, which has a certain air of distinction.

[1] *Journal of a Residence in N. Persia*, p. 136.
[2] *Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia*, vol. ii. p. 236.

H.M. NASR-ED-DIN SHAH

Black eyes and hair and clear complexions have been common to all the Kajars, both male and female, and the Shah is no exception in these particulars. It is probably, however, to the assistance of dye that his hair and moustache owe the raven hue, which as yet shows no tinge of grey. His younger brother, the Rukn-ed-Dowleh, whom I saw at Meshed, was equally black upon the head, but a white stubble besprinkled his duplicate chin.

Health and habits

On his return from Europe in the autumn of 1889, the Shah very nearly died at Tabriz, his life at one time being despaired of by the physicians; but his general health is excellent, and his habits of life are simple. It is possibly to their descent that the Kajars owe a manliness, amounting almost to a brusqueness of bearing, that is uncommon in the smooth and polished Persian; while the Turanian blood also asserts itself in a passionate love of the chase and a taste for nomad life, which have in no wise succumbed to the inroads of western civilisation. The Shah frequently absents himself from the capital on hunting excursions in the mountains, which abound with ibex, deer, and other four-footed game, immense tracts of country being preserved for the royal sport; while upon the plains the antelope is hunted with hounds, or hawks are flown after herons, bustards, francolin, quail, and partridge. Many of the kings of Persia have been great hunters; one of the Sassanian monarchs, Bahram V., being surnamed Gur, or wild ass, from the animal which he loved to pursue, and in hunting which he lost his life; and the later Sefavi sovereigns having divided their existence in about equal proportions between the chase, the harem, and the bottle. Fath Ali Shah and his son Abbas Mirza were both fine riders and excellent shots; and in these respects Nasr-ed-Din follows in their footsteps. He may frequently be encountered riding out of the city to one of his numerous shooting boxes in the mountains, attended by a large camp-following, and solaced by a selection from his extensive seraglio. In manner and address the Shah gives the impression of a man habituated to authority; and whether seen in public state or in private audience, he both acts and looks the monarch. He is believed to be naturally shy, which may account for a somewhat abrupt and fidgety manner, and for an utterance rapped out in short, incisive periods. In an interview with which I was favoured, he was continually shifting the spectacles which he wore from his eyes to the front of his sheepskin

kolah, and his short, jerky sentences resembled a forensic cross-examination rather than a conversation. He is extremely affable and well-disposed towards Europeans, and few foreigners leave his capital without the honour of an audience with the sovereign. In earlier life he was more partial to show and pomp; but his tastes appear to have grown simpler with advancing years. The representative of a monarchy that has long been one of the most gorgeous in the East, the heir of sovereigns whose court ceremonial, up till the last fifty years, was a blaze of splendour, and the possessor of jewels unnumbered, he now affects a simplicity of costume in striking contrast to his predecessors. The bediamonded sword and the flashing aigrette, which were so familiar on his first visit to England in 1873, had disappeared in 1889; and in Teheran I have seen him walking in the streets in a braided frock coat, with prodigious skirts (a speciality of the Persian Court), holding a walking stick in his hand. Upon other occasions he either appears on horseback, or, more commonly, is driven through the streets of the town in a sort of coach with glass panels, not unlike the carriage of a City sheriff, drawn by six or eight white horses with henna-dyed tails. In front and behind ride a small detachment of the royal bodyguard, or *gholams*, whose full number stands at 2,000, or two corps of 1,000 apiece, and who are recognisable by their gold-braided tunics and by the muskets, wrapped up in red cases, which they wear slung across their shoulders. A number of the liveried harlequins, or royal runners, whom I have previously described, are also in attendance to clear a way, while the less ornamental *ferashes*, with their long switches, keep back the crowd. The Shah does not allow of any redundant zeal on the part of the *ferashes*, and is accessible to any one of his subjects who may press forward to offer him a petition.

While Heir Apparent and when resident at Tabriz, Nasr-ed-Din Mirza[1] received the usual education of Persian princes. In other words, he was taught to read, write, pray, ride and shoot. The governorship of Azerbaijan, though nominally vested in the Vali-Ahd, being as a rule exercised by some minister of weight and years, the heir to the throne has few other occupations except those of the harem and the chase. Accordingly,

Intellectual attainments

[1] I need scarcely explain that when *Mirza* succeeds a proper name it signifies Prince (being a contraction of *Amir-zadeh*—descendant of an Amir), but that when it precedes it means a person in civil employment or a secretary.

it is not surprising to learn that the young prince was a father at sixteen, and that the chief reputation he left at Tabriz was that of a great hunter. Called to the throne at the early age of seventeen, and surrounded therefore from youth upwards by the sycophants and flatterers who buzz round an Oriental crown, it is surprising that Nasr-ed-Din Shah has turned out so well. This happy development he owes to abilities considerably above the average, and to decided strength of character. When he came to the throne he only knew the Turkish language, which is spoken in Azerbaijan; but he soon learnt both to speak and to write Persian well, and has since acquired a tolerable familiarity with French and Arabic. He is well versed in the Persian poets and in Oriental works of history, philosophy, and art. Nor is the Shah by any means destitute of artistic accomplishments. He can draw well, and is reputed to write passable verses, or, to adopt the Persian hyperbole, 'he can make the nightingale of the pen flutter about the full-blown roses of the harem.' He is assured by his courtiers, as was his great-grandfather Fath Ali Shah, that his poetical effusions are superior to those of Hafiz.[1] But he is probably too sensible a man to believe that whatever immortality he may attain to, it will be among the lords of song. Well informed, and thoroughly *au courant* with passing events, he is full of inquisitiveness, and has a thirst for new information, which he acquires by closely questioning those with whom he comes in contact. His published journals, if they can with justice be attributed to his own pen, show decided originality, and a vein of native shrewdness.[2] A private secretary translates to him the French newspapers; the 'Times' he regards

[1] Yet on one occasion, according to a well-known story, Fath Ali Shah found an honest critic in his own Poet Laureate. 'What do you think of my verses?' said the king. 'May I be your sacrifice, I think they are great rubbish,' was the frank rejoinder. 'Take the donkey to the stables,' shouted the indignant Shah; and the order was obeyed. A little while later the King sent for the poet again, and read out to him some more of his own compositions. The poet, without a word, began to walk away. 'Where are you going?' cried the Shah. 'Back to the stables,' answered the fearless Laureate. It is to the credit of the King that he was so pleased with the repartee that he released the poet, and ordered his mouth to be stuffed with sugar-candy as a mark of his extreme approbation.

[2] In addition to the diaries of his tours in Europe, which have been translated into English and French, the Shah has published diaries in the Persian tongue, with illustrations, of his two journeys to Meshed, and of his pilgrimage to Kerbela. The bulk of their contents, no doubt, emanate from the royal pen. When in England, His Majesty was in the habit of dictating his diary to the Head Chamberlain before retiring to rest.

with great respect; he is well posted in European politics, and the personal criticism of the Continental journals is generally reported to his ears. That the freedom of speech which he there encounters, and of which he has occasionally found himself the victim, does not quite harmonise with his own ideas of the licence that should be accorded to a press, will be evident when I come to an account of the newspapers of Teheran.

Tastes and caprices

That the Shah is not without artistic tastes is shown by his fondness for music. In the Royal Museum is quite a collection of musical boxes; and the sound of military airs is peculiarly agreeable to his ears. To gratify this propensity, he keeps both a French and an Austrian bandmaster. Another respect in which he and his predecessors have so far conquered native prejudice as to rely upon foreign assistance, is in the employment of medical science. Abbas Mirza was the first to set the example by appointing Dr. Cormick, an Englishman, to be Physician of his Household. Mohammed Shah followed, with Dr. Labat, a Frenchman, who on one occasion saved his life, and later with Dr. Cloquet. Dr. Dickson, of the British Legation, acquired a great reputation during the present reign; but the personal physician of the Shah has, for many years, been another Frenchman, Dr. Tholozan, whose name and personality are familiar to most visitors to Teheran. Among the more trivial, but not uninteresting characteristics of the monarch whom we are discussing, there are three, which in this context are worthy of mention. These are the Shah's childlike passion for novelty, his incurable love of a joke, and his fondness for animals, about all of which many good stories are current in the society of the capital. Just as, in the course of his European travels, he picked up a vast number of what appeared, to the Eastern mind, to be wonderful curiosities, but which have since been stacked in the various apartments of the palace, or put away and forgotten; so in the larger sphere of public policy and administration he is continually taking up and pushing some new scheme or invention which, when the caprice has been gratified, is neglected or allowed to expire. One week it is gas; another it is electric light. Now it is a staff college; anon, a military hospital. To-day it is a Russian uniform; yesterday it was a German man-of-war for the Persian Gulf. A new army warrant is issued this year; a new code of law is promised for the next. Nothing comes of any of these

brilliant schemes, and the lumber-rooms of the palace are not more full of broken mechanism and discarded bric-à-brac than are the pigeon-holes of the government bureaux of abortive reforms and dead fiascoes.

More curious, and, in a sense, more childlike still, is the Shah's well-known partiality for a pun, or still more for a practical joke.

Sense of humour

His sense of humour is easily operated upon, and does not err on the side of refinement. It is recorded that he was immensely tickled upon one occasion, when he asked the reason for the removal of some lamps which had lighted the approach to one of the palaces, and received the reply that it was 'parce que le *chat* (Shah) voit toujours mieux dans la nuit.' He is even more pleased, however, when he can victimise his ministers or courtiers by some successful ruse. Having procured a number of skates and bicycles, he compelled the luckless grandees to perform upon these strange instruments in the palace garden, to his own intense amusement. Well known, too, is the story of the collapsible india-rubber boat, which was presented to him by an English officer, and in which he sent a dozen A.D.C.'s and chamberlains out for a row, on the tank in the royal garden. Meanwhile, he had secretly ordered the valve to be opened, and the boat duly collapsed in mid-lake, leaving the richly-dressed courtiers floundering in the water. Nor do the titled members of the royal household by any means fill sinecure offices, for the Shah will sometimes, when out in the country, require them to prepare his meal with their own elegant hands.

Fancy for animals

Strongest of all these proclivities is the extreme fondness of the Shah for animals, which is pushed to a point that recalls the story of Caligula and his horse. Cats have been the especial object of this strange attachment. For one of these creatures was kept a baggage horse, which carried a specially constructed cage with velvet-padded wires. On another occasion, one of the royal cats fell asleep on the coat-tails of a courtier, who, with true diplomacy, cut off the offending skirt rather than disturb the slumbers of the favourite. Another cat had a pension of 400*l.* a year settled upon it in old age. One of the Shah's wives is said to have originally commended herself to his fancy by her devotion to the feline favourite of the hour. Quite the funniest, however, of the anecdotes illustrating this innocent, if uncommon taste, is that of the lioness who gave birth to cubs in the royal menagerie

at Doshan Tepe. The Shah was so consumed with anxiety for the welfare of the mother that, being detained by the ceremonies of the Tazieh in Teheran, he had the telegraph wires in the capital connected with an improvised bureau opposite the cage of the animal, so as to be in possession of the latest news; and finally cashiered an unsympathetic clerk who telegraphed, 'The beasts are doing well,' on the ground that 'the true beast was not the lion, but the man who could call the lion by such a name.' Almost the same in kind, if superior in degree, is the intense fondness which the Shah has developed in recent years for the little boy, known as the Aziz-es-Sultan, whom he brought with him to England, and whom he seldom allows out of his sight at Teheran. This child, whose name is Gholam Ali Khan, is a nephew of the Amin-i-Akdas (Trusted of the Sovereign), one of the Shah's favourite wives. She was only a Kurdish slave, and her brother, the father of the child, was a peasant, as his appearance and manner sufficiently indicated when he came over to England in the retinue of the Shah. There seems to have been no truth in the stories circulated throughout Europe of a superstitious origin of the Shah's attachment to this boy, which would appear to be no more than one of the peculiar caprices of the royal nature. The child, who is eleven or twelve years of age, is a Field-Marshal, and wears a huge portrait of the Shah, set in diamonds, round his neck. While in Teheran, I saw him driving about in a state and style second only to that adopted by the sovereign; and he was deputed by the latter as a special compliment to make a call upon the British Minister. If the lad is not well, the Shah is at once in a bad humour, and is incapable of attending to affairs of State.

The Shah as ruler

From these anecdotes of personal idiosyncrasies which I have related, not so much because of the interest attached in popular estimation to the deeds and fancies of sovereigns, as because they illustrate the bent of a character which could hardly have been moulded in any other surroundings than those of an Asiatic throne, I turn to a contemplation of Nasr-ed-Din Shah in his more important capacity as a monarch and a statesman. Here he possesses many excellent business qualities, and betrays a voracious appetite for any and every affair of State. Rising early in the morning, he devotes the forenoon to audience with his ministers and to matters of State. The smallest detail is

submitted to him, and is not decided except upon his authority. His ministers disavow all initiative, and tremble at any executive responsibility. Imperious, diligent, and fairly just, the Shah is in his own person the sole arbiter of Persia's fortunes. All policy emanates from him. He supervises every department with a curiosity that requires to be constantly appeased; and his attention both to foreign and domestic politics is constant and unremitting. There is a consensus of opinion in Persia that he is the most competent man in the country, and the best ruler that it can produce. Nor will anyone deny him the possession of patriotism and of a genuine interest in the welfare of the nation. He is, however, placed in a most unfortunate situation by the rivalry of Great Britain and Russia—a question which I shall discuss in a later chapter—while he is further impeded by the intrigues that swarm about the Court and person of the monarch, by a tendency natural to humanity, and particularly to a man who has passed the middle of life, to let things abide in his time, and by a sense of powerlessness against the petrified ideas and prejudices of an Oriental people.

Atmosphere of flattery

Perhaps a special sympathy is due to a sovereign, the exigencies of whose rank and position render it almost impossible for him to receive the assistance which tried and independent counsellors can afford even to the wearer of a crown. Such is the divinity that doth hedge a throne in Persia, that not merely does the Shah never attend at state dinners or eat with his subjects at table, with the exception of a single banquet to his principal male relatives at No Ruz, but the attitude and language employed towards him even by his confidential ministers are those of servile obeisance and adulation. 'May I be your sacrifice, Asylum of the Universe,' is the common mode of address adopted even by subjects of the highest rank. In his own surrounding there is no one to tell him the truth or to give him dispassionate counsel. The foreign Ministers are probably almost the only source from which he learns facts as they are, or receives unvarnished, even if interested, advice. With the best intentions in the world for the undertaking of great plans and for the amelioration of his country, he has little or no control over the execution of an enterprise which has once passed out of his hands and has become the sport of corrupt and self-seeking officials. Half the money voted with his consent never

reaches its destination, but sticks to every intervening pocket with which a professional ingenuity can bring it into transient contact; half the schemes authorised by him are never brought any nearer to realisation, the minister or functionary in charge trusting to the oblivious caprices of the sovereign to overlook his dereliction of duty.

Cruelty or humanity

Nevertheless, whilst admitting the difficulties with which Nasr-ed-Din Shah is surrounded, let us not fail to do full justice both to his character and to his reign. He is unquestionably the best sovereign that has sat upon the throne of Persia since Kerim Khan Zend in the last century. He is the first king of his race, and one of the few kings in Persian history, against whom the charge of cruelty and arbitrary indifference to injustice or suffering cannot fairly be brought. It is true that his reign has been disfigured by one or two acts of regrettable violence; worst among which was the murder of his first Prime Minister, Mirza Taki Khan, the Amir-i-Nizam—a man who, although of humble origin, was endowed with lofty sentiments, and who, in the short space of three years (1849–1851), established a reputation for statesmanship that constitutes him one of the most remarkable figures of the century. The brother-in-law of the Shah, and the first subject in the kingdom, he owed to the vindictiveness of court intrigue and to the maliciously excited jealousy of his youthful sovereign, a disgrace which his enemies were not satisfied until they had fulfilled by the death of their fallen, but still formidable victim.[1] It should be said, however, that the Shah was only twenty years of age at the time; that it was inevitable, under the circumstances, that a young ruler without experience should be the instrument of unscrupulous advisers; and that he is believed ever since to have repented of the act. The terrible acts of cruelty that followed the suppression of the Babi conspiracy against the life of the Shah in 1852, and of the Babi sedition in general throughout the country, come under a different category.[2] For not

[1] For the administration and murder of the Amir-i-Nizam I may refer my readers to the pages of Markham, Watson, Lady Sheil, and Binning.

[2] It was on this occasion that Mirza Agha Khan, the Grand Vizier, in order to distribute the responsibility of punishment and to lessen the chances of blood-revenge, conceived the extraordinary idea of assigning the several criminals for execution to the principal ministers, generals, and officers of the Court, as well as to representatives of the priestly and merchant classes. The Foreign Secretary killed one, the Home Secretary another, the Master of the Horse a third, and so on.

only had the life of the sovereign been attempted, but the existence of the dynasty was believed to be at stake; and it must be remembered that studied refinements of torture are an immemorial tradition of the East.

There was less excuse for the execution of the soldiers suspected of having conspired against the life of the Shah, just before his second European journey, in 1878. The story is a tragic one, illustrating both the abuses of the Persian administrative system and the perils attaching to the irresponsibility of an Oriental sovereign.[1] Some soldiers of an Isfahan regiment, who, according to the Persian custom, had received no pay for three years, and had yet been ordered to remain under arms, seized the opportunity of a pilgrimage of the Shah to the shrine of Shah Abdul Azim to approach his carriage and present a petition. The Shah was in a bad humour, and ordered his *ferashes* to drive back the supplicants. An *émeute* ensued, in which stones were thrown, some of which struck the royal equipage. The apprehensions of the Shah were further excited by the wicked assurance of one of his suite that it was a Babi conspiracy against his life. He ordered the arrest of the soldiers, and, on his return to the palace, ten of their number were strangled without further inquiry, and their bodies dragged through the streets. The remainder were sentenced to have their ears cut off, and to be bastinadoed. A few days later, when starting for Europe, the Shah read the petition of the suspected soldiers, and ascertained his fatal mistake. He at once took steps to redress the injustice that had been done; but the *dénouement* is even more Persian in its characteristics than the earlier incidents of the story. The culprits were released, and their arrears paid, with a small indemnity of five *tomans* to each man for his unmerited sufferings. But the offending chamberlain, who had started the false cry of a Babi rebellion, was mulcted in a sum of 18,000 *tomans*, so that the whole transaction resulted in a gain to the Royal Exchequer of 7,000*l*. I do not think it would be possible in the space of a short paragraph to narrate a more profoundly illustrative tale.

[1] It is related among others by Mme. Carla Serena, *Hommes et Choses en Perse*, p. 319, and by S. G. Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, pp. 178–180. With it may be compared the incident of the execution of the *Kalantar* or Mayor of Teheran, on the occasion of a riot arising out of a corner in grain which had been effected by some rich speculator in 1861. It is related by Ussher, *Journey from London to Persepolis*, p. 625.

Notwithstanding these cases of cruelty and injustice, for which some palliation may in each case be found, the Shah is admittedly a man of humane disposition. Since his visits to Europe the instances of such unlicensed exercise of power have been rare, if they have not altogether ceased to exist. We have only to contrast his reign with that of his predecessors, to say that on the whole it has embraced the most bloodless forty years in modern Persian history. Only a century ago the abominable system prevailed of blinding possible aspirants to the throne, of savage mutilations and life-long captivities, of wanton slaughter and systematic bloodshed. Disgrace was not less sudden than promotion, and death was a frequent concomitant of disgrace. The old fashion which made the kings of Persia the executioners of their subjects, the deed of blood being enacted before their very eyes, has been abandoned. The bastinado has lost somewhat of its consecrated ubiquity of infliction. Provincial governors are no longer allowed the immunity of savage punishments which made the rule of some of the king's uncles and great-uncles so dreaded although so superficially successful. Under the Sefavi kings, when the ladies of the royal harem desired an outing in the country, a *kuruk* was ordered, which meant that every man was to absent himself from the neighbourhood of the prescribed route; and we read of poor wretches, straying by accident on to the road, or caught sleeping in its vicinity, being hewn to death by the guards or eunuchs. In the present reign males are expected to turn to the wall when the royal cortège passes, but the old horrors of the *kuruk* have disappeared. Similarly, a labourer, who, pursuing an underground *kanat* found himself in the *anderun* of the royal palace, was spared by the Shah, although his life would certainly have been forfeited in any previous reign. We may attribute this fortunate amelioration of manners both to the character of the sovereign and to the immense, though perhaps grudgingly acknowledged, influence of foreign opinion, and of the representatives of foreign Powers at the Persian Court.

His European journeys

It is no mean criterion of the strength and also of the general popularity of the Shah, that he is the first Persian monarch who has ventured to leave his dominions and to journey in foreign and infidel lands, not as a conqueror at the head of an army, but as a friendly visitor, if not as a volunteer tourist. During the last three centuries for certain no Persian

sovereign could have hazarded such a step. Nadir Shah, before he started out for India, had removed every possible competitor for the throne. Moreover, he took his army with him, and the prospect of the great Afshar returning at the head of a victorious host was enough to make the blood of any would-be upstart run cold. Nasr-ed-Din Shah had to contend with many obstacles in arranging the first of his European journeys, of which there have now been three, in 1873, 1878, and 1889. The project was obstinately resisted by the clergy; great difficulty was experienced in settling the problem of the seraglio, the solitary wife who accompanied His Majesty in 1873 being ultimately sent back from Moscow; and the putting of the government into commission in his absence was also not unattended with hazard. It is to the credit of the Shah that then, and indeed throughout his reign, he has shown a commendable independence of the fanatical element among the *mullahs* and *mujtaheds* of Islam. Though a careful observant of the forms and rites of the Mussulman creed, and though reposing a superstitious credulity in astrology and divination, he has uniformly asserted the superiority of the temporal over the spiritual power, and there was probably never a moment in the history of Persia when the ecclesiastical ascendency, that is of the essence of Islam, was so much in abeyance as at present. The immense amount of money spent by the Shah in the purchase of furniture and curiosities in Europe also excited a feeling of discontent; and his second tour was unquestionably unpopular among his subjects. That he was able to venture upon a third is a proof of the absolute security of his position, but it is also due to the sentiment which he has taken care to diffuse among his subjects, that the princes of Christendom vie with each other in anxiety to entertain so great a potentate and squabble for the honour of his alliance.

Comparison with previous reigns

Finally, I will apply the double test of a comparison, firstly, of the general state of the country during the Shah's reign with its state under his predecessors; and, secondly, of its condition now with its condition at his accession forty-three years ago. The record of previous reigns is one of internal warfare, yearly renewed against insurgent tribes or recalcitrant chieftains, of tribute refused, of brigandage rampant and unpunished, of ambitious nobles struggling with each other for the ascendency, of the royal authority frequently insulted and sometimes wholly ignored. Such is not the picture which is presented by the Persia of to-day.

Its condition is bad enough viewed from the standpoint of public works, education, or internal development. But life and property are fairly secure, brigandage is scarcely known, robbery and violence (at any rate upon Europeans) are rarely attempted; revenue is exacted even from the nomad and mountainous tribes; the provincial Governors are thoroughly under control and quake at the vibrations of the telegraph wire from Teheran; the Shah is supreme from the Caspian to the Gulf, and from the Kurdish mountains to Seistan; and there is not a single man in the kingdom who dare venture either his voice or his position against the sovereign. Hitherto, again, the death of the monarch has almost invariably been the signal for a general outbreak; rival candidates for the throne have appeared in arms; and there has been a horrid interval of anarchy and turbulence until the superior genius or resources of one competitor have enabled him to win the day. When Fath Ali Shah died in 1834, there were two claimants of the throne in the field in addition to the rightful heir, Mohammed Shah; and it was only owing to the inexhaustible energy and influence of Sir John Campbell, then British Minister, and to the assistance of the British officers in command of the Persian troops, that he was able so soon to establish his legitimate claim. Similarly, when Mohammed Shah died in 1848 rebellions broke out in Khorasan, Kerman, Yezd, and Isfahan, and it was mainly to the joint co-operation of the British and Russian Ministers that Nasr-ed-Din was indebted for his speedy recognition. Such has been the experience of the last two accessions to the crown. If the present Shah were to die to-morrow there might be isolated acts of lawlessness or violence, but I do not credit the likelihood of any general insurrection; I foresee no warring competition for the throne; and I believe that the Heir Apparent would succeed without firing a musket or shedding a drop of blood.

Comparison between 1848 and 1891

Secondly, if we take the period covered by the present reign and contrast the state of Persia at the beginning and end of this epoch, we shall note a marked advance in many of the resources of civilisation, culture, comfort, and security. In the year after Nasr-ed-Din Shah ascended the throne the following sentences were penned by the greatest living authority on the Persian question:—

In every quarter there is abundant cause for anxiety, and few, very few, faint glimmerings of hope. The treasury has been drained of its last ducat, and we see little chance of its being replenished. The

sustaining or motive power of the Government no longer exists, nor can it be renewed. The general condition of the provinces is hardly less unfavourable to the consolidation of the young monarch's power than an empty treasury and impotent and divided councils. In no quarter is there any feeling of confidence in the stability of the Government. A domestic crisis may be imminent, and cannot be very far distant.[1]

Nevertheless, the subsequent period has not ratified these gloomy vaticinations. There is a balance in the Royal Exchequer, regrettable though it be that it should swell by idle increment instead of being devoted to the service of the people. The Government is secure, strong, and respected. The provinces, as I have shown, are in thorough subordination. No member of the Royal Family has ventured to dispute the supremacy of the Shah. Simultaneously there has been a considerable, even if inadequate, expansion of commerce. The telegraph wire has been stretched between all the principal towns; regular posts have been inaugurated; newspapers of an official character are published in the capital; a miniature railway, which may perhaps become the nucleus of a great undertaking, has been built; gas is manufactured at Teheran. The critic of the present finds plenty that is backward and a good deal that is deplorable in the condition of the country. Of these abuses I shall presently speak. But the historian, contrasting the Persia of the two periods, will record an advance, small as measured by European ideas, but by no means contemptible according to the standards of the East.

Before I quit the subject of the Shah and his personality, I may briefly recapitulate the incidents of an interview with which I was honoured in the Palace at Teheran. The Shah, to whom I had been previously introduced in England, received me in the room in which stands the so-called Peacock Throne. There was no other article of furniture in the chamber, and the King was standing alone in the middle. He wore black trousers and a black coat, edged with astrakhan, thick with gold cording in front, and equipped with voluminous skirts. Upon the face of his *kolah*, or sheepskin hat, was a small Lion and Sun in diamonds, a recent commission from a Parisian jeweller. Whereas in England he had employed French, which however he is shy in using in conversation, he now spoke in Persian, through an inter-

Audience with the Shah

[1] Sir H. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, p. 75.

preter. He looked extraordinarily hale and well, and was in the best of tempers. Hearing that I had entered Persia *viâ* Ashkabad and Kuchan, his curiosity was at once excited, and for ten minutes I sustained a cross-examination conducted in short, jerky sentences, which fairly elicited from me all that I knew about the position of the Russians, the road that they had made, and the unfinished works on the Persian side of the frontier. 'What was Ashkabad like? How many streets, houses, inhabitants, barracks, soldiers, did it contain? What of the water-supply?' Next about the Kuchan road: 'Was the Russian section finished? Was it well engineered? How many men were at work on the Persian section? How broad was it? Were the gradients easy and the work good?' It was fortunate that I had made a special study of this question while passing over the road, and was therefore able to give His Majesty a more unvarnished account than he probably receives from his own officers.

Harem of the Shah

The domestic life of the Shah is shrouded in the mystery common to Mussulman countries. No glimpse of the Harem is caught by males, either Persian or European, with the exception of doctors of both nationalities) save what may be derived from the passage of a closed litter with silken curtains, or of an ancient coach containing undistinguishable masses of drapery. European ladies have, however, frequently been admitted to the royal *anderun*, and its features and occupants are tolerably well known. The actual number of the Shah's wives and concubines cannot accurately be determined, but is believed to be about sixty. This is exclusive of those who have died, been sent away, or otherwise parted with. All these ladies live in the palace, and most of them have separate establishments, with equipages, servants, and jewels of their own, and an allowance varying from 200*l.* to 2,000*l.* a year, which is often doubled in value by the presents which beauty or complaisance knows how to extract from an uxorious lord. The Shah is reported to be a kind master in his harem, for on so extended a scale of matrimony it is scarcely possible to apply the European nomenclature of a good husband. By the law of the Koran every Mohammedan is allowed four regular wives or *akdis*, and as many *sighehs* or concubines as means or inclination permit. Three only of the Shah's wives belong to the former category. Two of them were his cousins, both princesses of royal blood. The elder of the two, known as the Shukuh-es-

Sultaneh (Glory of the Empire), is the mother of the Heir Apparent and consequently the first lady of the harem. In Oriental and Mussulman countries it is absurd to speak of any individual wife as queen. The third *akdi*, and the favourite wife of the Shah, is known as the Anis-ed-Dowleh (Companion of the King). She was originally a *sigheh*, being a miller's daughter, of the Shimran district, who lifted her veil to the Shah while out riding, and so fascinated the monarch that she was removed next day to the royal harem. She has had no children, but her influence over the Shah has procured her elevation to the rank of a lawful wife and of first favourite, and has secured lucrative positions at court for all her relations. European ladies have on several occasions been courteously received by her, and a description of one of these visits is contained in the pages of Madame Carla Serena. She was the wife who was chosen to accompany the Shah on his first European journey, but who was sent back in high dudgeon from Moscow. In earlier life the Shah made another girl of humble origin an *akdi*, she having given birth to a son whom he named Vali-Ahd. But mother and child both died.

Among the *sighehs*, all of whom bear high-sounding titles of very similar import, I need only mention the Iffat-ed-Dowleh (Chastity of the Kingdom), who is the mother of the Zil-es-Sultan, eldest surviving son, but not the heir, of the Shah. I owe an apology to His Royal Highness for having described his mother in a letter to the 'Times,' which the prince saw, and at which he was very furious, as 'a poor village girl—a carpenter's daughter, who accidentally attracted the notice and won the affections of the Shah.' Of this parentage I had been informed on high authority, and it was, moreover, confirmed by Dr. Wills, who lived fourteen years in Persia, and was on intimate terms with the Zil-es-Sultan, and who, in his books, described the prince's mother, no doubt confusing her with the Anis-ed-Dowleh, as 'a poor Kurdish girl—the daughter of a miller, who caught the Shah's eye while washing clothes at the brookside.'[1] I hasten to make the reparation that is due—even at this distance of time—by informing English readers that the mother of the prince was the daughter, neither of a carpenter nor a miller, but of Musi Reza Beg, who was *gholam*, i.e. mounted attendant or outrider, of Bahman Mirza, son of Abbas Mirza, and uncle of the Shah. Next among the

[1] Vide *Land of the Lion and the Sun*, p. 18; and *Persia as it is*, p. 65.

sighehs must be counted the Munir-es-Sultaneh (Grandeur of the Empire), daughter of the late, and sister of the present, Chief Architect of Teheran, who is the mother of the Naib-es-Sultaneh, third son of the Shah, of whom I shall speak presently. The only other *sigheh* who merits attention in this place is the Amin-i-Akdas (Trusted of the Sovereign), a Kurdish slave, who has acquired the confidence of the Shah by her business capacity and honesty, and who is the aunt of the little boy favourite already alluded to. She originally owed her position to having been the devoted attendant of the Shah's favourite cat, which I have before mentioned. In the past year (1890) the Shah sent her to Vienna to submit to an operation for cataract which, unfortunately, was not successful. Deeper into the secrets of the seraglio, or into a further enumeration of Stars, Suns, Lights, and Glories of the Empire, it is unnecessary to advance. Regarding the indoor costume of these ladies, I can, of course, only speak from hearsay. But it is well known that, while in the days of Fath Ali Shah the ladies of high rank wore silk or muslin shifts, loose velvet pantaloons, and an embroidered vest, the reigning sovereign has introduced a more liberal fashion of *toilette*. The upper part of the dress consists of a chemise under a short jacket; below which are worn very short, and very much puffed-out petticoats.[1] In their excursions abroad the ladies of the Harem, as I have before said, are as closely veiled as are Mohammedan women in general, and more closely veiled than the favourites of the Seraglio at Constantinople.

The Kajars as progenitors

Neither in the number of his wives nor in the extent of his progeny, can the Shah, although undeniably a family man, be compared with his great-grandfather, Fath Ali Shah. To the high opinion universally held of the domestic capacities of that monarch must, I imagine, be attributed the divergent estimates that are to be found, in works about Persia, of the number of his concubines and children. Colonel Drouville, in 1813, credits him with 700 wives, 64 sons, and 125 daughters. Colonel Stuart, who was in Persia in the year after Fath Ali's death, gives him 1,000 wives and 105 children. Lady Sheil, in the next decade, mentions 80 sons, and innumerable daughters. Binning names 800 wives, 130 sons, 170 daughters, and 5,000 living descendants, at the time of his death. Madame Dieulafoy

[1] Vide Mrs. Bishop's *Journeys in Persia*, vol. i. pp. 216, 264.

also names the 5,000 descendants, but as existing at an epoch fifty years later (which has an air of greater probability); she reduces the wives to 700, but increases the children to 600. Rawlinson represents 3,000 direct descendants as existing at the time of his death. The two historians of modern Persia likewise fail to agree; for while Watson mentions 159 children, Markham allows for 300 wives, 150 sons, and 20 daughters. The estimate which appears in the Nasekh-et-Tavarikh, a great modern Persian historical work, fixes the number of Fath Ali's wives as over 1,000, and of his offspring as 260, 110 of whom survived their father.[1] Hence the familiar Persian proverb 'Camels, fleas, and princes exist everywhere.' The talent of paternity was by no means exhausted in the next generation, for several of Fath Ali's sons could boast of 40 or 50 male offspring; and one of their number—Sheikh Ali Mirza—used to ride abroad with a bodyguard of 60 of his own sons. No royal family has ever afforded a more exemplary illustration of the Scriptural assurance, 'Instead of thy fathers thou shalt have (A. V. shall be thy) children, whom thou mayest make princes in all lands;'[2] for there was scarcely a governorship or a post of emolument in Persia that was not filled by one of this beehive of princelings; and to this day the myriad brood of *Shahzadehs*, or descendants of a king, is a perfect curse to the country, although many of these luckless scions of royalty, who consume a large portion of the revenue in annual allowances and pensions, now occupy very inferior positions as telegraph clerks, secretaries, &c. Fraser drew a vivid picture of the misery entailed upon the country fifty years ago by this 'race of royal drones,' who filled the governing posts not merely of every province, but of every *beluk* or district, city, and town; each of whom kept up a court, and a huge harem, and who preyed upon the country like a swarm of locusts.[3]

In contrast to these surprising totals, it is with an air of relief that we learn that the reigning Shah has only had a family of about 40 children, of whom half are still living, viz., 9 sons, and

[1] None of these figures can be compared with those of Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, who left a child for every day in the year. Either of these monarchs might well have spoken in the language of our own Charles II., who, when addressed by an effusive courtier as the Father of his People, replied, 'Well, say of a considerable proportion of them!'

[2] *Psalm* xlv. 16. Compare what is said of Rehoboam in 2 Chron. xi. 23.

[3] *A Winter's Journey*, vol. i. p. 400.

12 daughters. His eldest son was born forty-four years ago, his youngest during the present year. Of his grown-up daughters, who bear similar titles to their mothers, and are known as Pride, Purity, Chastity, Splendour, and Diadem of the Kingdom or Empire, one is married to the Chief Priest of Teheran —an ingenious method of annexing the ecclesiastical interest—and the rest are wedded to princes, or eminent subjects. It is with no special delight that one of the latter receives the intimation that he has been selected as a son-in-law of the sovereign; for although it may bring official promotion for himself, the distinction also involves a large ready-money present, followed by recurrent donations, to his royal father-in-law; it entails a great outlay in keeping up the requisite state for a Princess of the Blood; and it deprives the favoured husband of the liberty of taking any other wife. The Shah, as a rule, gives a dowry of 2,000*l.* a year to his married daughters.

Family of the Shah

Under the Sefavi kings there existed no rule determining the succession to the Persian crown. Differing from the practice that prevails among the Sunni Mussulmans, e.g. in the Court at Constantinople, of the heredity of the eldest surviving male, the Persian ruler selected which of his offspring he pleased, and often did not declare his choice till his deathbed. The Kajars have resumed what is an ancient Tartar or Turkish custom, by instituting the Blood-Royal qualification, and closely regarding the rank of the mother. Mohammed Husein Khan, the father of Agha Mohammed and grandfather of Fath Ali Shah, when a refugee with the Turkomans, refused to wed the daughter of one of their chiefs, on the ground that she was not of sufficiently exalted rank to give birth to a line of possible aspirants to the throne. Abbas Mirza was not the eldest son of Fath Ali, but was preferred above Mohammed Ali Mirza, his elder brother, because he was the son of a Kajar princess. It is true that early in his reign the present Shah departed from this custom, and gratified both the pride of irresponsibility and the instincts of love by nominating as Vali-Ahd, or Heir Apparent (after his first male child and bearer of that title, had died), the son of a favourite *sigheh*, who was of humble birth. But upon the death of this child he reverted to the more normal custom; his eldest surviving son, the Zil-es-Sultan, was passed over, and the junior of the latter by three years—being the son of a princess—

His Sons. Succession to the throne

was named Vali-Ahd, and is now Heir Apparent to the Persian throne.

Muzaffer-ed-Din, the Vali-Ahd

Muzaffer-ed-Din (Victorious of the Faith) is the name of this prince, who was born in 1853, and who has now been Vali-Ahd (having succeeded three elder brothers in the title) for thirty-three years. In accordance with another fixed, but most impolitic, tradition of the Kajar dynasty, the Vali-Ahd is appointed Governor-General of the north-western province of Azerbaijan, with his capital and palace at Tabriz. He cannot leave this province without the sanction of the Shah; and, immured there, he remains in total ignorance of the politics and statecraft of Teheran, of the ministers whom he may have to depend upon, the system which he may have to dispense, the people whom he may have to rule. He does not ordinarily even administer the province of which he is the nominal governor, but is a mere puppet in the hands of some trusted servant of the State. It is as though the Prince of Wales were compelled habitually to reside at Cardiff or Carnarvon and were never allowed to quit the borders of the Principality. Nay, it is worse; for Tabriz, which is the second city in the kingdom, cannot fairly be compared to a small provincial town; and a better simile would be that of an English Heir Apparent who, as heir of the Duchy of Lancaster, was compelled to hold his court at Liverpool, but was precluded from bearing any part in the administration of that great county or city. Placed, moreover, in the province which is nearest to the Russian frontier, and is overshadowed by Russian influence, the Vali-Ahd is apt to contract prepossessions or apprehensions which it is difficult to throw off, and which may affect his entire subsequent reign. The Shah has three times been to Europe himself, but, unfortunately, has never so far permitted his son to stir outside of Persia. The consequence is that but little is known of the character and capacities of the latter, which have been variously represented as those of a polished and well-informed gentleman and of a weak and harmless nonentity.

His character

Dr. Wills has, I think, in his writings done a great injustice to the Vali-Ahd, whom, in passages to which, without quoting, I may refer my readers, he has described as physically weak and mentally imbecile, and as an impracticable and obstinate bigot.[1]

[1] *In the Land, etc.*, p. 366; *Persia as it is*, p. 176. Other books about Persia

I believe (and I have taken steps to procure the best information on the subject) that this is a most unfair account of the personality of the future king of Persia. So far from being either an idiot or an imbecile, he is a man of good intelligence and considerable instruction, being well read in history, professing an interest in botany, and being withal of an amiable and unassuming disposition. The charge of bigotry appears to have arisen from the fact that he pays marked respect to the *mullahs*, and that he is believed to be more or less under the influence of the Sheikhi sect, which may be described as a fanatical agency.[1] Any such prepossession, however, which probably does not amount to more than serious orthodoxy, as contrasted with the free-thinking tendencies of his elder brother, is far from justifying a fear of active religious persecution in the future. If the prince is, as alleged, of weak character and easily led—although such a lack of individuality is denied by others—it is largely owing to the inexcusable position of subordination in which he, a man of nearly forty years of age, the second personage in the kingdom, and the future sovereign, has been placed by the shortsighted apprehensions of his father. Though nominally Governor-General of a great province, he has hitherto been allowed no more voice in the actual administration than a lacquey at his table; a child in leading-strings has more control over his own movements than this pseudo-ruler has had over his subjects.[2] The allowance given to him by the Shah has been

have contained similarly unflattering portraits of the Vali-Ahd, but I cannot ascertain that they amount in any case to more than repetitions of second-hand or third-hand gossip.

[1] The Sheikhi sect are so called from a celebrated Sheikh of Kerman, Haji Mohammed Kerim Khan, who in the early part of the century was a disciple of Sheikh Ahmed Ahsai, the doctrinal parent of Babism. A split occurred between the followers of the Bab and the pupils of the Sheikh, who called themselves by his name. He preached a superior rationalism, reconciling dogma with reason, and had many admirers, including Fath Ali Shah. The three chief points of his creed were, extreme veneration for the Imams, as divine incarnations, belief in his own spiritual communion with them, and denial of a material resurrection. *Vide* E. G Browne, *Journal of the R.A.S.*, 1889, art. xii.

[2] The Province, as I shall presently show, has been for long administered by the Prince's Vizier—the Amir-i-Nizam. Several years ago, in the absence of a strong hand at the helm, the mis-government was so great that the Vali-Ahd was temporarily deprived of his governorship, which was conferred upon one of the Shah's uncles, an adept in the proper use of the bastinado, the bowstring, and the executioner's knife. The Amir-i-Nizam having been recalled (1891), the Vali-Ahd has now once more a chance.

variously quoted to me as 40,000, 60,000, and 72,000 *tomans*, the lowest estimate being equivalent to 11,400*l.*, the highest to 20,500*l.*; whichever it be, it is notoriously inadequate for the becoming maintenance of royal state, a great retinue, and a large harem; and the prince has continually found himself in the ignominious position of being indebted to his own Prime Minister for the means of defraying his expenses. From the Amir-i-Nizam he received an annual contribution towards this object of 40,000 *tomans*. Owing to his long residence in Azerbaijan, and to the close proximity of that province to Russian territory, he has frequently been credited with strong Russophile proclivities. There does not appear, however, to be any more ground for this than for the other damaging insinuations against his character; the Prince seeing so little of any Europeans that it is impossible to ascertain his real sympathies. The Amir-i-Nizam was reputed to be a strong Russophile, and in consequence to have encouraged the belief that his feelings were shared by his royal master. In the lack of any more serious occupation, the latter has devoted himself greatly to sport and shooting, being, like all the Kajars, a fine performer both with a rifle and a shot-gun; and being further devoted to artillery exercise, at which he is something more than an amateur, making excellent practice with the Austrian Uchatius guns in the arsenal at Tabriz. In appearance, as the accompanying photograph will show, he is of middle stature, and of handsome, but careworn expression. He is the father of a large family, having more than twelve children living, several of whom are already married. His first wife—the daughter of Mirza Taki Khan, the great minister of whom I have spoken, and consequently his first cousin, her mother being the Shah's sister—he parted with, owing, it is said, to circumstances arising out of her father's assassination. One of her sisters was married to his elder brother, the Zil-es-Sultan, but died many years ago. Such is the information that I have been able to gather about the next king of Persia. He is emphatically what would, in sporting parlance, be termed 'a dark horse.' It is quite possible, however, that upon his succession to the throne, this unknown quantity may turn out somewhat of a surprise. The recent eclipse of his elder brother has added to his prestige and chances, which, approved by the reigning monarch, recognised by foreign Powers, and accepted by the country, may now be looked upon, humanly speaking, as absolutely secure.

I now turn to the best-known son of the Shah, Sultan Masud Mirza (Prince Felicitous), more commonly known by the title of the Zil-es-Sultan, or Shadow of the King—a misnomer in this case, seeing that he is very nearly double his father's size. Three years older than the Crown Prince, having been born in 1850, he is yet disqualified from the succession to the throne by reason of his plebeian origin on the maternal side, of which I have previously spoken. Though not destined to rule as sovereign, this prince has, from youth upwards, been allowed to ape the part, and to wield the functions, of sovereignty with a freedom that could not fail to encourage extravagant pretensions, and that ultimately led to his downfall. At a very early age he was made Governor of Isfahan, and afterwards of Shiraz. As the years passed by, he grew in favour and authority. His stern and savage rule, which effectually repressed disorder and brigandage in the provinces under his control, and the punctuality of his remittances of revenue to Teheran, caused him to be regarded with peculiar gratification at Court. Province after province was added to his dominions, until Fars, Isfahan, Kurdistan, Luristan, Arabistan, and Yezd were all subject to his sway.[1] It was calculated that, prior to his fall, 250,000 square miles, or two-fifths of the whole of Persia, were beneath his rule. Simultaneously, he collected and controlled a great army at Isfahan, for which he adopted Prussian uniforms and *pickelhaube* helmets—a dress in which he was very fond of being photographed himself, in full general's uniform. In 1886 the troops under his command amounted (I give the actual, not the nominal, figures) to twenty-four regiments of infantry, containing 15,800 men, with 6,000 breech-loading rifles, 10 batteries of artillery, and 8 regiments of irregular cavalry, or a total of nearly 21,000 men and 7,000 horses. Residing, as Governor, at Isfahan, he was constantly interviewed by English travellers, to whom he invariably professed the most liberal and Anglophile sentiments. The severity of his administration, by which the turbulent tribesmen of the western provinces were kept in fair order, and his manly bearing, created

The Zil-es-Sultan

[1] The provinces or districts of which he was actually the governor in 1886 were Gulpaigan and Khonsar, Joshagan, Irak, Isfahan, Fars, Yezd, Arabistan, Luristan, Kurdistan, Kangavar, Nihavend, Kamareh, Burujird, Kermanshah, Asadabad, Kezzaz. Their revenue amounted in the same year (reckoning three *tomans* as 1*l.*, according to the then rate of exchange) to 599,400*l.* in cash, and 73,800*l.* in grain, or a total of 673,200*l.*

THE VALI-AHD

an impression of resoluteness and strength; and it was erroneously inferred that the prince thus gifted and smiled upon would ultimately both deserve the throne and win it.

Fallacious predictions

These impressions have nowhere found a more emphatic spokesman than in Dr. Wills, who has already been proved to have cast as erroneous a horoscope for the Zil-es-Sultan as, I believe, he will also be proved in the future to have done for the Vali-Ahd. This is what he says in his two works before quoted:—

> I suppose the time will come when His Royal Highness will make an effort for the throne, probably on the present Shah's death. It will be a lucky day for Persia if he succeeds, as he is clever, tolerant, and a good governor. His personal popularity is very great, and his luck as a governor proverbial. He has a dislike to deeds of blood, but is a severe governor.[1]

And later:—

> There is no shadow of a doubt that the Zil will ultimately become Shah. He is a vigorous and fortunate governor, and his popularity is immense.[2]

I do not know whether, as a statement of facts or as a prediction of the future, these paragraphs are the more to be mistrusted. The Zil-es-Sultan was undoubtedly a ruler of vigour and determination. He held the reins in his own hand, and with a tight grip. Hating and despising the Mussulman clergy, he treated them with refreshing contempt. Never were the nomad tribesmen of the south-west provinces in a state of such acceptable subordination. But these merits, which were undeniable, and which are such as an Oriental respects, were compensated by faults of character and administration that in early days, when he was Governor at Shiraz, caused a popular outbreak which compelled him to fly, and in later times, at the very zenith of his power, were secretly preparing his downfall. Continued acts of violence and extortion on the part of officials to whose licence he appeared indifferent inflamed the public mind against his government. Several lamentable tragedies occurred during his administration—such, for instance, as the execution of the two Babi merchants in 1878[3] and the assassination of the Ilkhani of the

[1] *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, p. 366.
[2] *Persia as it is*, p. 176.
[3] *Vide* p. 500.

Bakhtiaris in 1882.[1] The astonishment, therefore, was not great when, in February 1888, the prince, being on a visit to the capital, was deprived of all his governorships, except that of Isfahan, and denuded of all but a fragment of the fine army on which he had so triumphantly relied. Acquiescing in his disgrace, he has since led a more humble and contracted existence, and is generally recognised as having, at least for the time being, lost all chances of future eminence or promotion. He has lately begun to exhibit a closer personal interest in the details of his government in Isfahan, where he acts as his own Vizier, and sits daily in one of the cabinets opening out of the Chehel Situn, to receive in audience any who may choose to come. The Zil was kind enough to accord me an interview at Teheran; and in the above remarks I must be understood to pass no personal sentence, but merely to reflect, with as much accuracy as I can, the verdict of the well-informed.

Interview with the Prince

The palace of the Prince is one of the finest in Teheran, having an imposing façade relieved with stucco work, and broad large windows. At the door was standing a carriage richly adorned with gilt armorial bearings and drawn by four horses. Mounting a staircase, and passing through several rooms decorated with a comic mixture of the European and Oriental, I entered a long passage or corridor, one side of which consisted entirely of windows filled with geraniums, while the opposite wall was covered with pictures, chiefly replica photographs and portraits of the Zil, illustrations from Russian newspapers of Russian Emperors, generals, and battle scenes, interspersed with innumerable coloured prints of sparsely attired and languishing houris. The Zil was standing in the middle, attired in a loose frock coat or pelisse of Persian cashmere material, drab cloth trousers, and patent-leather boots. He took his seat on an iron bedstead—a culminating example of the bizarre furniture of a Persian palace—which supported a brocaded mattress, and in front of which were placed chairs. During the interview,

[1] For this tragedy *vide* Wills, *In the Land, &c.*, p. 262; *Persia as it is*, p. 192. The victim was Husein Kuli Khan, the Ilkhani or Chieftain of the Bakhtiari tribes, a man of enlightened character, a vigorous and beneficent ruler, and a loyal subject. He was invited to Isfahan, where it was given out that he died of apoplexy. It subsequently transpired that, having refused to drink a cup of poisoned coffee, he was strangled. For further mention of this great chief, and for the unfortunate policy pursued by the Persian Government towards the Bakhtiari tribes and their rulers, *vide* vol. ii. cap. xxiv.

a younger son of the Shah came in, a nice little boy of eight years of age, with a pink velvet coat and an immense diamond buckle. His elder brother appeared to be very fond of him, and caressed the lad as he talked.

His appearance and conversation

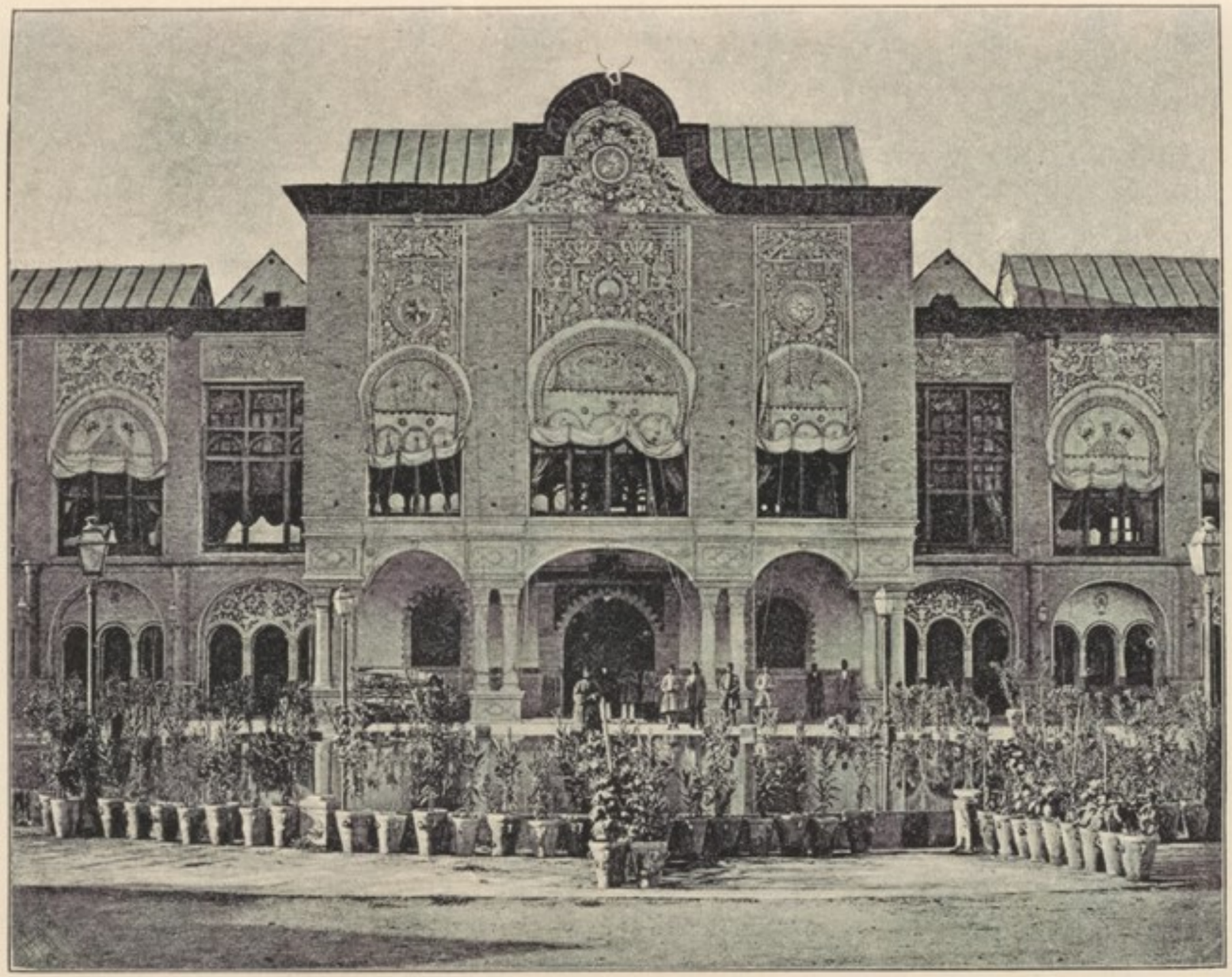
The Shadow of the King is short of stature, unusually corpulent for his years, and is a chronic sufferer from gout. A defect in one of his eyes detracts from the smart appearance that he has commonly been made to present in photographs; and his features wear an expression of mingled *bonhomie* and astuteness. Upon the present occasion he looked pallid and far from well. He talked a great deal in Persian, with a very rapid flow of language and constant laughter. Beginning with the stereotyped conversational overture that he always had been and would be the friend of England, which was the centre of civilisation and to whose interests he had devoted his life, he went on to say that he thought Lord Salisbury's Government the best in the world, and hoped it would remain in office for ever. On the other hand, he considered Lord Randolph Churchill not too loyal, and rather troublesome. I asked him what they would do with him in Persia. He replied, with some discretion, that a course of office might be expected to have a steadying effect. He added that he took in fifteen English as well as French, German, and Russian newspapers; and that he employed a special translator for the purpose. Turning the conversation on to general politics, with which he seemed creditably familiar, and on to the chances of peace and war, he expressed sentiments unfavourable to the two greatest neighbouring Powers. On the other hand, he told a Russian officer of my acquaintance, upon one occasion, that he was eagerly awaiting the Russians; and Mr. Stack, in his excellent book,[1] relates a story that casts similar doubt upon his Anglophile professions. It is supposed that his general predisposition is in favour of the English as against their rivals; but that expediency recommends an application of the same compliments to both. He then proceeded to pass an elaborate panegyric on the good government of the Shah, under whose administration life and property were secure, and no one was oppressed or murdered (an example which, in these respects, it is still not too late for the Prince to follow). Persia he depicted as 'hungering and thirsting for civilisation,' emotions of very dubious existence, which I question if the Zil

[1] *Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. p. 27.

would lift a little finger to appease. He added what was true, that he had come to Teheran in order to reingratiate himself with the Shah, to whom he had brought a fine present of money and horses. The attempt was so far successful—the prince having an alleged enemy in the ruling Grand Vizier, the Amin-es-Sultan—that the governments of Irak and Yezd were added to that of Isfahan. In the Fortune's wheel of Oriental politics, the degraded of one day is the uppermost of the next, and no revolu-

THE ZIL-ES-SULTAN

tion is too astonishing to be possible. But whatever be the ups and downs of the Zil's future career, he can no longer be regarded as a competitor for the throne, or as a formidable factor in the political future of Persia. It should be added that the prince shares to the full the masculine tastes of his family, being a great sportsman and passionately addicted to the saddle and the chase. His first wife died thirteen years ago; and his eldest son, the Jelal-ed-Dowleh, who, during the Zil's period of grandeur, ruled as deputy



PALACE OF THE ZIL-ES-SULTAN AT TEHERAN

at Shiraz, and was, in 1890, transferred to Yezd, now rules as his father's deputy in that city. The prince has also several daughters.

The third grown-up son of the Shah, by name Kamran Mirza, but more commonly called by his title of the Naib-es-Sultaneh, (Lieutenant of the Kingdom), with whom also I was granted an audience, holds the posts of Minister of War, Commander-in-Chief of the Persian Army (entitled Amir-i-Kebir, or Great Lord), and Governor of Teheran. He is now

The Naib-es-Sultaneh

THE NAIB-ES-SULTANEH

thirty-five years of age and is also unusually stout for his years. Though generally reputed to be the favourite son of the Shah and a young man of amiable disposition, he is deficient in capacity or political influence, and, except for the importance attaching to his military rank, fills no part on the public stage. Alone among the Shah's sons, he speaks very tolerable French, and can converse without the aid of an interpreter. He is understood to be very much afraid of his elder brother, the Zil, and to be on the reverse

of friendly terms with him. He possesses a fine palace at Teheran, as well as a summer residence in the country, the garden attached to the former being reputed the most beautiful in Persia. This prince is partial to the luxuries of life; and the appointments and furniture of his palace reflect these æsthetic inclinations. On the Shah's anniversary he has been in the habit for some years of giving a great dinner, in the French style, to the foreign Ministers, at which are to be noticed all the latest refinements of Parisian art. In youth he married a daughter of the Hissam-es-Sultaneh, who was Governor of Khorasan and was called the Victor of Herat. It was her brother, the present Hissam-es-Sultaneh, who represented the Shah at the Queen's Jubilee in 1887. The expenses necessitated by his various posts entail an outlay upon the Naib which his allowance is inadequate to meet; but in the administration of the Army he has discovered the wherewithal of a very substantial fortune. Of the audience with which I was favoured, I can recall nothing more important or perhaps more characteristic than the prince's declaration that he disliked the military parades in the Great Meidan, because they blew the dust in his eyes.

The remaining sons of the Shah are little boys of seven and eight years of age, and infants, the offspring of younger and later wives. It will be seen from what has been said that in none of the Royal Family is there any certain reproduction of the kingly qualities of their father; and that though the succession to the throne is not now likely to be disputed, yet it will place in power a personality whose character is still an enigma, and with regard to whom, if he turns out a feeble ruler, no one can be astonished; if a good ruler, most people will be surprised.

Rest of the Royal Family

While speaking of the Royal Family I must not omit all mention of the brothers of the Shah, although none of these possesses any special importance beyond that which results from his rank. The eldest of them is Abbas Mirza, Mulk Ara. Regarded forty years ago as a possible pretender to the throne, he fled, on his elder brother's accession, to Baghdad, where he resided for thirty years, until reconciled to the Shah, who invited him back to Teheran. Here he became Minister of Commerce and Honorary President of the Council. He has also been Governor of Kazvin and other places. Soured, however, by his long exile, he is destitute of ambition, and has

Brothers of the Shah

finished his *rôle* in public life. The second brother, Abdus Samed Mirza, the Izz-ed-Dowleh, was till recently Minister of Justice. He accompanied the Shah on his previous tour to Europe, can speak both English and French, and was also sent to Moscow to congratulate the present Czar on his accession to the throne. Politically he exercises no influence, but is now for a second time Governor of Hamadan. The third and last surviving brother is Mohammed Taki Mirza, the Rukn-ed-Dowleh, of whom I have already spoken, in a previous chapter, as Governor-General of Khorasan. He was reputed not to be a strong governor and to be mainly in the hands of his Vizier, who was a strenuous Russian partisan; and it is to these reasons that his recall in the present year has been attributed. The three brothers are, therefore, in no case factors of political moment, and are said to be dependent for their fortunes upon the bounty of the Shah.

From the Palace I pass to the principal Ministers of the Crown. The Shah is nominally assisted in the task of government by a Council of State of fluctuating numbers—it at present contains thirty members—nominated by himself. The more prominent of these are ministers with portfolios, the departments being distinguished and named on semi-European lines, though an accumulation of several offices, with not the slightest connection between their functions, in the hands of a single person is a characteristic departure from the European model. It is, in fact, the greatest mistake to confuse this Council with the Cabinets of Western Constitutions, with which it has little in common. Perhaps the institution which it most closely resembles, and from which it was in all probability copied, is the Imperial Council in Russia.

Council of State

It was after returning from his first voyage to Europe that the Persian Council of State assumed its present shape. The Shah on that occasion issued a Rescript to the Secretary of the Council in which the functions of the reorganised body were thus defined :—

Scheme of its functions

The regular establishment of a Council of State is an affair of great importance, and is indispensable to the Government. It is our desire that this assembly shall be well constituted and well directed, and we are resolved to confer upon it unlimited powers and exalted influence. You will therefore communicate to the Council of State the following orders, which will serve as a basis for its reorganisation :—

(i.) Inasmuch as the affairs of Government are manifold, and as we

are anxious that they shall be promptly examined, and that our decision shall be immediately executed, two meetings in the week are insufficient. The Council will therefore in future be convened three times in the week.

(ii.) The members of the Council will enjoy full liberty of speech. They must fear nothing, and must deliberate with the greatest impartiality. If one of their number, occupying an inferior position in rank, desires to make observations or criticisms upon the manner in which certain affairs of government have been conducted by the higher officials, the latter will have no right either to be angry or to complain; but they will be able to defend and to justify themselves by reasons and remarks offered in polite language.

(iii.) Every member of the Council, of whatever rank, may submit for discussion any project of merit or public utility.

(iv.) All business will be decided by the majority of votes. The decisions, inscribed upon parchment, will be signed by all the members. Those that are verbally given will have no effect unless they are written out and signed.

(v.) Henceforward all the provincial governors and officers charged with high functions by the State shall be nominated and elected by the Council of State.

(vi.) The meetings of the Council will take place regularly, and all public matters will be laid before them.

This document possesses undeniable merits as a scheme for a powerful Cabinet of advice, in a constitutional monarchy; and might supply a very respectable charter of the rights of functions of such a body. But Persia is very far from being a constitutional monarchy, and accordingly it is not surprising to find that the Rescript has been either tacitly ignored or diplomatically forgotten, the fifth article in particular never having shown a spark of vitality.

Present condition

The Persian Council of State, as it at present exists, has no ministerial responsibility and no collective authority, either executive or legislative. It is a purely consultative body, convened sometimes to advise the Shah beforehand, more commonly to discuss the fulfilment of his orders when already delivered. Its sole executive power is that of the individual men composing it, who are the Shah's servants, and can be shifted, promoted, or dismissed without any relation to their colleagues. There is a titular President of the Council who summons the meetings, but has no other presidential functions. He neither

takes the chair nor puts questions to the vote. Indeed, no speeches are made nor votes taken. The discussion is purely informal and conversational, and each minister is in the habit of reporting privately to the sovereign.

Ministers of State

Of the general character and accomplishments of the ministers of the Persian Court, Sir J. Malcolm, in his History, wrote as follows in the early years of the century:—

> The Ministers and chief officers of the Court are almost always men of polished manners, well skilled in the business of their respective departments, of pleasant conversation, subdued temper, and very acute observation; but these agreeable and useful qualities are, in general, all that they possess. Nor is virtue or liberal knowledge to be expected in men whose lives are wasted in attending to forms; whose means of subsistence are derived from the most corrupt sources; whose occupation is in intrigues which have always the same objects: to preserve themselves or ruin others; who cannot, without danger, speak any language but that of flattery and deceit; and who are, in short, condemned by their condition to be venal, artful, and false. There have, no doubt, been many ministers of Persia whom it would be injustice to class under this general description; but even the most distinguished for their virtues and talents have been forced in some degree to accommodate their principles to their station; and, unless where the confidence of their sovereign has placed them beyond the fear of rivals, necessity has compelled them to practise a subserviency and dissimulation at variance with the truth and integrity which can alone constitute a claim to the respect all are disposed to grant to good and great men.[1]

These observations are marked by the insight and justice characteristic of their distinguished author, and it is to be feared that to a large extent they hold as good of the present as of the old generation. Nevertheless, I hope I am not wrong in believing that the milder disposition and example of the reigning Shah, the results of European experience—most of the ministers having accompanied the king on one or other of his journeys—and the changing spirit of the times, recognisable even in Persia, have tempered some of the harsher outlines of the original picture; and that there is increasing scope for that honesty and integrity, whose absence Malcolm deplored, and which have hitherto been frightened out of existence by the danger attaching to honourable pre-eminence and by the universal complicity in fraud and corruption.

[1] *History of Persia*, vol. ii. cap. xxiv.

I at least shall assume the best in describing the character and conversations of those ministers whom I met in England and at Teheran.

The Amin-es-Sultan

There are at the present time seven ministers who may be described as possessing portfolios, the division or concentration of which will strike European readers as both arbitrary and eccentric. The rank of Sadr Azem, or Grand Vizier, which has occasionally been conferred by the Shah upon his leading adviser, is not strictly now enjoyed by any individual.[1] The present Prime Minister is known as the Amin-es-Sultan, or Trusted of the Sovereign, his name being Mirza Ali Askar Khan. He is a young man of now (1891) only thirty-four years of age, who, without the advantages of noble birth, has by his dash and ability won for himself the foremost position in Persia, and in 1889 accompanied the Shah on his European tour as the most important personage after his royal master. The grandson of an Armenian, and the son of an official who was originally *abdar* (the 'cup-bearer' of Nehemiah i. 11; the 'chief butler' of Genesis xl. 1) to the Shah on his travelling and hunting excursions, but who subsequently rose to high favour and office, the Amin-es-Sultan now unites in his own person the Ministries of the Interior, Court, Customs, and Treasury, besides being Administrator of the Mint and Governor of the Persian Gulf Ports. He is also practically Foreign Minister as well. I met him several times, and was favourably impressed with his intelligence, energy, and seeming force of character. His appearance is prepossessing, he has a frank and attractive manner, and he talks with great ease, rapidity, and emphasis. Having, like all Persian officials of high rank, attained a very large fortune, partly inherited, partly acquired, he inhabits a fine residence in the capital. He makes no concealment, at any rate to English ears, of liberal and Anglophile sympathies,

[1] Upon the Shah's accession he made Mirza Taki Khan his First Minister; but the latter is said to have declined the title of Sadr Azem, and to have been content with that of Amir-i-Nizam, or Commander-in-Chief. After his murder in 1852, Mirza Agha Khan was appointed Sadr Azem, a title and position which he held till 1858. The Shah did not again confer the rank until 1871, when the recipient was Mirza Husein Khan, the author of the Reuter concession. An official intrigue caused his fall in 1873, but he was afterwards made Minister of Foreign Affairs, and received the title of Sipah Salar, another synonym for Commander-in-Chief. Since 1873 there has been but one Sadr Azem, Mirza Yusuf Ashtiani, who was raised from the high office of Mustofi-el-Mamalek to the higher one of Sadr Azem, and died while in occupation of that post.

and spoke to me with the utmost freedom about the politics of his country. He said that what had struck him most in England was the wealth of the nobility, where each was a king, the education of the people, where all could philosophise, and the density of the population, where every village was a town and every town a city. Upon his return to his native country, the sight of the Persian

THE AMIN-ES-SULTAN

roads had almost made him weep, and he considered the introduction of roads and railroads as the best method of expressing his indebtedness to Europe. He declared that he would like his two sons, the eldest of whom was twelve years of age, to be educated in England, but that their mother would not hear of their leaving the country. We discussed many political questions, to which I will not here refer, but in all of which I was struck by the grasp of the situation and by the ready comprehension of rival designs and standpoints exhibited by the Amin. He has now, in the face

of continuous intrigue and watchful opposition from the older official school, by whom he is regarded as a schemer and an upstart, held his own for several years. His administration has on the whole been marked by ability and success, and if he continues to receive the support of the king, if he can escape the deteriorating contagion of Persian official life, and if he can hold up his head amid the hurricane of intrigue that surges round a leading man in Persia, he may live to be a real benefactor of his country. At the time of going to press, in the winter of 1891–2, his position appears to be still unimpaired; nor does the jealousy of his rivals seem to have shaken the wise confidence of his sovereign.

The remaining ministers are for the nonce somewhat overshadowed by the ascendency of the Amin. The most honourable and capable among them is the Amin-ed-Dowleh, Mirza Ali Khan, a man of middle age, courtly manners, liberal sympathies, and great cultivation. Superseded in the first position by his younger rival, he is regarded as hostile to the latter, but still unites in his own person the Presidency of the Council with the Ministries of Posts, Pensions, and Church Property. He accompanied the Shah on his former visit to England, but not in the year 1889, having withdrawn from the suite in Germany, it was said, in consequence of strained relations with the Amin-es-Sultan. Were it not for a certain want of initiative and energy, possibly the result of too acute an insight into the stubbornness of the system with which would-be reformers are brought into collision, he might be regarded as the best man in Persia. I visited him in a fine house which was decorated in the European fashion. He conversed very fairly well in the French tongue, and struck me as the most attractive personality whom I encountered in Persia. His tone about his own country was that of a true lover of reform, whose enthusiasms were dead and who had lost all hope of regeneration in his time.

The Amin-ed-Dowleh

The portfolio of Foreign Affairs is in the hands of Mirza Abbas Khan, the Kawam-ed-Dowleh (Support of the State), a man of rough manners and appearance, and a typical representative of the old school. He did not accompany the Shah to Europe, but was left in charge of his department at Teheran. He was formerly Minister of the Interior, and has the reputation of being straightforward and industrious, as well as enormously wealthy. In spite of his portfolio, he is little more

The Kawam-ed-Dowleh

than a political cypher; the real control of the foreign relations of Persia being entirely in the hands of the Shah and the Prime Minister.

Yahia Khan, Mushir-ed-Dowleh

Among the most important of the ministers, although at present occupying only a secondary official rank, is Yahia Khan, known as the Mushir-ed-Dowleh. He is the younger brother of the famous Sadr Azem and Sipah Salar Mirza Husein Khan, who was Prime Minister at the time of the Shah's first visit to Europe, and who afterwards died in semi-exile at Meshed in 1881. From early years he attracted the favour of his sovereign.[1] He became a minister, received the Shah's sister in marriage,[2] was appointed Governor of Gilan and Mazanderan, and afterwards of Fars, was President of the Council of Regency during the Shah's second absence in Europe, and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1885 to 1887. In that year he forfeited the post by the intrigues which led to the flight of Ayub Khan from Teheran, and which rendered him a *persona ingrata* to the British Legation. This charge he resolutely denies; but it is to be feared that it is not without serious justification. He has also been sent on a special mission to St. Petersburg, where he was treated with great consideration, and where he is supposed to have imbibed Russian ideas. He is now Minister of Justice and Commerce. Speaking French admirably, the result of an early European education, and thoroughly versed in the politics and habits of the West, he is probably one of the cleverest of the public men in modern Persia. He inhabits a magnificent house, which he holds no loan from the Shah, who had confiscated it from his deceased brother. It adjoins the immense Sipah Salar Mosque, which I have described in my chapter on Teheran, and which he is completing in accordance with the instructions and bequests of the former Sipah Salar. At the time of my visit his eldest son was about to be married to one of the daughters of the Vali-Ahd, and the Mushir, who

[1] Contradictory and incorrect accounts of the incidents of his early career have been given by Mme. Carla Serena (*Hommes et Choses en Perse*, cap. xx.), and Benjamin, p. 225.

[2] This lady, who is the Shah's sister by the same mother, has had a somewhat checkered matrimonial career. She was first wedded to Mirza Taki Khan, the great minister who was murdered by the Shah in 1852. She was then given to the son of his successor in that post. Upon his disgrace and exile several years later she was again set free, and on this occasion married her uncle, who soon died of cholera. Her fourth and final destiny was as wife of Yahia Khan.

does everything in the most lordly style, and is understood in consequence to be crippled with debt, was giving a series of entertainments that were the talk of Teheran. One day he entertained the Persian Ministers; on another the foreign element; on a third all the dervishes in the capital; on the day when I visited him the *mullahs* of Teheran were enjoying their share of the festivities, and I saw 200 of these holy and turbaned individuals seated round an immense room consuming an excellent *déjeuner*. On the night of the wedding he illuminated the main streets and big Meidan. Of all the ministers with whom I came in contact he was the least Oriental and the most European. Dispensing with the rotund phraseology of compliment, which, as a rule, occupies the first ten minutes of an interview with a Persian grandee, he conversed sensibly and pointedly about both the European and Eastern situations, making the just remark, that if England had spent half the money in conciliating the friendship of Persia that she has squandered in alienating that of Afghanistan, she would have gained a secure and invaluable bulwark for her Indian Empire. Rumour credits the Mushir-ed-Dowleh with strong Russian proclivities; but these, in conversation with me, he strenuously denied. It is possible that he may again come to the front; and in any case his personality is one that cannot be ignored in the future. (He has since died, January 1892.)

Other ministers

Of the Minister of War, the Naib-es-Sultaneh, I have already spoken. Jehangir Khan, an Armenian, was, till his recent death, Minister of Fine Arts. Mohammed Hasan Khan, the Itimad-es-Sultaneh, is interpreter to the Shah and Minister of the Press, without a portfolio. He translates the European papers daily to the Shah, and is in close and confidential attendance upon the sovereign. The sole remaining minister of distinction is the Mukhber-ed-Dowleh, Ali Kuli Khan, who combines the ministries of Public Instruction, Telegraphs, and Mines. In the second capacity he was brought into constant intercourse with the officials of the Indian Government and of the Indo-European Company during the first introduction of the telegraph wire into Persia twenty-five years ago, and was made a C.I.E.; while, in the third, he has again been in close relations with the English since the formation of the Persian Mining Rights Corporation. He also is a man of considerable ability and enlightenment, though deficient in ambition. He accompanied the Shah as far as London in 1889, but, owing to

jealousies among the suite, obtained permission to retire from there and undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca. One of his sons, who bears the title of the Sani-ed-Dowleh, is married to a daughter of the Vali-Ahd.

The Amir-i-Nizam

Among other prominent personages, though not actually a minister of the Crown, must be mentioned the Amir-i-Nizam, Hasan Ali Khan, who till lately was Vizier to the Heir Apparent in Azerbaijan, and was for years the real governor of that province. This remarkable man is a native of Bijar, a small town in the Gerrus district between Sinna and Kazvin. The country of Bijar, where his family have lived long and have some influence, is Kurdish, though they are Persians. It was no doubt owing to these patrimonial surroundings that he understood the Kurds so well and kept them, on the whole, in such excellent order. Formerly Persian Minister in Paris, he speaks French with perfect facility and is imbued with Western and progressive ideas. He has also been several times in London. Before being raised to his recent high office he was Minister of Public Works in Teheran. A man of very strong will and determination, he reduced turbulence in Azerbaijan to a minimum, and was the best provincial administrator in Persia. Though far advanced in years, being now seventy-five or seventy-six years of age, he is hale and robust, is frequently spoken of as a likely Minister of Foreign Affairs, and in a new reign would possibly be appointed Grand Vizier to the sovereign.[1]

The Sahib Diwan

Another powerful individual is the Sahib Diwan, Fathullah Khan, a wealthy nobleman of Shiraz, who has been both Vizier to the Vali-Ahd at Tabriz, and Governor of Isfahan and Fars, and who formerly held office in the capital. His administration at Shiraz was reported to be hard and avaricious, but strong. He is a man of enlightened views and intelligence, and, in spite of his years, is said to covet the post of First Minister, which he sees with reluctance in its present occupant's hands. In the spring of the present year he was appointed Governor-General of Khorasan, where it is to be hoped that he will prove less pliant than his predecessor.

[1] He was recalled by the Shah (Sept. 1891) on account of the disturbances in Tabriz arising out of the Tobacco Concession, which he is alleged to have fomented; but has since been appointed Governor of Kermanshah and Persian Kurdistan. I have before alluded to his unconcealed Russian proclivities.

In addition to the Council of State, there exists an *imperium in imperio* in the shape of a small Council of Five, specially constituted by the Shah in 1888 to advise him on matters of high political moment. This inner Council consists at the present moment of the Amin-es-Sultan, the Naib-es-Sultaneh, the Amin-ed-Dowleh, the Kawam-ed-Dowleh, and the Mukhber-ed-Dowleh.

Council of Five

These are at present the leading men in Persia. From my account of them it will be seen that there is no deficiency, either in capacity or (if assurances are to be believed) in will, to prevent the initiation of a policy of reform. Intrigue, however, is rampant, prejudices are powerful, fanaticism is not extinct, and both Shah and Ministers are caught in the meshes of a system which is characterised by many ingrained vices, and which in my next chapter I shall endeavour to describe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GOVERNMENT

I do not like the fashion of your garments. You will say, They are Persian. But let them be changed.—SHAKSPEARE, *King Lear*.

FROM what was said at the beginning of the previous chapter, it may be inferred that the government of Persia would, nominally at any rate, be classified by constitutional writers as an absolute monarchy. In theory the king may do what he pleases; his word is law. The saying that 'The law of the Medes and Persians altereth not' was merely an ancient periphrasis for the absolutism of the sovereign. He appoints and he may dismiss all ministers, officers, officials and judges. Over his own family and household, and over the civil or military functionaries in his employ he has power of life and death without reference to any tribunal. The property of any such individual, if disgraced or executed, reverts to him. The right to take life in any case is vested in him alone, but can be delegated to governors or deputies. All property, not previously granted by the crown or purchased—all property in fact to which a legal title cannot be established—belongs to him, and can be disposed of at his pleasure. All rights or privileges, such as the making of public works, the working of mines, the institution of telegraphs, roads, railroads, tramways, &c., the exploitation, in fact, of any of the resources of the country, are vested in him, and must be purchased from him before they can be assumed by others. In his person are fused the threefold functions of government, legislative, executive, and judicial. No obligation is imposed upon him beyond the outward observance of the forms of the national religion. He is the pivot upon which turns the entire machinery of public life.

An absolute monarchy

Such is, in theory, and was till lately in practice, the character of the Persian monarchy. Nor has a single one of these high pretensions been overtly conceded. The language in which the Shah addresses his subjects and is addressed by them,

Modern pretensions

recalls the proud tone in which an Artaxerxes or Darius spoke to his tributary millions, and which may still be read in the graven record of rock-wall and tomb. He remains the Shahinshah, or King of Kings; the Zil Allah, or Shadow of God; the Kibleh Alem, or Centre of the Universe; 'Exalted like the planet Saturn; Well of Science; Footpath of Heaven; Sublime Sovereign, whose standard is the Sun, whose Splendour is that of the Firmament; Monarch of armies numerous as the stars.'[1] Still would the Persian subject endorse the precept of Sadi, that 'The vice approved by the king becomes a virtue; to seek opposite counsel is to imbrue one's hands in his own blood.' The march of time has imposed upon him neither religious council nor secular council, neither *ulema* nor senate. Elective and representative institutions have not yet intruded their irreverent features. No written check exists upon the royal prerogative.

Real curtailment of prerogative

And yet the power of the Persian king by no means corresponds to its arrogant definition, nor is it now equal to what it once was. In the first place, the Shah is no longer the religious head even of the Shiah community of the Mussulman world. At no time have the sovereigns of Persia enjoyed the spiritual supremacy that was conceded to the Khalifs of Baghdad, and that is still claimed for the Sultan of Constantinople. But the Sefavi monarchs, by virtue of their descent from a famous saint, who was himself a Seyid, or descendant of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, were invested with a semi-sacred character, to which alone can we attribute the passiveness with which, for a whole century, their subjects submitted to the rule of a succession of capricious and dissolute drunkards. Chardin says that they were regarded as vicars or successors of the Imams; and Kaempfer records that the water in which they had washed was deemed holy, and was eagerly sought after as a cure for all complaints. No such pretensions, however, have been made, or could be made, on behalf of any subsequent dynasty; least of all on behalf of a family like the Kajars, of Turkish extraction. The Shah of Persia, therefore, must be dissociated from any claims of personal

[1] *Vide* Fowler's *Three Years in Persia*, vol. ii. p. 12, for an enumeration of the Shah's titles. The name Shah is the Khshayathiya, or Khshatya, of the Cuneiform Inscriptions. From the same root, indicating pre-eminence, come Khshatrapa, *i.e.* Satrap, Khshayarsha, *i.e.* Xerxes, Arthkhshatra, *i.e.* Artaxerxes, and Khshathraputhra = Shaputra = Sapor.

sanctity; and both the scope and limitations of his prerogative must be sought on purely secular grounds.

Effective restraints

Although ostensibly supreme, the practical restraints upon the sovereign's power are many. Respect for the religious teachers and law might have been predicated with greater truth of his predecessors than of the reigning Shah, who, without either insulting or alienating the ecclesiastical element, has yet contrived its subordination to the civil authority to a degree unequalled in any previous reign, except that of a man of blood and iron, such as Nadir Shah. Regard for established usage has been found a stronger deterrent in the present reign. So long as the revenue is collected and robbery is suppressed, the complete assertion of the royal power is not, in hazardous cases, too rigorously pressed. In other words, political expediency acts as a further deterrent. But, strongest of all, in the case of the reigning monarch, and of great interest as proving the extent to which Persia has been drawn into the vortex of civilised states, is the deterrent of foreign opinion, which, in the absence of any indigenous public opinion worthy of the name, has taken its place, and has operated as a safeguard for which the Persian people are probably quite without gratitude, and of which they are, it may be suspected, wholly unaware. It may safely be predicted that any extravagant or savage exercise of the royal prerogative, such as has been a familiar incident in the Persian history of the past, will rarely occur, if at all, in the future, and that in any case it will prove an exceptional, instead of a normal, feature of government. This remarkable change is to be attributed to the permanent presence of foreign Ministers and to the electric telegraph.

Administrative hierarchy

The administrative régime of Persia is in essence the same at this day as under the Achæmenian kings. The empire is divided into satrapies or provinces, ruled by governor-generals who are appointed by, and are directly responsible to, the Crown, and these are further subdivided into *beluks*, or districts, cities and their dependencies, and towns, the lieutenant-governors of which are either nominated directly by the sovereign or by the governor-general of the larger province to which they belong. Until the present century four of these satraps, of peculiar distinction and almost independent power, bore the title of Vali, viz., the rulers of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and

Luristan. Of these, the last-named alone retains either the title or any shadow of independence. Governor-generals and lieutenant-governors are usually called *hakim*, the latter sometimes *naib-el-hukumah*. Under the governors are the *daroghah*, or head of police; the *kalantar*, or mayor of a city, and the *kedkhoda*, who is either the chief of a ward or parish if in a town, or the headman of a village. The principal governorships are conferred upon the king's sons, brothers, uncles, or relations, but to nothing like the intolerable and almost criminal extent that prevailed at the beginning of the century. The governor is now also, as a rule, resident in his province, instead of being an absentee at the capital. He is commonly assisted in the work of administration, and more especially in the fiscal side of government, by a vizier or minister. Among the nomad and military tribes a different system of appointments and titles prevails, the governors of the Kurdish, Bakhtiari, and other clans being known as *Ilkhani* and *Ilbegi*, and their subordinate chiefs as *khan*, *sheikh*, *tushmal*, &c., all of these being responsible for the collection of revenue to the governor of the province in which they reside.

Modifications of royal power

Ostensibly, in the creation of this governing hierarchy, the sovereign is absolute and supreme. Here again, however, in practice, very considerable checks are found to exist upon his prerogative. As I showed in my chapter upon Khorasan, in the case of the Ilkhanis of Kuchan and Bujnurd, and of the Amir of Kain, and, as I shall subsequently show in a chapter dealing with the Feili and Bakhtiari Lurs, the Shah is practically compelled to choose a governor from the ruling family; nor is it easy for him to interfere with the custom of direct hereditary succession. Similarly, in the cases of local magistrates or head men, such as the *kalantars* in cities, and the *kedkhodas* in wards or villages, although nominally he has a free choice, yet in reality he must make a selection that is agreeable to the inhabitants. Otherwise the authority of government falls into abeyance; and, what is regarded as much more serious in Persia, the revenue fails to come in. Hence, the popular choice as a rule marking out some individual for the exercise of these offices, and the Shah for expediency's sake accepting it as his guide, some writers have seen in this fact an introduction of the elective or representative principle into Persian administration. In many cases it happens that the office is practically hereditary in a single

ruling family, much after the fashion of the Italian cities before the Renaissance.

Administrative divisions

There is no fixed principle or permanence in the administrative subdivisions of Persia. Their separation or combination is regulated by the ability or reputation of their governors, and by the scope that may be conceded thereto by the confidence or the fears of the sovereign. Thus, for instance, a larger number of provinces were collected under the rule of the Shah's eldest son, the Zil-es-Sultan, prior to his fall, three years ago, than have probably ever before been assigned even to a prince of the royal family. Abbas Mirza, at the height of his power, when Khorasan had been joined to Azerbaijan and placed beneath his sway, did not wield as extensive an authority as this prince. Since his disgrace the vast dominion under his rule has been resolved again into its constituent elements; and the following list of the Persian provinces and administrative districts at the time of my visit in 1889, probably exhibits a larger number of independent posts and functionaries than at any recent period of Persian history. It should further be remarked that no principle, geographical, ethnographical, or political, appears to be adopted in determining the borders and size of the various divisions, which vary in extent from a province larger than the whole of England, to a small and decayed town with its immediate surroundings.

I. Larger Provinces or Districts

Administrative Division	Capital	Administrative Division	Capital
Azerbaijan	Tabriz	Arabistan	Shushter
Khorasan and Seistan	Meshed	Gilan and Talish	Resht
Teheran and Dependencies	Teheran	Mazanderan	Amol
Fars	Shiraz	Yezd and Dependencies	Yezd
Isfahan and Dependencies	Isfahan	Persian Gulf Littoral and Islands	Bushire
Kerman and Persian Beluchistan	Kerman		

II. Smaller Provinces or Districts

Administrative Division	Capital	Administrative Division	Capital
Kurdistan	Sinna	Kermanshah	Kermanshahan
Luristan	Khorremabad	Khamseh	Zinjan
Irak and Ferahan	Sultanabad	Malayer and Tusirkan	Dowletabad

Kazvin
Astrabad
Semnan and Damghan
Kum
Kashan
Gulpaigan and Khonsar
Mahallat
Kezzaz
Gerrus
Hamadan
Nihavend
Natanz
Biabanek and Jandek

III. Inferior Towns and Dependencies

Administrative Division

Burujird	Joshekan	Talikan
Bostam and Shahrud	Khar	Saveh
Kamareh	Kharakan	Firuzkuh
Asadabad	Demavend	Tarum

System of purchase and of presents

I now come to that which is the cardinal and differentiating feature of Iranian administration. Government, nay, life itself, in that country may be said to consist for the most part of an interchange of presents. Under its social aspects this practice may be supposed to illustrate the generous sentiments of an amiable people; though even here it has a grimly unemotional side, as, for instance, when, congratulating yourself upon being the recipient of a gift, you find that not only must you make a return of equivalent cost to the donor, but must also liberally remunerate the bearer of the gift (to whom your return is very likely the sole recognised means of subsistence) in a ratio proportionate to its pecuniary value. Under its political aspects, the practice of gift-making, though consecrated in the adamantine traditions of the East, is synonymous with the system elsewhere described by less agreeable names. This is the system on which the government of Persia has been conducted for centuries, and the maintenance of which opposes a solid barrier to any real reform. From the Shah downwards, there is scarcely an official who is not open to gifts, scarcely a post which is not conferred in return for gifts, scarcely an income which has not been amassed by the receipt of gifts. Every individual, with hardly an exception, in the official hierarchy above mentioned, has only purchased his post by a money present either to the Shah, or to a minister, or to the superior governor by whom he has been appointed. If there are several candidates for a post, in all probability the one who makes the best offer will win. Upon his appointment he receives the *kitabcheh*, or official statement of the revenues of the province, with regulations for its management. Henceforward it is his business to collect the taxes, to see that the proper military quota is forthcoming, and to administer justice. But there appears in Persia to be a peculiar objection to a new assessment, no doubt arising from the universal and legitimate fear that it can only result in further exaction. Accordingly, the *kitabcheh* remains obsolete and unaltered; but in bargaining for his post, the would-be

governor engages to pay to the Shah a sum in excess of that mentioned in the *kitabcheh*—the prolonged duration of peace having increased the general productiveness of the whole country; such sum being determined by the competing bribes of the several candidates, one of whom will perhaps undertake to pay to the Crown 30,000 *tomans* above the official assessment (in order to cut out the existing governor, who may only be giving 20,000), and will presently find himself outbidden by a third, who offers 40,000. Every post of any importance in Persia being, in theory, tenable only for one year, and being renewable at the annual festival of the vernal equinox or No Ruz, then comes the moment at which the most minute and delicate calculation of the requisite bribe prevails. I extract the following account of the system in its actual operation from the excellent report upon the condition of modern Persia, contributed to Petermann's 'Mittheilungen'[1] in 1885, by Messrs. Andreas and Stolze, who were themselves for some years in official or other employment in Persia:—

Every official has to purchase his appointment and to pay for his continuance in office by a present once a year, frequently almost equivalent to the salary that he receives. To this rule there are few exceptions, from the governor of a province, whose present goes direct into the private purse of the Shah, down to the lowest servant of an under-governor. The governors of provinces are required every year to pay in to the government the taxes of their provinces at a sum determined at the beginning of the spring equinox. Now, by law each has the right of levying a certain sum beyond—the Hak-el-Hukumah. All this, however, will go in presents to the Shah and Ministers. He is, therefore, compelled, for the maintenance of his own state and household, to extort a much higher sum still. Careful investigations, instituted in Fars, during the several years' government of the Motemed-ed-Dowleh—justly celebrated as the best governor in the country, under whom Fars attained its zenith of order and prosperity—showed that, instead of the prescribed 6,360,000 francs, 10,000,000 francs were collected. It is an open secret in Persia that the excess of levies averages at least 66⅔ per cent. The method of collection is as follows. The sub-governors (*zabit*) have to deliver in instalments to their respective superiors on each occasion a higher sum than is entered on the tax-roll (*kitabcheh*). They, in their turn, receive the taxes from the different heads of districts (*kalantars*), and these from the village magistrates; the collector at each stage paying in more than

[1] *Die Handelsverhaltnisse Persiens*, by F. Stolze and F. C. Andreas.

is due. All these supplements being regulated at best only by use and wont, there is ample scope for extortion; and terrible are sometimes the cases, complaints whereof are seldom of any avail, the complainant having probably to reckon with the bastinado.

The tax list (*tumar*) is often drawn out years beforehand, according to the number of taxable objects in each district: acres, fruit-trees, water-springs, beasts of labour, herds, &c. Not only is this sum exacted thenceforward year after year, though the taxed objects are meanwhile dwindling, but it is gradually raised. In these lists will figure villages which, from dearth of water or other causes, have been abandoned by their inhabitants. Although, in consequence of the silk-worm disease, and the dreadful famine of 1869–73, the economic condition of Persia became greatly reduced during the twenty years 1864–84, whence it is but recently, through the culture of opium, that it is beginning to revive, the taxes were yet continually going up, in many cases to an almost insupportable figure. Only the extreme frugality of the Persian peasant and of the lower classes in general, on whom presses almost exclusively the burden of the taxes, explains how they are got in at all.

Mudakhil

I have quoted the above passage at length, because it is the evidence of eye-witnesses, who lived for years in the country and whose authority is not to be impugned. From a perusal of its contents, a glimpse will have been caught of that which, along with, and perhaps even more than, the bribe or gift required to secure or to retain office of any description, is a cherished national institution in Persia, viz. the *mudakhil*, i.e. consideration, recompense, or profit which is required to balance the personal account, and the exaction of which, in a myriad different forms, whose ingenuity is only equalled by their multiplicity, is the crowning interest and delight of a Persian's existence. This remarkable word, for which Mr. Watson says there is no precise English equivalent,[1] may be variously translated as commission, perquisite, douceur, consideration, pickings and stealings, profit,

[1] 'The word *mudahil*, for which there is no exact English term, has for Persian ears a charm which few Europeans can comprehend. *Mudahil* signifies all that one can acquire by receiving bribes, by swindling and extortion, and by all other irregular means. It is *mudahil* and not salary which every Persian official is anxious to secure. A salary regularly paid affords no scope for the display of the talents in which Persians most excel—for dissimulating and over-reaching, oppressing and cringing—and therefore a post which has only a good salary attached to it, and which affords no good opportunities of making *mudahil*, is looked upon by Persians as being but a poor possession.'—*History of Persia*, p. 372.

according to the immediate context in which it is employed. Roughly speaking, it signifies that balance of personal advantage, usually expressed in money form, which can be squeezed out of any and every transaction. A negotiation, in which two parties are involved as donor and recipient, as superior and subordinate, or even as equal contracting agents, cannot take place in Persia without the party who can be represented as the author of the favour or service claiming and receiving a definite cash return for what he has done or given. It may of course be said that human nature is much the same all the world over; that a similar system exists under a different name in our own or other countries, and that the philosophic critic will welcome in the Persian a man and a brother. To some extent this is true. But in no country that I have ever seen or heard of in the world, is the system so open, so shameless, or so universal as in Persia. So far from being limited to the sphere of domestic economy or to commercial transactions, it permeates every walk and inspires most of the actions of life. By its operation, generosity or gratuitous service may be said to have been erased in Persia from the category of social virtues, and cupidity has been elevated into the guiding principle of human conduct. Examples, however, explain more clearly than can any verbal generalisation; and I will, therefore, proceed to show how the institution of *mudakhil* works in every channel and department of Persian life.

Practical illustrations

I have already shown that no office of distinction is conferred by the Crown except for a pecuniary consideration or price, which, in the case of a post bestowed by the Shah, goes into his private exchequer. This is the *mudakhil* of the sovereign. Some of the processes adopted for raising this branch of the revenue will hereafter come under discussion. Here I propose to follow the further ramifications of the system, as it spreads through the entire official hierarchy of which the Shah is the head and exemplar. In the next descending grade the governor who has paid a smart price for his appointment is not one whit behindhand either in the desire or in the capacity to indemnify himself. He farms out the taxes or customs to a third individual for a sum, perhaps, half as much again as that which he himself has given. The balance is his *mudakhil*. So too the *kalantar* or *kedkhoda* in his turn insists upon his squeeze; the 'farming' process, which is universal in Persia, affording an easy basis for

the realisation of the desired profit; and the system by which the *mudakhil* is extracted does not come to an end until the bottom of the descending scale has been reached, and there is no further victim from whom to grind out a gain. An Austrian, Baron von Teufenstein, was finance officer of the district of Saveh for a year, from 1881 to 1882, and published a most interesting account of his experiences, in which he said that his predecessor paid 25,000 francs for his office (the *mudakhil* of the sovereign, or of the minister who procured him the post), and cleared 80,000 francs by his year's tenure of it (his own *mudakhil*). If, however, in the sphere of administration this graduated scale of extortion be deemed either not extraordinary or normal, it will perhaps excite greater astonishment when observed in active existence in the army. It may safely be averred that no general officer obtains his post without a substantial money equivalent. His own profit consists in what he can extract from the colonels and majors under his command. They, in their turn, squeeze the captains and lieutenants; and these, not behindhand in resourcefulness, extract moisture from what one would, *prima facie*, imagine to be the flinty consistency of the Persian infantry soldier, by selling to him the privilege of furlough, or leave to work as an artisan in the bazaar. The last illustration which I shall give will be taken from domestic life. Here *mudakhil* is the commission exacted by your servant (in a Persian household usually by a member of the family, specially commissioned) upon every article that you purchase, or every order that you give. This is conceded to him as a matter of right by the vendor, who accordingly names a price, ten per cent. or more, in excess of that which he requires for his own profit, the balance to go to the domestic; and by the master, who knows well enough that he is paying ten per cent. above the market value. Still, *mudakhil* must exist all round; and seeing that he himself is doubtless making it on a larger scale elsewhere, why should he be so unjust as to complain?

Effect on the peasantry

If we examine this system in the light in which it affects the pockets and the interests of the governed, it is obvious that it must result in wholesale and illicit extortion. Take the case of the tenant or farmer of any office who has had to pay a substantial price for his nomination. He requires, in the first place, to recoup himself for this outlay. Next he has to collect the stipulated annual revenue for the Royal or Ministerial

Exchequer. Thirdly, he must be ready to purchase a continuance of the ever-precarious favour of his superiors; and, lastly, not knowing when he may fall, he must provide for himself against a rainy day. Hereby is instituted an arithmetical progression of plunder from the sovereign to the subject, each unit in the descending scale remunerating himself from the unit next in rank below him, and the hapless peasant being the ultimate victim. It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that office is the common avenue to wealth, and that cases are frequent of men who, having started from nothing, are found residing in magnificent houses, surrounded by crowds of retainers and living in princely style. 'Make what you can while you can' is the rule that most men set before themselves in entering public life. Nor does popular spirit resent the act; the estimation of anyone who, enjoying the opportunity, has failed to line his own pockets, being the reverse of complimentary to his sense. No one turns a thought to the sufferers from whom, in the last resort, the material for these successive *mudakhils* has been derived, and from the sweat of whose uncomplaining brow has been wrung the wealth that is dissipated in luxurious country houses, European curiosities, and enormous retinues. In one of Sir Lewis Pelly's reports upon Southern Persia, penned while he was British Resident at Bushire, I have come across the following passage, which tersely depicts the effect of this system upon the cultivators of the soil:—

One of the consequences of this system of farming is that the agriculturist is called on for a much larger rent than the State receives from him; e.g. A. farms a governorship from the Shah for an amount B. plus C. the *douceur* (the term of the annual contract remaining a constant quantity, while the *douceur* varies). A. in turn farms his circle of villages, of which D. takes one circle. D. again sublets a hamlet or one of his villages to E. who deputes F. to collect the rents. Each, of course, expects a profit on his contract, and consequently the agriculturist, instead of having to pay the amount B. which benefits the State, is called upon for his share of B + C, + D's + E's + F's profits. He cannot pay. F. complains to E. and E. to A., who is dunned for his contract sum from the capital. A. gives to his sub-farmers permission to collect the revenue by force. This is done; next year some of the peasants have fled, some of the land is lying waste. The country, in brief, is revenued as if the Government were to end with the expiry of the governor's lease.[1]

Report on the Tribes around the Shores of the Persian Gulf. 1874.

It may be wondered why a system that seems to press so hardly upon the taxpayers, who are in a numerical majority, and which is attended with such obvious injustice, should be mildly acquiesced in by a people who have never been slow at rebellion. I conceive the reason in part to lie in the fact that, from one point of view, Persia is the most democratic country in the world. Lowness of birth or station is positively not the slightest bar to promotion or office of the most exalted nature. Nor must it necessarily, as in European countries, be compensated or supplemented by distinguished abilities. Interest or the capacity to pay is sufficient to procure a post for anyone, even of menial origin. Many a Persian governor has started by filling a subordinate post in the household or retinue of some great man, and has passed through every grade of society before arriving at the top. The present Grand Vizier, as I have shown, was himself of humble descent, while his father was an attendant in the royal household. The Prime Minister who accompanied the Shah on his first visit to Europe was the grandson of a barber, and the great Amir-i-Nizam, Mirza Taki Khan, was the son of a cook. Consequently, every man sees a chance of some day profiting by the system of which he may for the moment be the victim, and as the present hardship or exaction is not to be compared in ratio with the pecuniary advantage which he may ultimately expect to reap, he is willing to bide his time, and to trust to the fall of the dice in the future.

Reasons of popular acquiescence

A second fact which may variously be regarded as a reason for the continuance, and as a product of the existence, of this system is the low and inadequate figure of official salaries in Persia. In most cases, the government allowance is sufficient for little more than household expenses, and takes no thought of the personal remuneration of the official. What a grudging treasury declines to give, *mudakhil*, it is well understood, is intended to supply, and were it conceivable that by some miraculous transformation of Persian character, or by a decree from some iconoclastic sovereign, this most sacred of institutions should perish without a corresponding rise at the same time of fifty per cent. in official salaries, the machine of government would be brought to a standstill. Quite apart, therefore, from the inherent popularity of a system by which all aspire to profit, so long as a miserly sovereign sits upon the throne, and the

Meagreness of official salaries

treasury is administered in the present niggardly fashion, *mudakhil* remains an essential feature of public life in Persia, and no reform is to be anticipated.

Duration in office

Although it might be thought that the existence of the purchase system on so extensive a scale would render long tenure of office rare, it is not as a rule found in practice that this is the case. The official in possession is in a far better situation than the candidate who wishes to oust him, inasmuch as he has at his easy disposal the means of increasing his annual gift or purchase money to the Shah. Moreover, the test of good governorship in Persia being, not the amelioration or contentment or prosperity of the province, but the absence of highway robbery and the punctuality with which the taxes and customs are paid into the royal exchequer, personal merit plays a very small part in the bargain between sovereign and deputy, and dismissal or degradation by no means follows upon proven incompetence. Too often it has happened that when complaints against an oppressive governor have been manifold and just, the accused official has been able, by the prompt addition of a few thousand *tomans* to his annual money-offering to the Shah, to avert disaster and to continue with impunity in his career of maladministration.

Pishkesh of gifts

That which is known as *mudakhil* from the point of view of the recipient, is classified as *pishkesh*, or gift (*lit.* that which leads on or comes before), from the standpoint of the donor. Every money-bribe, or gift, made to secure a post or concession, to influence a judicial decision or to escape punishment, falls under the head of *pishkesh*. This mysterious and elastic term, which includes every form of donation, from the contribution paid in by a governor-general to the fine exacted from a petty delinquent, may be roughly divided into two headings: (1) the fixed, regular, and open payments, prescribed by usage and never relaxed; (2) irregular or extraordinary payments, made or extracted as the opportunity occurs. Among the former the most conspicuous are the so-called presents made at the festival of No Ruz, or the New Year, to the Shah. Every governor, minister, chief of a tribe, or official of any rank, then makes his offering, the *minimum* amount of which is determined by custom, and the *maximum* left to the means or ambition of the donor. As Malcolm put it, to fall short of the accustomed sum means loss of office, to exceed is increase of favour. In his day the sums thus

received amounted to two-fifths of the entire fixed revenue (which he estimated at 3,000,000*l.*), or to 1,200,000*l.* Madame Serena[1] makes a great mistake in calculating the receipts of the present Shah at No Ruz from these sources as 60,000,000 francs, or double the sum ascribed to Fath Ali Shah by Malcolm. As a matter of fact the presents received by the reigning Shah have never been more than a third, or at most a half, of those extorted by his great-grandfather, and the total is said to have dwindled in recent years to only a few thousand pounds. This reduction does not by any means imply that the receipts of the government have fallen, but only that there has been a redistribution of incidence, the greatly increased results from the assessed revenue producing a corresponding diminution in the cash money-presents of the governor and officials.

The Royal *khelat*

A device, more delicate in its regard for the scruples of the donor, but equally certain in its productiveness, is the gift of the Royal *khelat*. Once in each year every provincial governor receives from the sovereign the gift of a *khelat*, or robe of honour (as a sign of his continuance in office), to the bearer of which he must present a *khelat-beha*, or equivalent price, the gift of which is in reality a relief to the pocket of the Shah.[2] The cost of the *khelat* is reckoned as a normal item of expenditure by every provincial governor in the calculation of his budget. Outside every Persian city of any size is a pavilion, or place, known as the *Khelat Pushan*, whither the governor rides out at the head of a brilliant cavalcade to receive the royal present, and whence, having donned the garb or mantle, he returns to the town, the remainder of the day being given up to public rejoicing. The happy recipient knows that he is safe for another year. Extraordinary *khelats* are frequently solicited and paid for on a larger scale, in order to insure the continued favour of the sovereign. The same system is repeated in a descending scale among the lower grades of the official hierarchy, the provincial governor also sending a yearly *khelat* to his subordinate, and being equally gratified by the petition for an extraordinary *khelat*.

These are the more familiar and recognised resources of royal

[1] *Hommes et Choses en Perse*, p. 240.

[2] Thus the function of transmitting the *khelat* is intrusted to some minister or member of the household whom it is intended to favour, and who not uncommonly himself sells the honour to another party. The *khelat-beha* of Khorasan is not less than 1,000 *tomans*, in addition to other perquisites.

finance. They are supplemented by a variety of proceedings which may be classified under the head of irregular or extraordinary *pishkesh*, to which I promised a little while ago to devote the tribute of a paragraph. Of these presents, I have already described the most habitual, in the shape of the gifts which precede, and often follow, every appointment, according as they represent the aspirations or the gratitude of the nominee. But even when installed in office, the latter is not safe against rumours of the withdrawal of his post, in which case he must take the necessary steps to secure his position. Or let us suppose that a governor is accused of committing some offence against the central authority. A few thousand *tomans* are straightway despatched to the capital, and thus, by the payment of a voluntary fine, the dignity of the Government is satisfied, and the anxiety of the offender relieved. Other methods also exist. The Shah announces his intention of honouring a subject with a visit, and the latter loyally prepares an offering for his royal guest. Sometimes the high distinction of a present arrives from the sovereign, whose condescension is gratefully acknowledged by the return of a gift worthy of its royal destination. Sometimes, after a successful day's sport, there is the exhibition of a head of game that has fallen to the royal rifle. The defunct animal, let us say an ibex or a leopard, is taken round and shown to a select number of wealthy or eminent personages, who make, as a matter of course, a handsome present to the official who has given them the privilege of seeing the quarry of so illustrious a sportsman. It can be readily understood that one of the results of this system of presents from inferiors to superiors is that everyone of any standing in the official hierarchy is relieved of the irksome necessity of paying salaries to the bulk of his personal retainers. If he desires to discharge the arrears of pay of a member of his retinue, he has merely to send him with an ornamental gift to someone whose sense of etiquette may be trusted to make him bestow a substantial acknowledgment upon the bearer. One stone thus kills two birds. The recipient of the gift is pleased with the compliment implied, while the bearer gets a present which he accepts as a form of payment from his master. Manifold are the means by which the gift of a compliment can thus be translated into the compliment of a gift. Occasions have been known when the Shah, in a playful mood, has entered the bazaars, established a temporary partnership with a shopkeeper, and sold off his wares

at suitable prices to his courtiers, dividing with the delighted tradesman the proceeds of the sale. Enough has perhaps been said to give some idea of the system. Truly the maxim 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's' stands in no need of being pressed in a country where Cæsar takes such very good care of himself.

Corrupt administration

It is an obvious result of the administrative system which I have described, and of the proud predominance of *pishkesh*, that there is no guarantee, beyond the wisdom or the apprehensions of the sovereign, for the best men filling the right places. So long as the gift of office is largely determined by the length of purse, corrupt administration must prevail, and honest men will go to the wall. Even if a good man gains an appointment, the intrigues or the bribes of a rival behind his back may oust him at any moment, and he falls because at Rome he failed to do what the Romans do. Of the effect upon the governed, who are the ultimate source from which the successive *mudakhils* and the stipulated *pishkeshes* are drawn, I have already spoken. But the country does not suffer only from the greed of officials in respect of what they extort, but also in respect of what they withhold. Sums of money are assigned from the Royal Treasury for a definite public object—e.g., the payment of an army, the construction of public works, the building of a bridge, the repair of a road. These sums either never reach their destination at all, or only reach it in sadly diminished volume, having been arrested on the way in the pocket of some official responsible for the distribution. The Shah, meanwhile, is quite unaware of, or is powerless to detect, the embezzlement practised by his subordinates, upon whom, in the absence of responsible supervision from above or free criticism from below, it is almost impossible to keep a watch. The rapacity of the entire official world being thus enlisted in the maintenance of the existing system, it will easily be understood how stubborn a barrier is opposed to any administrative reform, and how faint is the hope that Persia will ever, unaided, work out her own salvation.

Neglect of public works

It is also to the peculation engendered by this system that must be attributed the neglect, or the total absence, of public works which so constantly arrests the traveller's attention in Persia. When I think over my long journeys, and recall how many caravanserais, or bridges, or post-houses in the entire country I saw in at all an efficient state of repair, I am bound

to say that they can be counted on the fingers of the two hands. The same applies to the mosques, which, with a few exceptions in the great cities, are dilapidated and crumbling to ruin; to the *madressehs*, or religious colleges, whose exterior of itself would invite no students; to the abandoned palaces and deserted gardens, in whose unsightly decay the dignity of the reigning monarch appears to find a vengeful solace at the expense of his predecessors. If anywhere a fine modern caravanserai, or a road which shows signs of labour, or a new bridge be encountered, it is almost certain to have been the work of some private individual, who, whether minister or merchant, defrayed the cost out of his own pocket, and thought thereby to gain the grateful prayers of pilgrims or to enhance his personal reputation. The productions of this somewhat spurious public spirit are the only structures that modern Persia can show, to compare with the superb and almost indestructible relics of the Sefavean rule. About the neglect of roads and railroads I shall speak hereafter. But of all illustrations of the dearth of administrative energy, resulting from a system where every man is squeezing his neighbour and being squeezed by somebody else, perhaps the most significant is the indifference that has hitherto been displayed to the mineral resources of Persia, which three centuries of travellers have pronounced to be exceptionally rich, but which, until the formation of an English company a year ago, no systematic or scientific effort has been made to explore or to utilise.

Hosts of retainers

Among the features of public life in Persia that most quickly strike the stranger's eye, and that indirectly arise from the same conditions, is the enormous number of attendants and retainers that swarm round a minister, or official of any description. In the case of a functionary of rank or position, these vary in number from 50 to 500. Benjamin says that the Prime Minister in his time kept 3,000. Now, the theory of social and ceremonial etiquette that prevails in Persia, and indeed throughout the East, is to some extent responsible for this phenomenon, personal importance being, to a large extent, estimated by the public show which it can make, and by the staff of servants whom on occasions it can parade. But it is the institution of *mudakhil* and of illicit pickings and stealings that is the root of the evil. If the governor or minister were bound to pay salaries to the whole of this servile crew their ranks would speedily dwindle. The bulk of

them are unpaid; they attach themselves to their master because of the opportunities for extortion with which that connection presents them, and they thrive and batten on plunder. It may readily be conceived how great a drain is this swarm of blood-suckers upon the resources of the country. They are true types of unproductive labourers, absorbing but never creating wealth; and their existence is little short of a national calamity.

Bureaucracy

The same feature that prevails in the private household of an important functionary is carried into the official departments and into the service of the State. Every minister, every governor, every petty official, is surrounded by an immense staff of *munshis*, *mirzas*, and *mustofis*, i.e. clerks, secretaries, and accountants. There is no proper division of labour; confusion and lack of system prevail everywhere. This enormous staff of civil servants justifies itself by no reports, and produces no statistics; official returns, tables, schedules, or calculations either do not exist at all or, if they do, exist in a deceptive shape. There is no means of arriving even at an approximate estimate of so elementary a fact as the population of the country. The figures which I elsewhere print of revenue and taxation have been derived from official sources; but though probably correct in themselves, I cannot tell what omissions they may contain, or how far it is legitimate to make them a basis of induction. Baron Teufenstein, the Austrian Governor of Saveh, whom I have before quoted, thus described the routine of official life:—

> A Ministry in Persia consists of the minister and some scribes, without any determinate place of office, or any of the apparatus that appears indispensable to Europeans. The bureau is set up at whatever spot the minister happens to be, whether in his house, or in an ante-room, or a court of the Royal Palace, or perchance in the street or in a coffee-house. A swarm of scribes buzzes after the chief on all his marches, each bearing with him in his pocket the necessary writing apparatus and documents. Accordingly, an office can be rigged up any or everywhere in a trice. In the pockets of such a *mirza* are often to be found the documents of a series of years past, consisting of little scraps of paper which he has come to regard as private, and in no sense official, property.[1]

My readers will not be surprised to learn that the reforms which Baron Teufenstein laboriously introduced into the administration of

[1] *Petermann's Mittheilungen* (Andreas and Stolze), 1885.

Saveh during his year of office, were cancelled upon his resignation,[1] and that at the same time the improved state of the province was made a ground for screwing a higher *pishkesh* out of his successor.

Salaries and titles

I have already pointed out that the bulk of this bureaucratic horde are not paid by the State, but are expected to remunerate themselves, and that for the same reason the salaries of the higher officials are fixed at a notoriously inadequate figure. A further characteristic results from the combined dislocation and parsimony of the system, viz. that even the fixed and official salaries are frequently in arrears, or are not paid at all. Europeans in the service of the State are better paid or more regularly paid than Persians, because, if they do not get their salaries, they are apt to send in their resignations. But even they have often been put off with *barats*, or orders, payable some weeks or months from date, on some merchant in the bazaar; whilst the native official is frequently without even this compensation, and in the absence of any sign of an impending settlement of his little account with the State, makes up the deficit from other quarters. How fatally this condition of affairs operates in the case of the army will be seen later on. In somewhat ludicrous contrast with this sordid and despicable system are the brave and sonorous titles that are worn by the official hierarchy of whom I have been speaking. As will have been gathered from my narrative, ministers, or functionaries of any position, are seldom called by their proper names, but are known by the ornamental titles that have been conferred upon them by the Shah. These titles are much sought after, inasmuch as they confer distinction, security, and the opportunity of lucre. They are divided into three classes: those with the suffix Sultaneh, i.e. of the Government, which are rarely conferred except upon members of the Royal Family; those with the suffix Dowleh, of the Empire or State; and those with the suffix Mulk, of the Kingdom. It is to be feared that the majority of their owners think of little else but plundering the government, state, or kingdom of which they are grandiloquently described as the Ornament, Support, Defence, Pillar, or Strength.

[1] M. Orsolle (*Le Caucase et la Perse*, p. 314) says he was dismissed because he refused to pay to the Naib-es-Sultaneh a *pishkesh* of 4,000*l.* as *sadir*, or extra revenue, in addition to the greatly increased *maliat*, or ordinary revenue, which he had already paid in. But this does not appear to be true.

In a country where the judicial and executive functions of government are so constantly combined and confused, it behoves me to give some account of the law and its administration—a subject to which I now turn. It is well known that the law in Persia, and, indeed, among Mussulman peoples in general, consists of two branches: the religious, and the common law; that which is based upon the Mohammedan Scriptures, and that which is based on precedent; that which is administered by ecclesiastical, and that which is administered by civil tribunals. In Persia, the former is known as the Shar, the latter as the Urf. From the two is evolved a jurisprudence which, although in no sense scientific, is yet reasonably practical in application, and is roughly accommodated to the needs and circumstances of those for whom it is dispensed.

Twofold division of Law

The basis of authority in the case of the Shar, or Ecclesiastical Law, consists of the utterances of the Prophet in the Koran; of the opinions of the Twelve Holy Imams, whose voice in the judgment of the Shiah Mohammedans is of scarcely inferior weight; and of the commentaries of a school of pre-eminent ecclesiastical jurists. The latter have played much the same part in adding to the volume of the national jurisprudence that the famous *juris consulti* did with the Common Law of Rome, or the Talmudic commentators with the Hebrew system. The body of law so framed has been roughly codified and divided into four heads, dealing respectively with religious rites and duties, with contracts and obligations, with personal affairs, and with sumptuary rules and judicial procedure. This law is administered by an ecclesiastical court, consisting of *mullahs*, i.e. lay priests and *mujtaheds*, i.e. learned doctors of the law,[1] assisted sometimes by *kazis* or judges, and under the presidency of an official, known as the Sheikh-el-Islam, one of whom is, as a rule, appointed to every large city by the sovereign. In olden days, the chief of this ecclesiastical hierarchy was the Sadr-el-Sadur, or Pontifex Maximus, a dignitary who was chosen by the king and placed

Shar, or Ecclesiastical Law

[1] In Malcolm's time there were only five *mujtaheds* in all Persia; but the number is now much less restricted. A *mujtahed* must be the possessor of an *ijazeh* or diploma from another *mujtahed*, who enumerates therein his own credentials, and states that the recipient is learned in the laws of Islam, and competent to expound and practise the same. Most of the *mujtaheds* of Persia have received their diplomas from the most eminent jurists of Kerbela and Nejef.

over the entire priesthood and judicial bench of the kingdom. But this office was abolished in his anti-clerical campaign by Nadir Shah, and has never been renewed. In smaller centres of population and villages, the place of this court is taken by the local *mullah* or *mullahs*, who, for a consideration, are always ready with a text from the Koran. In the case of the higher courts, the decision is invariably written out, along with the citation from the Scriptures, or the commentators, upon which it is based. Cases of extreme importance are referred to the more eminent *mujtaheds*, of whom there is never a large number, who gain their position solely by eminent learning or abilities, ratified by the popular approval, and whose decisions are seldom impugned. Those who have been brought into contact with these distinguished doctors have expressed a high opinion of their general integrity and of the merciful inclination of their sentences. In works upon the theory of the law in Persia, it is commonly written that criminal cases are decided by the ecclesiastical, and civil cases by the secular, courts. In practice, however, there is no such clear distinction; the functions and the prerogative of the co-ordinate benches vary at different epochs, and appear to be a matter of accident or choice rather than of necessity; and at the present time, though criminal cases of difficulty may be submitted to the ecclesiastical court, yet it is with civil matters that they are chiefly concerned. Questions of heresy or sacrilege are naturally referred to them; they also take cognisance of adultery and divorce; and intoxication as an offence, not against the common law (indeed, if it were a matter of precedent, insobriety could present the highest credentials in Persia), but against the Koran, falls within the scope of their judgment.

Abridgment of authority

I have remarked that the authority of the ecclesiastical courts has varied at different epochs of history. The reason is to be sought in each case in the character and predilections of the sovereign, according to whose bigotry or liberal sentiments the Shar or the Urf has been invoked to settle both civil and criminal cases. Sometimes the *mullahs* and *mujtaheds* have been supreme; at others, as in the reign of Nadir Shah, they have been superseded and ignored. What I have said about the policy and inclinations of the reigning Shah will have prepared my readers for the statement that, during the present reign, they have suffered a steady decline. This new departure

was inaugurated, immediately upon his accession, by the great minister Mirza Taki Khan, who showed his contempt for the ecclesiastical order by seizing the person of the Sheikh-el-Islam at Tabriz, and by abolishing the privilege of affording sanctuary in his mosque, hitherto enjoyed by the Imam-i-Jama of Teheran. The complete assertion of the sovereign power, which ever since has been the keynote of the domestic policy of Nasr-ed-Din, is incompatible with the ascendency of an ecclesiastical court. Civil jurisdiction involves a final reference in every case to the sovereign; and one can easily understand the reluctance of a powerful monarch to admit a higher court of appeal. There is, however, in the constitution of the ecclesiastical bench, an inherent check upon their supremacy, of which the civil power can always take advantage to vindicate its own. They pronounce, but they cannot execute, judgment. The latter function devolves upon the officers of government; and although the decisions of the *mujtaheds* are seldom disputed, and are, as a rule, carried into effect, yet the final reference to the civil power is an acknowledgment of its superiority, while it opens the door to the lengthy process of negotiations and bribes that always supervenes when one of the parties engaged is a Persian governor or official.

From the Shar, I pass to the Urf, or Common Law. Nominally this is based on oral tradition, on precedent, and on custom. As such, it varies in different parts of the country. But, there being no written or recognised code, it is found to vary still more in practice according to the character or caprice of the individual who administers it; and so far from any attempt being made to hunt up precedents or to ascertain what has been done in parallel cases before, the decision is, as a rule, promptly given and as promptly executed by the civil officer before whom it comes, and whose sole guide, presuming him to be honest (perhaps a rash assumption in Persia), is a rough sense of right and wrong. The administrators of the Urf are the civil magistrates throughout the kingdom, there being no secular court or bench of judges after the Western model. In a village the case will be brought before the *kedkhoda*, or headman; in a town before the *darogha*, or police magistrate. To their judgment are submitted all the petty offences that occupy a city police-court or a bench of country magistrates in England. The penalty in the case of larceny, or assault, or such like offences, is, as a rule, restitution,

Urf, or Common Law

either in kind or in money value; while, if lack of means renders this impossible, the criminal is soundly thrashed. All ordinary criminal cases are brought before the *hakim*, or governor of a town; the more important before the provincial governor or governor-general. The ultimate court of appeal in each case is the king, of whose sovereign authority these subordinate exercises of jurisdiction are merely a delegation, although it is rare that a suppliant at any distance from the capital can make his complaint heard so far. The power of life and death, which was formerly wielded with freedom by the governor-general of a province, more especially if of royal blood, is now reserved by the Shah; and in an earlier chapter I have related an incident in which the Ilkhani of Kuchan, having attempted to revive the prerogative enjoyed by his predecessors, found himself in abrupt collision with his sovereign. Justice, as dispensed in this fashion by the officers of government in Persia, obeys no law and follows no system. Publicity is the sole guarantee for fairness; but great is the scope, especially in the lower grades, for *pishkesh* and the bribe. The *daroghas* have the reputation of being both harsh and venal, and there are some who go so far as to say that there is not a sentence of an official in Persia, even of the higher ranks, that cannot be swayed by a pecuniary consideration.

Civil cases and arbitration

Theoretically, the secular court takes cognisance of civil, just as, according to the same criterion, the ecclesiastical court embraces criminal cases. But the distinction is not less fallacious in this than in the other instance. The dread of the civil court, or *diwan-khaneh*, with its crude justice and the long avenues of bribery and rascality that it opens up, deters suitors from submitting to its judgment civil cases of any complexity or importance; and such cases are, as a rule, referred in the first place to private arbitration. Dr. Wills, who has written a most interesting account of the Persian law in its every-day or working aspect,[1] names questions of contracts, titles to landed property, disputed wills, intestate succession, the boundaries or shares of lands, the recovery of debts and bankruptcy, as among the cases which are commonly decided in this fashion. A *mejilis*, or informal council of leading merchants, is convoked in the house of a *mullah* or leading citizen. Both sides state their case; the documents are produced and inspected; and a decision, which is almost always in

[1] *Persia as it is*, caps. v. vi.

the nature of a compromise, is given, and, if reasonably fair, is accepted. The verdict is signed and registered by the Sheikh-el-Islam or the Imam-i-Jama (the Chief Priest), and with a little present to the jury all round, the appellants conclude what is probably one of the cheapest and most effective forms of legal procedure in the world. If either party is dissatisfied with the sentence, an appeal lies to the local governor; or, in intricate cases of landed titles and testamentary disposition, the ecclesiastical court may be first invoked. The same system prevails in the lower grades and occupations of life. A dispute of the character above mentioned occurring in a country district, will be referred, in the first place, to a *mejilis* of farmers, village elders, or *rish-sefid* (literally white-beards), &c., with an appeal from them to the *kedkhoda* or to the *mullahs*, or, in the last resort, to the provincial governor. In spite of the shameless bribery that prevails directly the purlieus of the *diwan-khaneh* are reached, Dr. Wills gives us the consolatory assurance that substantial justice is done in the end; for what the Asiatic expends in bribes, we disburse in fees, costs, and charges; thus both reaching the same goal by different roads. This genial opinion appears somewhat to ignore the quality of the justice that is dispensed in either case.

Pains and penalties

Before I quit the subject of the Persian law and its administration, let me add a few words upon the subject of penalties and prisons. Nothing is more shocking to the European reader, in pursuing his way through the crime-stained and bloody pages of Persian history during the last and, in a happily less degree, during the present century, than the record of savage punishments and abominable tortures, testifying alternately to the callousness of the brute and the ingenuity of the fiend. The Persian character has ever been fertile in device and indifferent to suffering; and in the field of judicial executions it has found ample scope for the exercise of both attainments. Up till quite a recent period, well within the borders of the present reign, condemned criminals have been crucified, blown from guns, buried alive, impaled, shod like horses, torn asunder by being bound to the heads of two trees bent together and then allowed to spring back to their natural position,[1] converted into human torches, flayed while living. The latest case

[1] This is a very ancient mode of execution; for it was the punishment inflicted by Alexander on Bessus, the murderer of Darius.

in which I have heard of robbers being walled up alive in pillars of brick and mortar was in 1884.[1] Fortunately, the visits of the Shah to Europe, and the increasing influence of civilised opinion, have had a wonderful effect in mitigating the barbarity of this truly merciless and Oriental code, and cases of unnecessary torture are now rarely heard of. The worst criminals are strangled, or decapitated, or have their throats cut. Robbery and thieving are expiated by mutilation, a finger or thumb, a hand or an ear, paying the penalty for the offence of the body. But the standard and most cherished punishment is the bastinado, to which all are liable, from the king's sons downwards, and in which a Persian, even of high rank and station, does not see a much greater indignity than does an English public schoolboy in the birch-rod. Nowhere is the house of a governor, or official, or even of a private person of high degree, without the implements of this hallowed mode of castigation; the theory of hereditary transmission must almost be invoked to explain the phenomenal hardness of Persian soles; and cases have been known where 2,000 switches have been broken, or, in other words, some 6,000 blows have been delivered, upon the feet of a single delinquent. On these occasions, the *ferashes* who administer the flagellation find a welcome opportunity of *mudakhil*, the leniency with which they lay on the strokes being rigidly proportioned to the bribe which they are promised by the victim. In cases of murder, the Lex Talionis, or Law of Retaliation, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' yet prevails; and the family of the murdered man may still claim the culprit upon his arrest, and kill him as they please. As late as the autumn of 1888 a case occurred in which a number of male collaterals of the royal family forced their way into the compound of the War Office, where a prisoner was confined who had murdered one of their relatives, hacked him to pieces with their weapons, and burned his body with petroleum. But in practice this bloody vendetta is seldom executed except among the nomad tribes of the south, where blood-feuds survive for generations, and sometimes result in the extinction of entire families. In ordinary cases the criminal escapes to the nearest sanctuary, from which secure retreat a bargain is conducted with the relatives of his victim as to the price of his free exit and

[1] In 1841 the Motemed-ed-Dowleh, Manucheher Khan, regarded as one of the severest of Persian governors, built a tower of 300 living men packed in layers of mortar, near Shiraz.—Layard's *Early Adventures*, vol. i. p. 312.

release from the pursuit of revenge. The majority of crimes perpetrated upon individuals are expiated in this fashion.

Concerning the Persian mode of imprisonment, the practice is as different from our own as in the case of penalties. There is no such thing as penal servitude for life, or even for a term of years; hard labour is unknown as a sentence; and confinement for any lengthy period is rare. There is usually a gaol-delivery at the beginning of the new year; and when a fresh governor is appointed, he not uncommonly empties the prison that

Prisons

PRISON AT TEHERAN.

may have been filled by his predecessor, one or two of the worst cases, perhaps, suffering the death penalty, in order to create a salutary impression of strength. There is no such thing as a female ward, women being detained, as also are male criminals of high rank, in the house of a priest. In Teheran there are said to be three kinds of prison: the subterranean cells beneath the Ark, where criminals guilty of conspiracy or high treason are reported to have been confined; the town prison, where the vulgar criminals may be seen with iron collars round their neck, sometimes with their feet in stocks, and attached to each other by iron chains; and the private guard-house, that is frequently an appurtenance of

the mansions of the great. It will be seen that the Persian theory of justice, as expressed both in judicial sentences, in the infliction of penalties, and in the prison code, is one of sharp and rapid procedure, whose object is the punishment (in a manner as roughly equivalent as possible to the original offence), but in no sense the reformation, of the culprit.

Defects and abuses of the system

Not even the most generous estimate of the merits, or the most lenient consideration of the failings, of the judicial procedure which I have described in this chapter, can blind us to the fact that it is lamentably deficient in the two essentials of an effective legal system, viz., a compact and systematised code of law, and a competent tribunal to administer it. Although the Ecclesiastical Law has been subjected to a rough codification, this is neither scientific, exhaustive, nor suited to modern conditions. The Common Law has no written existence, and is moulded by the arbitrary idiosyncrasies of individuals. The jurisdiction of the clerical and secular courts overlap; nor is there any intelligible distinction between their prerogatives and functions. Cases are referred to one or the other according to the fancy of the appellant, and frequently pass through the two courts in succession. Even if it be thought hazardous or unwise to interfere with the law based upon the Koran, no voice can possibly defend the haphazard condition of the Common Law, which is in a state of disgraceful uncertainty, and, as an instrument of guidance to the civil magistrates, is practically useless. Finally, the confusion of the judicial and executive functions in the person of the same individual, who is at once governor, tax-collector, police-magistrate, and judge, is a mark of a radically defective system, and is incompatible with the honest administration of the law; whilst the proverbial venality of the Persian official renders litigation a farce unless backed by a well-filled purse and the adroit understanding how to use it.

Attempts at reform

In justice to the Shah, it must be said that he is thoroughly well aware of the crudities and abuses of the Persian system of law, which, during his reign, certain efforts have been made to diminish; but equally in justice to the stubbornness of Persian character, which no Shah is strong enough to override, must it be admitted that these efforts have so far resulted in dismal failure. Lady Sheil, in her book, speaks of the institution at the beginning of the present sovereign's reign of

Courts of Justice for the conduct of civil jurisprudence.[1] I can find no trace either of their subsequent or of their present existence. In 1875, after the return of the Shah from his first visit to Europe, he introduced Councils of Administration, which were intended to assist the local authorities in the task of government, to check injustice or corruption on their part, and to counteract the legal prerogative of the clergy. But the *mullahs*, who saw their reign threatened, succeeded in persuading the people that such European innovations would deprive them of the slender protection they now enjoyed against the arbitrary government of the official classes, and created such a storm of opposition that the project was abandoned. After the Shah's second visit to Europe, another equally well-meaning, but equally futile, endeavour was made. On this occasion it was the institution of *bast* or sanctuary, which I have described in the chapter upon Meshed, that was most deservedly attacked; that which was originally designed as a safeguard against the arbitrary exercise of power having degenerated into a scandal of the worst description. Orders were issued from Teheran that 'sanctuary' was to be done away with; and that courts of justice were to be established. But the execution of the decree being committed to 'old hands' deeply pledged to the system under whose iniquities they had prospered, nothing more was heard of the projected reform, which quietly vanished from existence. Undeterred by these previous failures, and with a serenity that bespeaks either a very sanguine or a very careless disposition, the Shah, in May 1888, took another step in the direction of reform. He issued the following Royal Proclamation to all the provincial governors, by whom it was posted in the principal telegraph stations throughout the country:—

Royal Proclamation of Freedom of Life and Property

Forasmuch as Almighty God has endowed our blessed nature with the attributes of justice and benignity and ordained us the manifestor of his ordinances and power, and has especially committed to our all-sufficient guardianship the lives and property of the subjects of the divinely-guarded Empire of Iran; in gratitude for this great gift, we consider it incumbent on us, in discharge of the duties it imposes on us, to relax nothing in ensuring to the people of this kingdom the enjoyment of their rights and the preservation of their lives and property from molestation by oppressors, and to spare no efforts to the end that the people, secure in their per-

[1] *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia*, p. 169.

sons and property, shall, in perfect ease and tranquillity, employ themselves in affairs conducive to the spread of civilisation and stability.

Therefore, for the information and re-assurance of all the subjects and people of this kingdom generally, we do proclaim that all our subjects are free and independent as regards their persons and property; it is our will and pleasure that they should, without fear or doubt, employ their capital in whatever manner they please, and engage in any enterprises, such as combination of funds, formation of companies for the construction of factories and roads, or in any measures for the promotion of civilisation and security. The care of that is taken on ourselves; and no one has the right or power to interfere with, or lay hands on, the property of Persian subjects, nor to molest their persons or property, nor to punish Persian subjects except in giving effect to decrees of the civil or religious law.

This proclamation was accompanied by a Firman to each provincial governor, enjoining the strict observation of the edict, and severe penalties for its infringement. The Shah further commanded that both Proclamation and Firman 'be read in all *musjids* (mosques) and meeting-houses and thoroughly explained to the people; that they be circulated in all districts, small towns, and even villages and encampments; and that bonds be taken from all petty authorities, binding them to carry out the Royal commands.' The Firman concluded with these words: 'Anyone disregarding these orders will be punished in such a manner as to be the wonder of all beholders.' This declaration or charter of the rights of the subject is excellent in its way, and although it has made very little difference in the provinces, has been honourably observed by the sovereign himself; while its existence and public notification to the representatives of the European Powers afford the latter a reasonable ground for protest should any particularly scandalous case of injustice be brought to their notice, and therefore to some extent operate as a check upon the evilly-inclined.

Proposed codification of the law

It will be observed that the most needed reforms—viz., the codification of the law and the construction of an independent tribunal to confer a sanction upon the new decree and to administer the law already existent—were left entirely untouched by the Royal Proclamation. Once more, however, the Shah returned to the charge; and at the time of my visit to Teheran, in 1889, official circles in the capital were stirred to their foundations by the intelligence that the king had assigned to the Council of State the task of creating a new body

of law for the regulation of justice. In the 'Times' I wrôte as follows of this undertaking, purposely couching my remarks in a hopeful strain, so that I might not seem everywhere to see the blacker side of the cloud:—

The Council, who have not the clearest notion of what is required of them, have commenced the translation of the Code Napoléon, and have also been supplied with copies of that code as modified to suit the exigencies of the French Mohammedan populations, and also of our own Indian Mohammedan code; but, beyond this, have come to no decision as to what is incumbent upon them. There are some who regard the Royal command as a mere passing caprice, and expect no practical result. It is to be hoped, however, that this will not be the case, but that the Shah may be encouraged to proceed with a not unpromising design. The new code, however, if it is to be of any service, must contain provisions for tribunals, as well as laws; such provisions being, indeed, embodied in the European codes, upon which it will probably be modelled. A difficulty may be experienced in procuring judges of integrity and worth, and no abrupt change can be expected in the habits or moral standards of an Oriental country. But the eyes of the West will, at least, be directed with interest towards this fresh attempt to emancipate Persia from herself; while the assistance of foreign Governments may legitimately be given both towards the compilation of the new body of law and towards its proper administration when completed.

In response to recent inquiries (1891), I am informed that nothing further has been heard of the new code, whence I am led to infer that one more excellent scheme has gone into the waste-paper basket, and that one more stone must be added to the cairn of abortive reforms that has been so conscientiously piled by Nasr-ed-Din Shah.

Under a twofold governing system, such as that of which I have now completed the description—namely, an administration in which every actor is, in different aspects, both the briber and the bribed; and a judicial procedure, without either a law or a law court—it will readily be understood that confidence in the Government is not likely to exist, that there is no personal sense of duty or pride of honour, no mutual trust or co-operation (except in the service of ill-doing), no disgrace in exposure, no credit in virtue, above all no national spirit or patriotism. Those philosophers are right who argue that moral must precede material, and internal exterior, reform in Persia. It

Effect on national character

is useless to graft new shoots on to a stem whose own sap is exhausted or poisoned. We may give Persia roads and railroads; we may work her mines and exploit her resources; we may drill her army and clothe her artisans; but we shall not have brought her within the pale of civilised nations until we have got at the core of the people, and given a new and a radical twist to the national character and institutions. I have drawn this picture of Persian administration, which I believe to be true, in order that English readers may understand the system with which reformers, whether foreigners or natives, have to contend, and the iron wall of resistance, built up by all the most selfish instincts in human nature, that is opposed to progressive ideas. The Shah himself, however genuine his desire for innovation, is to some extent enlisted on the side of this pernicious system, seeing that he owes to it his private fortune; while those who most loudly condemn it in private are not behind their fellows in outwardly bowing their heads in the temple of Rimmon. In every rank below the sovereign, the initiative is utterly wanting to start a rebellion against the tyranny of immemorial custom; and if a strong man like the present king can only tentatively undertake it, where is he who shall preach the crusade?

CHAPTER XV

INSTITUTIONS AND REFORMS

And the nations far away
  Are watching with eager eyes;
They talk together and say
To-morrow, perhaps to-day,
  Enceladus will arise.

LONGFELLOW, *Enceladus.*

Ambiguous panorama

DEPRESSING as is the picture which I have been compelled in the interests of truth to draw of Persian administration, and sore as is the need for a fundamental change in the principles upon which it is conducted, the present reign has yet witnessed the introduction of a series of reforms into the country which honourably differentiate it from any immediately preceding epoch. An examination of these reforms, and of their history, is a task of alternate congratulation and dismay. On the one hand we see the imperious and irresistible influence of the West, and of what we term civilisation, successfully beating down the barriers of ancient Oriental prejudice. On the other hand, and side by side with this welcome spectacle, we observe superstition resurgent, reformatory zeal baffled, and the *vis inertiæ* supreme. We know not whether to give the rein to our hopes or to our despair. Is Persia about to enter, nay, has she already entered, the comity of civilised nations, or does she still sit a contented outcast without the gate? From the evidence which will be forthcoming in this chapter, added to that which has already been adduced, the reader must shape his own judgment. For my own part, I would solicit, in the interests of my subject, a friendly and even a lenient consideration; knowing well, as I do, that the ways of the East and West are wide asunder as the poles; that what we call civilisation and sometimes rashly confuse with progress, is viewed by Oriental peoples in a wholly different perspective; and that different nations have their own peculiar way of finding salvation. Moreover, what may seem but a foot-pace to ourselves, may resemble the rush of a locomotive

engine to others, to whom speed has hitherto been unknown. Nor must the sower expect an immediate harvest from all his seed.

Petition-boxes

Among the reforms successfully introduced by the present Shah, I have already noticed in other contexts, the institution of a city police in Teheran, and the reconstruction and embellishment of the capital itself. Among those unsuccessfully attempted, I have drawn attention to administrative reorganisation, the institution of judicial tribunals, and the codification of the law. To the latter class also belongs an amiable but ephemeral device that was one of the results of the first European journey of the Shah. Aware that much injustice existed which never reached his ears, and acting in unconscious imitation of the old Venetian practice, when petitions to the Council of Ten were placed in the mouth of a stone lion, he ordered petition-boxes to be exposed once a month in the public place of the larger towns. The keys were kept in his custody, and the boxes were to be opened in his presence. But the Persian provincial governor was not to be got the better of by so transparent a machinery. He promptly ordered a watch to be kept on the boxes; and the bastinado was freely administered to any indiscreet person dropping in a petition. Wherefore the petition-boxes remained permanently empty, and the Shah felicitated himself upon the singular contentment of his subjects.

Scheme of chapter

The reforms to which I now turn belong to a class that is not associated in the Western imagination with any very advanced degree of national progress, but that marks a considerable forward move in a country such as the Persia of Malcolm, of Morier, and of Ouseley. They will include the institution of a letter-post, of the electric telegraph, of newspapers, of a government mint and a new currency, of European banks, of commercial and other concessions, of manufactured roads, and of higher education. The opportunity will also present itself of saying something about the state of religious feeling in the country. Railroads will be reserved for a separate chapter.

Down to the year 1874 the postal system of Persia[1] was in the hands of the *chaparchi-bashis*, or masters of the post-houses, who

[1] For information upon this subject, *vide* articles by J. E. Polak in *Oesterreichische Monatsschrift für den Orient*, 1876, pp. 186–8; by G. Riederer in *ibid.* 1878, pp. 17–22; by Herr von Gödel Lannoy in *ibid.* 1881, pp. 176–9; and by Andreas and Stolze in *Petermann's Mittheilungen*, 1885, pp. 30–2.

farmed the *chapar* service from the Minister of Ways and Communications. The conveyance of letters was an agreeable source of profit to these individuals. There was supposed to be some fixed scale of charge, which, however, no one knew. As a matter of fact, they extracted a commission at both ends of the line; for on the one hand the sender of the letter had to pay beforehand for its conveyance; and on the other the recipient could not secure its delivery until he too had crossed the postmaster's palm. I have seen it stated that in this primitive epoch a postal service after the European model was started, but that it was abandoned because the contractor for the stamps was discovered to have privately printed 100,000 for his own benefit; an incident so profoundly Persian as to render the tale more than credible. In 1875, an official of the Austrian Post Office, by name G. Riederer, was entrusted with the organisation of the Persian Post upon European lines. Beginning experimentally with a postal delivery in the capital, and gradually extending his material and training a staff, within little more than a year of his appointment he had instituted the first regular riding post in Persia once a week between Teheran, Tabriz, and Julfa, with a branch from Kazvin to Resht. In the succeeding year (1876) he was appointed Postmaster-General. In 1877 Persia was admitted to the International Postal Union. Herr Riederer having quitted the Persian service in the same year, he was succeeded by a Russian named Stahl, who appointed Dr. Andreas, the joint author of the publication from which I have more than once quoted, General Inspector of Persian Posts. Within a couple of months Andreas was dismissed for reclaiming an embezzled letter from the Governor of Shiraz, and a year later M. Stahl fell also. For some time the service remained in a precarious and insecure condition, valuable packets being opened and plundered; and Europeans found it safer to trust to the couriers of the British Legation, or to the officials of the Indo-European Telegraph. Latterly much greater safety has been assured, and the arrangements now include a bi-weekly service to Europe *via* Tabriz and Tiflis, and *via* Resht and Baku; a weekly service to India *via* Bushire; and weekly services between the capital and Meshed, Yezd, Kerman, Shiraz, and Kermanshah. In 1886 there were reported to be seventy-three post-offices in the kingdom; and in the year 1884–5—the latest for which official statistics are procurable—there were conveyed 1,368,835 letters,

Letter Post

2,050 post-cards, 7,455 samples, and 173,995 parcels, having a value of 304,720*l.* The receipts for the same year were returned as 13,764*l.*, and the expenses as 13,298*l.* From England letters go to Persia *via* Berlin, and under favourable conditions are delivered in Teheran in a few days over a fortnight.

Electric Telegraph

By a curious inversion of the customary chronology (most characteristic of the East, Oriental potentates having a common passion for novelty, and electric light having preceded gas alike in Korea and Kabul) the electric telegraph was already in full working order throughout Persia long before a decent letter-post had been organised. The first experiment was made by the Government in 1859, with a line from Teheran to Sultanieh; but this was so badly constructed as to be soon abandoned. In 1860 followed a complete line from Teheran to Tabriz, extended in 1863 to Julfa. At this period ensued the negotiations between the British and Persian Governments that resulted in the passage of the main line of Indo-European Telegraph through Persia in transit from London to Bombay. The history and the result of these negotiations, which have profoundly affected the internal condition of Persia, will more appropriately be discussed in a chapter dealing with Anglo-Persian relations in the past and present; to which accordingly I refer the inquisitive reader. Here it will be sufficient to say that the issue of these proceedings has been the construction of a triple wire from Julfa to Teheran, worked by the Indo-European Telegraph Company; and from Teheran to Bushire, worked by a staff of the Indian Government. In addition to these lines Persia possesses some 3,000 miles of single wire lines, in a more or less dubious state of repair, which belong to the Government and are worked by a Persian staff. The capital is now connected with every city or centre of importance in the kingdom; and the prodigious effect that this has had in the consolidation of the sovereign power will afterwards come under notice. The chief Persian lines, excluding local lines around the capital, are those connecting Teheran and Meshed; Meshed and Sarakhs; Meshed, Kelat-i-Nadiri, and Deregez; Meshed and Kuchan; Shahrud, Astrabad, and Meshed-i-Ser; Semnan and Firuzkuh; Kazvin, Resht, and Enzeli; Resht and Khorremabad (Mazanderan frontier); Tabriz, Ardebil, and Namin; Tabriz and Suj Bulak; Marand, Khoi, and Urumiah; Teheran, Hamadan, and Khanikin; Hamadan, Sinna, and Gerrus; Hamadan, Burujird, and

Sultanabad; Burujird and Nihavend; Burujird, Khorremabad, and Shushter (in course of extension to Ahwaz and Mohammerah); Isfahan, Yezd, and Kerman. Statistics of the revenue and expenditure, and of the work accomplished, are not issued.

News-papers

The history and the present condition of Journalism in Persia afford as eloquent an illustration of the anomalous position occupied by that nation—suspended, like Mohammed's coffin, between the two worlds of culture and barbarism—as can be conceived. For on the one hand the outward symptoms of civilisation present themselves in the shape of a number of journals, published in the capital and elsewhere under Royal and ministerial patronage; but on the other, the Press as an institution has positively no existence, and freedom of printed speech, or even liberty of criticism, are unknown. Hence it is an illusory, if not a deceitful, claim that is sometimes advanced by the professional spokesmen of the Regeneration of Persia, when they point to her possession of three or four newspapers as a proof of respectable advance in the domain of liberty and culture.

Their history, past and present

It was in 1850, in the administration of the famous Amir-i-Nizam, Mirza Taki Khan, whom I have so often mentioned, that the first Persian newspaper was established.[1] He placed it under an English editor, whose duty was to republish judicious or interesting extracts from the European journals; and he frequently contributed political articles to it himself. At the same time he started the system, which has been virtually continued with every succeeding publication—and without which a press so straitly laced and hampered could not subsist—of requiring the entire Civil Service above a certain rank to become regular subscribers. This paper appears to have subsequently expired (probably upon the degradation and murder of its founder). In 1866 Mr. Mounsey speaks of another publication, entitled the 'Teheran Gazette,' which was started by command of the Shah in that year, and whose columns were at first filled with descriptions of European countries, inventions, and trades, until, the interest of editor and readers alike in these novelties being exhausted, the bill of fare was restricted to a Court Circular, and to disquisitions on Oriental Science, Alchemy, &c. At the present time the newspapers in existence in Teheran are as follows:—

(1) The 'Iran,' a purely official organ, to which all functionaries

[1] *Vide* R. B. Binning, *Two Years' Travel*, vol. ii. p. 162.

are expected to subscribe, and which is supposed to come out once a fortnight, although its appearances are irregular. This paper is edited by the Minister of the Press, who enjoys an absolute monopoly of all newspaper and other printing, and pays 500 *tomans* a year for the privilege. The 'copy' is always submitted to and countersigned by the Shah. It is produced, as are the other journals that I shall mention, by the lithographic process. The Shah occasionally contributes to the 'Iran,' and prides himself on the exceptional purity of his style, in which few Arabic words occur, in spite of the large part they fill in the national vocabulary. In the same journal (May 10 and 19, 1888) was printed a communication, also from the Royal pen, to which I shall afterwards refer, upon the new lake that was formed a few years ago on the road from Teheran to Kum. Foreign politics are excluded from the purview of the 'Iran,' for fear of offending the ambassadors; domestic politics are eschewed for fear of offending the Shah and governing hierarchy; and accordingly its scope is narrowed to the uninteresting dimensions of a Court Journal and Official Gazette, in which are recorded ministerial appointments, the movements of the Court, and the wonderful shots made or heads of game bagged by the king. A *feuilleton*, however, always appears, consisting as a rule of some historical or geographical work of ancient or modern times. It may well be imagined that without a subscription list artificially recruited such an organ could not boast of a very lucrative existence.

(2) The 'Ittelah,' a semi-official organ, also edited by the Minister of the Press, and also appearing irregularly, though nominally once a fortnight. The scientific bent of its editor, the Itimad-es-Sultaneh, then known as the Sani-ed-Dowleh, was responsible for the technical character of some of its earlier contents; but it has now embarked upon a less restricted field. It often contains a political article, snipped as a rule from some French newspaper by the scissors of the Minister; and it has been known to publish telegrams of European incidents within a month of their occurrence.

(3) The 'Sheref,' an illustrated monthly, lithographed at Teheran, under the same official supervision and editorship. Its illustrations are usually confined to portraits of some Persian minister or grandee, sometimes varied by the physiognomy of a European potentate.

The price of each of the above-mentioned journals is one *kran* (7*d.*), a figure which is quite prohibitory as regards general circulation. Where the official impulse to subscribe does not exist, self-interest has the same consequence; for the leading personages, unless they are counted among the patrons of the organ, find themselves roundly abused. A bribe is often found a wise preliminary to a flattering notice.

(4) The 'Farhang.' At Isfahan is published the 'Farhang,' under the editorship of the Zil-es-Sultan, or of an official employed by him. It shares the characteristics already described.

Formerly a paper called the 'Akhter' (Star) was much read. It was brought out by Persian refugees at Constantinople, but was subsequently interdicted in Persia, when found to contain somewhat too candid reflections upon the government of the King of Kings. A similar organ, named the 'Kanun,' has lately been started.

French papers

After the first European journey of the Shah, Mirza Husein Khan, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, fired by what he had seen in Europe, proposed the foundation of a Franco-Persian paper. The requisite plant was procured; a European was engaged as director; the promising title of 'La Patrie' was selected; but on February 5, 1876, when the first, and solitary, number appeared, the editorial with which it opened was found to contain the following astounding statement:—

> With regard to internal affairs, we shall speak of them with absolute independence. We take, and we mean to take, no side; we are bound by no pledge; we are under no official obligation. We desire to serve our country by enlightening it upon its true needs. We shall support progress, and encourage every manifestation of it. But we will never be vile flatterers; we shall offer no incense to power; we shall defend every just cause and blame every reprehensible act. We shall support the power that represents the law to us; but if its acts are contrary to the law, we shall censure them all the more severely. War upon abuses and those who are guilty of them, Progress, Justice, Equity—this is our device, there is our programme. We shall devote our entire care to meriting popular favour by constituting ourselves the universal champions of the rights of the country and the people.[1]

Such an announcement, which to Persian ears sounded like Sir Peter Wentworth declaiming in the Parliament of Elizabeth, or Caius Gracchus thundering in the Forum at Rome, was an insult to

[1] The entire article is reproduced by M. Orsolle, *Le Caucase et la Perse*, p. 256.

all that Iran held most dear. It was at once expiated by the dismissal of the guilty editor, and by the suppression of the offending organ. The number from which I have quoted remains a unique curiosity in the annals of journalism. The same minister established a military magazine at Teheran; but its existence was limited to seventeen or eighteen numbers.

In 1885 a more orderly and semi-official paper was started in the French language, entitled the 'Echo de la Perse.' It has since ceased to exist. A journal was also published for a short time at Tabriz, but soon expired. The Royal College further undertook for a while the publication of a scientific journal; but this, too, is defunct. There have been other journalistic attempts, whose epitaph required to be even sooner written.

Such is a brief record of the history and present condition of the press in Persia. How far it entitles either its promulgators or its patrons to the praise of enlightenment, every reader can judge for himself. Anyhow, no alarm need as yet be felt, even by the most tender susceptibilities, about the creation of a fourth estate in the dominions of the Shah.

The coinage

It may be imagined that in a country possessing the habits and instincts that I have described, the currency has at all times presented a fine field of operation for the devices of sovereigns, governors, and ministers, and that any approach either to science of management or stability of value has been conspicuous by its absence. The fluctuations in the value of the monetary unit have been enormous, and at the time of my visit had touched almost as low a point as has ever been reached. In Tavernier's time, in the middle of the seventeenth century, a *toman* was equal to fifteen French crowns or forty-six livres (a livre was about 1*s.* 6*d.*). Chardin, a little later, under Shah Suleiman, gave the value of the *toman* as from forty-five to fifty livres, or 3*l.* 10*s.* in English money. Early in the following century Krusinski returned its value as sixty livres or twenty crowns. Then came the overthrow of the Sefavi dynasty, the invasion of the Afghans, the reign of Nadir Shah, and the general anarchy and dislocation consequent upon his death. At the beginning of this century, when security had been re-established under the Kajar dynasty, Malcolm gave the value of the *toman* as 1*l.* Between 1820 and 1830 Fraser valued it at 11*s.* Since then the value has fluctuated, but with a general inclination to fall. In 1874 the *toman* was worth ten francs

or 8*s*. In 1889–90, when I was in Persia, it had sunk at one moment to 5½*s*. The rise in the price of silver has since raised it to over 6*s*.

Government Mint

Formerly there was a Government Mint at nearly every big town in Persia—at Hamadan, Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan, Kerman, Meshed, Kermanshah, Resht, Astrabad, Kum, and in Mazanderan and Seistan—and the antiquated products of these local mints are still sometimes encountered.[1] This haphazard system was a great encouragement to forgery, and there was quite a brisk manufacture of spurious coins, the Government being finally compelled to call in the whole of the old hammer-struck currency. It was in 1865 that the reigning Shah, having been persuaded by some interested individual to recoin the currency on the European system, instructed his minister at Paris to purchase the necessary machinery and to engage French engineers. The men duly arrived at Teheran, but the machinery, the packing-cases of which had already been consumed as fuel for the steamer that brought it, was deposited upon the sand at Enzeli, where it lay and rotted, no beasts of burden being strong enough to carry the big boilers and wheels, and the Shah's elephant being even found unequal to the task. These misfortunes delayed for some time the execution of the projected scheme; and it was not till 1877 that the new coinage appeared, a large building on the northern outskirts of Teheran, which had been unsuccessfully tried as a cotton factory, having been converted into the Royal Mint. This establishment, which possesses a German overseer and French dies, and is under the control of the Amin-es-Sultan, is now the sole mint in Persia.

Modern currency

In my volume of appendices will be found a table of the coins issued by the Government Mint. The silver *kran* is the monetary unit. Originally it weighed eighty-three grains, then it was reduced to seventy-seven grains, now it weighs seventy-one grains. The proportion of fine silver was originally ninety-five per cent.; that is, the *kran* contained only five per cent. of alloy. The gold *toman* also contained the same original proportion of pure metal —viz., ninety-five per cent. Later on this was reduced in the silver *kran* to ninety-two per cent., and subsequently again to ninety per cent., at which figure the ratio now nominally

[1] The old *krans* remain the basis of the coinage in Persia; and the Imperial Bank has been compelled to make its notes payable in the old currency, since the new *krans* have been at a constant premium.

stands. The Master of the Mint, however, who pays 5,000 *tomans* a year for the concession, and is allowed to take five per cent. *seigneurage* on whatever he coins, is not to be cheated of his sly personal *mudakhil* in addition; and the actual proportion in the case of the silver coinage was, in 1889, 891⅔ in every 1,000, in the gold coinage 885½, the remainder being copper alloy. Originally this individual paid a much larger sum for the concession, and realised a handsome profit out of the copper currency. But, in consequence of the scandalous depreciation, this prerogative was taken from him.[1]

Circulation of gold

Owing principally to the great excess of imports over exports which existed till within recent years, but which is now being slowly redressed, gold may be said to have disappeared from circulation. Silver at one time became exceedingly scarce. The Persian Government, becoming much alarmed, conceived the delicious idea of prohibiting the export of the precious metals; but this design was, fortunately, not proceeded with. The gold pieces nominally in circulation are coins of a quarter, half, one, two, five, and ten *tomans*. To such a point had the appreciation risen, that I found that one of the last-named coins, nominally equivalent to 100 *krans*, could not be purchased for less than 145 *krans* in Teheran, a premium of nearly fifty per cent.

Need of European banks

The abuses and drawbacks of the Persian monetary system, and, indeed, of all mercantile transactions in that country, have long rendered the introduction of banks managed upon the European plan a *sine qua non* of any material improvement on a large scale. Of the fluctuations in exchange and scarcity of money I have already spoken. Another drawback was the unequal distribution at any given moment of the precious metals, and the enormous cost of the transport of specie, which could only be carried at much expense on the backs of beasts of burden. Merchants experienced the greatest difficulty and risk in making remittances to Europe. Small cliques of native money-jobbers controlled the market in the provincial towns. Native capital was frightened away from any enterprise of public advantage by the distrust attending all investment. Still worse was the practice of hoarding pursued by every man of wealth, from the Shah downwards. Nothing could demonstrate the retrograde

[1] In December 1889, however, he procured a renewal of the right to coin copper money for an experimental period of six months, and the farm price was increased to the rate of 25,000 *tomans* per annum.

condition of Persian finance more effectively than the exorbitant rate of interest cheerfully paid to native usurers. Legal interest is limited by the Koran to twelve per cent.; but, in the middle of the century, Lady Sheil recorded that 'it seldom amounts to less than twenty-five, and often reaches fifty, sixty, or one hundred per cent.' For loans of ready money, native bankers could, till a year or two ago, easily procure two per cent. per month, settled monthly, i.e. twenty-nine per cent. per annum. Private money-lenders exacted a good deal more.

New Oriental Bank

Such, in outline, was the state of Persian finance when, in 1888, the New Oriental Bank Corporation decided to include Persia within the sphere of its Asiatic operations, and opened branches or established agencies in Teheran, Meshed, Tabriz, Resht, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Bushire. As a trading company, dealing in a branch of commerce open to all, it required no special concession from the Persian Government. Renting a palatial building occupying one entire side of the Meidan-i-Tupkhaneh in the capital, after only a year's existence it already, at the time of my visit, did a considerable business both there and in the provinces. The Persians were beginning to understand the meaning of a deposit account and the value of a fixed and certain interest upon their savings. The bank paid two and a half per cent. on current accounts, four per cent. on those running for six months, and six per cent. on yearly deposits. It had already lowered the rate of interest on loans to twelve per cent., and was reported to have lent money to the Shah at from six to eight per cent. The Oriental Bank had also introduced and familiarised the natives with a form of paper money, in the shape of cashier's orders, for sums from five *krans* upward, payable to the bearer, which enjoyed a considerable circulation in the capital. After an existence of two years, the Persian branch of the Corporation was bought out for a substantial sum by the new Imperial Bank of Persia, which, entering upon the scene under the most favourable auspices, and with a wider ambition, rendered competition even less desirable to others than to itself. The Imperial Bank now reigns supreme.

It was on January 30, 1889, that the Shah signed the preliminary concession in favour of Baron de Reuter for the Imperial Bank of Persia. That this concession was in some sort an *amende honorable* to that gentleman for the scurvy treatment he had received in respect of the famous Reuter Concession of 1872, was

evident both by the new agreement being made out in his favour, and also by a clause in one of its articles, which provided for the repayment to Baron de Reuter of the sum of 40,000*l.*, deposited by him as caution money for the first undertaking, and illegally confiscated by the Persian Government in 1873. Appendices and additional articles were added to the new concession up till the end of July 1889. In August the British Government granted a Royal Charter of Incorporation for thirty years to the Bank thus formed. In October the prospectus appeared in London, and subscriptions were invited; and so great was the confidence in the undertaking that, within a few hours of the date of issue, the capital, amounting to 1,000,000*l.*, was subscribed fifteen times over.

Imperial Bank of Persia

I shall print in my supplemental volume a copy of the original concession to the Imperial Bank, and will, therefore, content myself here with noticing only its more important provisions. The concession was for a period of sixty years, dating from January 1889. The key-note of a future policy which, if interpreted with enterprise and liberality, may result in the inauguration of commercial undertakings on a large scale, independent of banking proper, was struck in the very first article, which contained these significant words: 'In order to develop the commerce and increase the riches of Persia, the Imperial Bank, outside any operations which appertain to a financial institution, may undertake on its own account, or on account of third parties, all matters financial, industrial, or commercial, which it may think advantageous to this end, on the condition, however, that none of these enterprises be contrary to treaties, laws, usages, or the religion of the country, and that previous notice thereof be given to the Persian Government.' Article 2 fixed the capital of the bank at four millions sterling, of which the first series, in shares to bearer, was to amount to one million, in 100,000 shares of 10*l.* each. Article 3 related to bank-notes, to which I must devote a separate paragraph. In Article 7 appeared the *quid pro quo* (apart from the price paid for the concession itself) exacted by the Persian Government, viz. 6 per cent. of the net profits of the bank in each year, such sum never to be less than 4,000*l.* Articles 11, 12, and 13 were among the most important of the whole series, inasmuch as they conceded to the bank, with certain stipulated exceptions, the right to work the mineral resources of Persia, currently believed to be very con-

Terms of concession

siderable, although hitherto most inadequately explored. Article 11 ran as follows: 'The Imperial Bank being ready to incur forthwith the sacrifices necessary for developing the resources of the country by the exploitation of its natural riches, the Persian Government grants to the said bank, for the term of the present concession, the exclusive right of working throughout the Empire the iron, copper, lead, mercury, coal, petroleum, manganese, borax, and asbestos mines which belong to the State, and which have not already been ceded to others. The Persian Government shall, as an appendix to this concession, deliver to the Baron de Reuter, on the day of the signature of these presents, an official list of mines already ceded. The gold and silver mines and mines of precious stones belong exclusively to the State, and should the engineers of the bank discover any such they must immediately notify the same to the Government of his Imperial Majesty the Shah. Excepting the necessary engineers and foremen, all the workmen engaged on the mines must be subjects of his Imperial Majesty the Shah. The Persian Government shall assist the bank by all the means in its power to obtain workmen at the current wage of the country. All mines which the bank has not commenced working within ten years of its formation shall be deemed to have been abandoned by it, and the State may dispose of the same without consulting the bank.' Article 12 promised that the lands necessary for working the mines should, if on State domain, be given free, whilst, if they belonged to private individuals, the Government should co-operate in getting them for the bank on the most favourable terms. No import duty was to be charged on the necessary materials, and the lands and buildings should be exempt from all taxes. Article 13 fixed the share of the Government in the profits of the mines at 16 per cent., and also that 'on the expiry of the term of the present concession, the mines, with their lands, buildings, accessory constructions, and plants, should revert to the Persian Government according to the most favourable rules and regulations generally adopted by other Powers who have stipulated in this behalf.'

How this extensive and important mining concession, amounting to the command of the mineral resources of Persia, was disposed of by the Imperial Bank, how a Corporation was specially formed in London for its purchase and for the execution of its terms, what steps have since been taken by the company so constituted for the exploration or exploitation of Persian mines, and what success

has so far attended, or may be expected to attend, their labours—all these are questions which will more appropriately find an answer in a later chapter dealing with the natural resources of Persia. I here turn to the history of the bank since its formation, and proceed to show how, up till the present time (winter of 1891–2), it has sustained the expectations of its founders or justified the confidence of its shareholders.[1]

Opening of premises

At the time of my visit to Teheran, the Imperial Bank had just commenced business, having acquired premises in the street wherein stands the British Legation. A competent manager had been secured in the person of Mr. Rabino, a gentleman long and honourably connected with the Crédit Lyonnais in Cairo; and the relations of the bank with the Persian Government were in the capable hands of General Houtum Schindler, whom my readers will long ago have learnt to regard as a sort of *deus ex machina* required to assist in the solution of most Persian problems. Early in 1890 the directorate of the bank came to terms with the New Oriental Bank Corporation, of which I have already spoken, and for the sum of 20,000*l.* purchased the lease of their premises in Teheran, as well as the Corporation's goodwill, furniture, appointments, &c.

Monopoly of bank notes

I have previously mentioned among the rights conceded by the Shah to the Imperial Bank, the monopoly of issuing bank notes. Article 3 stipulated that the amount so issued should not exceed 800,000*l.* without the knowledge and assent of the Persian Government; and that for two years the bank should keep a cover in specie of fifty per cent., and afterwards of thirty-three per cent.

Ancient experiment of the Mongol

This is not the first time in history that bank notes have been introduced into Persia. Just 600 years ago the scheme was attempted by one of the Mongol sovereigns of the house of Jenghiz Khan, who succeeded that conqueror upon the throne of Iran. This was Kei Khatu (1291–94 A.D.), the brother of Arghun Khan, or Argawan Shah, and grandson of Hulaku Khan. It was he who was ruler in Persia when Marco Polo came from the distant court of Kublai Khan with the Tartar bride intended for his brother. Kei Khatu had heard

[1] *Vide* a most valuable paper on 'Banking in Persia,' by J. Rabino, with notes by A. H. Schindler, read before the Institute of Bankers in December 1891. An extract from it is quoted at the end of this chapter.

of the attempt made by Thai-tsu of the Sung Dynasty to introduce paper money into China three centuries before, and of its revival in that country within the last fifty years; a proceeding with which we have been rendered familiar by the writings of the learned Venetian, and of Ibn Batutah, the Moor of Tangier. The Persian Mongol, finding himself over two millions sterling in debt, conceived the bright idea that, by issuing a paper currency, which would be bought by his faithful subjects, all the gold and silver in the kingdom would flow into the royal exchequer; while the paper would become the universal medium of exchange. For this purpose a royal edict was issued, forbidding the circulation of the precious metals as currency. Banks, called, after the Chinese name, *Chow-khaneh*, were erected at Tabriz and other places; and notes, or *Chow*, were issued for sums varying from ¾*d.* to 4*s.* 7*d.*, bearing a Mohammedan inscription and the value written in a circle upon them, and the imperial mandate to accept this novel currency. The subjects of Kei Khatu were, however, less docile or more wide-awake than he had anticipated. A howl of universal execration greeted the promulgation of the scheme; the minister who had suggested it was torn to pieces by an infuriated mob; and within three days the decree was repealed, and the first Persian experiment of paper money ignominiously expired.

Warned by this example, or timorous of empirical finance, no subsequent Persian sovereign repeated the experiment of the Mongol.

Modern opinion

Indeed, in the present century, the introduction of the Russian paper rouble into Persia was regarded with the gravest suspicion by the ruling powers as an insidious attempt to drain the country of its silver and gold. So strong did this feeling become that, in 1883, the Shah actually issued a royal edict which declared that 'the people are very foolish who take dirty pieces of paper for gold and silver, and in future all Russian rouble notes will be confiscated.' Like many royal decrees, this was fortunately allowed to become a dead letter almost as soon as promulgated.

It is, therefore, in the face of inauspicious historical omens, and among a people and court whose ideas of finance are rudimentary,

Notes of the Imperial Bank

that the Imperial Bank has started upon this part of its programme. Some time was spent in selecting a suitable and handsome design; and in 1890 the new bank notes, having a Persian inscription with the badge of the Lion and the Sun on one side, and an English inscription with the

Shah's portrait on the other, and representing values of from one to 1,000 *tomans*, were issued. One of the first discoveries made by the bank was that these notes were bought up by wealthy men and hidden away, a purpose for which they were better adapted, in bulk and weight, than coined money. This was an unexpected development of the Persian passion for hoarding. It is as yet too early to say how the experiment of paper money will eventuate. I understand that the bank notes of the provincial towns are only payable on the spot, and are not interchangeable elsewhere, the reason being that the bank gets a commission on the transfer. This may, perhaps, stand in the way of an immediately wide circulation.

First year of existence

At the end of the first year of its existence (September 1890), the directors of the bank were enabled to present a satisfactory report to their shareholders. The net profits realised, after paying all charges and deducting interest paid and due, were nearly 68,000*l.*, and justified the board in declaring a dividend equal to eight per cent. on the capital paid up from the date of payment. Branches or agencies of the bank have been opened, in addition to London and Teheran, at Tabriz, Resht, Meshed, Isfahan, Shiraz, Bushire, Kermanshah, Baghdad, Busrah, and Bombay; and the bank has already taken its place as a great national institution, affecting and absorbing the financial interests of Persia. It is employed by the Persian Government as a vehicle for the receipts of revenue and payment of expenditure, and for general financial purposes; and by most foreign governments having relations with Persia, for the discharge of their necessary business. By the natives it is already much used as a channel for mercantile transactions, and has appreciably benefited commerce by the issue of advances against merchandise, bills of lading, etc. The deposits made with the bank doubled in the first six months what the New Oriental Bank Corporation had received in the whole year of its existence, and have since risen to five and sixfold the amount. Similarly, the business done in loans to natives upon security was doubled in the first eight months; and the normal rate of interest has sunk to less than half of its previous figure. Nor has the effect been less noticeable upon the fluctuations of the money market arising from the shifting rates of exchange. In a country possessing a silver currency there will always be a certain movement arising from the rise or fall in price of the precious metal; but the more violent oscillations due to the speculations of private

exchange agents, and to other causes, have been remedied, and a far greater steadiness may be predicated of the Persian money market as a whole. The report at the end of the second year (September 1891) did not, perhaps, fully answer the expectations that had been formed; but substantial progress was recorded, and a dividend equal to five per cent. was declared. It is to be hoped that the bank will, before long, acquire control of the mint, in order to secure an efficient currency and to put an end to the reactionary abuses of the present system.

The Reuter Concession of 1872

I have had occasion to mention the original and famous Reuter Concession of 1872, which produced such a sensation in Europe; and both in order that a contrast may be drawn between its provisions and those of the Imperial Bank's concession, and as the most conspicuous historical sample of the fortuitous fashion in which Persia seeks redemption, I may here be permitted to recapitulate what were its leading features. As a railway scheme I shall not now notice it, though the construction of a Grand Trunk Railway through Persia, and the monopoly of all future railroads in the country, were among its most important features, reserving any remarks upon that head for a future chapter. The Reuter scheme was the culminating product of a phase of sincere and zealous Anglophilism at Teheran. Designed as the crowning act of the policy of Mirza Husein Khan, the powerful Sadr Azem, or Grand Vizier, who then guided the councils of the Shah, it summed up a programme which, in the words of Sir H. Rawlinson,[1] 'was aimed at the regeneration of Persia through the identification of her interests with those of Great Britain.' The concession was dated July 25, 1872. When published to the world, it was found to contain the most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamed of, much less accomplished, in history. Exclusive of the clauses referring to railroads and tramways, which conferred an absolute monopoly of both those undertakings upon Baron de Reuter for the space of seventy years, the concession also handed over to him the exclusive working for the same period of all Persian mines, except those of gold, silver, and precious stones; the monopoly of the government forests, all uncultivated land being embraced under that designation; the

[1] By far the best account of the Reuter Concession is to be found in his *England and Russia in the East*, pp. 122–8.

exclusive construction of canals, *kanats*, and irrigation works of every description; the first refusal of a national bank, and of all future enterprises connected with the introduction of roads, telegraphs, mills, factories, workshops, and public works of every description; and a farm of the entire customs of the empire for a period of twenty-five years from March 1, 1874, upon payment to the Shah of a stipulated sum for the first five years, and of an additional sixty per cent. of the net revenue for the remaining twenty. With respect to the other profits, twenty per cent. of those accruing from railways, and fifteen per cent. of those derived from all other sources, were reserved for the Persian Government. Such was the amazing document that fell like a bombshell upon Europe just before the Shah started upon his first foreign journey in 1873.[1]

Its rescission

The subsequent history of this colossal but impossible undertaking is well known and may be briefly summarised. In the Shah's absence in Europe, time and opportunity were given for the marshalling in hostile array of all the reactionary, or fanatical, or, as a Persian might say, patriotic forces in the country. In England the Shah found that but a lukewarm reception had been given to the scheme, the possible political complications arising from which more than counterbalanced, in the eyes of the British Government, and of public opinion in general, the advantages which it conferred. But the *coup de grâce* to the project was in reality dealt at St. Petersburg. Naturally indignant at a concession which handed over to her rival the entire resources of which she had long contemplated, or at least coveted, the future reversion, and firmly convinced (the conviction was utterly devoid of foundation) that the British Government was at the back of Baron de Reuter and had insidiously inspired the whole scheme, Russia adopted an attitude of resentment mingled with menace, that, in the absence of any reassuring counterblast from Downing Street, effectually frightened the Shah, and settled the fate of the too precocious bantling of Baron de Reuter. It did not much matter, in a country and with a government like Persia, what excuse was forthcoming to justify the revocation that was decided upon; and when the Baron's caution money was, after the Shah's return to Persia, rudely confiscated, on the technical ground that the works had not been commenced

[1] For an abstract of the Reuter Concession, *vide* Appendix to Rawlinson's work.

within the fifteen months stipulated by Article 8 of the Concession,[1] it was felt that the Persian Government had adopted a convenient, even if an illegal, way of escape from an impossible situation. The Baron, who had every right to complain of ill-usage, continued to make appeals and claims for compensation; but until the reparatory clause inserted in the Imperial Bank Concession sixteen years later, these met with no response.

Reasons of failure

It must be obvious to all impartial critics, both that the Reuter Concession was doomed to failure from its birth and also that its demise was not, on the whole, to be regretted in the interests of Persia. The scheme was overweighted *ab initio*. No individual, nor even any company, would have been capable of carrying even a moiety of it into execution. As Sir H. Rawlinson observes:—

> It was only under the possible agreement of the European Powers to the neutralisation of Persia, the Shah's dominions forming a sort of Asiatic Belgium, that the working of the Concession—by means, perhaps, of a great international company or commission—would have been at all practicable; and although this idea was mooted, and is understood to have received some consideration at Berlin and Vienna, it may be well understood that where the interests of England and Russia were strong, immediate, and conflicting, the prospect of any joint action or acceptance of mutual responsibility was altogether visionary.

As a matter of fact, the commercial world was completely staggered by the proposal; and Baron de Reuter found that, without a Government guarantee, he could neither raise the loan of 6,000,000*l.* stipulated by Article 16 of the agreement in the London market, nor constitute a company for working the Concession. The political objections to the scheme were great and formidable. Its execution would have involved Great Britain and Russia in a perpetual and unseemly strife in Persia, and might have produced serious international embarrassment. But stronger, in my judgment, than any other objection, was the fact that it involved the complete abroga-

[1] This article said, 'Should the works not be begun within fifteen months of the date of the Concession, the caution money will be forfeited to the Persian Government.' Baron de Reuter contended that he had fulfilled these conditions by commencing the earthwork for the railway from Resht, the permanent way of which was completed for a short distance. The Persian Government, on their side, contended that the terms were broken because no rails had been laid and no mines opened.

tion of a nation's birthright in favour of foreign speculators. We have seen in other and contemporaneous cases enough of the evil effects of a country or a people sustained and exploited by foreign capitalists, and falling a prey to successive gangs of selfish adventurers—according as subconcessions are granted in a descending scale by the parent government or company—to know that it is not by such methods that national stability is built up. Persia may be, and is, deplorably infirm; but she will never be able to stand if she voluntarily surrenders the use of all her limbs. Her regeneration must doubtless be worked out by foreign aid, and to some extent by foreign capital—as is now being attempted—but native enterprise, native industry, and native resources must play some part in the undertaking, or an artificial redemption will only have been achieved at the cost of national atrophy. England would seemingly have been placed in a position of overwhelming political preponderance by the realisation of the Reuter Concession. But it would have been at the expense of the best interests of Persia, and since it is one of the objects of this book to show that Persian interests are British interests, or, in other words, that a strong Persia should be the object of British diplomacy, we may congratulate ourselves that a scheme which postulated the reduction of that country to impotence broke down.

Concession-mongers

It was said at the time of the Reuter Concession that one of the reasons for confiding powers so enormous to a single individual or to a single company, was the desire of the Persian Government to escape from the conflicting offers of a horde of foreign speculators, who, ever since the opening of the Indo-European Telegraph in 1865, had settled down upon Persia, and were clamouring for a share in the division of the spoils. For a time the collapse of the Reuter scheme frightened away these harpies; but as confidence was re-established, and more especially when, under the friendly pressure of the British Government, concessions such as those for the navigation of the Karun river and the Imperial Bank were granted, they began to reassemble; and on the return of the Shah from his last European journey a crowd of these interested applicants descended like a flight of locusts upon Teheran. The air was full of rumours of concessions for the exclusive introduction, or manufacture, or growth of wine, sugar, glass, telephones, electric light, and in one instance for a monopoly of all agricultural produce! To a temperament and to tastes such as those of

the Shah, these proposals are peculiarly seductive; for, in any case, they mean the payment of a lump sum down to his own account; if successful, they augment the annual revenue; and if the reverse, they only implicate foreigners in failure.

Whilst applauding the policy of assisting Persia by foreign capital where she cannot assist herself, and in enterprises of unquestioned stability, I am of opinion that she is more likely to lose than to gain from the indiscriminate gift of commercial concessions, and that her best advisers should check any premature zeal in this direction. The first concessionary usually thinks of little but selling his monopoly, and realising a good profit for himself. He is not uncommonly an adventurer, and sometimes a rogue. By the failure of such bogus undertakings, good capital is frightened away from the country, and the natives themselves form an unfavourable impression of European conduct and honesty. The internal development of Persia will fare much better if it follows the broad lines of road and railroad extension, rather than imperil its chances by grotesque monopolies and fanciful concessions to vagrant *chevaliers d'industrie.*

Recent schemes

An unfortunate, but significant, illustration of the truth of the above remarks, which appeared originally in the 'Times,' was afforded by a case that occurred almost simultaneously with my visit to Persia. One among the numerous concessions of the class that I have described had been granted by the Shah—who had received his *douceur*—for the introduction, *inter alia*, of State lotteries into Persia; but this concession had subsequently been cancelled in consequence of the inclusion of other and less desirable items in its terms. In apparent ignorance of these facts, the concession was disposed of to a syndicate, and again passed on to a company (the Persian Investment Corporation), whose final collapse agitated the London market in 1890; the result of the entire series of transactions, the moral blame of which I do not pretend to distribute, being that a great shock was given to Persian credit and that capital was scared away from Persian investment. Hence it arose that, when in the autumn of the same year a large scheme was brought out for the formation of the 'Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia,' to acquire and work a concession for a monopoly of the purchase, sale, and manufacture of the entire tobacco crop of the Persian Empire, this project, though warmly commended by high authorities and possessing many

features of probable advantage, did not at once secure the anticipated support.[1] I am myself aware of many other inchoate or abortive schemes for the exploitation of various of the natural resources of Persia, in each of which cases the concession has been granted and *paid for*, but the further progress of which has been arrested by the sense of insecurity developed by past proceedings. I cannot, as a friend of Persia, too strongly reiterate my conviction that this headlong signing away of the country's assets, in return for a cash payment, to all the knights-errant of speculation whose quest may lead them to Teheran, is a policy fraught neither with principle, patriotism, nor ulterior profit.

Roads in the East

Among the evidences of civilisation that have been, or are capable of being, introduced into Persia, a prominent place must be assigned to roads. Truth, unfortunately, compels the discussion of this question to be couched as yet in the future and potential, rather than in the past or present tenses; but this phenomenon holds good of so many Persian institutions, as to require neither explanation nor apology. I have more than once pointed, as one of the most conspicuous characteristics of the East, to the total absence of anything corresponding to what we call roads; and yet, such is either the poverty or the tyranny of the English vocabulary, I find myself frequently using, and I observe that others frequently use, that term to describe what is no more than a foot-track beaten by the hoofs of horses, donkeys, and mules. Occasionally a great Eastern sovereign of the past has immortalised his name by constructing a paved causeway between important cities of his dominions (such was Shah Abbas' Causeway through Gilan and Mazanderan, and the Atabegs' road, probably the survival of an earlier Sassanian construction, from Arabistan to Fars); but, as a rule, roads may be classified as an institution unknown from early times to the East, until introduced by a European conqueror. The Romans were the road-makers of the ancient world. The British are their heirs in the modern. The French have constructed some admirable roads in their foreign and colonial possessions. The Russians, though painfully in arrears, are slowly, and at an immense distance, following suit. But in no

[1] Later on, the capital having been raised, business commenced, but was greatly impeded by native hostility, directed and aggravated by the *mullahs*, who even placed an interdict on the use of the pipe. The agitation at length became so serious that the Shah was forced to give way, and in January 1892, cancelled the entire concession, promising pecuniary compensation for the rupture of contract.

Eastern country, within my knowledge, where these influences have not been felt, do the recognised and most populous highways of communication, though, perhaps, as in the case of pilgrim routes, trodden by hundreds of thousands, correspond to what we should term a road, that is, a track artificially prepared, levelled, and metalled; and in Persia, least perhaps of any among the important and frequented countries of Asia, is there plausible excuse for the employment of the term.

Need in Persia

The need of roads for Persia has been long seen. No one who has laboriously travelled over that country, by postal service or by caravan, or who has witnessed the tedious and expensive transport of merchandise on the backs of camels or mules, but sighs for the intelligence or the enterprise that will set on foot this most elementary and indispensable of innovations. The quick eye of Sir John Malcolm at the beginning of the century detected the need; and his bluff candour as soon communicated the discovery to the Persian Ministers. But let him speak for himself:—

> The wisdom which prompted this advice was lauded to the skies. Roads were admitted to be a great and obvious improvement, at once ornamental and profitable to Persia. Plans for making and keeping them in repair were required and furnished. The royal mandate, the Elchi was told, should be issued immediately; and he was much pleased at the thought of having given rise to a measure so good, and which he considered as preparing the way for the permanent improvement of the country. . . . 'But you know Persia,' was the concluding observation of the Amin-ed-Dowleh, Minister of Finance, on the scheme.[1]

Yes, the Amin-ed-Dowleh was right; and a far inferior knowledge of Persia to that which he possessed might have taught the sanguine plenipotentiary that roads would not come in his time. It is eighty years since Malcolm was in Persia; and a chorus of later travellers has swollen alike the advice and the lament. Here, therefore, we may reasonably pause and note both what has been done, and what is still projected, for the supply of this classic and venerable need.

Existing carriage roads

In 1889 Persia possessed only two carriageable roads of any extent. These were the roads from Kazvin to Teheran, and from Teheran to Kum, each between ninety and a hundred miles in length. Upon the former alone is organised a service of *telegas* and *tarantasses*, after the Russian fashion,

[1] *Sketches of Persia*, vol. ii. p. 231.

and a series of post-houses, superior in equipment to any of the *chapar* stations, at intervals of from fifteen to twenty miles. This road, of which I have previously spoken in Chapter II., cost a sum officially returned at 87,000 *tomans*, or about 25,000*l.*, but alleged in reality to have mounted to more than double that total. It is unmetalled, and would not provoke the encomiums of a European engineer. The Teheran-Kum road, which was constructed in 1883, is said, after the experience gained upon its predecessor, to have cost much less, viz. road and six caravanserais upon it, 35,000 *tomans*;[1] but, having ridden over part of it, I can aver that the road-making must have been of the most meagre description; for nothing appeared to have been done beyond the marking out of a straight track, with a ditch on either side, and the removal of the loose stones encumbering the space thus enclosed. To these two roads must be added that from Baj Girha, on the Russian frontier near Ashkabad, viâ Kuchan to Meshed, which I have elsewhere described at length, and which, having now attained completion, raises to the dignified total of three the carriageable highways of Persia.

Minor roads

To these must be added a limited number of roads in the suburbs of Teheran, mostly conducting to favourite country residences of the Shah, and accordingly levelled so as to admit of the equipages that transport the royal harem. Of these there are three, affording the solitary possible drives to the residents in the capital. The straight and ugly road, lined with an avenue of trees, that leads to Doshan Tepe, was made after the Shah's first visit to Europe, in 1874, and was opened with great ceremonial and with public rejoicing, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mirza Husein Khan, receiving the proud title of Sipah Salar, or Commander-in-Chief, in honour of the occasion. In the succeeding year, with a similar flourish of trumpets, was opened the scarcely longer road that conducts from the Southern Gate to the shrine and village of Shah Abdul Azim. The third suburban road is that leading to Gulahek, which is monotonously familiar to the members of the British Legation.

Among minor routes, to construct or repair which some effort has at one time or another been made, must be mentioned the roads from Resht to Pir-i-Bazaar, and from Tabriz to Julfa.

[1] The caravanserais, five upon the road and one at Kum, are rented by the Amin-es-Sultan for the sum of 600 *tomans* or 170*l.* a year.

These are accessible to vehicles, but are unworthy of any more lavish praise.

I have in my previous volume so fully described the features of the postal or *chapar* service that I need not here recapitulate its characteristics. The *chapar* roads are in no sense of the term made roads; they are superior caravan tracks; and although on the flat, gravelly plains they are often as level as Pall Mall,[1] yet they are commonly strewn with stones and boulders, and in the mountain passes are little more than furrows or ruts. The *chapar* routes in Persia are as follows:

Chapar routes

Teheran to Khanikin	Kazvin to Resht
Teheran to Meshed	Hamadan to Sinna
Teheran to Sari	Hamadan to Khorremabad
Teheran to Tabriz	Teheran to Shiraz
Khoi to Sufian	Kashan to Yezd and Kerman
Julfa to Tabriz	

The remaining highways of Persia may be divided into two classes: caravan or mule tracks, upon which some, however slight, labour has at one time or other been spent, and those to which no labour has ever been devoted at all. Samples of the former are the mountain road leading from Teheran through Mazanderan to Meshed-i-Ser on the Caspian, and the execrable ladder-road from Bushire to Shiraz. To the second class belongs every other track in Persia that has been more or less worn by the feet of beasts of burden passing from town to town or village to village. The distinguishing features of all these pack-roads are a superabundance of loose, jagged stones, the most impossible gradients in steep places, an utter disregard of improvements so elementary that they might be effected for a few pounds, and the universal decay of bridges, caravanserais, and public works.

Pack roads

So much for the existing routes. Under the auspices of the Imperial Bank of Persia, an attempt is now being made to supply Persia, not merely with a carriageable road and transport service by carts, but with a new highway of entry into the country, penetrating as far as the capital, from the Southern sea. This is the long-projected and now finally

New Teheran-Shushter road

[1] Hence, in the dry season, it is possible for wheeled vehicles to travel upon them in many parts, though, as soon as a mountain pass is reached, the situation becomes critical. The Shah journeyed almost all the way to Baghdad, on his way to Kerbela in 1870, in a carriage; but the road was in the hands of workmen for months beforehand. In the whole of my *chapar* rides I did not encounter half a dozen vehicles.

commenced road between Teheran and Shushter, or Ahwaz, on the Karun, viâ Kum, Sultanabad, Burujird, and Khorremabad. A concession for this road for sixty years was granted by the Shah in 1889 to the Mushir-ed-Dowleh, and was acquired from him by the Imperial Bank, whose engineers have since prospected the line, and whose workmen are now engaged upon its construction. It is not improbable that a syndicate may be formed for the complete execution of this scheme. Its advantages have long been realised, and consist in the great reduction of distance effected between the Persian Gulf and the principal cities of Western Persia; in the corn-growing districts of immense but neglected capacity opened up; in the increased facilities that will be provided for the importation of British or Anglo-Indian merchandise into the interior; and in the use that is likely to be made of the road by the human stream of pilgrims who, by the hundred thousand, annually trudge along the Persian highways in movement towards the sacred goals of Kum, or Meshed in the east, and of Kerbela, Nejef, Kazimein, Samara, and, ultimately, Mecca in the south-west. The distances upon this road may roughly be calculated as follows:—

	Miles		Miles
Teheran to Kum	100	Khorremabad to Dizful	156
Kum to Sultanabad	80	Dizful to Shushter	36
Sultanabad to Burujird	60	Shushter to Ahwaz	52
Burujird to Khorremabad	63		

Upon this line, or at least upon the more level sections of it, a wagon service will be organised; the rivers, where necessary, will be bridged; caravanserais and guardhouses will be built; and from Burujird a branch road is to be constructed to Isfahan, a distance of 210 miles, thus bringing the southern capital into new connection both with the western centres of trade and population and with a fresh outlet on the Persian Gulf. This road, as will have been seen, is linked on the south to the water-way of the Karun river; and I must postpone to my chapter upon that subject any further discussion of its features, which I have here regarded only in their bearing upon the system of Persian communications in general.[1] It is calculated that Teheran

[1] For a more elaborate discussion of the advantages claimed by the new road, I may be permitted to refer my readers to Colonel Bell's article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1889, and to a paper by myself on 'The Karun River and Commercial Geography of South-West Persia,' in the *Proceedings of the R. G. S.*, Sept. 1890.

will thereby be brought within twelve days by caravan of the Persian Gulf, instead of the forty to fifty days that are the minimum now occupied by beasts of burden following the familiar mule-track *viâ* Shiraz from Bushire.

Lastly comes the heading of projected, discussed, or contemplated roads, a class which, whatever the ingredient commodity, is always well-stocked in Persia. In my chapter upon Azerbaijan, I have mentioned the long-talked-of, but as yet uncommenced, roads from Tabriz *viâ* Ardebil to Astara on the Caspian, and from the Turkish frontier at Bayazid *viâ* Khoi to Tabriz. The Shah is also willing to grant, or has already granted, concessions for wagon-roads from Teheran to Tabriz, from Tabriz to Julfa, and from Zinjan *viâ* Hamadan to Burujird. It goes without saying that all these roads, if constructed, would be of great advantage to the undeveloped resources of the country; although, in the present backward condition both of agriculture and population, some of them might not produce an immediate return, and others would be remunerative in different ratios. Political considerations will render some of these roads more favourable to British, others to Russian, ambition. Broadly speaking, roads from the north and north-west will benefit Russian commerce, and, if it ever arise, Russian aggression; roads from the south and south-west will benefit British influence. I prefer, however, not to regard this question from the outside-nation point of view, conceiving that the true interests to be regarded are those of Persia, and that to whatever schemes can be devised for the amelioration of that country, both Russia and England should lend a helping hand, opposing no obstacles of a purely selfish character, but extracting in friendly competition whatever of commercial advantage they can from that which is primarily beneficial to Iran.

Projected roads

It is, indeed, to the extension of roads, and at a future date of railroads (for the latter *vide* Chapter XVIII.), that the energies of all friends of Persia should be directed. They will be inclined to favour the one or the other method, according as their conception of the due rate of progress is slow or rapid. The more cautious spirit, whose motto is *Festina lente*, the eternal *Yavash* of the Persian vocabulary, declares that he will be content for the time being with the repair or construction of good cart roads between the various trading centres and from the sea-

Road-making policy

ports, with the removal of arbitrary restrictions upon commerce, and with the assurance of security to life and property upon the caravan routes. Later on he hopes for the gradual introduction of railways, commencing experimentally in the regions most likely to give a mercantile return, and extending by slow degrees throughout the country. The more impetuous nature would like to carry Persia by storm, to throw down her walls by trumpet-blast, and to open her doorways to the world by a network of railways, connecting with those of India, Turkey, and Russia, and transporting her at a bound into the van of civilised nations. A mean may very practically be discovered between the two ideas. The Persian Government may reasonably be pressed, or, if it be found unwilling, foreign capital may be enlisted, to undertake the proper opening up of the natural channels of communication. Did the Shah's Government show the least genuine earnestness in the matter, there is quite sufficient money in the country, without appealing to Europe for a sixpence, to initiate and to carry through these by no means costly undertakings. Persians possessed of means would be willing enough to invest in their own country, did they not feel that it was like throwing money down a *kanat*. The absence, however, of any State guarantee, and the general insecurity of property, prevent, and will probably continue to prevent, any such employment of native capital on a large scale. Until a better régime is inaugurated in the country, the necessity of foreign assistance will continue to be felt.

Messrs. Andreas and Stolze

It is noteworthy that Messrs. Andreas and Stolze, after their seven years' official or semi-official experience of Persia, concluded their *résumé* of the industrial condition of that country by the strongest possible recommendation of such road works as I have indicated or described. They said :—

The caravan tracks are designed only for beasts of burden, and are only passable by them with difficulty. Yet there is no doubt that it would be possible to discover roads upon which, with comparatively little improvement, large two-wheeled carts might pass from the coast to the mountain terraces and to the plateau proper. It would be of great advantage to have the goods remaining in the cart until they reach their destination, in place of the reckless daily unlading of the mules. In the second place, bales of over 75 kilos. have now to be transported on litters, and accordingly pay double carriage, while packages of more than 250 kilos. have to be hauled along by

manual labour, with the aid of rollers. On carts, weights up to at least 700 kilos. would be transportable. Such an undertaking under European control would be sure of the grandest success, enlarging, as it would, the market range of all the cheaper products at least threefold. The roads would doubtless require improvement, calling for outlay of capital. But be it remembered how cheap labour is in Persia, and how the material for road repair is everywhere to be had for nothing.[1]

Persian education

I have been surprised, in my studies of works on Persia, to note how small is the attention that has been bestowed by their writers upon the subject of the national education. With the conscious superiority of a civilised standard, it is simple enough to expose and to denounce the abuses of an Oriental system. But while complaining of the stupidity of the Persians for not at once recognising the beneficent contents of the cornucopia which is offered to them by Europe, ought not such critics to go a little further, and to examine the foundations of the system upon which is built up the fabric of national prejudice which it is so easy to condemn? Persian character may be obstinate, or retrograde, or perfidious, but, like every other character, it is the product of a system; and if we are to turn our batteries upon its walls, had we not better ascertain of what material they are made? I have even seen it stated—a rash generalisation from the universal existence of education of a sort, without regard to what sort—that the lower classes in Persia are the best educated in the East. A more grotesque paradox could not, I believe, be uttered. A mere ability to read and write the native language, however widespread it may be, acquaintance in the higher classes with the Koran or the Persian classics, carry with them no adaptation to a different life or to liberal propensities. Amid the heroic schemes which a hundred miracle-mongers propose for the revivification of the country no one seems to think of the schools, or to suggest that better teachers, a wider curriculum, different class books, are needed to make the next generation other than the present. A familiarity with the ways and standards of civilisation will breed an anxiety for a share in its advantages which no amount of diplomatic manipulation can implant. If I had any voice in the so-called regeneration of Persia, I would not bring out a company in London, but I would organise a *coup d'état* in the village schools.

[1] *Petermann's Mittheilungen*, 1885, pp. 54–6.

Let me, however, describe Persian education such as it is. In every town, city, and village in Persia there is some sort of school.

Primary schools

In the small villages it is often little more than a class held by a *mullah* in the parish mosque. Here the children are taught the Persian equivalent to the three R's; i.e., they are taught the Persian alphabet, the rudiments of arithmetic, and a parrot-knowledge of the Koran. By this phrase I mean that they learn to read, I should rather say to pronounce, the Arabic of the Scriptures, without the slightest inkling as to its meaning. Though all arrive at the power of reading the Persian alphabet, only a few attain to that of writing it. Hence the pride with which anyone who can both read and write passably prefixes the title *mirza* to his name. Among this class primary education is carried a step farther, inasmuch as it will embrace a slight knowledge of the national poetry, and an acquaintance with the art of rounded phrase and swelling trope, in which the Persian imagination loves to expand its infantile wings. But, as Dr. Wills says, in the majority of cases 'the repeating from memory of a few prayers and passages from the Koran, with some verses of poetry, is all that remains to a villager generally of his education.' Elementary education is, however, very cheap in Persia, the fees for attendance amounting only to from one to three *krans* (7*d.* to 1*s.* 9*d.*) per month for each child.

There are no higher schools or grammar schools in Persia in the English sense of the term. The only form of secondary education open to the masses, and that only to a limited section of them, is provided in the *madressehs*, or religious colleges, which are frequented by candidates for the three learned professions of the Church, law, and medicine. Here the curriculum is one of a peculiarly straitened character, for, as every Oriental believes that all human knowledge is summed up in the obsolete patchwork of Mohammedan science, but little outer light is permitted to dawn upon the inquirer's mind. The study of the text and commentaries of the Koran, deeper excursions into Persian literature, an absorption of the sterile nonsense that passes for philosophy in the East, and a respectful attention to the discourses of learned men—these are the duties and the results of *madresseh* education. In every town of any size are one or more of these establishments, many of them owning large incomes from endowments, and containing accommodation for tenfold the number of

Secondary education

students that they sustain. The Minister of Public Instruction has no authority over these colleges, and the management of their revenues is frequently abused by the priesthood.

Royal College at Teheran

In the field of education, however, as in other departments, the reign of Nasr-ed-Din has not passed without an effort, although, as in other cases, a curiously one-sided and restricted effort, to open to the youth of Persia the benefits of a European education. In the year of his accession, the Shah started at Teheran an institution known as the Madresseh-i-Shah, or Royal College, with a European curriculum, and foreign teachers. The premises are in the precincts of the Ark, and consist of a series of low one-storeyed buildings round a court planted as a garden. They contain a tolerable library and a concert-hall or theatre, where for a time amateur theatricals were given, until stopped by the hostility of the *mullahs*. The preparatory courses are in Persian and Arabic, taught by native masters. The higher branches comprise the learning of some foreign language, either English, French, Russian, or German; and tuition in mathematics, medicine, chemistry, drawing and painting, mineralogy, geography, instrumental music, and military science. The latter department, which is under two Prussian officers, will more appropriately be mentioned in a chapter dealing with the Army. At the time of my visit there were eight European teachers in the College, one English, three French, three German, and one Pole, Russian being taught by an Armenian of Julfa. There were seventy-five pupils in the military department, one hundred and forty in the science and art departments, and forty new comers. The division in the foreign classes was as follows: French, forty-five students; French *plus* drawing, eighty; Russian, twenty; English, thirty-seven. I visited most of the class-rooms on a working day, and was much interested by what I saw. In the French class, the pupils were invited to compose a short story in French, upon the nucleus of a few given ideas (*voyage*, *cheval*, *mal-à-la-tête*); to write French from dictation, Fénelon's 'Télémaque' being the text-book; and to translate from French into Persian. All these tasks they performed very creditably. In the geography class, where the maps in use have been drawn by Persians from English models, a pupil traced from memory a very respectable map of Europe upon a blackboard. In the drawing-class the models were European studies from the nude, classical heads and busts, drawings of Christ, pictures of

subjects as various as His Majesty the Shah, Andromeda, and Landseer's 'Challenge.' In the English classes, I also witnessed dictation, composition, and translation, elementary illustrated school manuals being employed, and the text-books in use being 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Baron Munchausen,' the latter of which I thought a somewhat dubious selection. I was informed that the majority of the pupils show an extraordinary aptitude for mathematics; and that in the other departments they are quick and receptive, but lazy. The chemistry branch has included the teaching of photography, and several of the best illustrations in these two volumes are from photographs taken by pupils of the Royal College.

Management and discipline

I made inquiries about the management and discipline of the college, and received the following replies. The institution is state-supported, and costs 30,000 *tomans* (8,500*l.*) per annum,[1] being under the direction of the Mukhber-ed-Dowleh, Minister of Public Instruction. It is open to all. Parents are not required to procure any nomination, but only leave from the head of the school. The pupils are entered at all ages, usually at ten or eleven, and remain for a period of six or seven years. The royal endowment, or foundation, consists in the free gift of two uniforms, or suits of clothes, annually, summer and winter, daily breakfast, a small premium as the reward of passing certain examinations, a medal on leaving, and sometimes nomination to a post in the Civil Service. The hours of work are from 8 A.M. to 3 P.M.; but there are frequent holidays for saints' days, and a vacation of some months in the summer, the working period not amounting to more than six months of the year. I was informed that the boys are more often idle than insubordinate. Punishments are assigned by the class teacher, but require to be confirmed by the head master. They are administered by a band of *ferashes* kept in attendance, and differ considerably from the European pattern. The lowest or simplest punishment is that of standing sentry with a shouldered gun, which is regarded as derogatory to self-respect. Next in order comes the cat-o'-nine-tails upon the back. Finally are 'the sticks,' or bastinado, a specified number of which are broken upon the soles of the feet. This, I heard, was the only punishment that is really feared.

[1] One of the teachers informed me, with a sigh, that the salaries frequently remained for a long time unpaid.

There is also a college, nominally on a similar plan, at Tabriz; but, in the absence of direct Royal supervision, it is ill-attended, and not much work is done. At Isfahan a college was opened by the Zil-es-Sultan, under the direction of a Persian officer who had passed the examination of an artillery lieutenant at Fontainebleau.

Provincial colleges

Such is the modest scope of liberal education that is open to the subjects of the Shah. The Royal College at Teheran is an excellent institution in its way, but, standing practically alone, it is on far too small a scale to have any appreciable effect in leavening the lump. It is disappointing to think that, in the forty years of the Shah's reign, more progress has not been made, and that, while the crumbs of European knowledge are dispensed to the few, the old, stale loaves of Mussulman lore are still thought food enough and to spare for the many.

Limited scope

Of the religion of Persia, of the precepts of the creed of Islam, and of the differences, ceremonial, practical, and dogmatic, between the Shiah and the Sunni persuasions, I purposely say nothing in this book. There are few writers on Persia who have not entertained their readers with disquisitions on the subject, and those who are desirous of the rudiments of information thereupon may confidently be referred to the pages of a score of writers infinitely better qualified to handle the matter than I. There are, however, three questions, closely connected with the state of religious feeling in Persia and possessing a peculiar interest for foreigners, upon which the majority of authors have either been silent or, at least, inadequate, and which, in a work dealing with contemporary thought and action, require to be mentioned. These are the present condition of the Babi movement, the attitude of Persia towards Christian missionary enterprise, and the state of religious toleration towards other non-Moslem persuasions. In each of these cases some clue may be found to the interpretation of modern Persian life, some straw to show which way the wind is setting in Iran.

Religious questions

Both about the history and the dogma of the Babi movement great confusion and much error have prevailed among European, and especially English, writers, of whom Binning and Markham, for instance, have gone conspicuously astray. The early history of a schism, particularly if visited with prompt persecution, is apt to become involved in mystery and to suffer

The Babi movement

serious perversion, in proportion as the current verdict is derived from the prejudices of the arraigned, but dominant, creed. Upon both aspects of the question, however, much light has been thrown by the researches and writings of Mr. E. G. Browne, a study of whose admirable essays, together with the writings of the Comte de Gobineau and others,[1] will enable any reader to form a coherent impression of the development and character of this remarkable heresy in the Mohammedan church. I shall consign to a footnote a summary of the early history of the schism,[2] and shall then

[1] I have compiled the following bibliography of Babism. Lady Sheil, *Glimpses of Life, &c.*, caps. xi., xviii.; Comte de Gobineau, *Religions et Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale*; R. G. Watson, *History of Persia*, caps. xi., xiii.; Mme. C. Serena, *Hommes et Choses en Perse*, caps. iv., v., vi., vii.; Mirza Kazim Beg, *Journal Asiatique*, 1866; C. Huart, *ibid.* 1887; Dorn, *Bull. de l'Acad. Imp. de St.-Pét.*, 1864–5; F. Pillon, *L'Année Philosophique*, 1869; Ethé, *Essays und Studien*, 1872; Baron V. Rosen, *Coll. de l'Inst. Or. de St.-Pét.* (Les Manuscrits Arabes, 1877; Les Manuscrits Persans, 1886); A. von Kremer, *Herrschenden Ideen des Islams*; E. G. Browne, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, art. vi. and xii., 1889; and the works of Benjamin (cap. xii.), Dieulafoy (pp. 77–84), and Binder.

[2] Mirza Ali Mahommed, the Bab, was the son of a grocer of Shiraz, and was born in the year 1819 or 1820. From early years he was addicted to metaphysics and theology, and, being sent by his father to manage his business at Bushire, soon started upon the pilgrimage to Mecca, on his return from which he became a pupil of Haji Seyid Kazim at Kerbela. Upon the death of the latter, he returned to Bushire, where he presently announced his pretensions to the leadership of the sect formed by his master, and was accepted as a prophet by Mullah Husein of Bushrawieh, who became one of his most zealous disciples. The date of his Zuhur or manifestation was May 23, 1844. At Bushire he continued to preach in the mosques and public places, attacking the *mullahs*, and, in defence of his claims to miraculous powers, exposing himself bareheaded to the rays of the noontide sun. He now assumed the title of the *Bab*, or gate, through whom knowledge of the Twelfth Imam Mahdi could alone be attained. His pretensions undoubtedly became more extravagant as time proceeded, and he successively announced himself as the Mahdi, as a re-incarnation of the Prophet, and as a Revelation or Incarnation of God himself. His disciples now carried his faith, with a missionary energy that scorned persecution, far and wide through Iran. They were imprisoned, proscribed, tortured, hunted, and slain. Foremost among their number were Mullah Husein, before mentioned, and Mullah Mohammed Ali of Barfurush, who, at the head of a band of devoted followers, sustained a protracted siege against the Shah's troops in Mazanderan, until they were at length exterminated in 1849. Beauty and the female sex also lent their consecration to the new creed, and the heroism of the lovely but ill-fated poetess of Kazvin, Zerin Taj (Crown of Gold), or Kurrat-el-Ain (Solace of the Eyes), who, throwing off the veil, carried the missionary torch far and wide, is one of the most affecting episodes in modern history. Meanwhile the Bab had himself been arrested, examined, and thrown into prison at Shiraz in 1845. He escaped to Isfahan, where he was at first well received by the Motemed-ed-Dowleh, Manucheher Khan, in 1846, but soon found himself again in prison, from which he never again emerged. Of the remaining

proceed to give the latest information as to its present foothold and probable future.

The Babi movement may be divided into three epochs—the period of formation and persecution, the temporary recoil, and the subsequent internal schism, with its consequences. After the first savage outbreak—which has been most unfairly mistaken for a revolutionary and anarchical conspiracy—had been drowned in blood, the Babis shifted their headquarters to Baghdad, where Mirza Yahia, known as Hazret-i-Ezel—i.e. His Highness the Eternal—was recognised as the Khalifa, or successor of the Bab, his chief subordinate being his half-brother, Mirza Husein Ali of Mazanderan, known as Beha, who during this period wrote the Ikan or argumentative demonstration of the truth of the Babi doctrine. After a ten years' sojourn (1853–63) at Baghdad, the Babis were removed by the Turkish Government, first to Constantinople, and afterwards to Adrianople. It was while at the latter place that, in 1866, Beha renounced his allegiance to his step-brother, and claimed himself to be 'He whom God shall manifest'—i.e. the Mahdi, or veritable incarnation, whom the Bab had foretold, and who superseded all other manifestations. A bloody dissension at once arose between the followers of the two prophets, which was only superficially healed by the despatch of Beha to Acre and of the Hazret-i-Ezel to Cyprus, where the two have ever since remained, each claiming the sole headship of the Babi Church. Beha,

Later developments

three years of his life, the greater part was spent in confinement at Maku and Cherik in Azerbaijan; and on July 9, 1850, he was led out with a disciple, and shot in the citadel of Tabriz. How at the first volley he escaped unhurt, and disappeared, but, taking the wrong direction, was recaptured and killed, is well known. Had he evaded recapture on this occasion, there can be little doubt but that Nasr-ed-Din Shah would not now be upon the throne of Persia, and that Babism would be the religion of the land. While in prison, the Bab composed the voluminous works, the principal of which was the Beyan, that embody his doctrines and beliefs. In the same year occurred the terrific siege and slaughter of Babis at Zinjan, where women and children fought in the streets like fiends against the Royal troops, and the execution of seven leading sectaries, since known as the Seven Martyrs, at Teheran. Babi rebellions occurred at Yezd and elsewhere, and were put down with horrible cruelty, and an attempt was made upon the life of the Amir-i-Nizam. Finally, in August 1852, an attempt was made by four Babis to assassinate the Shah while out riding near Teheran. The inquisition and appalling tortures that succeeded have been alluded to elsewhere. Since that time there has been no formal outbreak of Babi hostility or revenge, and the persecution of the ruling powers has been only intermittently revived. But *sanguis martyrum semen Ecclesiæ*, and the massacres of those five years have given Babism a vitality which no other impulse could have secured.

however, has a great superiority; for whereas his rival has never pretended to be more than the successor and vicegerent of the Bab, Beha claims to have altogether superseded the Bab, who is now no more than a martyr John the Baptist to a subsequent Messiah, and whose scriptures are of inferior holiness to the revelations that come from Acre. Of these the principal is the Lawh-i-Akdas, or most holy Tablet, which is an enunciation of the precepts of Babism as revised and remodelled by Beha. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the Behais have rapidly outnumbered the Ezelis, and are now believed to comprise nineteen twentieths of the Babi persuasion. The rival prophets still survive, he of Acre being an old man of seventy-six years of age, while his younger brother of Cyprus is only sixty-three and is in receipt of a pension from the British Government. Though the movement is still popularly known as the Babi movement, the followers of neither leader now acknowledge the name. They are the Mahr-el-Beha, or the Mahr-el-Beyan, according as they subscribe to Beha or to the scriptures of the original Bab. Even the latter is no longer known by that title, but is designated Hazret-i-Ala, His Highness the Supreme.

Modern proselytism

It will thus be seen that, in its external organisation, Babism has undergone great and radical changes since it first appeared as a proselytising force half a century ago. These changes, however, have in no wise impaired, but appear, on the contrary, to have stimulated its propaganda, which has advanced with a rapidity inexplicable to those who can only see therein a crude form of political or even of metaphysical fermentation. The lowest estimate places the present number of Babis in Persia at half a million. I am disposed to think, from conversations with persons well qualified to judge, that the total is nearer one million. They are to be found in every walk of life, from the ministers and nobles of the Court to the scavenger or the groom, not the least arena of their activity being the Mussulman priesthood itself. It will have been noticed that the movement was initiated by *seyids*, *hajis*, and *mullahs*—i.e. persons who, either by descent, from pious inclination, or by profession, were intimately concerned with the Mohammedan creed; and it is among even the professed votaries of the faith that they continue to make their converts. Many Babis are well known to be such, but, as long as they walk circumspectly, are free from intrusion or persecution. In the poorer walks of life the fact is, as a rule, concealed for fear

of giving an excuse for the superstitious rancour of superiors. Quite recently the Babis have had great success in the camp of another enemy, having secured many proselytes among the Jewish populations of the Persian towns. I hear that during the past year they are reported to have made 150 Jewish converts in Teheran, 100 in Hamadan, 50 in Kashan, and 75 per cent. of the Jews at Gulpaigan.

Persecution

For a long time after the terrible events of 1850–52, Babism dared not lift its head in Persia, and the zeal of even a triumphant priesthood found no victims.[1] Latterly, as the widespread influence of the heresy has become more manifest, there have been spasmodic outbreaks of fury on the part of the sacerdotal hierarchy employing the civil governors as their tools, and occasional acts of barbarity that recall an earlier time. In 1878 occurred the brutal and unprovoked murder of two eminent merchants of Isfahan, at the instance of the Ulema, or priestly Council of that city.[2] The two victims, whose names were Haji Mirza Hasan and Haji Mirza Husein, have been renamed by the Babis, Sultan-es-Shahada, or King of Martyrs, and Mahbub-es-Shahada, or Beloved of Martyrs; and their naked graves in the cemetery have become places of pilgrimage where many a tear is shed over the fate of the 'Martyrs of Isfahan.' In 1888 a respectable elderly man, named Mirza Agha Ashraf of Abadeh, was put to death in Isfahan by the Zil-es-Sultan, and his body mutilated and burnt, because, being suspected of Babism, he declined publicly to curse the Bab. Just before my visit to Persia in 1889, a Babi persecution had broken out at Nejefabad and Sehdeh, two towns or groups of villages in the neighbourhood of Isfahan, where the Babis have always been very strong. Large numbers of the unhappy sectaries were expelled from their homes by the *mujtaheds*, and came wandering to Isfahan, seeking redress, and taking sanctuary in the stable of the Zil. Some fled to Teheran, but were sent back by the Shah. As for the Zil, in his weakened position, he was so powerless in the hands of the *mullahs*, that small mercy could be expected from him. At

[1] The messenger, however, who bore a letter from Beha to the Shah in 1869—one of a series addressed by the prophet to the crowned heads of Europe and Asia—received the penalty of his rash presumption by being branded to death with red-hot bricks.

[2] *Vide* E. Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, vol. ii. p. 29; and C. J. Wills, *In the Land, etc.* pp. 154–156.

length, as some of the miserable fugitives reapproached their homes, they were met by a crowd headed by the Imam Jama, or Chief Priest of Sehdeh. 'Kill these renegades,' shouted he. 'Who is the Shah? We know no Shah! Erase them from the earth!' The poor Babis were at once attacked, several were killed or wounded, and one captive was smeared with petroleum and burnt alive. It is these little incidents, protruding from time to time their ugly features, that prove Persia to be not as yet quite redeemed, and that somewhat stagger the tall-talkers about Iranian civilisation.

Heroism

If one conclusion more than another has been forced upon our notice by the retrospect in which I have indulged, it is that a sublime and unmurmuring devotion has been inculcated by this new faith, whatever it be. There is, I believe, but one instance of a Babi having recanted under pressure or menace of suffering, and he reverted to the faith and was executed within two years. Tales of magnificent heroism illumine the blood-stained pages of Babi history. Ignorant and unlettered as many of its votaries are, and have been, they are yet prepared to die for their religion, and the fires of Smithfield did not kindle a nobler courage than has met and defied the more refined torture-mongers of Teheran. Of no small account, then, must be the tenets of a creed that can awaken in its followers so rare and beautiful a spirit of self-sacrifice.

Not a political movement

From the facts that Babism in its earliest years found itself in conflict with the civil powers, and that an attempt was made by Babis upon the life of the Shah, it has been wrongly inferred that the movement was political in origin and Nihilist in character. It does not appear from a study of the writings either of the Bab or his successors, that there is any foundation for such a suspicion. The persecution of the government very early drove the adherents of the new creed into an attitude of rebellion; and in the exasperation produced by the struggle, and by the ferocious brutality with which the rights of conquest were exercised by the victors, it was not surprising if fanatical hands were found ready to strike the sovereign down. At the present time the Babis are equally loyal with any other subjects of the Crown. Nor does there appear to be any greater justice in the charges of socialism, communism, and immorality, that have so freely been levelled at the youthful persuasion. Certainly no such

idea as communism in the European sense, i.e., a forcible redistribution of property, or as socialism in the nineteenth century sense, i.e., the defeat of capital by labour, ever entered the brain of the Bab or his disciples. The only communism known to and recommended by him was that of the New Testament and the early Christian Church, viz., the sharing of goods in common by members of the faith, and the exercise of alms-giving, and an ample charity. The charge of immorality seems to have arisen partly from the malignant inventions of opponents, partly from the much greater freedom claimed for women by the Bab, which in the Oriental mind is scarcely dissociable from profligacy of conduct.

Babism is, in reality, a religious movement whose primary object is a revolt against the tyranny and fanaticism of the Koran, and against the growing laxity of Mussulman practice. As such, it represents what, in our terminology, would be described as an effort after freedom of thought and purity of observance. Foremost among the objects that it inculcates is the emancipation of women, an idea which it seems to have derived, in common with many others, from the Christian doctrine. The Bab and Beha in their writings have enjoined the disuse of the veil, the abolition of divorce, polygamy, and concubinage, in other words, of the harem, and greater liberty of action for the female sex. They recommend a system of poor-law relief, but declare war against mendicancy. As regards the corrupt practices of the modern Mussulman, the Bab forbade smoking, and condemned the *kalian*. Wine-drinking is permitted in moderation by Beha, but is interdicted to the Ezelis. Against the profligate imposture of the ordinary *mullah's* life, both inveigh with acrimony. Broadly regarded, Babism may be defined as a creed of charity, and almost of common humanity. Brotherly love, kindness to children, courtesy combined with dignity, sociability, hospitality, freedom from bigotry, friendliness even to Christians, are included in its tenets. That every Babi recognises or observes these precepts would be a foolish assertion; but let a prophet, if his gospel be in question, be judged by his own preaching.

Religious tenets

Only secondarily does Babism present a constructive body of doctrine, which, it may safely be averred, not one tenth of its votaries either understand or could explain. The somewhat mystic and speculative character of the Persian is easily attracted by a pantheistic conception of the Deity, by which all creation is regarded as

an emanation from that source, into which it will ultimately again be resolved. According to the Babi view, God is not a person, as in the Bible or in the Koran, but a spiritual essence, perpetually communicating and reproducing itself. Man is compounded of this essence, subject to the defilements of the flesh, but by reason of his origin is essentially divine. To whatever extent the average Babi has imbibed or holds these doctrines, he appears to have absolutely cut himself adrift from Mohammed and the Koran. He believes in the divinity of Beha, and, it may be added, of Christ, as several incarnations of the Deity; and his scriptures may be described as a curious amalgam of the Bible, Sufiism, and the Koran. Mr. Browne thinks it an error to credit the Babis with a belief in the transmigration of souls.

Observances

Among other properties claimed or observances pursued by the Babis, may be mentioned the gift of *clairvoyance*, or foresight, of which instances are related that appertain to the miraculous. They have also a peculiar sort of handwriting, very little in vogue, a seal with a peculiar device, a particular form of salutation, and an elaborate burial service.

Future of Babism

If Babism continues to grow at its present rate of progression, a time may conceivably come when it will oust Mohammedanism from the field in Persia. This, I think, it would be unlikely to do, did it appear upon the ground under the flag of a hostile faith. But since its recruits are won from the best soldiers of the garrison whom it is attacking, there is greater reason to believe that it may ultimately prevail. To those who know anything of the Persian character, so extraordinarily susceptible of religious influences as it is, it will be obvious to how many classes in that country the new creed makes successful appeal. The Sufis, or mystics, have long held that there must always be a Pir, or Prophet, visible in the flesh, and are very easily absorbed into the Babi fold. Even the orthodox Mussulman, whose mind's eye has ever been turned in eager anticipation upon the vanished Imam, is amenable to the cogent reasoning, by which it is sought to prove that either the Bab, or Beha, is the Mahdi, according to all the predictions of the Koran and the traditions. The pure and suffering life of the Bab, his ignominious death, the heroism and martyrdom of his followers, will appeal to many others who can find no similar phenomena in the contemporaneous records of Islam. Finally, all those who secretly rebel against the tyranny

of old-fashioned superstition, are inspired by a teaching which, alone among Oriental heresies, seems to be imbued with ideas of amelioration and progress. How far the gentler and more amiable aspects of Babism would prevail if that faith ever found itself in the ascendant, it is more hazardous to predict. I incline to think that the 'old man' would still be found unregenerate; and that, even if such an issue could be described as a victory for civilisation, it would not, as some have fondly imagined, be synonymous with an overture to Christianity.

Persia as field for Christian missions

There are some who hold different opinions, and who see in the increasing popularity of the Babi movement, in the wide-spread though secret revolt against the authority of the Koran, and in the prevalent tendency in Persia towards speculative inquiry and extreme latitude of religious opinion, a favourable opening for the proselytising zeal of the Protestant Church. Persia has even been described as the most hopeful among the fields of missionary labour in the East. While conscious of the valuable work that has been and is being done by the representatives of English, French, and American Mission societies in that country, by the spread of education, by the display of charity, by the free gift of medical assistance, by the force of example, and while in no way suggesting that these pious labours should be slackened, I am unable, from such knowledge as I possess, to participate in so sanguine a forecast of the future. Before I give my reasons for this opinion, let me cast an eye in brief retrospect over the history of Christian effort in Iran.

History of Christianity

If Mr. Thomas's suggested translation of the Hajiabad Inscription be correct, it may even be that a Christian king sat upon the throne of Persia, in the person of the renowned Shapur I., as early as 241–272 A.D. But it would be unwise to speak with any confidence of this hypothesis.[1] The second Chosroes or Parviz (A.D. 591–628), the last great sovereign of the same dynasty, seems for a time to have professed a dubious sort of Christianity, which he picked up while in exile with the Romans. He worshipped the Virgin, prayed to saints and martyrs, and adopted St. Sergius as his own patron saint. He

[1] Vide his *Early Sassanian Inscriptions*, pp. 73–101, where he reads the name of Jesus in the epigraph. So great a scholar, however, as Dr. Martin Haug finds no such reference at all, and interprets the inscription as referring to an unsuccessful bowshot on the part of the King (*Essays on the Sacred Language etc. of the Parsees*),

also married a Christian, the far-famed Sira or Shirin. Similar suspicions have been entertained of the enlightened Mongol prince, Abaka Khan, the son of Hulaku Khan, and great-grandson of Jenghiz Khan, who married the daughter of the Greek Emperor Michael Palæologos, and is believed to have embraced the Christian faith. It is certain in any case that the Gospels were first translated into the Persian tongue a few years after his death, in 1282 A.D.; and a Persian MS. version of the Four Evangelists is in existence, dated 1314.[1] A later version was published in London in 1652–7 (edited by Pierson), from a collation of three MSS. supposed to have been made from the Greek. Shah Abbas liked to delude the missionaries at Isfahan into thinking that he was a Christian, and is said once actually to have gone through the ceremony of baptism; whereupon tracts were issued by the delighted Friars, ascribing his victories over the Turks to this conversion. In the succeeding century Nadir Shah, in a freak of anti-religious intolerance, ordered the four Gospels to be translated into Persian, after which, before an audience of priests, rabbis, and *mullahs*, he made fun of the doctrines presented in what was a ludicrously inaccurate version. The first Protestant missionary to Persia was the famous Henry Martyn, who, in the year 1811, went out to Shiraz.[2] This remarkable man, who impressed everyone by his simplicity and godliness of character, created an effect in the short space of a year (for he died at Tokat in Asiatic Turkey in October 1812), that was as much to be attributed to the charm of his personality as to the character of his mission. Known as 'the enlightened infidel,' he spent his time in translating the New Testament into Persian, in preaching Christ, and in publicly confuting the doctrines of Islam, a written refutation of which from his pen was sent to Kerbela, to be answered by the learned Mohammedan divines of that sacred city. An anonymous writer in the 'Asiatic Journal' of March 1830 quoted the words of a Persian *mullah* named Mohammed Rahim, alleged to have been converted to Christianity by Martyn:—

In the year of the Hejira 1223, there came to this city (Shiraz) an Englishman, who taught the religion of Christ with a boldness hitherto

[1] This was first printed in the London Polyglot by Bishop Walton.

[2] Vide *Journals and Letters of the Rev. Henry Martyn*, edited by Rev. S. Wilberforce (London, 1821, 1839); and a *Memoir* of the same, by Rev. J. Sargent (1828, 1837).

unparalleled in Persia, in the midst of much scorn and ill-treatment from the *mullahs* as well as the rabble. He was a beardless youth and evidently enfeebled by disease. He dwelt amongst us for more than a year. His extreme forbearance towards the violence of his opponents, the calm yet convincing manner in which he expounded the fallacies and sophistries by which he was assailed (for he spoke Persian excellently) gradually inclined me to listen to his arguments, to inquire dispassionately into the subject of them, and finally to read a tract which he had written in reply to a 'Defence of Islam' by our chief *mullahs*. The result of my examination was a conviction that the young disputant was right.

Binning, in 1850, made inquiries as to the alleged convert at Shiraz, but finding no trace of him, said, 'it is probable that the account is a fiction;' a conclusion which, considering the lapse of time—forty years—between the incident and the inquiry, and in spite of my own views upon converts from Islam, it seems to me far from fair to adopt. Martyn having died, the next comer, in 1829, was Mr. Groves, who, however, soon gravitated from Persia to Baghdad. Some Germans, named Dietrich, Zaremba, and Haas, opened Christian schools at about the same time in Shisheh and Tabriz. In 1838 the Rev. W. Glen arrived in Persia, and eventually completed a revised edition of the New Testament translation of Martyn, having already spent three years in translating the Old Testament at Astrakhan. In the same period the Frenchman, Eugène Boré, created much excitement and uproar by his preaching in Isfahan. I shall, in my chapter upon the North-West Provinces, narrate the foundation of the American, the French, and the English Missions to the Nestorians of Urumiah and the border districts of Azerbaijan, and the extension of branches of the first-named mission to Teheran (1872), Tabriz (1873), Hamadan (1881), Resht (1883). In a later chapter I shall mention the flourishing Church of England Mission, established by the Rev. Dr. Bruce under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society in Julfa, the suburb of Isfahan. I am here concerned rather to discuss the attitude of the Persian Government towards Christian missions in general, and the success or the reverse that attends the missionary propaganda among the Persian Mohammedans.

The Persian Government must be credited on the whole with a liberal and conciliatory policy towards the Christian elements among its population. As I have said, the Nestorians have few

real grievances of which to complain, and the same may be said of the Armenians, though both may have to submit to the stigma of social inferiority in the middle and lower grades of life.

Religious liberty in Persia

No objection is raised by the Government to the settlement of missionaries, or building of schools, chapels, and dispensaries in the country; to the free circulation of the Christian scriptures, or to the distribution of Christian books. The latter are even printed and published by Mohammedan printers at Teheran. In these respects the Persian Government sustains the honourable traditions of the Sefavi monarchy, under whose rule there were houses belonging to the four orders of Catholic Friars at Isfahan. But the attitude of the Government is not always the same thing as the attitude of individual governors; and the security and freedom enjoyed by the Christian missionaries depend very much on the character of the latter. The Zil-es-Sultan, for instance, does not regard with a very friendly eye Dr. Bruce's establishment at Julfa. The protection, however, that is extended to missionaries by the ministers of their nationalities at Teheran is an effective guarantee against positive injustice, and, on the whole, the Christian missions have very little to complain of in Persia.

They must, of course, reckon upon the active hostility of the *mullahs*; and there was, at the time of my visit, a prominent Seyid in Isfahan who distinguished himself by the bitterness of his fanatical antagonism, and did all in his power to provoke anti-Christian violence.[1] These Seyids, or descendants of the Prophet, are an intolerable nuisance to the country, deducing from their alleged descent and from the prerogative of the green turban, the right to an independence and insolence of bearing from which their countrymen, no less than foreigners, are made to suffer. In Persia, however, not the least of the obstacles with which Christian communities are confronted arise from their own sectarian differences; and the Mussulmans are perfectly entitled to scoff at those who invite them to enter a flock the different members of which love each other so bitterly. Protestants squabble with Roman Catholics, Presbyterians with Episcopalians, the Protestant Nestorians look with no very friendly eye upon the

Source of hostility

[1] In May of last year, another of these firebrands, Haji Seyid Ali Akbar, raised a disturbance by preaching against the Christians in Shiraz, and was forcibly expelled from that city, several lives being lost in the riot that ensued, but the Government behaving with commendable firmness.

Nestorians proper, and these, again, are not on the most harmonious terms with the Chaldæans, or Catholic Nestorians. The Armenians gaze askance upon the United (or Catholic) Armenians, and both unite in retarding the work of the Protestant missions. Finally, the hostility of the Jews may, as a rule, be reckoned upon. In the various countries of the East in which I have travelled, from Syria to Japan, I have been struck by the strange and, to my mind, sorrowful phenomenon, of missionary bands waging the noblest of warfares under the banner of the King of Peace with fratricidal weapons in their hands.

Practical results

And now, with regard to the practical results of all this excellent, if not always harmonious, enterprise. In my remarks upon the Nestorian Christians I shall show that the missionaries have there performed, and continue to perform, a highly meritorious work. The same may be said of Dr. Bruce's labour among the Armenians at Julfa. But, after all, the temper of mission work is propagandist, and the zealous missionary is ill-satisfied unless he is adding to the fold as well as confirming its existing members. If, then, the criterion of missionary enterprise in Persia be the number of converts it has made from Islam, I do not hesitate to say that the prodigious expenditure of money, of honest effort, and of sacrificing toil that has been showered upon that country has met with a wholly inadequate return. Young Mohammedans have sometimes been baptised by Christian missionaries. But this must not too readily be confounded with conversion, since the bulk of the newcomers relapse into the faith of their fathers; and I question if, since the day when Henry Martyn set foot in Shiraz up till the present moment, half a dozen Persian Mohammedans have genuinely embraced the Christian creed.[1] I have myself often inquired for, but have never seen, a converted Mussulman (I exclude, of course, those derelicts or orphans of Mussulman parents who are brought up from childhood in Christian schools). Nor am I surprised at even the most complete demonstration of failure. Putting aside the

[1] Canon Isaac Taylor, in his well-known article, entitled 'The Great Missionary Failure,' in the *Fortnightly Review* of 1888, said of Persia: 'In Persia, we are told that "a great and wondrous door has been opened for the Gospel"; but no converts are mentioned, and the door seems to consist of a Persian who reads the Bible, which is one of his own sacred books. I have several correspondents among the Persian Moslems, and they continually quote the Bible, with which they seem to be almost as familiar as with the Koran.'

dogmatic assumptions of Christianity (e.g. the doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ), which are so repugnant to the Mohammedan conception of the unity of God, we cannot regard the reluctance of a Mussulman to desert his faith with much astonishment when we remember that the penalty for such an act is death. The chances of conversion are remote indeed so long as the body as well as the soul of the convert is thrown into the scales.

The strength of Islam

But personal apprehensions, though an important, are not the deciding factor in the situation. It is against the impregnable rock-wall of Islam, as a system embracing every sphere, and duty, and act of life, that the waves of missionary effort beat and buffet in vain. Marvellously adapted alike to the climate, character, and occupations of those countries upon which it has laid its adamantine grip, Islam holds its votary in complete thrall from the cradle to the grave. To him, it is not only religion, it is government, philosophy, and science as well. The Mohammedan conception is not so much that of a state church as, if the phrase may be permitted, of a church state. The under-girders with which society itself is warped round are not of civil, but of ecclesiastical, fabrication; and, wrapped in this superb, if paralysing, creed, the Mussulman lives in contented surrender of all volition, deems it his highest duty to worship God and to compel, or, where impossible, to depise those who do not worship Him in the spirit, and then dies in sure and certain hope of Paradise. So long as this all-compelling, all-absorbing code of life holds an Eastern people in its embrace, determining every duty and regulating every act of existence, and finally meting out an assured salvation, missionary treasure and missionary self-denial will largely be spent in vain. Indeed, an active propaganda is, in my judgment, the worst of policies that a Christian mission in a bigoted Mussulman country can adopt, and the very tolerance with which I have credited the Persian government is in large measure due to the prudent abstention of the Christian missionaries from avowed proselytism. Their work and their ultimate reward lie rather in the secular and physical than in the spiritual aspect of missionary enterprise. By schools, by charity, and still more by the free gift of medical aid, they slowly, but surely, make some impression upon the hearts of the unregenerate mass, and some day, when they have been long dead and forgotten, their justification may come.

Finally, let me speak of the attitude of the Persian Government towards the Jews. Five years ago the number of Jews in Persia was conjecturally returned as 19,000; but I incline to the opinion that this total is below the mark. I have, indeed, been supplied with a table in which their total census is fixed at 65,000, but this appears to be a gross exaggeration. The chief centres of Jewish residence are Teheran (4,000), Hamadan (2,000), Isfahan (3,700), Shiraz (3,000), Urumiah, Meshed, Kashan, Saveh, Kermanshah, and Bushire.

The Jews in Persia

As a community, the Persian Jews are sunk in great poverty and ignorance. They have no schools of their own, except in the synagogues, where they are only taught to repeat their prayers, which the majority do not understand. Except in Teheran, Hamadan, Kashan, Khonsar, and Gulpaigan only Hebrew is taught, and not Persian. Such as can read or write the language of the country have studied it privately. In Hamadan, about a hundred young men receive tuition in the school of the American Mission; in Teheran, about fifteen study foreign languages under similar auspices. In Isfahan, a converted Jew of Teheran, Mirza Nurullah by name, who has been educated in England, has recently started a school, where he instructs about twenty young men in Hebrew, Persian, and English.

Backward condition

Throughout the Mussulman countries of the East these unhappy people have been subjected to the persecution which custom has taught themselves, as well as the world, to regard as their normal lot. Usually compelled to live apart in a Ghetto, or separate quarter of the towns, they have from time immemorial suffered from disabilities of occupation, dress, and habits, which have marked them out as social pariahs from their fellow creatures. The majority of Jews in Persia are engaged in trade, in jewellery, in wine and opium manufacture, as musicians, dancers, scavengers, pedlars, and in other professions to which is attached no great respect. They rarely attain to a leading mercantile position. In Isfahan, where there are said to be 3,700, and where they occupy a relatively better status than elsewhere in Persia, they are not permitted to wear the *kolah* or Persian head-dress, to have shops in the bazaar, to build the walls of their houses as high as a Moslem neighbour's, or to ride in the streets. In Teheran and Kashan they are also to be found in large numbers and enjoying a fair position. In Shiraz they are very badly off. At Bushire

Disabilities and persecution

they are prosperous and free from persecution. As soon, however, as any outburst of bigotry takes place in Persia or elsewhere, the Jews are apt to be the first victims. Every man's hand is then against them; and woe betide the luckless Hebrew who is the first to encounter a Persian street mob. I have already related the circumstances of the forced conversion fifty years ago of the Jews in Meshed. During the absence of the Shah in Europe in 1889, a fanatical disturbance took place in Shiraz and Isfahan, largely instigated by the clerical firebrand, Sheikh Agha Nejefi, whom I have mentioned, in the course of which a Jew was killed in the streets, and his murderer was at first suffered to go scot-free, and finally only sentenced to the bastinado. The Sheikh, by way of improving or embittering the situation, took upon himself to promulgate a series of archaic disabling laws against the Jews of Isfahan, in which odious restrictions were imposed upon their food, dress, habits, life, fortune, inheritance, and trade. The Zil-es-Sultan was afraid to move for fear of endangering his position. It was largely in consequence of this outbreak that an influential deputation from the Anglo-Jewish Association waited upon the Shah while in London, and presented to him a memorial on the subject of their co-religionists in Persia. The Shah gave assurances of protection, which were much needed, and which, it is to be hoped, will be carried out.

Summary

This slight sketch of the condition of religious liberty in Persia will have shown that, universal as is the spirit of scepticism among the intelligent classes, conciliatory as is the attitude of the Government towards Christian sects who keep to themselves and do not interfere with others, and decadent though the power of the *mullahs* has become in contrast with their former pride, the hold of Islam, as a system over Persia, is not seriously weakened, fanaticism can still be played upon by adroit fingers, and the day is yet far distant, when, if ever, the Crescent will be supplanted in Iran by the Cross.

Note on the Persian Currency

(*from 'Banking in Persia,' by J. Rabino, in the 'Journal of the Institute of Bankers,' December* 1891).

The story of Persian currency, like that of all eastern countries, is a story of depreciation, and in great measure of debasement. Etymology gives us in Persia a lesson in economic history. I have spoken frequently of a *toman*, which is

actually a piece of money of ten silver *krans*, worth about 5*s*. 9*d*. Now *toman* is a word introduced into Persian by the Mongols, under Jenghiz Khan, in the thirteenth century. It signifies 'ten thousand,' and, amongst other applications, was used to mean ten thousand *dinars*. The *dinar* was a gold coin of 52 grains, equivalent, therefore, to a fraction more than half a sovereign; consequently a *toman* was worth about 5,000*l*.

With the Sefavi dynasty, during the sixteenth century, the *toman* ceased to be equivalent to 10,000 gold *dinars*, and under Abbas the Great a *toman* of money was equivalent to 50 *abbassis*—a silver coin weighing about 130 grains—and the value of the *toman* was about 3*l*. 7*s*. The *abbassi* was divided into four *shahis*, weighing each 18 grains of silver, and worth about 4*d*. The *toman*, as it does to-day, still figured in accounts as 10,000 *dinars*, but the *dinars* became a mere money of account, without any coin to represent it.

The weights of the silver coinage were soon reduced, and in 1678 one *toman* (or 50 *abbassis*) was worth 2*l*. 6*s*. 8*d*. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, under Shah Sultan Husein, the *abbassi* weighed only 84 grains, and the *toman* was worth about 2*l*. 4*s*., and under Nadir Shah, some years later, the *abbassi* was reduced to 72 grains, and the *toman* was worth 1*l*. 18*s*.

In Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia*, published in 1815, the *toman* is put down at 1*l*. Under Fath Ali Shah, who died in 1835, *krans*, each weighing 142 grains, were first coined, and a *kran* was equal to 5 *abbassis* or 20 *shahis*, and was the tenth part of a *toman*, which was worth 15*s*.

The *shahis* ceased to be silver coins, and with a further reduction in the weight of the *kran*, silver *abbassis* were also abolished. The *kran* experienced several reductions in weight; already in 1839, ten of them, or one *toman*, were worth only 10*s*. 9½*d*.; and now, in 1891, the *toman* is worth about 5*s*. 9*d*.

The *abbassi*, or one-fifth of a *kran*, is worth less than 1½*d*., and the *shahi* is a copper coin weighing 77 grains, and worth a quarter of that amount.

It is tolerably certain that the people had to bear the weighty burden of these tamperings with the standard, and, as in other countries, the decrease in weight or fineness of coin was no more than an indirect and very severe tax. Of the copper coinage, we are told, for instance, that it was considerable, that each town had its own coinage, and that it was re-minted every year at a reduction, and that the old coin was forcibly bought up at par with the new coin of lesser weight.

In the seventeenth century one pound of copper was coined into 46 *kasbeks*, worth 1*s*. 4*d*., giving a profit of 15 per cent. The Shah in 1672 received a royalty of 2 per cent. on the mintage. Three inferences may, I think, be drawn from the fragmentary notices we have of currency matters, viz.: that the riches of the country have greatly decreased; that the circulating medium has for ages been below the wants of the country; and that one of the causes of this lack of coin is the hoardings of the Government and, doubtless, also of the people.

Any one who has examined a handful of old Persian coin—*i.e.* coin minted before 1877—will understand the difficulty there is in counting (for weighing is out of the question) and examining any considerable sum. A thorough and well thought-out reform is, therefore, of great urgency, as a first step to the economic regeneration of the country. Unfortunately, to bring about such a reform, the Persian Government must give up all its old ideas of administration, and its profits obtained by farming out the mint; in fact, it must submit to be absolutely guided by European theory and practice.

Attempts have been made of late years to attain this object, but they have failed, on account of the public weal having frequently given way to temporary profit. In 1863 Monsieur Davoust was invited to Teheran to take charge of the

mint, but the resistance, active and passive, he encountered was so great that seven years later he left the country without having been able to accomplish anything. In 1875 Herr Pechan, an Austrian mint official, was entrusted with a reform of the currency, and initiated one which would have been efficient had he been allowed full powers and the requisite means for carrying out his ideas. He no sooner had begun his work, however, than he was ordered to coin large quantities of copper, and to leave silver minting for a future occasion. When he attempted to coin a standard silver *kran*, and asked for the funds necessary for raising the quality of the piece, he was met by a refusal, and by a suggestion as to alloy which it was impossible for him, as an Austrian official, to accept. Herr Pechan furnished the following table, showing the result of his assays of coin in circulation in 1877. It must be stated that at that time the governors of provinces had each a local mint, for working which they paid a yearly royalty.

Provinces	Years		Weight	Fineness	Value
	A.H.	A.D.	grammes	per 1,000	francs
Hamadan . .	1293	1877	4·95	760	0·836
Tauris . .	1290	1874	4·90	820	0·8926
Kashan . .	1282	1865	5·03	820	0·91658
Isfahan . .	1293	1877	5·02	840	0·937
Kerman . .	1293	1877	4·90	840	0·9146
Mazanderan .	1292	1876	4·97	840	0·9277
Meshed . .	1293	1877	4·90	840	0·91
Kermanshah .	1282	1866	4·97	880	0·9719
Resht . . .	1280	1864	4·80	890	0·9493
Teheran . .	1292	1876	5·02	900	1·004
Shiraz . .	1291	1875	4·90	900	0·98
Yezd . . .	1278	1862	4·97	900	0·994
Herat . . .	1277	1861	4·90	900	0·98

These figures give some idea of the irregularity of the Persian currency. Between *krans* of Hamadan and those of Teheran there is a difference in value of no less than 17 per cent.; between those of other towns and of the capital the difference is very considerable from a monetary point of view, although less than in the extreme cases quoted. Since 1877 the currency has certainly not improved, for the old heavy *krans* have been re-minted, and the debased ones remain in circulation in obedience to Gresham's law.

It is evident that a reform of the currency can only be carried out in one of two ways:—*Firstly:* The Government should abandon the policy of farming out the mint for a yearly sum, and should take over the direct management of the currency. A new coinage should be struck, and the old coinage called in and re-minted at its legal standard and weight, at the expense of the State. This would be the best and soundest solution of the difficulty, but to carry it out the ideas of the Government must undergo a complete revolution. *Secondly:* The mint might be handed over to European control for a definite period, to be worked for the benefit of the State. As the Government would probably refuse to make any sacrifices for the reform, there remains only the creation of a new system, based upon a *kran*, corresponding to the value of the coin actually in circulation, less the cost of re-coinage. This would enable the old coinage to be called in, and, with the dearth of the circulating medium, it is probable that the modification would affect the exchange very slightly, if at all. On the other hand, a uniform type of *kran*, well executed and circulating in sufficient quantities, would undoubtedly be a great boon to trade and to the country generally.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NORTH-WEST AND WESTERN PROVINCES

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear.
SHAKSPEARE, *Macbeth*, act iii. sc. 4.

Ille etiam cæcos instare tumultus
Sæpe monet, fraudesque et operta tumescere bella.
VIRGIL, *Georg.* I. 463.

Peculiar political interest of Azerbaijan

IN passing to the North-Western Provinces of Persia, I am approaching a part of my subject which, like the Caspian Provinces —but for different and less purely physical reasons—has special characteristics and a marked individuality of its own. These reasons are in the main political, or allied thereto. Azerbaijan is the province which, excepting only Khorasan, has more often been violated by foreign invasion than any other part of Persia. Not seventy years ago it was the theatre of the last Russo-Persian war. Should that conflict ever again be renewed, it is all but certain to be the scene of the initial operations. Its northern borders march with those of the Russian Trans-Caucasian dominions, and its capital is less than 100 miles from the Russian frontier. On the west it is coterminous with the territories of another Power with whom Persia is on worse terms than with Russia—viz. Turkey—and the borderland with whom is to this day a matter of dispute and an arena of intermittent conflict. Nor is the political problem of Azerbaijan created by actual contact or possible collision with Russia and Turkey alone. The province contains within itself human elements that differentiate it from all other parts of the kingdom. Here, and in the adjacent regions, are located the famous and formidable Kurds, whose name has achieved a world-wide reputation as synonymous with a state of anarchy and deeds of blood. Here, side by side with these desperate tribesmen, are settled a large population belonging to an ancient Christian persuasion, who have attracted to themselves the attention of Europe, and have fired the missionary enterprise alike of America, France, and Great

Britain. Here, too, are to be found the ubiquitous Armenians and their inseparable and irrepressible concomitant, the Armenian Question. Surely in these jarring elements, which would appear to have as much in common as the contents of the several vessels that compose a cruet-stand, there is material enough and to spare for the 'questions' of diplomatists or the crises of politicians. If we add that the vast majority of the inhabitants of this part of the Shah's dominions are not Iranian but Turkish in descent, and that the language of Azerbaijan is not Persian but Turki, we augment rather than diminish the interest already excited; whilst the facts that from this province are drawn the most resolute and warlike elements of the entire population of Persia, that it contains the commercial capital, Tabriz, and that its fertility of resources entitles it to be called the granary of Northern Iran, justify the claim that it should be examined and regarded with no careless or superficial eye.[1]

Mountain system

My readers will long ago have gathered that Persia is a land of mountains and plains, in which the former are rarely out of sight, and the latter play the part of thresholds to the successive ranges. Azerbaijan does not differ from the rest of the country in this respect. But whereas we have hitherto remained in close proximity to the main or lateral branches of a single great system, running from the south-west of the Caspian to the confines of Meshed, we here encounter a separate and detached mountain group, not directly connected with the Elburz. The orographic system of North-Western Persia is part of the lofty highlands of Russian and Turkish Armenia on the north and north-west, and of Kurdistan on the south, which have been called by Ritter the Medic Isthmus, connecting the Iranian with the

[1] For information relating specially to Azerbaijan, *vide* John Bell (1716), *Travels from St. Petersburg*, vol. i.; P. Tancoigne (1807–1808), *Lettres sur la Perse*, vol. i.; A. Dupré (1807–1809), *Voyage en Perse*, vol. i.; Sir J. M. Kinneir (circ. 1810), *Geographical Memoir*; J. P. Morier (1809), *First Journey*, caps. xiv., xv.; J. P. Morier (1812), *Second Journey*, caps. xv., xvi., xviii., xix., xx., xxii.; St. Martin (1818), *Mémoires sur l'Arménie*, 2 vols.; Colonel W. Monteith (1826), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. iii. p. 1; General F. R. Chesney (1835–1837), *Expedition for the Survey of the Euphrates*, vol. ii. cap. x.; Colonel W. K. Stuart (1835), *Journal of a Residence in Northern Persia*; Ch. Texier (1839), *L'Arménie, la Perse, et la Mésopotamie*; M. von Thielmann (1872), *Journey in the Caucasus*, vol. ii.; Dr. G. Radde (1879–80), *Petermann's Mittheil.* 1881, pp. 47–55, 169–176, 261–270; M. Orsolle (1882), *Le Caucase et la Perse*; Mme. Dieulafoy (1881), *La Perse*, caps. ii.–v.

Anatolian ranges. The northern part of this region is broken into fertile valleys and rolling plateaux; the ravines sometimes contain extensive, but not lofty, forests; on the hill slopes are pasture-lands which feed the flocks of the nomad tribes; whilst in the hollows of the plains, where water is abundant, villages are buried in the rich foliage of orchards and gardens. A considerable river, the Aras or Araxes, is the boundary of the province on the north, the Kizil Uzun (Red Long River), skirts it on the south, and afterwards, under the name of the Sefid Rud (White River), flows into the Caspian to the east of Resht. Rich in water, with a soil excellently adapted to the growth of cereals, possessing mineral resources, certain though undeveloped, Azerbaijan is indeed a favoured portion of the Shah's dominions. Further south, when we come to the Kurdistan mountains, a name somewhat vaguely applied to the frontier highlands inhabited by the Kurds, the more open valleys and undulations of the north are succeeded by narrow defiles between the several ridges, whose uniform inclination is, with an astonishing regularity, from north-west to south-east, and passage between which is effected by means of deep *tengs* or transverse gorges, due, like those which I have previously described in North-Eastern Khorasan, not to the erosive action of water, but to primordial fracture in the crust of the earth. These mountains unite on the south with the range known to classical writers as the Zagros.

Climate

The great elevation and the more northern latitude of this mountainous region are responsible for extremes of climate more severe than are felt in any other part of Persia. The heat of the Persian Gulf in summer is matched by the cold of Azerbaijan in winter; but whereas the Gulf is never cold in winter, Azerbaijan is apt to be excessively hot in summer as well. The spring and autumn are delightful seasons. In the intervening months the sun's rays are very piercing. The winter begins early, lasts late, and is dreaded for its rigours. Heavy falls of snow block the roads; men are frequently frozen to death in the passes; at Tabriz, a thermometer exposed to the air at night seldom rises above zero (Fahrenheit), and we read of ink freezing in the inkstand and water in the tumblers in a room where a fire is kept burning. Colonel Stewart, in a report, compares the summer climate to India (with the advantage, however, of cool nights) and the winter climate to Canada.

General Chesney gave the area of Azerbaijan as 25,280 square

miles. Colonel Stewart, now Consul-General at Tabriz, returns it as 43,500, General Schindler as 35,000. The total population is estimated at not far short of 2,000,000,[1] of which the Kurds are reckoned at 450,000, and the Christians at 72,900 (Nestorians, 44,000; Armenians, 28,900). Owing in part to the missionary establishments of the foreign churches, in part to the staffs of the various consulates at Tabriz, and in part to the mercantile importance of the latter city, there are now as many as 120 Europeans and Americans in the province. The name Azerbaijan is said to be derived from *Azer*, fire, and *baijan*, keeper, and to testify to the ancient predominance of the fire-worshippers in this part of Persia. It is identical with the Atropatia or Atropatene of the classical writers.

Population

In the tables which I publish elsewhere of the Persian Revenue for 1888 to 1889, the contribution of Azerbaijan appears at 786,142 *tomans*, plus 60,062 *kharvars* of grain, or a total money value of 966,666 *tomans*, equivalent to 276,190*l*. On the other hand, the revenue for 1889 to 1890 appears in the Consular Report[2] as 385,674*l*. No two tables of Persian accounts were ever found to agree; and there is frequently sufficient ground for divergence in the different bases upon which the conflicting calculations have been framed. In this case the figures in the earlier and smaller estimate are those of revenue from taxes and customs only, and are calculated at the rate of 35 krans to 1*l*. The figures in the Consular Report contain other items, as the following table shows; and the recent remarkable rise in silver having lowered the rate of exchange to 30 *krans* to the 1*l*., they are counted at that rate:—

Revenue and expenditure

	£	s.	d.
'Maliat' (including land tax in money, rent of Crown lands, tax on cattle, and tax on trades), 750,000 *tomans* . . . . =	275,000	0	0
Tax in kind, 15,200 *kharvars* (*kharvar* = 1,000 lbs.) of grain = 6,785⅔ tons. Value, at 15*s*. a *kharvar* of 1,000 lbs . . . =	11,400	0	0
7,000 *kharvars* of straw = 3,¼25 tons, at 6*s*. 6*d*. a *kharvar* of 1,000 lbs. . . . . =	2,275	0	0
Customs and octroi, 271,000 *tomans* . . . . . =	90,333	6	0
Passports, 20,000 *tomans* . . . . . =	6,666	13	0
Total . .	385,674	19	0

This total is not in itself by any means too severe a burden for

[1] If this be correct, Azerbaijan must be by far the most thickly populated province of Persia.

[2] *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, No. 789, 1890.

so wealthy a province to sustain, although some injustice is inflicted by irregular assessments and by the unscientific mode of collection.

Tabriz

Tabriz, the capital city, which occupies much the same position in North-Western as does Meshed in North-Eastern Persia, which is the residence of the Heir Apparent, the station of a British Consul-General, and the largest commercial emporium in Persia, deserves somewhat minute attention. Situated at the extremity of an extensive plain, which extends to the gleaming expanse of the Urumiah Lake, and a little to the south of the Aji Chai (*chai* is Turki for river), which irrigates the gardens outside the city, it is framed in a landscape of orange and red-coloured hills, while on the south rises the snow-covered cone of Mount Sehend, 11,800 feet above the sea.

Earthquakes

Tabriz has enjoyed, or perhaps I should say suffered, an eventful history. Situated at so slight a distance from the frontier, it has fallen the first victim to invading armies, and has been successively held by Arabs, Seljuks, Ottomans, Persians, and Russians. What the rage of conquest or the licence of possession has spared, Nature has interfered to destroy. The city has been desolated by frequent and calamitous earthquakes. Twice we hear of its being levelled to the ground before, in 1392, it was sacked by Timur, whose path was strewn with ruins that vied with the convulsions of Nature. Five times during the last two centuries has it again been laid low. A reliable historian (Krusinski) tells us that 80,000 persons perished in the earthquake of 1721; and we hear from another source that half that number were claimed for the death-roll by its successor in 1780. It is small wonder that a city so relentlessly persecuted has scarcely ventured to raise its head, that its streets are mean and narrow, that it contains few or no public buildings of any distinction, and that the bulk of its dwelling-houses are one-storeyed and low. What is the use of building a lofty structure, only to find it toppling down upon your ears?

Early history

A fanciful tradition ascribes the origin of the name to the gratitude of Zobeideh, the famous wife of the Kalif Harun-er Rashid, who, having been cured of a fever by its salubrious climate, is said to have called the spot Tab-riz, or Fever-expelling. This, in common with other far-fetched interpretations that excited the curiosity of the seventeenth-century travellers

from Europe, must be not too respectfully dismissed. Tabriz is an Aryan word, derived from *tab* or *tap*, warm, tepid, and *rez*, *riz*, *resh*, a verbal root meaning to flow. It signifies, therefore, 'warm-flowing,' and originated from the hot springs in the neighbourhood. This word became the classical Tauris, which at the close of the third century after Christ was the capital of the Armenian King Tiridates III. Its predecessor, located by Rawlinson at Takht-i-Suleiman, was Ganzaca, or Gaza, the Kandsag of Armenian history. To Zobeideh we may concede the distinction of having, in 791 A.D., rebuilt and beautified the city, a service which has more than once in history procured for its author a founder's claim and honour. In Marco Polo's time it was a city where 'the merchants make large profits.'[1] The Spaniard Clavijo spent nine days here in 1404 and nineteen days in 1405, on his journey to and from Samarkand; and so speedily had the city recovered from Timur's visitation that even then, though formerly much more populous, it contained 200,000 inhabitants, and 'the finest baths in the whole world.'[2] A few years later it became the capital of the Kurdish dynasty of Kara Koyunlu, or Black Sheep; but they in their turn were expelled in 1468 by Uzun Hasan (Long Hasan), the chief of the Ak Koyunlu, or White Sheep, who made himself sovereign of Persia, and in whose reign the Venetian travellers, whose diaries have fortunately been preserved and given to the world, visited his dominions. Josafa Barbaro, who was at Tabriz in 1474, called him King Assambai (i.e. Hasan Beg), and left a long account of the city. Ambrosio Contarini called the King Ussun Cassan. A little later the anonymous merchant whose travels have also been published in the same collection[3] (1507–20) said the city was without walls but twenty-four miles in circumference. As for the ladies, he seems to have found time in the intervals of business to appreciate their charms, for he leaves record that

> The women are as white as snow. Their dress is the same as always has been the Persian costume—wearing it open at the breast, showing their bosoms and even their bodies, the whiteness of which resembles ivory.

[1] In 1320 there is evidence of a Venetian settlement at Tabriz, and in 1341 the Genoese had a factory there, presided over by a Consul with a council of 24 merchants.

[2] *Narrative of Embassy* (Hakluyt Soc.), pp. 87–89.

[3] *Travels into Tana and Persia* (Hakluyt Soc.).

On the other hand, less favoured or more exacting was 'the most noble magnifico' Vincentio d'Alessandri, who in 1571 said—

> The women are mostly ugly, though of fine features and noble dispositions. They wear robes of silk, veils on their heads, and show their faces openly.

All the writers of this and the succeeding epoch concur in eulogies of the great commercial wealth and importance of Tabriz.

Commercial importance

Tavernier, in the middle of the next century, said that 'money trolls about in that place more than any other part of Asia.'[1] Chardin, however, in 1671, has left the most glowing account of its extent and features:—

> It is really and truly a very large and potent city; as being the second in Persia, both in dignity, in grandeur, in Riches, in Trade, and in number of Inhabitants. It contains 15,000 Houses and 15,000 shops. I did not see many palaces or magnificent houses at Tauris. But there are the fairest Basars that are in any place of Asia. And it is a lovely sight to see their vast extent, their largeness, their beautiful Duomos, and the Arches over 'em; the number of people that are there all the day long, and the vast quantities of merchandise with which they are filled.[2]

The enthusiastic Frenchman went on to say that the city contained 250 mosques, 300 caravanserais, and a population of 550,000, and that

> The Piazza of Tauris is the most spacious Piazza that ever I saw in any city of the world, and far surpasses that of Ispahan. The Turks have several times drawn up within it 30,000 men in Battel.

In the present century the most notable experience of Tabriz has been its unresisted occupation by the Russian army under

Capture by the Russians

Paskievitch in the campaign of 1827. The Governor was seized and handed over as a prisoner to the Russians, and the latter occupied the Citadel and captured the town without firing a shot. Nevertheless the 'St. Petersburg Gazette,' in chronicling this achievement, stated that the garrison made a most obstinate defence, but that nothing could impede the ardour of the Imperial troops, who carried all before them, took numerous stands of colours, and finally wrested from the Governor the keys of the city. The colours, which had been specially manufactured in the bazaar at Tabriz and then artifically perforated with bullet-holes, were

[1] *Travels*, book i. cap. iii.

[2] *Travels*, pp. 352–370.

THE BLUE MOSQUE AT TABRIZ

sent to Moscow and were enshrined in great state in the Kremlin. There were only eight gates to the city, but fifteen colossal keys, also manufactured for the purpose, were despatched to the same destination, and, I doubt not, are treasured as among the proudest trophies of Muscovite prowess. The city was restored to Persia upon the conclusion of peace in February of the following year.

Recent figures

Since 1805 Tabriz has been the capital and residence of the Heir Apparent, having been first chosen for that purpose in the case of Abbas Mirza, the selected son of Fath Ali Shah. Kinneir, about 1810, described it as 'one of the most wretched cities in Persia,' and as having only 30,000 inhabitants. Morier, in 1812, gave it 50,000. In the long reign of peace that has succeeded the Russian war, the numbers have gradually swollen, being reported at different intervals as from 100,000 to 140,000, until at the present moment they are said to be between 170,000 and 200,000. In 1886 General Schindler reported the town as containing eight *imamzadehs*, 318 mosques, 100 public baths, 166 caravanserais, 3,922 shops, twenty-eight guard-houses and five Armenian churches; but a good many of these figures, represent deserted fabrics, while the majority of the so-called mosques are *tekiehs* or public prayer-places; so that the totals give an exaggerated impression of the existing city.

The Blue Mosque and Citadel

Imposing and extensive as Tabriz must once have been, there are at this moment positively only two monuments of antiquity worthy of any notice, and both of them are in a state of ruin. The first of these is the Kabud Musjid, or Blue Mosque, so called from the magnificent specimens of enamelled faïence by which it was once encrusted. It was built by Jehan Shah, the last sovereign of the Black Sheep dynasty (1437–1468 A.D.).[1] Earthquakes have shattered its walls; its dome has

[1] It is scarcely credible that M. Binder, at other times an intelligent traveller, should have confused this monarch with the Mogul Emperor Shah Jehan. 'The Blue Mosque,' he says, 'was built by Shah Jehan in 1670, and it is to him that we owe the Mausoleum of Agra, of Secundra, and the palace of Delhi, which struck me so much on my voyage to India.' (*Au Kurdistan*, p. 63.) Here is quite a neat collection of errors, apart from the crowning mistake of identity and of two centuries. For Shah Jehan could hardly have built a mosque anywhere in 1670, having been deposed in 1658 and having died in 1665; nor did he build the Mausoleum of Secundra, which was raised by Jehangir in honour of his father Akbar. As regards the Blue Mosque, I have followed the account given by most historians. At Tabriz, however, local tradition ascribes the foundation to Ghazan Khan, the third Mongol sovereign.

fallen in; and but few relics survive of the departed splendour; although these are sufficient to have drawn from a competent observer the remark that the Mosque of the Sunnis, as he calls it, from the tradition that it was raised in the days when the Sunni was the national faith, is the '*chef-d'œuvre* of Persian, and, perhaps, of all Oriental architecture.'[1] The other relic is the Ark or Citadel, in the south-west part of the city, originally built by Ali Shah, and which once contained a magnificent mosque within its walls. It was converted into an arsenal in the first quarter of this century by Abbas Mirza, who employed a large number of English workmen; and here, in July 1850, was shot the Bab, or founder of the Babi heresy. A solid mass of masonry 120 feet high, and with walls twenty-five feet thick at the base, towers above the city, and is a relic of the ancient structure. Faithless wives used to be hurled down from its summit; but this method of execution was abandoned when one of these ladies, sustained by her inflated petticoats as by a parachute, descended unharmed on to *terra firma*.

The palace of the Vali-Ahd, or Heir Apparent, is the most elegant modern building in the city. The Europeans live in the Armenian quarter. Here are the residences of the Turkish, Russian, and British Consul-Generals, the last named having a charming and spacious house, a great contrast to the quarters in which I left him before his transfer from Meshed. France also maintains a Consul at Tabriz, whose business it is to foster such trade as she may possess, and to supervise the interests of the Catholic Nestorians whom she has taken under her protection. There was once a Belgian Consul; but a sinecure so complete could only end in withdrawal. As I have said, the interior of the town possesses no distinction: the houses are low, the lanes narrow and dirty; and size and business alone demonstrate the existence of a capital. Considering that it is the second city in the kingdom, the residence of the heir to the throne, and the seat of great wealth, and that there are in the neighbourhood abundance of the most beautiful marbles and building materials, it is surprising, in spite of the earthquakes, that more effort has not been made to embellish Tabriz. An inner wall encircles the building of the Ark, and a double outer wall, in no sort of repair, surrounds the city.

European quarter

[1] Ch. Texier, *Description de l'Arménie, &c.*, vol. i. This work contains a series of superb plates, Nos. 42–52 of which are devoted to plans, designs, restorations, and coloured sections of the Blue Mosque.

I have already, in Chapter XIII., dwelt upon the character and personality both of the Vali-Ahd, the nominal Governor, and of his recent minister, the Amir-i-Nizam, the actual Governor, of Azerbaijan. Under the Persian system, which has never, except in the case of Abbas Mirza, allowed any initiative to a son of the sovereign, the former was a mere puppet. The latter kept the whole power in his own hands, and was indeed as a rule addressed as Governor-General. Being a man of strong character, he reduced turbulence to a minimum, and immensely consolidated the Shah's authority and position in Azerbaijan. Though an old man, he is still full of life and vigour, and under any change of *régime* might devote to a kingdom the talents that were recently concentrated upon a province. His salary was only 5,000 *tomans* per annum, or 1,420*l.*; but the important point in the pay of any Persian Governor is not what he receives from the State, but what he exacts from the people. Among other allowances to Azerbaijan from the Royal Treasury we find a subsidy of 2,000 *tomans* for post-houses on the postal route; and the same sum for fireworks at festival times, the Persians considering a holiday, religious or secular, that is not so celebrated in much the same light as we should a Christmas without plum-pudding or mince-pies.

Government

Fraser, passing through Azerbaijan in 1834, and observing the calamitous results of the system under which Fath Ali Shah distributed his colossal male progeny in every Government post throughout the kingdom, remarked:—

Loyalty to the Crown

> The most obvious consequence of this state of affairs is a thorough and universal detestation of the Kajar race, which is a prevalent feeling in every heart and the theme of every tongue.[1]

Just, however, as in Khorasan a similar feeling, existing as late as MacGregor's visit in 1875, has disappeared under the firm and not unpopular rule of the reigning Shah, so have the sins of his great-uncles, the sons of the prolific Fath Ali, been forgotten and forgiven in Azerbaijan. The Turkish population of that province, so far from being hostile, are predisposed to be friendly to a dynasty of Turkish extraction. There is far too keen a hatred between Shiahs and Sunnis, between the Turkish subjects of the Shah and the Turkish subjects of the Sultan across the border, to

[1] *A Winter's Journey*, p. 401.

afford much scope for political discontent among the former; and Azerbaijan is probably at this moment the most loyal of the frontier provinces. Its inhabitants (with the exception of the Kurds, who will be dealt with separately, and of whom it would be unsafe to predicate loyalty to anybody), being of the Turkish stock, are more stubborn and self-reliant than the docile and supple Iranian; and it may be asserted that, were resistance to a foreign invader ventured upon, it would be far more effectively displayed by the Azerbaijanis, in spite of their proximity to Russian territory and Russian arms, than by the lethargic peoples of Khorasan.

Russian views

Russia has been, not unnaturally, credited with designs upon Azerbaijan second only in seriousness and intensity to her yearning for Khorasan. Just as, after the war of 1857, England, in the opinion of many persons well qualified to judge, acted foolishly in the surrender of certain posts in the south, such as Mohammerah and Bushire, which were then in her possession, so Russia is believed many times to have regretted that she did not retain a little more in the settlement of Turkomanchai. That that settlement was as negatively favourable, or as little unfavourable, to the Persians as it now appears to have been, was mainly due to the wise counsel of Sir John McNeill, who persuaded Fath Ali Shah to yield before more was demanded. Sir Justin Sheil, speaking with the authority of a British Minister in Persia, said:—

> Had Russia known then as well as she now (circ. 1850) does the value of Azerbaijan, commercial, political and material—its richness in corn, mineral productions, and soldiers—there can be little doubt that that province too would have been absorbed by the Holy Empire.[1]

Trade of Azerbaijan

Trade between Europe and Persia in this quarter has commonly entered or left Azerbaijan by one of two routes—either through Turkish territory from Trebizond in the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea, or through Russian territory from the Caucasus. The former route was inaugurated by Abbas Mirza over sixty years ago, with the double desire of encouraging British trade with Persia, to which he was very friendly, and of injuring the Russian trade route, to which he was naturally hostile. This prince deputed an agent to London and established correspon-

[1] Note D to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia.*

dence with a large commercial house in the City, who opened direct communication by steamer with Trebizond. The first experiment failed; but a second attempt, in which the English goods were brought in transit through Constantinople, succeeded, and this transit trade is said before long to have amounted to 1,000,000*l.* At the same time cloth manufacture was introduced into Persia by Mr. Armstrong, an Englishman, at the request and cost of Abbas Mirza. Fulling mills were established at Khoi, and spinning, carding, and weaving machines near Tabriz. After the rupture between England and Persia consequent upon Mohammed Shah's expedition against Herat in 1838, this Anglo-Persian trade collapsed abruptly; and in the year 1839 an English traveller wrote: 'Of the British residents in Tabriz only three remain; of the British commerce I am not aware that there are any remains.' The squabbles of diplomatists and the humours of Courts do not, however, permanently interfere with a trade well founded and convenient to both parties; and within a few years' time British imports were again to be seen in the ascendant in the bazaars of Tabriz. There was the less necessity to adopt the long and arduous overland route from Trebizond, because Russia for some time encouraged international trade by allowing free transit through the Caucasus, Poti being the port of debarkation usually resorted to on the Black Sea. Under these conditions the value of imports and exports for the province of Azerbaijan rose in the years 1868, 1869, and 1870 to the following high figures:—

	1868	1869	1870
Imports . .	£1,351,000	£1,575,776	£1,094,717
Exports . .	683,885	901,218	422,632 [1]

In explanation of these remarkably high figures of imports, it must be remembered that the bulk of trade with Northern Persia, both Russian and English, at that time entered the country by way of Azerbaijan, the Russians not having as yet developed the Baku-Enzeli route, and the English not having approached Teheran on any large scale from the Persian Gulf. The absolute command of the market in cotton fabrics, possessed by Great Britain, is shown by the following proportions of the totals above quoted:—

1868	1869	1870
£1,017,885	£1,123,211	£864,000

[1] The great fall in the exports for 1870 was due to the lamentable famine of that year. The growth and export of cotton all but collapsed.

In 1877, however, Russia embarked upon a policy of strict protection, and adopted almost prohibitive measures against the Caucasian transit trade by demanding the deposit with Russian officials of a sum equal to the entire value of the goods transported through her territory, which was only returned after it had been certified by official report that the goods had crossed the frontier intact. This edict had the effect of driving back the European trade with Persia to the Trebizond route. It was to some extent modified a little later, but reappeared in a yet more savage form in 1883, to which year we may attribute the almost total cessation of the Caucasian route for European goods bound for Persia, which have ever since continued to enter the country from Trebizond. Of this route and the value of the trade that passes along it, I shall say something in a later chapter upon the Commerce of Persia. I am here restricting myself to the figures of Azerbaijan, of which, however, it must be borne in mind that a large proportion only passes through the Custom-house in transit to other parts of the country, and therefore must not be mistaken for local consumption.

Russian protection

Taking the returns for the last three years, or a period twenty years posterior to that previously selected, we find that the totals are as follows:—

Latest statistics

	1887	1888	1889
Imports	£910,108	£664,196	£853,891
Exports	575,035	413,694	389,456
Total volume of trade .	1,485,143	1,077,890	1,243,347

England still retains a scarcely disputed command of the market in cotton goods (grey and white, coloured, and prints), the value of her imports in these commodities (nearly all from Manchester) having been 393,220*l.* in 1888 and 501,830*l.* in 1889. During the same years Russia only imported 170 bales of cotton goods in 1888, and 196 bales, valued at 4,000*l.*, in 1889. The collapse in Russian competition, which raged rather merrily a few years ago, is to some extent due to temporary circumstances, of which the main is the extraordinary rise of fifty per cent. in the value of the Russian paper rouble in the course of the last two years, rendering importation from that country an unremunerative proceeding. Russia, however, assisted by a large direct bounty to her exporters, has handsomely beaten French sugar in the Tabriz market, although the rise in the rouble may detrimentally affect her here

also. Woollen goods to the value of from 30,000*l.* to 40,000*l.* come from Bradford; but a rather larger proportion (40,000*l.* to 50,000*l.*) hails from Austria and Germany, the bulk of these being woollen cloths of stiff texture and lustrous surface, which are manufactured in the former country. Tea to the value of 107,000*l.* comes from London and Amsterdam, chiefly the former. Russia sends half the glassware and crockery; Austria and Germany the other half. The two last-named countries share with France the haberdashery, and with France and Italy the velvets and silks. Bavaria supplies the gold lace and thread. Of the total of imports above quoted for 1889, the proportions claimed by Russia and other European countries are respectively as follows:—

From Europe	From Russia
£792,340	£61,551

Roughly speaking, England may be said to take about 80 per cent. of the import and 10 to 12 per cent. of the export trade. The above figures represent the European import trade from Trebizond, and the Russian import trade by the two routes of Tiflis and Julfa, and, on a rather larger scale, *viâ* Ardebil, from the little port of Astara, on the Caspian. European goods in small quantities enter Azerbaijan from other quarters, viz. *viâ* Aleppo and Mosul from Alexandretta, and *viâ* Suleimanieh from Baghdad, but the returns of this traffic are not forthcoming.

Export trade

If we turn to the component items of the export table, it is not surprising to find that Russia, by virtue of her neighbourhood and the handy market thereby supplied to local produce, claims a large preponderance—266,439*l.*, as compared with the 123,017*l.* of other countries.[1] Of the former total, by far the largest item consists of dried fruits, raisins, apricots, and almonds, which to the united value of nearly 200,000*l.* in 1890 (and in 1888 of 222,000*l.*) were exported from the plains of Urumiah and Maragha by Russian Armenians through Ardebil and Astara, for shipment to Baku. Of the latter, or European total, the largest items are carpets, which to the value of 42,260*l.* were exported, principally to England and America, and *tumbaku*, or Shiraz tobacco, to the value of 36,290*l.*, which goes to fill the hubble-bubbles in

[1] The figures here quoted of Russian imports and exports are taken from the British Consular Reports, and do not exactly tally with those given in the official Reports published at St. Petersburg, where the total of Russian imports is returned as 74,624*l.*, and of Persian exports to Russia as 318 751*l.*

the coffee-shops of Stambul. A few years ago Russia endeavoured to stimulate the growth of cotton in Azerbaijan for her own supply by distributing cotton-seed gratuitously to the native cultivators; but the climate is less propitious in this province than in other parts of Persia. With reference to the figures of exports given above, and in mitigation of the disparity existing between them and the imports, it should be mentioned that there is a large contraband trade across the border both with the Russian and Turkish provinces, which escapes the Custom-house altogether; and that the total value of exports is probably half as much again.

Present and future

Although the figures that I have cited seem to indicate a considerable volume of trade, complaints have long been heard in Tabriz of the difficulties and small profits of business. This arises principally from the vicious system of very long credits, which is a time-honoured institution in this market, from the rapid and constant fluctuations in exchange, and from the commercial morality of the Persian traders, which is as low as can well be imagined. A fraudulent bankruptcy, easily achieved by a bribe to the officials, or *mullahs*, is the favourite means of escaping an irksome debt. No doubt trade would be much improved if either of two roads which have been talked about for years were constructed: (1) from Bayazid on the Turkish frontier (on the Trebizond route), *viâ* Khoi to Tabriz, and thence to Kazvin, where the main road would be struck to Teheran; (2) *viâ* Ardebil to Astara on the Caspian. Nothing has hitherto come of either of these projects, although rumour is at this moment busy with their extended execution. It is not safe in Persian politics, however, to look much more than a yard beyond the end of your nose; and therefore I shall say no more about them. The Manchester firm of Ziegler's is the principal European house of business in Tabriz.

Azerbaijan troops

As I have said, Azerbaijan is the recruiting ground of the flower of the Persian army, if, indeed, the phrase can be used of a force that ordinarily presents so bedraggled an appearance. I speak here, however, of the material, not of the methods or results. Abbas Mirza collected in this province the entire army which, although ultimately severely beaten, performed so creditably in the opening engagements of the Russian campaign. At the time of the war (1826) the Azerbaijan army consisted of 20,000 cavalry, 6,000 regular infantry, and 10,000 irregular infantry, the second item being to a large extent drilled and in part officered

by Englishmen. The military contribution of the province is nominally now as follows:—

INFANTRY

Three 'Tomans' or Divisions

First Division, consisting of eleven battalions, eight of which have a strength of 1,000 men, and three of 800 men each	= 10,400
Second Division, consisting of eight battalions, four of which have a strength of 1,000 men, and four of 800 men each	= 7,200
Third Division, consisting of ten battalions, two of which have a strength of 1,000 men, and eight of 800 men each	= 8,400
(Of these battalions three are recruited in the Government of Hamadan, but are included in the Azerbaijan army).	
Total . .	26,000

CAVALRY

Irregular (i.e. effective but not mobilised): from each district 200 to 400. Three regiments alone—with an average of 350 each—are uniformed and disciplined, or can therefore be considered mobilised; the remainder are simply mounted men	= 6,800

ARTILLERY

Twelve battalions, each consisting of 400 men (formed, if required, into batteries of four guns each, drawn by horses and manned by sixty men, or into mountain batteries of four guns each, carried on mules)	= 4,800

Infantry	26,000
Cavalry	6,800
Artillery	4,800
Grand total . .	37,600

Of the infantry and artillerymen it may be said that they are indisputably the best soldiers that Persia possesses. Both are drilled from time to time, and have uniforms (not an invariable appurtenance of the Persian soldier) and a certain acquaintance with discipline. They are called out perhaps once in three or four years for a period of six months, being the rest of the time at their homes. Certain of the battalions, however, as will have been seen in my chapter upon Khorasan, are embodied for a longer period, two or three years, and are sent to garrison Meshed, Kerman, and other distant parts of Persia, whose local levies are either untrustworthy or are not endowed with military instincts. The cavalry horses are small, but of a strong and wiry stamp; and the men are born riders, and could be made into excellent light cavalry. A portion of the infantry and cavalry are armed with breech-loading Werndl rifles, and some of the batteries of artillery

Drill and armament

with breech-loading Uchatius guns; but the majority of the infantry still trail the old smooth-bore percussion musket.

Garrisons of Azerbaijan

The garrisons of the large towns in the province vary considerbly in strength, according to the season of the year, a much larger number being called out in summer than in winter. For some years a large camp of exercise has been annually formed near Tabriz, 8,000 to 9,000 men being assembled for drill under an Austrian officer, who is reported to have made a great improvement in their efficiency. In 1890, however, the camp consisted of one cavalry regiment, 300 men, three battalions of infantry, two horse-batteries, and a mountain or mule-battery of artillery. The normal garrisons are as follows, entirely supplied by Azerbaijan regiments:—

Tabriz.—Two and a half battalions of infantry, one cavalry regiment[1] (Persian Cossacks), and three batteries of artillery.
Khoi.—One infantry regiment and one battery of artillery, besides some garrison artillery to man the guns of the fort.[2]
Urumiah.—One infantry regiment and a small force of artillery.
Maragha.—One infantry regiment and a small force of artillery.
Suj Bulak.—Half a regiment of infantry and a few artillerymen.
Ardebil.—Half a regiment of infantry and a few artillerymen.

For guarding the high road through the province from near Mianeh to Julfa on the Aras, and for the maintenance of some ten guardhouses, which are mostly empty, the Government pays 12,000 *tomans* per annum to Prince Nasret-ed-Dowleh. At Maku, a curious place near the Turkish frontier, where there is an inaccessible stronghold formed by some natural caverns,[3] a powerful chief, named Timur Pasha Khan, is paid by the Government to supply 2,000 cavalry. He keeps many more men, some say 10,000, mostly armed with Martini-Henrys and Berdans, the latter being supposed to be a gift from Russia, by whom it is alleged that he is subsidised. Anyhow, he is not of the slightest use to Persia, being perfectly independent, and paying no attention to instructions from Tabriz.

[1] This regiment costs the Government 4,000 *tomans* a year, but only consists of 100 men.

[2] The fort of Khoi, which was designed by European engineers, is reported on good authority to be the only fortress worth speaking of in Persia.

[3] *Vide* a description of them by T. Alcock (1828), *Travels in Russia, Persia, &c.* In his day also Maku was 'the residence of an independent chief, who is so jealous of Russia and all his neighbours, that no European, except Colonel Monteith, had ever been received by him.'

Besides the main line of European telegraph which enters Persia by Julfa on the one side, and passes through Tabriz on its way to Teheran, there are local wires in Persian hands, running from Tabriz to Namin, above Astara, on the Caspian, 136 miles; to Suj Bulak, in the Kurdish country, 125 miles; through Khoi to Bayazid, on the Turkish frontier; and through Khoi to Urumiah, on the other side of the Shahi Lake.

Telegraphs

Before I pass on to the western and southern environs of Tabriz, the memories of a great past and the dignity attaching to illustrious names compel me to devote a paragraph to the now semi-ruined, but once renowned and prosperous city, Ardebil. Situated on a plain about equidistant between the Caspian and the remarkable extinct volcano of Savalan, whose snowy crown rises to a height of 15,791 feet above the sea,[1] Ardebil was elevated into the first rank of Persian cities, as the residence and last resting-place of the famous saint Sheikh Sefi-ed-Din, the direct descendant of the seventh Imam, and contemporary of Timur.[2] In the fifth generation from him came Shah Ismail (1480–1524 A.D.), the founder of the Sefavi dynasty, who first established his power and was finally interred, as sovereign of all Persia, in Ardebil. No wonder that two sepulchres so holy should, throughout the duration of the Sefavi dynasty, have attracted to Ardebil a host of pilgrims, and have conferred upon it the distinction almost of a royal city. In a decayed and crumbling mosque, the tombs may yet be seen, over that of the Shah being suspended a sandal-wood case, beautifully inlaid with ivory, the gift of the grateful exile of Hindustan, the Emperor Humaiun, to Ismail's son, Shah Tahmasp. In the main hall of the same building, behind silver gratings and a golden-plated gate, is the tomb of the Sheikh, overlaid with costly carpets and shawls. An adjoining hall contains a superb collection of old faïence, principally China vases, the offering of Shah Abbas for the daily service of rice, amounting to 3,600 lbs., that was issued to the pilgrims;

Ardebil

[1] In the early part of the century local tradition asserted that at the top of this mountain existed the miraculously preserved body of a great prophet (Morier's *Second Journey*, p. 238). In 1825 Captain Shee climbed to the summit and found a tomb in which lay a skeleton, half exposed, and half buried in soil and ice (*Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. iii. p. 28).

[2] I am driven, therefore, to hope that when Thielmann (*Journey*, vol. ii. p. 29) somewhat vaguely describes him as 'a great saint who died in 1834,' he has been made the victim of a printer's error for 1384.

whilst until the Russian war there were kept here under lock and key a library of the richest manuscripts and illuminated Korans, the gift of the same monarch, the bulk of which, in spite of the curses openly invoked upon the spoliator on the title-page of each volume, were mercilessly swept off by General Paskievitch for the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg.[1] In the present century Ardebil has taken the place of Alamut as a State prison; and hither, upon the suppression of the revolts that had attended the accession of Mohammed Shah, were despatched the unsuccessful pretenders, two of whom were uncles of the sovereign.

Daria-i-Shahi, or Lake of Urumiah

Not the least remarkable among the natural features of the mountain system of which Azerbaijan constitutes a part is the cluster of great lakes which are here encountered at a very considerable elevation above the sea. In Russian territory is Lake Gotcha, to the east of Erivan; in Turkish territory is Lake Van, to the west of Van. But the largest, to which I now turn, is in Persian territory, and can be seen from the citadel of Tabriz. This lake is commonly called in maps and by Europeans Lake Urumiah, from the well-known city, twelve miles distant from its western shore; but this name does not appear to be known to the Persians, who generally call it Daria-i-Shahi, or Royal Sea. It is the Kapauta of Strabo, his version of the Persian *kabuda*, or blue. The lake is eighty-four miles long, between twenty and thirty miles broad, has a circumference of nearly 300 miles, and an elevation of 4,100 feet above the sea. Indented with bays and inlets, studded particularly in the southern part with islands, surrounded by wooded shores and hills, with Mount Sehend rising to a height of 11,800 feet from its eastern side, and with the white cone of Ararat piercing the distant clouds on the north, this noble sheet of water presents a fine and delightful prospect. Accounts vary as to its earlier history; for on the one hand it is said to have formerly covered a very much larger area, so much so that the peninsula of Shahi or Shahkuh, which juts forward into it from the eastern bank, is reported (even as late as by Kinneir) to

[1] For descriptions of Ardebil, *vide* Olearius (1637), *Ambassador's Travels*, p. 38, &c.; C. Le Brun (1703), *Travels*, p. 170; Morier's *Second Journey* (1812), p. 253; Sir J. Sheil (1834), Note C to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life, &c.*; W. R. Holmes (1843), *Sketches on the Caspian Shores*, cap. iv. Popular legend derives the name from two *Divs* or Genii, named Ard and Bil, who are said to have assisted King Solomon in clearing a passage through the mountains here, in order to drain off the waters of Central Iran into the Caspian.

have been an island twenty-five miles in circumference; on the other hand, local tradition is in favour of expansion, rather than contraction, and there is alleged to have been a causeway for traffic across what is now the bed of the lake to Urumiah. Its most peculiar features are its great shallowness, rendering it for the most part little more than a flooded swamp, and its abnormal saline properties, which in salt (of which it contains 22 per cent.) and iodine excel even those of the Dead Sea. The bottom of the lake has been proved by soundings to consist of a series of terraces or ledges, the maximum depth being forty-five feet, and the average depth being perhaps fifteen or sixteen feet, though the bather can advance for two miles from the edge without getting out of his depth. The sensations of the latter, if I may judge by the analogous case of the Dead Sea, are not to be envied;[1] for it is impossible to dive or even swim, the limbs being thrown up to the surface, and a thick crust of salt being deposited upon the body, the eyelids, and in the hair. When the wind blows on Lake Urumiah, sheets of saline foam are seen scudding along the surface, and the salt is left upon the shore in a solid efflorescence, sometimes several inches thick. No fish or molluscs live in the waters, whose sole living contents are a species of small jelly-fish, which sustain the swans and wild fowl that are occasionally seen. The banks are covered with a thick and treacherous slime, composed partly of salt, partly of decomposed vegetable matter, and emitting a horrible effluvium. Of the sixty islets clustered in a group towards the southern end, three are either cultivated or used as pasture-ground, the largest being five miles in length.

Navigation

It might be imagined that so extensive a sheet of water, surrounded by such large cities and fertile plains, and said to be singularly free from storms, would have given birth to a busy and profitable navigation, and have been ploughed by the keels of numerous craft. It is not so in Persia. No Persian, not even a Turkish Persian, ever ventured a yard on to the treacherous element if he could possibly help it. The metaphor of 'burning your boats' can have no home in a country where there are no boats to burn. The instincts of lucre alone account

[1] Of the contrary opinion was Wagner, who said: 'I can affirm from personal experience that ten baths in the German Ocean do not create so much stimulus in the skin, or so much exhilaration in the nerves as the water of this lake. It is five times as salt as the sea at the Equator. You come out of its waters as red as a crab (lobster?) and, moreover, greatly invigorated and refreshed.'

for the fact that Lake Shahi is navigated at all. In 1838, an uncle of the King, being Governor-General of Azerbaijan, in order to secure a monopoly of the carrying trade, ordered all private boats to be destroyed. The same intelligent policy has been followed by his successors; and at this moment the Governor of Maragha, who enjoys the monopoly, allows only three small decked boats of twenty tons burden, which ply between the opposite shores of the lake, and the working of which he sublets to a contractor who pays him 800*l.* a year, and makes a substantial profit out of the enterprise. As Colonel Stewart says, what is wanted is a small line of steamers running between the southern and northern extremities, and transporting the grain from the rich cornlands south of the lake where it is plentiful and cheap, to the towns of Khoi and Tabriz where it is comparatively dear. But I suppose we must wait for this, as for all good things in Persia.

Marble pits

Near the eastern shore of the lake, and at about six miles from the village of Dehkharegan, are the pits or springs from which is extracted the famous semi-transparent marble, sometimes called after the neighbouring town of Maragha, sometimes after Tabriz. A number of springs, clustered within an area of half a mile in circumference, are constantly bubbling up and precipitating the limestone which they hold in solution. This is deposited in the form of horizontal layers, which are like a thin crust to start with, and can be cracked or broken, but which gradually solidify into hard blocks, with an average thickness of seven or eight inches, the best of which are believed to have been formed when the springs had a much higher temperature than the present (65° Fahr.). When quarried this petrifaction can be sawn either in the thinnest plates, when it is nearly transparent, and is sometimes used for windows, or in more substantial slabs, in which form it is much used for pavements and mural wainscoting. It is a singularly beautiful substance, being of a pink, or greenish, or milk-white colour, streaked with reddish or copper-coloured veins (from the oxide which it contains); and I have seen beautiful samples of it in the palaces and mosques of the East. I have very little doubt that the wainscoting of the Gur Amir, or Tomb of Timur, at Samarkand, which I have described in my former work,[1] and which has puzzled all travellers, is composed of this marble, which there is nothing more natural than that the great conqueror

[1] *Russia in Central Asia*, pp. 218–20.

should have carried home with him at the close of his Persian campaign.[1] The process of petrifaction bears a marked resemblance to that which was in existence till the great eruption of a few years ago at the Pink and White Terraces in New Zealand; and to that which may still be seen at the Mammoth Hot Springs in the Yellowstone Park, in North America, where the induration may be observed through all its stages from a film like frosted sugar to gleaming blocks of snow-white marble.

Maragha

The neighbouring town of Maragha, which is now a flourishing place with about 15,000 inhabitants, has, like many of its compeers in Persia, played an eminent though almost forgotten part in history. Here the enlightened Mongol prince, Hulaku Khan, the grandson of Jenghiz Khan and brother of Kublai Khan, returning from his conquest of Baghdad and overthrow of the Abbaside Khalifs, fixed his residence; here he drew around him a distinguished body of philosophers, poets, and men of science; and here in 1265 A.D. he died and was interred, on a hill of the Shahi peninsula.[2] The fame of the city was, however, chiefly due to the labours of his friend and counsellor, Nasr-ed-Din, the greatest astronomer of the age, who erected on a hill to the west of the city, where its foundations may still be traced, the observatory which has preserved his name, and in which he composed his 'Tables of the Ilkhani.' Hulaku is now almost forgotten, and Maragha knows another Nasr-ed-Din; but it is permissible to the student, as he passes by, to add a stone to the fallen cairn of such illustrious names.

Urumiah

On the other or western side of the lake, and at a distance of twelve miles from its shores, stands the city of Urumiah (shortened by the Christians into Urmia or Urmi), in a plain that is deservedly famous for its abounding fertility.[3] Framed in the Kurdistan mountains, from which descend a multiplicity of perpetual streams, and planted, irrigated, or peopled to the full extent, it has been variously reported to contain 400, 300, and 200 villages (round numbers, which I take to be merely indicative of an

[1] Since writing the above, I have come across the statement, as a matter of fact, that Timur took back with him to Samarkand a large supply of the marble of Azerbaijan.

[2] His so-called grave at Maragha is probably the tomb of one of his wives. His mother was also buried there.

[3] *Vide* a paper on the topography of the Urmi district by H. Kiepert, *Zeitschrift d. Gesellsch. f. Erdk. z. Berlin*, 1878, pp. 166–70; and Mrs. Bishop's description of Urmi city and plain (*Journeys in Persia*, vol. ii. pp. 218–45).

unusually extensive population), and has been compared by the fancy or the recollection of different voyagers to the lands at the foot of the Himalayas, to the banks of the Lake of Zurich, and to the wealthy plains of Lombardy. The city, which is situated at an elevation of 4,400 feet above the sea, contains a population of between 30,000 and 40,000, the bulk of whom are Afshar Turks, but which comprises a considerable sprinkling of Nestorian, Jewish, and Armenian families. In ancient history Urumiah is famous as one of the legendary birthplaces of the scarcely less legendary Zoroaster, and also as one of the burial-places of the Three Magi. The city is enclosed within a wall, with seven gates, and an outer ditch. The only interior structure of any importance is the arsenal, a walled building in the centre of the town, the court of which contains a dozen ancient smooth-bore six-pounders and a single brass howitzer. Until recently, and while the Kurdish terror arising out of the rebellion of Sheikh Obeidullah in 1880 prevailed, a garrison of three regiments of regulars, armed with Werndl rifles, was quartered here. To Christian visitors the chief interest of the place will consist in the fact that it is the headquarters of the American, French, and English Missions to the Nestorian populations of the neighbourhood, to which interesting but somewhat intricate subject I now turn.[1]

Origin of the Nestorians

The Nestorian Christians of the Turco-Persian highlands have been variously estimated at figures between 100,000 and 200,000, the higher being in all probability the more correct calculation. Of these by far the greater number are Turkish subjects, the Nestorian population of Azerbaijan being, according to the latest report (which nearly doubles all previous

[1] As a brief bibliography of the Nestorian Question, I have compiled the following: E. Smith and H. G. Dwight, *Missionary Researches, including a Journey into Persia*, 1834; Bishop H. Southgate, *Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, &c.*, 2 vols. 1840; Eug. Boré (1839–40), four reports in *Correspondance et Mémoires*, vol. ii.; Dr. A. Grant (1840), *Account of the Nestorian Christians settled in Ooroomia*; W. F. Ainsworth (1840), *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldæa, and Armenia*, 2 vols. 1842; Rev. J. Perkins, *Eight Years' Residence in Persia among the Nestorians*, 1843; Rev. G. P. Badger (1842), *Nestorians and their Ritual*, 2 vols. 1852; Sir J. Sheil (circ. 1850), Note E to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life, &c.*; D. T. Stoddard, *Mission to Nestorians*, 1858; Rev. J. Bassett (1871–85), *The Land of the Imams*; Rev. E. L. Cutts (1876), *Christians under the Crescent in Asia*; W. G. Abbott (1880), *Report on the Nestorian Christians of Urmia*, No. 55 in Parliamentary Papers, Turkey, No. 5, 1881; Publications of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission, particularly reports by A. Riley and Rev. Canon Maclean (1884–90); Mrs. Bishop (1890), *Journeys in Persia*, vol. ii. p. 221 *et seq.*

estimates), a little over 40,000 persons. The name by which they are popularly known in Europe, and by which I have called them, is, however, one which they neither accept nor employ themselves. It has been given to them as the lineal descendants of the famous sect which, when Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, was excommunicated and banished by the Third General Council of the Church at Ephesus in A.D. 431 for heretical opinions concerning the incarnation of Christ (he held the doctrine of two natures and two persons), espoused his cause; took refuge in the Persian kingdom, which, at that time hostile to the Roman Empire, extended to them a ready welcome; spread their name and tenets throughout the East; established great religious seminaries at Edessa, Baghdad, and Nisibis; sent missionaries to Bactria, Tartary, India, and China; converted the celebrated but misnamed Prester John; established twenty-five archiepiscopal sees, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pacific; and alike outnumbered and excelled in influence the Western organisations of Christendom; until, at the end of the fourteenth century after Christ, the universal scourge of Timur, the Great Tartar, fell upon them, and their scattered and decimated fragments retired in poverty and distress to the mountain fastnesses north of Mesopotamia, which they have since occupied, descending, as the peril became less acute, on to the plains of Mosul on the one side, and those which stretch on the other towards the basin of Urumiah. Of Nestorius the modern descendants of these fugitives know nothing. They claim to be the spiritual progeny of St. Thomas and St. Jude, and, while they commonly call themselves Syrians, are styled by the Moslems Naserani or Nazarenes. The genealogy of this interesting community is a matter upon which the learned dispute, but which is incapable of exact solution. Dr. Grant, one of the first missionary labourers amongst them, insisted that they were the relics of the Ten Tribes of Israel—a claim which has also been made by themselves—and found confirmatory evidence in their ceremonial law and ritual. It is not for me to say whether they were Hebrews—though much suspicion, in my judgment, attaches to every Lost Tribe argument that I have ever seen—Syrians, Assyrians, or Chaldæans, all of which denominations are sometimes given to them. Their language is an ancient Syriac dialect, intermingled with a good many Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, and Persian words.

More interesting, or at least more profitable than these specu-

lations, is the history of their ecclesiastical polity. The remnant saved from the slaughter of Tamerlane appear to have remained united under the headship of a Patriarch, known as Mar Elias, residing at El Kush, north of Mosul, until the middle of the sixteenth century; when the bishop of the Eastern Nestorians, living on the Turco-Persian frontier, declared his independence and founded the patriarchal line of Mar Shimun (*Anglice*, the Lord Simon), which title has been borne by his successors and has remained in the same family ever since. Early in the succeeding century a section of the Mosul Nestorians went over to Rome; their allegiance was accepted by the Pope, who consecrated their Patriarch under the title of Mar Yusuf (the Lord Joseph), his residence being at Diarbekr and his official diocese being that of Babylon. In 1778 the whole of the Mosul or Western branch of the Nestorians followed suit; and therefore at this period, about a century ago, the church was clearly, though not evenly, divided into two portions—the Eastern or Nestorian proper, under Mar Shimun, and the Western or Chaldæan (as it was more commonly called), in communion with Rome. In 1873, the latter organisation, already much shaken by the celebrated Bull of Papal Infallibility in 1869, suffered further disruption, owing to a Bull from Rome that superseded the old Assyrian Canon touching the election of a Patriarch. Mar Elia Melus, the Mattran or Metropolitan, residing at Mosul, led another schism, which has repudiated Rome, and which, though greatly inferior in numbers to its rivals, includes many of the chief families in the neighbourhood of Mosul. The large village of Telkief, on the Tigris, is a stronghold of this sect; and I saw some of its natives, magnificent specimens of manhood and strongly attached to the English, who are regularly employed as sailors upon Messrs. Lynch's steamers on the Tigris. There are, therefore, at this moment three branches of Syrian Christians: (1) the Old Nestorians, under Mar Shimun; (2) the Old Chaldæans, under the Patriarch of Babylon; (3) the New Chaldæans, under Mar Elia Melus of Mosul. The first named is the most numerous of the three, and is supposed to contain nearly 100,000 members, 40,000 in Persia and 60,000 in Turkey.

Ecclesiastical organisation

It is with the Eastern branch, under Mar Shimun, that in a work dealing with Persia I am here alone concerned. Of this church there are eight bishops, two of whom (Mar Goriel and Mar Johnan) are attached to Persian dioceses. The Mar

The Mar Shimun

Shimun has long resided in the mountain village of Kochannis, near Julamerk, in Turkish territory, above the famous waters of the Zab. Nominally he unites in his own person the spiritual and temporal functions of government over his flock; he appoints the *maleks* or lay rulers of each district; he is the head of a sacerdotal hierarchy of *kashishas* and *abunas*, who are the spiritual heads of

THE MAR SHIMUN

the various villages and tribes; and in times past his authority was absolute and unique. The Mar Shimun, or reigning Patriarch, is always chosen from the same family, a number of the male members of which, who have neither eaten meat from their birth nor married, are kept as a school of candidates to the succession. When one of their number is chosen, the rest are permitted to relapse into the enjoyments from which they have hitherto been excluded. The present Patriarch-Designate is the

cousin of Mar Shimun, and is a young man named Mar Auraham. When he succeeds he will take the dynastic title that always accompanies the Patriarchal throne.

His authority

In recent times, and ever since these provinces were converted into pashaliks and seriously governed by the Porte, the authority of Mar Shimun has sensibly dwindled. During the savage Kurdish outbreak of Badar Khan Beg against the Nestorians in 1843, the then occupant of the patriarchate fled into Persian territory to Urumiah. Since his return to Kochannis he has received a monthly subsidy of 12*l.* from the Turkish Government, who have acted astutely in assuming the *rôle* of paymasters. The *maleks* or headmen no longer pay him implicit obedience; his authority over the hill tribes is in parts *nil*; and the reigning Patriarch has still further weakened his position by incapacity, indolence, and it is said by even worse characteristics. He is in a somewhat difficult position; for on the one hand he is salaried by the Porte, on the other he is at once in correspondence and co-operation with the English Church, and is angled for by the American Presbyterians; while his own sympathies have been rumoured to be in favour of the Russians. His name is Reuil, and he signs himself Reuil Shimun. In the clash of conflicting interests above mentioned it is probable that this peculiar and almost isolated relic of theocratic government is doomed, and that the Mar Shimun of the future will play but a small part on the political stage.

Creed and ritual

Of the tenets of the Syrian Christians it is both difficult and, in this context, unnecessary to give a minute account; the peculiarity of the Church consisting rather in organisation and ritual than in any written standard of doctrinal belief, and the missionaries of the various foreign persuasions being apt to read their own dogmas into the Nestorian Creed. It may be said, however, that it presents many of the features that might be expected in a Church, dating from the fifth century of the Christian era, which, owing to its peculiar situation and surroundings, has altered but little up to the present time. An ambiguous canon of the Holy Scriptures, an uncommon and elastic catalogue of sacraments, a hereditary and celibate episcopate, accompanied by very strict observance of the Sabbath and the Christian fasts, are among its most striking characteristics.[1]

[1] The churches may also be mentioned, which are mostly very plain, unpretentious buildings, in order not to excite Mussulman hostility; and the

I now come to the missionary efforts that have been made in the last half century either to evangelise, to confirm, or to reconstruct the different branches of this ancient Church, and that have brought its name so prominently under the notice of Europe.

Missionary enterprise

The American Presbyterians were the first in the field. In the year 1829 Messrs. Smith and Dwight came out to report; in 1833 the Rev. J. Perkins was appointed to the Mission, and in 1835 he opened the work, which, supported by active industry and large funds, has been vigorously and successfully pursued (largely by means of British Consular protection from Tabriz) ever since. At first the Americans disclaimed all intentions of proselytism, and announced reform and not reconstruction as their programme. Accordingly they were received with acclamation by the native Church and bishops; an attitude which gave way to sullen hostility and finally to embittered resistance when the new-comers began ostentatiously to make converts and to set about the creation of a new Church. In 1868 the body of Protestant Nestorians thus formed, and numbering at that time 2,400 persons, felt itself strong enough to secede; and a Confession of Faith and rules of discipline were drawn up for the infant organisation. In 1870 the Mission, which had previously been settled at Urumiah alone, extended its field of operation, and decided to embrace both Mussulmans and Armenians within the range of its propaganda. It established missions at Tabriz, Teheran, and Hamadan, all of which, well appointed and liberally endowed, have worked with great success. The head-quarters of the Mission are still at Urumiah, where they possess a town house and a large building, known as the College, outside the town, containing chapel, schools for ordinary and for technical instruction (carpentering and smithy), a hospital, and a printing press; as well as a country residence for the summer upon Mount Seir, five miles from the city. According to the latest report that I have seen, their establishment consists of six missionaries at Urumiah, one on the plain of Salmas, four at Tabriz, two at Teheran, two at Hamadan, a considerable number of ladies being also resident at the stations, and a medical missionary being attached to each. One of these gentlemen, Dr. Holmes, held for a time the appointment of consulting

1. American Presbyterians

entrances to which—it is said so as to inculcate reverence, but in reality to escape defilement by cattle—often consist only of small apertures in the wall not three feet high, reached by a ladder from the ground.

physician to the Vali-Ahd, or Heir Apparent, at Tabriz. Another, Dr. Torrence, is well known in Teheran. The income of the Mission, according to the latest published returns, is over 7,000*l.* a year. In addition to the American ministers and their wives or female helpers, the organisation can boast of seventy ordained or licentiate native priests, of 120 native lay missionaries, of thirty churches and over 2,000 communicants, of 120 schools and 2,800 scholars. It is pushed by all the means that an indefatigable propaganda and large pecuniary resources can promote.

A number of Roman Catholic Chaldæans had been for some time settled upon the Salmas plain, to the north of Urumiah.[1] Alarmed at the prospect of losing these adherents, owing to the vigorous neighbouring crusade of the Americans, the Papal College at Rome, urged by a very remarkable young Frenchman, named Boré, who, having been sent out to Persia on a scientific mission by a French society, became interested in the Persian Christians, and developed a passionate missionary fervour—determined upon an energetic counter-effort, and sent out a band of French Lazarists to take their part in the competition for converts. The French Government has always patronised this establishment, though it was not till the year 1858 that the Primate of the Roman Chaldæans, with the aid of the French Embassy at Constantinople, obtained a firman from the Porte acknowledging his patriarchal supremacy. At the present time the French missionaries have two stations in Azerbaijan—one at Urumiah, in which place a Monseigneur or French bishop resides; the other at Khosrova, on the plain of Salmas, where the Catholics have for long been in the ascendant. Their establishment consists of seven priests and a nunnery of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul. In Turkey, but not in Persia, there is a Dominican mission to the Papal Chaldæans as well.

2. French Catholics

3. Swiss Protestants

About the same time a mission to the Nestorians was inaugurated by the Protestant Church of Basle.

[1] At Dilman, in the Salmas district, to the north-east of Lake Urumiah, there is a colossal Sassanian bas-relief sculped on a rock, which has been conjectured to represent Ardeshir and Shapur I. receiving the submission of the Armenians. (Texier's *L'Arménie, &c.*, vol. i. pl. 40, and Flandin and Coste, *Perse Ancienne*, vol. iv. pls. 204–5. Colonel Stewart also tells me of a rock-tomb 30 feet above the ground, at a distance of 1½ hour from Suj Bulak on the road to Miandoab, where a pillar carved in the cliff-face separates two doorways conducting into the sepulchral chamber.

It did not long survive, however, and was abandoned, after the departure of the first missionaries, in 1837.

4. Anglican mission

Finally, but not till after repeated overtures, the Anglican Church appeared upon the scene. The first official communications between the leaders of the two Churches appear to have taken place in the year 1843, when the Mar Shimun of that day opened a correspondence with Archbishop Howley. Mr. W. F. Ainsworth had already, in 1840, been sent out on a mission by the joint agency of the Royal Geographical Society and the S.P.C.K., to report upon the condition of the Nestorian peoples,[1] and in 1842 he was followed by Dr. G. P. Badger, the well-known scholar, who was despatched by the S.P.C.K. and S.P.G.; but upon the latter withdrawing from the co-operation in the succeeding year he was compelled to return, not, however, before he had collected the material for a standard work upon the Nestorian ritual.[2] The communications then languished till in 1868 a further and pathetic appeal for assistance was addressed by the Bishops of the Syrian Church to Archbishop Tait. The result was the mission of the Rev. E. L. Cutts, and a third book.[3] The succession, however, of more or less bootless missions and more or less admirable books now came to an end. A minister was definitely authorised and sent out by Dr. Tait in 1881; and since 1884 when, in consequence of troubles both with the Turks and Persians, Mr. Riley was commissioned by Archbishop Benson to report upon the situation, he has been succeeded by a capable missionary staff with a well-elaborated organisation. In 1888, the ministers of the new Mission, whose object is not the making of converts, which is formally disavowed, but the re-edification and gradual purification of the ancient Nestorian Church,[4] arrived in Persia, and met with an enthusiastic

[1] *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor*, &c., 2 vols. 1842.

[2] *The Nestorians and their Ritual*, 2 vols. 1852.

[3] *Christians under the Crescent in Asia*, S.P.C.K.

[4] The Archbishop's letter to the Patriarch of Antioch, announcing the Mission, contained these words: 'Our object in sending out these priests is not to bring over these Christians to the communion of the Church of England, nor to alter their ecclesiastical customs and traditions, nor to change any doctrines held by them which are not contrary to that faith which the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Œcumenical Councils of the undivided Church of Christ, has taught as necessary to be believed by all Christians; but to encourage them in bettering their religious condition, and to strengthen an ancient Church, which, through ignorance from within and persecution from without, cannot any longer stand alone, but without some assistance must eventually succumb, though unwillingly, to the external organisations at work in its midst.'

reception at the hands of the Christians, from Mar Shimun downwards. The establishment, whose headquarters are also at Urumiah, under the charge of Canon Maclean, has grown so rapidly that it now consists of a College for Priests and Deacons at Urumiah, which, at the beginning of last year (1891), contained seventy students, a High School for boys, with a membership of fifty, the same for girls with twenty, and an establishment of the Sisters of Bethany. There is also a High School at Superghan, eighteen miles north-east of Urumiah, with forty scholars, another at Ardishai with the same number, and seventy-two village schools in Persia and Turkey combined, with a total scholars' list of nearly fifteen hundred. There are five English clergymen engaged in the work, one of whom, the Rev. W. Browne, under circumstances of great peril and privation, spent the winter of 1887–1888 in Mar Shimun's village of Kochannis, and was thereby instrumental in preventing a massacre of the Christians by the Kurds. In 1889 the income of the Mission was one thousand pounds from subscriptions and nine hundred from donations.

Results of Missions

How far the laudable attempt to enable this archaic and interesting Church, which, in spite of persecution, ignominy, and desertion, has resolutely clung to its ancient faith, to stand again upon its own legs, is likely to succeed, or how far regeneration can be kept divorced from organic and doctrinal change, it is as yet too early to determine. There are some who cling to the belief that reunion between the Anglican and Syrian Churches is possible. There are others, and they are perhaps the wiser, who look to education and moral nurture as the true field of missionary enterprise among these peoples, and who either care little for, or have not much hope of, ecclesiastical communion or ecclesiastical reorganisation. One thing is certain, that immense benefit has already resulted to the Christian populations both of Persia and Turkey from the labours of the various missionary bodies, American, French, and English. Persecution is much rarer; disabilities have been removed; education, for which the Nestorians, even in the wild, mountainous districts, clamour with avidity, has rendered them docile, law-abiding, and industrious. They are a warm-hearted people, prone to hospitality, fond of festivity, and neither so precocious nor so crafty as the Armenians. On the other hand, they are very quarrelsome amongst themselves, are avaricious of money, and

incurably addicted to mendicancy;[1] and sixty years of missionary effort have not taught them that there is any virtue in truth, or any call for private honour.[2] Since a decree by the Shah in December 1889, prohibiting the opening of any fresh Christian schools in Persia, the missionaries have found difficulty in extending their educational programme. The present Prince-Governor of Urumiah, Jehansuz Mirza, a cousin of the Shah, has, however, shown himself friendly and courteous; and it must be avowed to the credit of the Persian Government, that, with rare exceptions, they have acted with liberal-mindedness and fairness towards their Christian subjects in these parts. Between the French and English Missions there exist the most friendly relations; for each has a large and independent field of work, and neither intrudes upon the ground of the other. Between the Americans and the English it is only natural that there should have been some jealousy and friction, not merely because the latter are later arrivals upon an arena over which the former thought that they had established a monopoly, but because their objects are entirely

[1] Mr. Riley in his first report says: 'To proceed on a begging tour to England or America is the highest ambition of an Assyrian; for many have returned to their native land to pass their days in comparative wealth owing to the misplaced zeal of honest and charitable people in England, who are no match for the subtle Oriental. The appeal is usually on behalf of a school; in rare cases there is some establishment of this kind in existence, and if the applicant be more than ordinarily honest he may spend a third or even half of the sum he has raised in England on his school when he returns. The mixture of honesty and dishonesty in the Chaldæan character—a combination entirely strange to the English mind—is calculated to deceive even the most astute, and I can only say that of all the Assyrians or Nestorians who have visited England during the last few years, I cannot call to mind one whose word I would believe when his interests were concerned, or to whom I would entrust with confidence the smallest sum of money.'

[2] Again let me quote Mr. Riley: 'Out of the whole nation there is not a single person of any kind whom we can absolutely and entirely trust. All, from the highest to the boys in the school, are only relatively trustworthy; the boys, indeed, are the best, but as they grow up it is no wonder if they develop this untrustworthy character, when they find their fathers and mothers, pastors, and all whom they are bound to revere, habitually and shamelessly departing from the truth whenever it is to their interest to do so. No amount of education will remove this terrible evil. There is no sign of improvement amongst that part of the nation which has been under the education of the American Presbyterian Mission for over half a century—this education is, in some respects, an advanced one, but it seems rather to sharpen the wits of the recipients and make them clever rogues than to improve their morality;—those of them that come under the ordinary education of the French Mission are the same, the only difference being that the Americans endeavour to trust their people, and get deceived, and the French are very chary of their confidence, and so escape.'

different and even irreconcilable, the Anglican missionaries having come out to renovate and build up that which it is the avowed desire of a proselytising body to weaken and destroy. The American Missions, including, as they do, Mohammedans within the scope of their activity, are also rendered more likely thereby to conflict with the Persian Government, which resolutely prohibits any such propaganda, and has in consequence sometimes come into collision with the work of the Church of England Missionary Society, of which I shall speak later, at Isfahan.

The latest calculation of the Nestorian population of Azerbaijan is as follows:—

	Families		Families
Salmas district	700	Baradost or Beranduz	100
Somai and Chara	100	Tergavar	500
Urumiah district	3,600	Mergavar	100
Sulduz	400	Total	5,500

It has been common to estimate these families at four or five persons apiece, and hence the total usually given of 20,000 to 25,000 Persian Nestorians. The missionaries, however, are of opinion that the population has so much increased in the peaceful reign of the present Shah that eight persons to each family is a fairer computation. Adopting this average, we shall get a total of 44,000. It is to the interest of the Persians for political reasons to underrate the number of their Christian subjects. The Nestorians of the plains are robust, broad-shouldered men, with open countenances, fair complexions, and frequently with red beards. The mountain Nestorians are wild and uncouth, and often undistinguishable from the Kurds, with whom, however, they are at constant and deadly enmity. Each attack the camps and rob the flocks of the other, but the Kurds, being the stronger, better armed, and more evilly-disposed, are usually the aggressors.

Numbers and appearance of Persian Nestorians

Owing to the active interest of the missionaries, the protestations of foreign consuls, and the milder disposition of modern Persian Governments, the Persian Nestorians cannot now complain of serious oppression. It is true that there still remain in the Mohammedan code two laws which, if enforced as they were once, with asperity, might become instruments of cruel injustice. These are the law by which, in a court of justice, the evidence of a Christian is not accepted against that of a

Disabilities and hardships

Mussulman; and the law, known as that of Jedid-el-Islam, by which any Christian convert to Islam is entitled to claim the entire property of his or her family, including collaterals. Male apostates have always been rare; but Christian girls were sometimes forcibly, or even willingly, abducted by Mohammedan lovers, who then, under a fictitious declaration of conversion, put in a claim for the forfeited property.[1] This practice gave rise to much fraud and imposture; but a careful inquiry is now as a rule instituted into the spontaneity of the alleged conversion, and it rests with the Governor either to carry out the law in its cruel intensity, or more frequently to assign to the convert only a share of the family goods. Class and social prejudices are drawbacks from which a subject Christian population must always expect to suffer in a Mohammedan country, and of which the Nestorians bear their share. They are also liable to be oppressed by the village *aghas* or landlords, to whom they pay their rent, and who will not infrequently exact more than is their legal due. An official, called the *serperast*, was appointed many years ago, at the instance of the British Government, to safeguard the interests of the Christian peoples, and as a medium between them and the district governor; but he appears to have utilised his position to inflame rather than allay disputes, with a view to extracting bribes from the rival litigants. Unfortunately, the Nestorians are so incurably litigious themselves, that even the certainty of being worsted in any legal encounter does not in the least act as a deterrent to their zeal. These appear to be the sole surviving hardships from which the Nestorian subjects of Persia now suffer; and their redress may provide material for the energies of missionaries and consuls for a little while yet to come.

All Christians are exempt from military service in Persia; but, in return, they pay a poll tax of five *krans* per annum to the state.

Taxation

This tax is legally levied only upon males above the age of fifteen; but it is sometimes exacted both from boys and from old men. In certain villages on the Urumiah plain there is a special tax called *giur-al-lik* (lit. 'see and take'), according to which a house tax of five *krans* per annum is levied upon

[1] In the recent summer (1891), the papers have been full of a case which I suspect of belonging to this category. A young girl named Greenfield, the daughter of an English subject and an Armenian mother, the former of whom had acquired property near Suj Bulak, was forcibly abducted by a Kurd, whose fellow-countrymen took up arms and declined to surrender her. Upon examination she declared her conversion to Islam.

Mussulmans, but of eight *krans* upon Christians; and an equivalent scale on whatever live stock they possess. Generally speaking, the position of the peasants may be said to depend upon the character of the *agha*, or landlord, who is responsible to Government for the taxes up to the fixed assessment, and who either exacts or renounces his pound of flesh as his inclination determines.

Armenians

The number of Armenians resident in Azerbaijan is inferior to the Nestorians, but is yet considerable. The census is calculated as follows:—

	Families		Families
Maku	300	Baradost or Beranduz	180
Kotur	100	Karadagh	1,000
Khoi	400	Maragha	120
Salmas Plain	1,200	Miandoab	80
Somai and Chara	100	Suj Bulak	60
Urumiah	400	Tabriz	740
Sulduz	100	Ardebil	35
		Total	4,815

The Armenians being less prolific, less gregarious, and less stay-at-home than the Nestorians, it is recommended to compute their families at an average of six persons, which will give a total of 28,890; or, together with the Nestorians, a grand total of 72,890 for the Christian population of Azerbaijan. The Persian Armenians are a less attractive and an even less reliable people than the mendacious, but peaceable Nestorians. They travel a great deal, and pick up revolutionary ideas, and are disposed to deceit and turbulence. The local head of their church is an archbishop at Tabriz, who throws what obstacles he can in the way of the Christian missions; whilst the Catholicos of the entire Armenian church is located not far from the frontier, in Russian territory, at Echmiadzin. The Armenian question is, however, so much a Turkish and so little a Persian one, that I do not feel called upon to say anything more about it here. I shall have occasion to speak of the people again, when dealing with Julfa.

Kurdistan

From the Nestorians and Armenians it is an easy and natural transition to turn to their hereditary foes, the Kurds. It is a strange caprice of fortune that should have located in this quarter of the globe, in immediate neighbourhood, two, nay, three communities of men, alien to each other in character, race, and religion, whose juxtaposition is fraught with endless and irremediable strife, whereas, had they been separated,

each has qualities and merits fitting it for some nobler part than that of combatants in an international brawl. Kurdistan, which is a name in very common use upon the titlepage of travellers' books, is no more than a convenient geographical expression for the entire country, estimated at over 50,000 square miles, that is inhabited by the Kurds. This region has no natural or political boundaries; it includes both Turkish and Persian territory, and it contains many other elements, Turkish, Persian, Chaldæan, and Armenian, in the population as well. It may be said to extend from Turkish Armenia on the north, to the plains of the middle Tigris and the Luristan mountains on the south, and through the greater part of this length to overlap the Persian border.[1]

Origin and history of the Kurds

The origin and ancestry of the Kurds is too large, and, I may add, too uncertain a question to be debated at length here. Whether they are of Iranian or of Turanian origin, whether they are the descendants of Medes, or of Parthians, or whether they are the Gardu or Gurdu, or Gutu, who, in the remote times when Hittites and Accadians were great in the land, held the mountains north of Assyria, and after the fall of Nineveh became Aryanised by the overwhelming Aryan migrations of the period—are questions which no one has hitherto

[1] I have compiled the following list of authorities for Kurdistan, and more especially the Persian Kurds: Sir J. M. Kinneir (1813), *Journey through Kurdistan*; J. S. Buckingham (1816), *Travels in Assyria, etc.*, caps. vi.–ix.; C. J. Rich (1820), *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. i. caps. ii.–xi.; Hon. G. Keppel (1824), *Personal Narrative of a Journey, etc.*, caps. xii., xiv.; Sir H. Willock (1829), *Assassination of Professor Schultz in Kurdistan* (Journal of the R. As. Soc., vol. i.); G. Fowler (1831, 1836), *Three Years' Residence in Persia*, vol. i. p. 134, vol. ii. cap. ii.; Capt. R. Mignan (1830), *Winter Journey through Russia to Koordistaun*, 2 vols.; (Sir) J. Sheil (1836), *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. viii. p. 54; J. B. Fraser (1834), *Travels in Koordistan, etc.*, vol. i. letters iii., iv., v.; vol. ii. letters viii., ix., x.; (Sir) H. Rawlinson (1838), *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. x. p. 1; J. Brant (1838), *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. x. p. 341; Com. J. F. Jones (1844), *Narrative of a Journey through part of Kurdistan* (No. 43 of Bombay Records, 1857); M. Wagner (1843), *Travels in . . . Koordistan*; Scheref Nameh, Prince de Bitlis, *Histoire des Kourdes*, 2 vols. 1860–1862; D. W. Marsh (1864), *The Tennesseean in Persian Kurdistan*; J. G. Taylor (1864), *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. xxxv. p. 21; F. Millingen (1868), *Wild Life among the Koords*; J. C. McCoan (1879), *Our New Protectorate, Turkey in Asia*, 2 vols.; Colonel R. E. Carr (1879), 'The Kurdistan Mountain Ranges' (*Journal of the R. U. S. I.*, vol. xxii. pp. 135–184); J. Creagh, *Armenians, Koords, and Turks*, 2 vols., 1880; Major H. Trotter (1881), 'Report on the Kurds' (No. 134 of *Parliamentary Papers*, Turkey, No. 6, 1881); H. Binder (1886), *Au Kurdistan*, cap. v.; Mrs. Bishop (1890), *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. ii.

solved, and which I am content, therefore, to relinquish. One may still vindicate for the Kurds a respectable antiquity, by identifying them, as it is tolerably safe to do, with the Carduchi of Xenophon (probably the Kudraha of the cuneiform inscriptions), who, in this very region, harassed and tormented the retreating Ten Thousand. Alike in country, character, and name (though this last is not universally admitted), the two peoples correspond; and dismissing the more nebulous past, we may, therefore, usher them into history with credentials of identity which they have ever since sustained. Included, but never absorbed in the successive empires that have claimed the sovereignty of Western Asia—Macedonian, Roman, Parthian, Byzantine, Tartar, Persian, and Turkish—they have proved a thorn in the side of every ruling power. The famous Saladin (lit. Salah-ed-Din) of the Crusades, was, according to Abulfeda, a Kurd. So was Edrisi, the historian, who, when Sultan Selim I. wrested these regions in battle from Shah Ismail, the first Sefavi King of Persia, in 1514, was appointed by the conqueror to organise and administer the territory of his unruly countrymen. Over a century later, in 1639 A.D., a treaty between another Sultan and another Shah, Murad IV. of Turkey and Sefi of Persia, established a frontier line between the two empires, substantially identical with that which has ever since prevailed; and from this period, therefore, dates the divided and, as a rule, in both cases illusory allegiance of the Kurdish tribes. On either side of the frontier, the subsequent history of the Kurds is obscure. They are a people without a literature, and almost without a history. The tribal feeling was very strong amongst them, and in the absence of any interference—for the best of reasons, fear—on the part of the central power, individual chieftains acquired a position that was little short of despotic independence. About sixty years ago, in 1834, the Turks, under the capable lead of Reshid Mohammed Pasha, set about destroying this system and replacing it by Ottoman *vilayets* and *valis* in Turkish Kurdistan: while in Persian Kurdistan, where the problem, because smaller, was always less acute, the reigning dynasty, and particularly the present Shah, have pursued the familiar Kajar policy of breaking up the cohesion and ruling families of the dangerous tribes, and reasserting the authority of Teheran. At the present time, therefore, the Kurds, though addicted to outbreaks of lawlessness,

are, in both territories, more subject to discipline than at any previous epoch of their history.

Religion and language

I am here more especially concerned with the Persian Kurds, and I shall, therefore, omit any details that relate to the Turkish Kurds only; though of what I have to say upon the former subject, there is scarcely anything that is not equally applicable to the Turkish side of the border. The Kurds are illiterate, but bigoted Sunnis of the Shafei sect (one of the four subdivisions of orthodox Mussulmans); bigoted, not because they are, as is frequently supposed, fanatical by temperament, but because, in Persia, they are brought into contact with a Shiah people and dynasty whom they cordially detest and despise. The root of the Persian Kurdish question, whenever it becomes acute, is the religious hatred between Sunnis and Shiahs; the root of the Ottoman Kurdish question is the religious hatred between Mohammedans and Christians. Some of the more Persianised Kurds are, however, Shiahs; whilst in some places of the mountains are to be found communities belonging to the peculiar Ali Illahi sect, who combine with a belief in the godhead of Ali, certain strange ceremonies and esoteric doctrines of which not very much is known.[1] The language spoken by the majority of the Kurds is Kurmanju (sometimes called Kirdasi) which is generally accepted as an old Persian patois, intermingled with alien words. In Ardelan, however, and Kermanshah, what is called the Guran dialect is spoken, presenting an even greater affinity to modern Persian.

[1] Sir H. Rawlinson wrote of the Ali Illahis in vol. ix. of the *Journal of the R. G. S.* (1839): 'They believe in a series of successive incarnations of the Godhead, amounting to 1001. Benjamin, Moses, Elias, David, Jesus Christ, Ali, and his tutor Salman, a joint development; the Imam Husein and the Haft Tun (Seven Bodies) are considered the chief of these incarnations. The Haft Tun were seven Pirs or spiritual guides, who lived in the early ages of Islam, and each, worshipped as the Deity, is an object of adoration in some particular part of Kurdistan. Baba Yadgar was one of these. The whole of the incarnations are thus regarded as one and the same person, the bodily form of the divine manifestation being alone changed; but the most perfect development is supposed to have taken place in the person of Benjamin, David, and Ali.' Ali is, indeed, frequently invoked by them under the name of Daud or David; and there are evident marks of Judaism in their creed. In the twelfth century Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela appears to have regarded them as Jews. Their sacred place is at Zardah on Mount Dalaku (near Zohab), and there their chief priest resides.' *Vide* also note by Sir H. R. to Rawlinson's *Herodotus*, vol. i. p. 258; W. F. Ainsworth, *Personal Recollections*, vol. i. p. 381; and J. T. Bent, *Scotch Geogr. Mag.* Feb. 1890.

Occupation and character

Of the life and character of the Kurds, it would appear from the apoplectic sputterings of some newspapers that a prejudiced and erroneous impression prevails. They are commonly spoken of, for instance, as though they were all nomads, all robbers, and, for the most part, monsters of iniquity. The impeachment against the evil-doers amongst them is quite sufficiently strong without including the innocent in the attainder. By far the greater part of the Persian Kurds are sedentary and pastoral. A great many of them farm and till the ground on the plains and hill-slopes; an even larger number keep herds of sheep, goats and cattle, from which they make excellent cheese and butter; and the extent of their nomadic habits is in most cases that in the summer months they move into camps on the higher acclivities, above the settled villages which they inhabit in the winter. Nomad Kurds are to be found particularly in Turkish territory, and on the border: and perhaps the wealthiest and most independent of the tribes belong to this class, the cultivators of the soil and shepherds being, as a rule, deplorably ignorant and poor. As regards their character, every variety may be found in their midst, from the typical robber chieftain to the harmless peasant, and from the dashing warrior to the miserable thrall. Those who know them best, deny that they are naturally either cruel or fanatical, and credit them with a rude hospitality and high courage. When excited, however, they are as ugly customers as can be encountered. Their position amid hostile and craven communities, whose religions they abhor, and in territories whose governments they abominate, tempts them to anarchy and turbulence. Ruled by a strong but just hand, there is no reason why they should not become an orderly community, very useful for purposes of warfare, instead of a bogey to frighten the missionaries and scarify the readers of the 'Daily News.' At the present time they are not, at any rate in Turkey, of much avail for military purposes, being addicted to plunder and impatient of restraint. In the Russo-Turkish War they are said to have done more harm than good. From the Persian Kurds, who are more civilised, several regiments are raised for the Persian army; one of which, from the Guran district, was for two years, 1834–6, commanded by Sir Henry Rawlinson, when in the service of Mohammed Shah. Down to the present century, the Kurdish cavalry were in many parts clad in chain armour, in which, together with their long lances and

flaunting scarves, they presented a very martial and formidable appearance. They are an extraordinarily ignorant and an extraordinarily stupid people, with neither education, schools, nor books, and it has been said of the whole race that not one in 10,000 can read. They have the black hair and eyes, the dark complexion, and the sullen swagger (so characteristic, too, of the Afghans), that are usually associated with picturesque ruffianism; and the sympathies or the fears of travellers have variously represented their features as strikingly handsome, or repulsively ugly.

Rebellion of Sheikh Obeidullah

In 1880 occurred a serious, but abortive, Kurdish rebellion in Persia, which afforded at once a measure of the strength and of the weakness of the Kurdish organisation. A chieftain named Sheikh Obeidullah, whose father, Sheikh Tahar, had been a fanatic of local note, hailing from a mountain village south of Van in Turkish Kurdistan, where he was head of the small tribe of Oramar, acquired a great reputation for personal sanctity and administrative ability, and gradually came to be looked upon as the leader of Kurdish nationality. He affected almost royal style, entertained from 500 to 1000 visitors daily in his *diwan-khaneh*, ruled with a strong hand, and was in fact a sort of petty monarch among the Kurds. There is not a doubt that he dreamed of an independent Kurdistan as a stepping-stone to an attack upon the detested Shiah kingdom of Persia, which, had he been successful in his prior object, he might have thrown into very considerable confusion. There is also no doubt that the Turks, whose subject he was, at first smiled upon his aspirations, not so much because of the *arrière pensée* with regard to Persia, as because in the erection of an independent Kurdish principality they saw an effective set-off and checkmate to the Armenian agitation. Encouraged by these symptoms, Sheikh Obeidullah struck, and struck, as it first appeared, to some purpose. He crossed the border into Persia at the head of several thousand men, and his son, Abdul Kader, seized the town of Suj Bulak and advanced upon Maragha, from which the Persians fled with characteristic precipitation. A massacre of 3,000 persons was perpetrated by the victorious Kurds at Miandoab. Soon the Kurdish army, joined by most of the local tribes, was heard of on Mount Seir outside the walls of Urumiah, which, while beleaguered for ten days, is said to have been saved chiefly by the negotiations of Dr. Cochrane, one of the American Mission, who was on friendly terms

with the Sheikh. Meanwhile, there were great trepidation and telegraphing at Teheran. An army of 20,000 men, with some batteries of artillery, was marched off to the theatre of war; its commander, the Hishmet-ed-Dowleh having died *en route*, the old statesman Mohammed Husein Khan, the Sipah Salar, or Commander-in-Chief, was despatched to Tabriz; the Shah appealed to Russia for help, to England for counsel, and to Turkey for amends. At the moment, however, of the most tense and ominous anxiety, the thundercloud dwindled, dissolved, and disappeared. The Sheikh, who might with ease have marched upon Tabriz, and have occupied it probably without resistance, faltered and was lost. The time was long enough to show that his following had no ideas of cohesion, much less of conquest, but were animated only by religious animosity and the desire to plunder. As the prospect of hard fighting increased, their own jealousies broke loose, they fell away from their leader, and the movement which had begun with such sanguine omens in September, ignominously collapsed in November. Strong pressure was brought to bear upon the Porte by the European Governments, in deference to which Obeidullah was at length arrested and conveyed to Constantinople in July 1881. In August 1882, like most prisoners at the Turkish capital, he escaped, but, having surrendered again a few months later, he was deported to Mecca, where he died in October 1883. The movement, although a fiasco, was, from the political point of view, one of great importance, for it demonstrated the utter impracticability, owing to family and clan dissensions, of a united Kurdish organisation, which will probably not again be heard of during our time.

The number of Kurds under Ottoman rule is estimated at from one to one and a half million. The figures of those on Persian territory have been given as follows (exclusive of the Kurdish colonies, of which I have previously spoken, in Khorasan):—

Number of Persian Kurds

Frontier Kurds and Kurds of Azerbaijan	250,000
Kurds of Kurdistan proper, i.e. Sinna and Ardelan	120,000
Kurds of Kermanshah	230,000
Total	600,000

On the other hand, Colonel Stewart, in his latest report (1890) gives the number of Kurds in Azerbaijan as 450,000, which is nearly double the first item in the above calculation. I may here

repeat what I have often said before, that no numerical calculations in Persia agree, or can be accepted with implicit confidence. The above-quoted table is, however, useful as supplying us with a fairly correct classification of the Persian Kurds, about which some more ample information may be opportune.

1. Frontier tribes

There can be no doubt that by far the most lawless and rascally of the Kurds are the frontier tribes, who migrate forwards and backwards across the border line, according to the season of the year or the hope of plunder, seeking refuge from an atrocity in the one country by retreat to the other. Twenty-five years ago, Mr. J. G. Taylor, British Consul at Diarbekr, penned the following paragraph, which is as true now as when composed:

> This mixed nationality of one family and the still unsettled state of the frontier cause interminable disputes between the governments of Persia and Turkey. The Kurds being equally at home in one country as in the other, cross the border whenever they feel inclined or it suits their purpose, either for business or to evade proper punishment due to crimes committed in one or the other country. All attempts to levy taxes, enforce conscription, and arrest offenders are thwarted by a hasty migration to Persia or Turkey, as the case may be. The military cordon stationed along the line that ought, if efficiently organised, to assist Government in enforcing order and obedience is totally useless for either, while the jealousies and quarrels invariably existing between the civil and military authorities thwart any well-devised action of the former.

Of these border-nomads and Azerbaijani Kurds, the following is the latest computation that I have received:—

	Tents or Families
Shekak.[1]—Partly Turkish, partly Persian, and noted robbers; Sunnis of Shafei sect	1,500
Herki.—Crossing in summer into Persia and descending in winter to the plains of Mosul	2,000
Oramar.—A few of whom cross the Persian frontier in summer	——
Karapapak.—Villagers of the Sulduz and Baradost (Beranduz) plains; Shiahs	3,000
Mikri.—East and north-east of Suj Bulak; Sunnis and sedentary	2,000
Menkuri.—South of Suj Bulak; Sunnis and sedentary	5,000
Mamash.—In district of Lahijan, west and south-west of Suj Bulak; Sunnis and sedentary	3,000
Zeza.—In mountains north-west of Ushnu; Sunnis and robbers	1,000
Haideranlu.—Large tribe on frontier near Khoi	——

[1] Their chief, Ali Khan, is in prison at Tabriz.

Suj Bulak, with a population of 15,000, is the local capital of the Kurds of Azerbaijan. It is ruled by a Kurdish governor (subject to the Governor-General of Tabriz), the present holder of the office, Saif-ed-Din Khan, being a well-educated man, with a knowledge of French.

2. Kurdistan proper

Between the provinces of Azerbaijan and Kermanshah is situated the small province of Ardelan, or Persian Kurdistan proper, inhabited mainly by sedentary Kurds. The capital, Sinna, is situated in an open, cultivated valley, and the Governor, at present Ferhad Mirza, a cousin of the Shah, occupies a fine palace, also containing the barracks, on an eminence in the centre of the town. Here are commonly stationed two Kurdish regiments of 800 men, and a battery of artillery. It is only within the present reign that this province has been thoroughly subdued to the central authority. For centuries it was ruled by almost independent Guran chieftains, of the house of Beni Ardelan, claiming descent from Saladin, and bearing the title of Wali of Ardelan. When Rich was here, in 1820, he found the Wali absolutely independent of Teheran, and ruling his province like a kingdom. Upon the death, however, of the last male in the direct line, about thirty years ago, the Shah disinherited the remaining male relatives, whose family are now reduced to insignificance, and signalised his recovered sovereignty by appointing his uncle as Governor. I have been supplied with the following list of Kurds in Ardelan, but cannot vouch for its accuracy:—

	Tents or Families
Kalhur.—In the district of Sakiz	300
Tailaku.—In the district of Hawatu	600
Gulbaki.—In the district of Hawatu	500
Sheikh Ismail.[1]—In the district of Isfandabad	300
Purpishah.[1]—In the district of Isfandabad	300
Mundami.—In the district of Hasandabad	500
Mamun, Jabrachi.—In the district of Bilawar	300
Gushki.—In the district of Bilawar	400
Gurgai.—In the district of Lailagh	300
Lek.—In the district of Lailagh	1,000
Shamshiri.[1]—On the frontier	400

Lastly are the Kurds of Kermanshah, or the province of which Kermanshahan [2] is the capital. Through this district, and through

[1] Nomads, migrating in winter into Turkish territory.

[2] Locally, Kermanshah is the name given to the province, Kermanshahan to its capital. By Europeans both are commonly called Kermanshah.

its capital city, as has been shown in Chapter II., runs the main caravan route between Teheran and Baghdad; and it is in this somewhat restricted application that travellers thereon have sometimes proclaimed their peregrinations in Kurdistan. The province borders on Turkish territory on the west and on the Persian province of Luristan, which will hereafter be dealt with, on the south. It may be considered the middle or dividing line between Northern and Southern Persia, and the mention of it will appropriately close a discussion confined to the former branch of my subject. These are the Kurdish tribes of Kermanshah :—

3. Kurds of Kermanshah

	Tents or Families
Kalhur.[1]—Partly nomad, partly sedentary. (Their *garmsir*, or summer quarters, are the mountains to the north-west of the Pusht-i-Kuh; their *sardsir*, or winter quarters, are the plains of Zohab and Kasr-i-Shirin, as far as the Turkish frontier.) They are variously reported to be Ali Illahis and Shiahs; and they furnish one regiment of infantry	5,000
Sinjabi.—In Mahidasht plain, west of Kermanshah; Ali Illahis .	1,500
Guran.—Partly nomad, partly sedentary; between Mahidasht and Harun Nishin Khan; Ali Illahis; they furnish one regiment of infantry, commanded by their chief . . .	5,000
Kerindi.—Partly nomad, partly sedentary; between Kerind and Harunabad; Ali Illahis; they furnish one regiment of infantry	2,000
Bowanij and *Jelalawand.*—Under the *sertip* of the Kerindi .	1,000
Zangenah or *Zenjina.*—Shiahs; they furnish one regiment of infantry	1,500
Hamawand.—Sedentary	200
Sunguru and *Kuliahi.*—Sedentary; north of Kermanshah . .	2,500
Nanakuli.—Sedentary; west of Kermanshah	300
Jelilawand.—Sedentary; east of Kermanshah	300
Mafi, Chubankera, Ghazil.—Sedentary	—
Hululan or *Halilan.*[2]—Nomads in the mountains south-east of Kermanshah, and on the upper waters of the Kerkhah . .	4,000
Akhur	1,000

In cereals, the province of Kermanshah is one of the richest in Persia, more grain being cultivated than can either be consumed in the district, or, in the miserable state of road transport, be

[1] Sir H. Rawlinson fancied from the marked Jewish cast of their countenances that they might be descendants of the Samaritan captives who were placed in the Assyrian city of Kalhur Halah (Sarpul-i-Zohab?). Their present chief is Reza Kuli Khan, of the Shahbazi clan, who is both civil governor of the Kalhur district and *sertip*, or colonel of the military contingent—one regiment of infantry and some cavalry—furnished by the tribe.

[2] I doubt if the Hululan ought to be included in this table, for they belong to the Lur tribes of Luristan, who disavow any blood-connection with the Kurds.

disposed of elsewhere. When Captain Napier was here in 1875, he found a surplus produce from the preceding harvest of 110,000 tons, which the owners were prepared to sell at five shillings per *kharvar* (649 lbs.). It is also a famous locality for the breed of horses and of mules. The Kurdish carpets, which figure so largely in the bazaars of Constantinople and other Oriental cities come largely from this neighbourhood, and are woven in the tents or in the open air by the women on a frame of rude stakes fixed in the ground. The tents, which are the sole habitation of the nomad tribes, are made of black goats' hair blankets stretched upon poles, and are often very considerable structures, divided by reed-partitions into several compartments, used as the *diwan-khaneh*, or reception chamber, the men's and the women's quarters, the kitchen, the stables, and the cowshed. The majority of the sedentary Kurds of Ardelan and Kermanshah, who have long been settled in villages, have completely abandoned both the national instincts and the national dress, and are not at first sight to be mistaken from Persians.[1] It is said that the revenue exacted in Persian Kurdistan is 1*l.* per house or tent, as against 1*l.* 6*s.* in the Ottoman dominions.

Products

The capital, Kermanshahan, with about 40,000 inhabitants, is a place of central position and consequent importance. Almost equidistant, between 250 and 300 miles, from Tabriz, Teheran, Isfahan, and Baghdad, it commands roads to each of those places, and is, therefore, invested with considerable strategical value. Being on the high road of the great pilgrim route to Kerbela, it is said to be visited yearly by over 100,000 pilgrims. Founded by Varahran IV., son or brother of Shapur III., who was known as Kerman Shah, from having been ruler of Kerman, it has not played the part in history that might have been expected, being overshadowed by its neighbour Hamadan (Ecbatana). It was fortified by Nadir Shah, but the walls, though repaired in this century, are now in ruins, and the ditch is choked with rubbish. In the early part of the century Fath Ali Shah conferred the Governorship of this province and city upon his eldest son, Mohammed Ali Mirza, whose jealousy of Abbas Mirza, the Heir Apparent, plays so large a part in the pages of contemporary writers. He, and his son Imam Kuli Mirza, who succeeded

Kermanshahan

[1] For an account of the life of the Persian Kurds *vide* H. Binder, *Au Kurdistan*, pp. 350–353.

him in the Governorship, rebuilt and beautified the town with bazaars, villas, and gardens, spending more, however, upon their own gratification and aggrandisement than upon works of public advantage. The post is commonly reserved for a near relative of the sovereign, and was at one time part of the gigantic government enjoyed by the Zil-es-Sultan, eldest son of the reigning Shah. On an elevation in the middle of the town is the arsenal, built by the Imad-ed-Dowleh, the second of the two royal governors above-mentioned, and lately containing 2 Austrian Uchatius 12-pounders, 2 brass smooth-bore 6-pounders, and 500 Werndl rifles, with a garrison of 500 men. Around the town, and particularly on the south, are extensive orchards and gardens, producing a multiplicity of fruits. Of the trade of Kermanshah, both local and transit, which is considerable, and which has an interest for Englishmen, I shall speak in a later chapter upon the Commerce of Persia.

Vekil-ed-Dowleh

The chief interest of Kermanshah to English travellers, and an unquestionable incentive to a visit, is the fact that it is the residence of Haji Agha Mohammed Hasan, commonly known as the Vekil-ed-Dowleh, who holds the office of British Agent, and is one of the most remarkable men in Persia. Brought by Sir H. Rawlinson, at an early age, to Teheran from Baghdad, of which place he is a native, he has ever since remained in the British service, and has, largely owing to the protection from official rapacity which he has thereby enjoyed, amassed great wealth, which he dispenses with a liberality and public spirit rare, if not unique, in Persia. He keeps open house in Kermanshah, and maintains a large and well-furnished residence, in addition, for the reception of guests. He owns, or has built, the six chief caravanserais in the town, some of which are structures of great size and splendour. In addition, he is said to be the proprietor of 100 villages in the surrounding district, and has purchased the Dilgusha palace and garden that were constructed by Mohammed Ali Mirza. Upon the occasion of the Queen's Jubilee he illuminated the town and fêted the inhabitants at his own expense—a singular and affecting testimony of loyalty in a distant and alien land. He has been made a C.M.G. by the British Government, of which decoration he is vastly proud. I met the Vekil-ed-Dowleh, who is now advancing in years, in Teheran, where he as nearly as possible died of fever in the hands of the native physicians. Being removed to the British Legation, and placed under the

charge of a European doctor, he lightly skipped off again, as soon as he was sufficiently well to emerge from bed, and with the unconquerable obstinacy of an Oriental resought the advice which had all but landed him in the grave. His son, Haji Abdur Rahim, has been trained by him in the same tastes and interests, and will, it is to be hoped, succeed alike to his position and influence.

Tak-i-Bostan

More remarkable than Kermanshahan or its Kurdish inhabitants, are the famous sculptured remains of antiquity in the neighbourhood, where, on smoothed surfaces of rock, are chiselled the pictorial or written records of the Achæmenian and Sassanian kings, of Darius son of Hystaspes, and the Shapurs; the former of which sculptures will for ever be associated with the name and discovery of Sir H. Rawlinson. The later of the two monuments is situated at Tak-i-Bostan, the Arch of the Garden, at a distance of four miles from Kermanshah. The road passes, at three miles from the city, the great triple-storeyed, but now decaying palace of Imadieh, built on the banks of the Kara Su (Black water) by the Imad-ed-Dowleh, before mentioned, and conducts to a spur of the same great rocky mass, rising in rugged grandeur from the plain, that, twenty miles away, presents to the world the imperishable tablets of Darius. Here, at the base of the cliff-wall, a stream gushes out from the rock, and is conducted into two large tanks or reservoirs, planted around with trees, the work of the same prince-governor, who also raised the large building adjoining, lately purchased by the Vekil-ed-Dowleh.

Sculptures of the Sassanian Kings

The monuments consist of two deep and lofty arches or grottoes, excavated with great labour and skill in the face of the mountain; within which are several bas-reliefs, executed with remarkable spirit and excellence; while a little beyond, where the mountain recedes, a flight of several hundred steps is cut on the edge of the nearly precipitous cliffs, finishing abruptly with an extensive ledge or platform. On the edge of the river, Sir R. K. Porter noticed the remains of a statue of colossal size, which he thought must have fallen from the heights above; as on the upper ledge was a row of sculptured feet broken off at the ankles.[1] The largest arch measures in height over

[1] Mounsey in 1867 (*Journey*, p. 297) said: 'Near lies a torso, so mutilated as hardly to be recognisable.' On the other hand, Kiach in 1878 (*Ancient Persian Sculptures*) gives an illustration of the statue, which he describes as that of 'a man wearing a turban and a rich garment, and grasping with both hands a long stick,' and which he says was dug up and placed in its present position.

thirty feet, in width twenty-four feet, and in depth twenty-two; and the face of the rock has been smoothed for a great distance above the sweep of the arch, and on each side. On the surface to the right and to the left are two upright entablatures, containing exquisitely carved ornamentation adorned with foliage in a classical style. Above the keystone is a crescent, and in the spandrels on either side are winged female figures, resembling the usual type of

TAK-I-BOSTAN

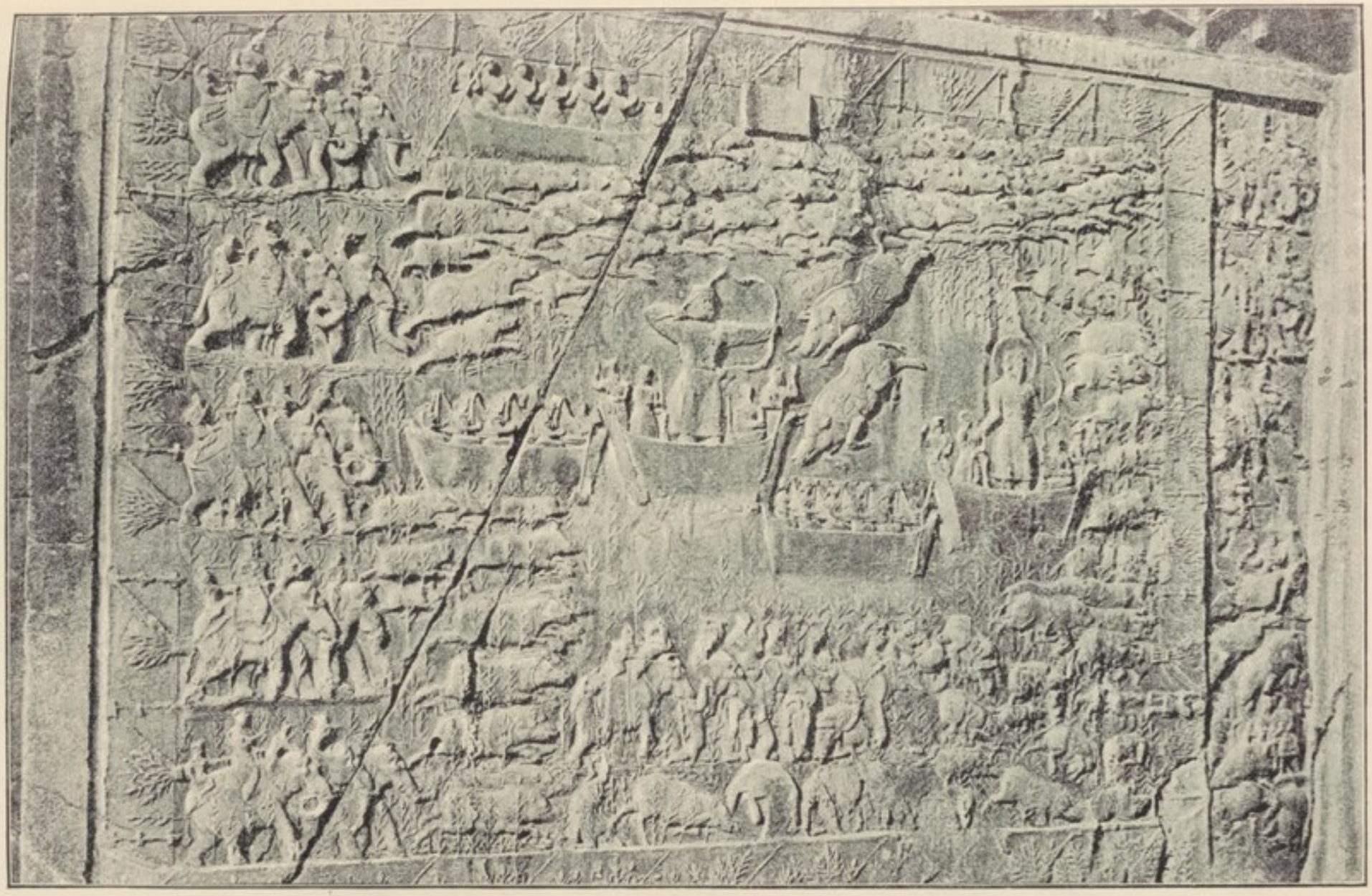
Victory on Roman coins; the artists who carved them having possibly been Greeks of Constantinople. The inner wall of the excavation is divided into two compartments, the upper one of which contains three figures, viz., Chosroes II. in the centre in robes of state, and wearing the Sassanian diadem; and two supporters engaged in presenting him with chaplets. It has been suggested that this group may commemorate the double gift by the Emperor Mauricius

to the Persian king of his bride, the beautiful Sira or Shirin,[1] and his crown. On this supposition, Chosroes is standing in his robes of inauguration between the imperial pair, the princess on the one side holding a diadem, and the emperor on the other presenting the new king with the crown, to which the arms of the Romans had restored him. At the same time it is doubtful whether either of the supporters is a female figure, or whether the tradition itself is true; and the figures are more probably symbolical representations. The lower space is almost wholly occupied by a colossal equestrian figure of the same monarch, both horse and rider being covered with a coat of mail. The sculpture has been much damaged by the Arabs, and there are no intelligible remains of the inscriptions once engraven upon it.

Panels of the chase

The sides of the arch are covered with representations of the sports of the field, wild-boar and stag hunts. In the panel representing the former boats appear, indicating a marshy country intersected by lakes; while ponderous elephants, with their riders, plunge through the reeds in order to drive the pigs towards the king in the middle. Two of the boats are filled with harpers, thought by some to be women; in a third are men who appear to be clapping their hands. In the centre of the scene are two boats, in one of which stands the king, of gigantic stature, with bow full-bent, while in the other he appears to be again depicted, with a halo round his head, receiving an arrow from one of his attendants, while a musician sits near him in the same boat, playing on the harp. Above the boar-hunt Mohammed Ali Mirza, son of Fath Ali Shah, and Governor of Kermanshah, had sculped a pompous image of himself in the early part of this century. On the opposite side of the arch is another relief, representing the chase of the deer. On this the same king Chosroes II. appears

[1] With the name of Shirin and the rock of Behistun the Persians have associated one of those poetic romances so dear to the national genius. Ferhad, the most famous sculptor of his time, who was very likely employed by Chosroes II. to execute these bas-reliefs, is said in the legend to have fallen madly in love with Shirin, and to have received a promise of her from the king, if he would cut through the rock of Behistun, and divert a stream to the Kermanshah plain. The lover set to work and had all but completed his gigantic enterprise (of which the remains, however interpreted, are still to be seen), when he was falsely informed by an emissary from the king of his lady's death. In despair he leaped from the rock and was dashed to pieces. The legend of the unhappy lover is familiar throughout the East, and is used to explain many traces of rock-cutting or excavation as far east as Beluchistan.



PANEL OF THE CHASE

nearly at the top of the sculpture, entering the field in state, under the shade of an umbrella, and mounted on a richly caparisoned horse. Below he is again pourtrayed riding at full speed, while at the bottom, the chase over, he canters gaily home. Towards the top of the bas-relief is raised a scaffold, on which rows of musicians are seated, playing on various instruments. In adjoining compartments we see elephants in pursuit of the deer, and camels carrying off the spoil. This bas-relief is finished in only a few places, but what has been completed is executed in a masterly style.

The second arch is smaller in its dimensions than the former, being only 19 feet wide by 11½ in depth and 17 in height. The figures on the back wall were originally rudely and carelessly sculptured, and are now still less visible owing to the wilful mutilation they have sustained. The monument, however, is of value from the inscriptions still remaining on it, which prove that one of the figures is meant for Shapur II. (Zulaktaf), and the other for his son Shapur III.[1]

A little to the right on the face of the cliff, is sculped another Sassanian panel, in which two crowned figures, standing upon the prostrate body of a third, are holding the *cydaris* or royal circlet; while behind the left-hand king is a fourth figure, whose head is surrounded with a radiated nimbus. This is generally accepted as representing the investiture of Shapur I. with a share of the royal dominion by his father Ardeshir Babekan, in the presence of the god Ormuzd; an act which is also indicated by the double heads that appear on some of Ardeshir's coins. The prostrate figure is conjectured to be that of Artabanus, the last Parthian king.

Behistun

Twenty-four miles to the east of Kermanshah the splendid ridge of rock, 1,500 feet in height above the plain, of which I have spoken, and whose grandeur of outline is matched by its steepness of face, presents upon a smoothed portion of its

[1] *Vide* E. Thomas, *Early Sassanian Inscriptions*, p. 104. I had originally quoted the three last paragraphs in inverted commas from W. S. Vaux, *Persia* (Ancient History from the Monuments) 1884; but a closer examination revealed that he had incorrectly copied them from R. K. Porter, who had also himself made many mistakes; and accordingly I have been obliged to recast the whole description. For other accounts of Tak-i-Bostan *vide* Sir R. K. Porter (1818), *Travels*, vol. ii. pp. 147–163; Sir H. Rawlinson (1836), *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. ix. p. 116; E. Flandin and P. Coste (1841), *Perse Ancienne*, vol. i. pls. 1–14, and *Voyage en Perse*, vol. i. caps. xxvi.–vii.; Com. F. Jones (1844), *Records of Bombay Government* (1857); Silvestre de Sacy, *Mém. sur div. Antiq. de la Perse*, 1793, pp. 211–270; M. Dieulafoy, *L'Art Antique de la Perse*, 1890, Part V. pp. 95–108.

surface, at a height of 300 feet from the ground, the triumphal engravings of Darius son of Hystaspes, and the cuneiform record of his conquering reign, first copied and deciphered nearly fifty years ago by Sir H. Rawlinson. The name is variously spelt and pronounced as Behistun or Bisitun, and was the Mons Bagistanus or Βαγίστανον ὄρος of the classical writers. Bisitun might mean either 'twenty pillars' or 'without pillars,' but Baghestan has been supposed by modern scholars to signify 'abode of the gods,' which would agree with the Διὸς ὄρος or title given to it by Diodorus Siculus.[1] If his account, cited from Ctesias, be credited, the sculptures of Semiramis, whom he alleges to have visited the place on her march from Babylon to Ecbatana, and to have caused her own image and that of her hundred guards to be graven on the rock, must have been obliterated by successors or have perished in the lapse of time. Before the secret of the cuneiform alphabet had been won, the rock and its aerial bas-reliefs had been made known to Europe by the descriptions of a number of travellers; but how deeply their ignorance allowed them to plunge, and how wild a goose chase they were led by a fine imagination, may be seen from the conjectures of the romantic Ker Porter, that the principal sculpture represented Shalmaneser and the ten captive tribes of Israel; of the Frenchman Gardanne that they were Christ and the twelve disciples; and of Keppel, that the train of prisoners were the attendants of Esther, with the queen at their head, supplicating King Ahasuerus on behalf of her condemned countrymen!

Sculptures of Darius

We now know that the bas-reliefs are those of Darius and of the rebels, tied to each other by the neck, whom he overcame, and upon the prostrate body of one of whom his heel is planted. Behind the king stand two warriors armed with bow and spear. The humiliation of the conquered is typified by their diminutive size, but the majesty of the king demands a superhuman stature. That there may be no mistake, tablets with the names of those referred to are placed above the monarch and the prisoners. Over the head of the king himself we read: 'I am Darius the king, the king of kings, the king of Persia, the great king of the provinces, the son of Hystaspes, the grandson of Arsames, the Achæmenian. Says Darius the king: My father was Hystaspes; of Hystaspes, the father was Arsames; of Arsames

[1] I should prefer simply to translate Baghestan as the 'place of gardens,' and to regard Bisitun and Bostan as versions, or contractions, of the same name.

ROCKS OF BISITUN

the father was Ariyaramnes; of Ariyaramnes, the father was Teispes; of Teispes, the father was Achæmenes. Says Darius the king: On that account we are called Achæmenians. From antiquity we have descended; from antiquity those of our race have been kings. Says Darius the king: There are eight of my race who have been kings before me; I am the ninth. For a very long time (or in a double line) we have been kings. Says Darius the king: By the grace of Ormuzd I am king. Ormuzd has granted to me the empire. Says Darius the king: These are the countries which belong to me; by the grace of Ormuzd I have become king of them: Persia, Susiana, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt; those which are of the sea, (i.e., the islands of the Mediterranean), Sparta and Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Zarangia, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandara, the Sacæ, the Sattagydes, Arachotia, and Mecia; in all, twenty-three countries.'

One of the figures before the king is the Pseudo-Bardes, or Gomates, the Magian, whom Darius dispossessed and slew, and the history of whose usurpation is here related. The fifth figure is another pretender of the royal house, the legend over him reading: 'I am king of Sagartia, of the race of Cyaxares.' Above the ninth, which, says Rawlinson, was added to the panel at a later period, runs the inscription: 'This is Sakuka the Scythian.' The entire cuneiform inscriptions below the sculptures, which together occupy a surface about 150 feet in length by 100 feet in height, amount to nearly 1,000 lines, engraved in the three characters, Persian, Susian, and Assyrian, and were executed by order of Darius on his return from the destruction of Babylon, which had revolted under Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabunit (= Labynetus and Nabonid). Their translation was given to the world in 1847 by Rawlinson.[1]

A second tablet, nearly destroyed, at the base of the rock, contains some mutilated equestrian figures, and an inscription, declaring them to be the work of Gotarzès, the Parthian King, about

[1] *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vols. x. xi. (1847), and xiv. (1853); *vide* also *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. ix. pp. 112–116; Com. F. Jones, *Records of the Bombay Government* (1857); E. Flandin and P. Coste, *Perse Ancienne*, vol. i. pls. 16, 18, 19, and *Voyage en Perse*, vol. i. cap. xxviii.; and for the inscriptions, C. Kossowicz, *Inscriptiones Palæo-Persicæ Achæmenidarum*; and F. Spiegel, *Die altpersischen Keilinschriften*; E. Ménant, *Les Achéménides et les Inscriptions de la Perse*; N. L. Westergaard, *Die altpers. Keilinschr.*; and Bézold, *Achæmen-Keilinschr.*

46–51 A.D. In a later archway excavated in the centre of the original sculpture, an Arabic inscription, said to be engraved like a palimpsest over an earlier epigraph, relates the terms upon which the neighbouring caravanserai was bequeathed to the people. Some of the superior sculptures and inscriptions are now illegible or undistinguishable, but the main cuneiform inscription is still almost intact. The great king must certainly have intended to leave his proclamation for all time in selecting a spot so difficult of access, where the sculptures can only have been executed by the aid of scaffoldings. But how laboriously and how conscientiously these ancient craftsmen worked! First the surface of the rock was smoothed, then every crevice or unsound place was either stopped with lead or filled with inlaid stone so nicely fitted that the joining escapes the eye. Then the characters were chiselled with an accuracy and a regularity quite marvellous. Finally, over all was spread a coating of siliceous varnish as a protection from the ravages of the climate; its broken or denuded flakes being even now infinitely harder than the rock itself.

Nature of the engravings

Further to the east, in a mountain gorge of Mount Elvend, near Hamadan, are two other tablets with trilingual inscriptions, known as Ganjnameh (History of a Treasure),[1] relating the names and titles of Darius son of Hystaspes and of his son Xerxes and an invocation to Ormuzd, which first afforded a clue to the interpretation of the cuneiform alphabet.

Ganjnameh tablets

Finally, I turn to Hamadan, in the province of Irak-Ajemi, but more naturally falling for purposes of description under the western provinces—a city which, both from its historical interest and its present state, cannot be omitted in any account of the Persian dominions. Planted at the foot of Mount Elvend[2] (the Orontes of the ancients) from which it derives an abundant water supply, and in a plain thickly besprinkled with vineyards, orchards, and gardens, but whose elevation is 6,000 feet above the sea, it enjoys one of the finest situations in Persia. Its streets are narrow and filthy, and its inhabitants are not more than 20,000, but its bazaars

Hamadan

[1] *Vide* Texier, *L'Arménie*, &c., vol. i. pls. 60–1; and Flandin and Coste, vol. i. pls. 24, 26. All Pehlevi or cuneiform inscriptions are supposed by the peasants and nomads in Persia to signify the whereabouts of buried treasure. Hence the suspicion with which they regard the scientific visitor with his photographic camera or squeezes or spade.

[2] *Vide* an Account of Exped. to Karaghan and Elvend, by J. E. Polak (1882), in *Mitth. d. Geogr. Gesellsch. in Wien*, 1883.

are well built and populous with trade, its local manufactures of copper ware, of leather (largely used for trunks and saddlery), and of red and white wine, are widely known and patronised; and its astute artificers, besides working in silver and gold, are said to be adepts at the manufacture of spurious coins. It contains a large resident colony of 1,500 to 2,000 Jews, with whom Hamadan has ever been a peculiarly sacred spot, owing to the alleged tombs of Esther and Mordecai, which are shown in a building adjoining the Musjid-i-Jama, in the heart of the town. A conspicuously modern cupola rises above the chamber in which, in wooden sarcophagi carved all over with Hebrew characters, are said to repose the bodies of the queen and her uncle. From early times this shrine has been a favourite resort of Hebrew pilgrims; nor is it regarded with any other feeling by the Mohammedans, many of whose saints are drawn from the Old Testament calendar. To them these tombs would appeal far more than the grave of the once famous philosopher and physician, Abu Ali-ibn-Sena of Bokhara, A.D. 980–1036 (Europeanised, by those strange processes of which Europeans alone are capable, into Avicenna), to which Layard could not anywhere find a guide.

Ancient Ecbatana

Of far greater interest is the historical and archæological problem of the identity of Hamadan with the celebrated Ecbatana of the ancient world. The identity of the names (Hamadan, the old Persian Hagmatana of the inscriptions, which is the Agbatana or Ecbatana, signifying treasure-house, of the Greek writers) leaves no doubt that the modern city occupies the site of one or an Ecbatana of ancient times. But there were no less than seven such Ecbatanas, of which four were on Persian or Median soil, suggesting that the name was a descriptive designation of a capital or royal city. It is now generally admitted that Hamadan is the Ecbatana of the Achæmenian kings,[1] from Darius son of Hystaspes down to the Macedonian conquest, where their court was held in summer, where their treasures were accumulated, where Alexander collected such vast piles of plunder, where he halted and sacrificed on his return from the East, and where Hephæstion died. But was it also the Ecbatana of Herodotus, the capital of the

[1] This is supposed to be the Achmetha where 'in the palace that is in the province of the Medes,' the decree of Cyrus was found, ordering the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem, *Ezra*, vi. 2. According to Polybius, the columns and beams of the palace were of cedar and cypress, and were entirely covered with plates of silver and gold.

earlier Median kingdom, where Deioces erected the citadel with seven concentric and coloured walls, painted like those of the terraced temples of Babylon to represent the celestial spheres? Upon this point authorities differ, and are likely to continue to differ, until the discovery of some relic or inscription throws light upon one of the dark places of history. Outside the modern town is an elevation, known as the Musallah, which has always been occupied by a citadel (until levelled by Agha Mohammed Shah); but it is doubtful whether this eminence can be made to correspond with the Herodotean description. Sir H. Rawlinson has boldly sought a solution of the difficulty, by locating the Median Ecbatana at a spot called Takht-i-Suleiman (Throne of Solomon), about half-way between Hamadan and Tabriz, where, upon a conical hill, are to be found extensive ruins and the remains of a great fire-temple.[1] It is certainly strange, if Hamadan be the site of a city, said by the early Greeks to have been scarcely inferior to Babylon, that barely a remnant worthy of the name should have been discovered. A rudely carved stone lion, or rather the battered semblance thereof, lies not far from the city, and is locally regarded as a talisman or palladium against famine and cold. But the great beast tells no tale, and until a really scientific attempt with pick and shovel be made at Hamadan we can but imitate its silence.[2]

Turco-Persian frontier

Before I quit the subject of the western provinces of Persia, let me revert once more to the boundary with Turkey, in order to say that, ill-defined or dubiously recognised as I have described the frontier of Persia as being on the east, any uncertainty existing in that quarter is as nothing compared with the lack of exact delimitation that prevails here. Nearly half a century ago, in order to prevent an impending collision between Persia and Turkey on the Kurdish border, Great Britain and Russia secured the appointment of a Turco-Persian

[1] *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. x. p. 1.

[2] For accounts of Hamadan *vide* A. Dupré (1807), *Voyage en Perse*, vol. i. cap. xxiii; J. P. Morier (1812), *Second Journey*, pp. 264–270; Sir H. Layard (1840), *Early Adventures*, vol. i. pp. 252–254, 269–273; J. P. Ferrier (1845), *Caravan Journeys*, pp. 35–42; Mrs. Bishop (1890), *Journeys in Persia*, vol. ii. letter xxiii. The only Achæmenian remains found near Hamadan have been five or six bases of columns, one of which, presenting an inscription with the name of Artaxerxes II. or Mnemon, was on view in the Paris Exhibition in 1889 (*vide* Ker Porter, *Travels*, vol. ii. p. 115; and Perrot and Chipiez, *Histoire de l'Art*, vol. v. pp. 501, 755–6); and, on another spot, two other bases of columns (Flandin and Coste, vol. i. pl. 25).

Commission, to which were attached British and Russian representatives, and which met at Erzerum in 1843, in order to discuss and settle the frontier question. The English Commissioners were Sir F. Williams (of Kars), Major Farrant, and a relative of my own—Mr. Robert Curzon, author of 'Monasteries of the Levant,' and afterwards Lord Zouche. As a consequence of their deliberations and surveys, the treaty of Erzerum was signed in June 1847. Soon after, in 1849, the Commissioners reassembled at Baghdad in order to commence the actual delimitation. In the course of their labours, the Turks anticipated any future decision by wrongfully seizing the fort of Kotur, from which they expelled the Persian garrison, and where they built barracks and remained in spite of frequent protests for over thirty years.[1] Meanwhile, the Commissioners continued their survey from Mohammerah on the Shat-el-Arab to Mount Ararat, a distance of 700 miles, until the Crimean war broke out, when their labours were of course suspended. As a result of their examination, a map was drawn up, and presented in 1865, which did not however attempt to demarcate a boundary, but indicated a border-strip from twenty to forty miles in width, somewhere inside which the frontier line was understood to lie, the two governments being left to settle the question by agreement or force as they pleased. This somewhat uncourageous solution was confirmed in 1869 by a convention between Turkey and Persia, in which each side undertook to respect the *status quo* until a settlement was arrived at. On many occasions, in 1870, 1873, and 1874, disputes arose, and armed collision was narrowly avoided. Finally, when in 1878 the European Congress met at Berlin to rearrange the map of Europe, and generally to carve up Ottoman territory, the question of the Turco-Persian border was again raised. Article 60 of that treaty ordered the evacuation of Kotur by the Turks, and its cession to Persia, and an Anglo-Russian Commission, of which Generals Hamley and Zelenoi were the leading members, was appointed in 1879 to carry out the provisions agreed upon. In July 1880 they signed a protocol confirming that agreement, and from the point of view of international law the question was definitely decided. The Turks, however, still declined to move, and it was not till some time later that they finally surrendered Kotur, which is now occu-

[1] Major Millingen, author of *Wild Life among the Koords*, was in command of the Turkish garrison of Kotur in 1868, and describes the place in cap. xiii.

pied by a small body of Persian troops. Another point of disagreement was Zohab, a partition of which district between the two powers was ordered by the Treaty of Erzerum, but was for long ignored, whilst quite recently a third dispute has arisen about certain districts round Bagsai and Ghoreibeh, west of the Pusht-i-Kuh mountains of Luristan, and near the Tigris, over which the Persians claim disputed rights of cultivation. These cases are typical of others that might at any moment arise upon a stretch of frontier so long and so completely lacking either in precision or in finality. Were not Turkey and Persia each so desperately afraid of war, and so apprehensive of unloosing the turbulent elements that, at the best of times, preserve but an ambiguous quietude in the border mountains, a state of affairs so abnormal could not fail to lead to international conflict.

Routes in the North-West Provinces.[1]

Tabriz to Ardebil.—A. Jaubert (1805), *Voyage en Arménie, &c.*, cap. xviii.; W. R. Holmes (1843), *Sketches on the Caspian Shores*, caps. i.–iv.; M. von Thielmann (1872), *Journey in the Caucasus, &c.*, vol. ii. cap. v.

Tabriz to Suleimanieh (1. *viâ* Van).—(Sir) J. Sheil (1836), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. viii. p. 54. (2. *viâ* Urumiah, Ushnu, and Suj Bulak).—Sir R. K. Porter (1818), *Travels*, vol. ii. pp. 448–98; Capt. R. Mignan (1830), *Winter's Journey, &c.*, vol. i. caps. ix–xii.; J B. Fraser (1835), *Travels in Koordistan*, vol. i. letters iv., v.; M. Wagner (1843), *Travels in Persia*, vol. iii. caps. vi., vii.

Tabriz to Suj Bulak (*viâ* Ajebshir).—A. H. Schindler (1881–2), *Zeit. d. Gesell. f. Erdk. z. Berlin*, 1883, pp. 320–44.

Suleimanieh to Sinna.—C. J. Rich (1820), *Narrative of Residence*, vol. i. caps. vi., vii.

Tabriz to Takht-i-Suleiman.—Sir R. K. Porter (1819), *Travels*, vol. ii. pp. 527–59; (Sir) H. Rawlinson (1838), *Journal of the R.G.S.*, vol. x. 1.

Takht-i-Suleiman to Zinjan.—(Sir) H. Rawlinson (1838), *ibid.*; A. H Schindler (1880), *ibid.*

Ardebil to Sultanieh (*viâ* Khalkal and Zinjan).—A. Jaubert (1805), *Voyage en Arménie, &c.*, cap. xxii.

Kazvin to Hamadan (*viâ* Farsian, Ruak, Aliabad, Kulanjin, Ainabad, Harian, and Faminin).—J. D. Rees (1885), *Notes of a Journey* (Madras).

Sultanieh to Hamadan.—Ch. Texier (1839), *Description de l'Arménie, &c.*, vol. ii.

Hamadan to Isfahan (*viâ* Gulpaigan and Khonsar).—J. S. Buckingham (1816), *Travels in Assyria*, vol. i. caps. x. xi.; Sir R. K. Porter (1818), *Travels*, vol. ii. pp. 59–91; Ch. Texier (1839), *ibid.*, vol. ii.

Hamadan to Urumiah (*viâ* Suj Bulak).—Mrs. Bishop (1890), *Journeys in Persia*, vol. ii. letters xxv.–xxvii.

Urumiah to Kochannis.—Mrs. Bishop (1890), *ibid.*, vol. ii. letter xxviii.

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[1] In this table *ibid.* signifies the work by the same writer before mentioned.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ARMY

Prince Henry.—I did never see such pitiful rascals!

Falstaff.—Tut! tut! good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder, they'll fill a pit as well as better. Tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.

SHAKSPEARE.—*Henry IV.*, Part I., act iv., sc. ii.

History of the Persian army

FROM the time when Persian soldiers were first seen in Europe, and when, according to Herodotus, who gives a most minute account of their organisation and equipment, 'the Persians at Platæa were not one whit inferior to the Greeks in courage and warlike spirit,'[1] down to the present day, when he would be a bold critic who would institute even such a comparison, the Persian army has in many and shifting phases afforded material of interest to the traveller and the historian. The vision of the 10,000 Immortals, marching in serried ranks, with the golden pomegranates flashing on their spears, has early impressed our imagination; and in the distant galleries of time few echoes ring more loudly than the clash of Persian and Grecian onset upon the fields of Marathon and Thermopylæ, of Cunaxa, of Issus and Arbela. These illustrious memories we must here relinquish, nor does space admit of our recovering from the oblivion with which they have been long overlaid, the armaments and tactics, the marches and combats, of the Parthian and Sassanian kings.[2] It was not till the dawn of the seventeenth century that the foundations of a modern standing army were laid in Persia, or that the military ideas of the West were perfunctorily grafted on to the Oriental stock. Here, in brief retrospect, our study of the Persian army may begin, the moment when a European turn was given to its organisation being also the moment when the connection between itself and England, that has had so many and fateful vicissitudes,

[1] Herodotus, ix. 62.

[2] Cedrenus says of Chosroes I. (Nushirwan), that he invented an engine which 'guttas demitteret tanquam pluviam et tonitrus sonitus resonaret.' But what was the exact nature of this early anticipation of Greek fire we cannot determine.

originated. A hurried survey will carry us through a period of alternate splendour and disgrace, during which the Persian army, at its prime under Shah Abbas the Great, sank to its lowest ebb under Shah Sultan Husein, emerged again with a recrudescence that is one of the most startling phenomena of history under Nadir Shah, again spent itself in internecine conflict, and was again revived by the genius of the first Kajar sovereign, Agha Mohammed. At this point, where the present century opens, commences the yet unexhausted epoch of submission to foreign leading-strings, in the futile effort to infuse some stability into the mobile and dissolvent atoms of an Oriental fabric; and the ninety years which have yet run betray a panorama of successive experiments, as the figures of French, English, German, Italian, Austrian, and Russian officers pass across the stage, that is not the least quaint or characteristic among the features that mark the tentative Europeanisation of Iran. For a third of this epoch, the figure of England looms largest upon the scene, and the narrative of the connection of Great Britain with the armies of Persia, which seems to have insufficiently attracted the gaze of historians, is among the most interesting chapters of the relationship, diplomatic as well as military, between the East and the West. Of this period, so intimately bound up with our imperial policy in Persia down to the present day, I shall require to say something. Finally, I shall come to the Persian army as it now exists, and shall endeavour, by means of information derived partly from Persian officers possessing the fullest acquaintance with the subject, partly from official reports and documents, supplemented by my own inquiries in the country and by the experience resulting from frequent personal observation of the Persian troops and equipment, including a visit to the arsenal and a special parade of the garrison at Teheran, to furnish some criterion of its practical value as a weapon either of offence or defence. Upon this question I have been astonished to find the most conflicting opinions expressed by European writers. Some have seen in the Persian army a possible auxiliary of the greatest value, or an enemy too dangerous to be ignored. Others have scarcely found language strong enough in which to denounce the administration and deride the material. As the question of the actual capabilities of Persia in both respects is one that is likely to play some part in future political developments, it is desirable that the truth should, as far as possible, be known, in order that no

party in England may base an action or initiate a policy upon erroneous *data*. Not being a military man myself, I shall, in cases where a civilian judgment is worthless, support myself by professional authority which none will dispute. If my remarks are anywhere found to grate upon Persian susceptibilities, or to constitute a delineation unflattering to the rulers of that country, suffer me to take shelter behind the motto, *Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas.*[1]

The brothers Sherley

It was to the brothers Sherley, Sir Anthony and Sir Robert, circ. 1600 A.D., that Persia owed her first practical initiation into the military science of Europe. According to the ingenious Herbert, the Persians 'got the use of cannon from the vanquised Portugal,' and 'the use of musquets they have had onely since the Portugals assisted King Tahamas (i.e. Shah Tahmasp) with some Christian auxiliaries against the Turk, so as now (i.e. 1627 A.D.) they are become very good shots.'[2] But if already acquainted with gunpowder and with the new weapons of war, it was from the adventurous English knight-errants that they learnt how to make proper use of the discovery. Upon their advice Shah Abbas, for the first time in modern Persian history, laid the foundations of a regular army by incorporating a large force of infantry armed with muskets. A contemporary writer says of this event:—

> The mightie Ottoman, terror of the Christian world, quaketh of a Sherly fever, and gives hopes of approaching fates; the prevailing Persian hath learned Sherleian arts of war, and he which before knew not the use of ordnance, hath now 500 pieces of brasse, and 60,000 musketiers; so that they, which at hand with the sword were before

[1] For the best accounts of the Persian Army at different epochs of the last two centuries, *vide* the following:—

J. Hanway (1744), *Historical Account, &c.*, vol. i. pp. 251–4; Sir J. Malcolm (1800–10), *History of Persia*, vol. ii. cap. xxi.; A. Dupré (1808), *Voyage en Perse*, vol. ii. cap. liv.; J. P. Morier (1811), *Second Journey*, cap. xiv.; Col. G. Drouville (1813), *Voyage en Perse*, vol. ii. caps. xxxii.–xxxvi.; Sir R. K. Porter (1819), *Travels*, vol. ii. pp. 580–591; J. B. Fraser (1821), *Journey into Khorasan*, pp. 223–30; J. H. Stocqueler (1831), *Fifteen Months' Pilgrimage*, vol. i. pp. 164–75; Lt.-Col. W. K. Stuart (1835), *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 186–94; Sir J. Sheil (circ. 1850), Note C to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life, &c.*; Sir H. Rawlinson (1858), Journal of the R. U. S. I., vol. i. pp. 23–7; A. H. Mounsey (1865), *Journey in the Caucasus, &c.*, pp. 141–4; Cte. J. de Rochechouart (1865), *Souvenirs*, cap. v.; Sir F. Goldsmid (1879), Journal of the R. U. S. I., March 17, 1879; L. M. H. (1885), *La Russie et l'Angleterre dans l'Asie Centrale*; Capt. A. C. Yate (1886), *National Review*, January, 1886; C. J. Wills (1886), *Persia as it is*, cap. xx.

[2] *Some Yeares' Travels, &c.* (3rd. edit.), p. 298.

dreadful to the Turks, now also in remoter blowes and sulfurian arts are growne terrible.[1]

Pietro della Valle, who was in Persia at the time, speaks of the newly enrolled infantry as fusiliers, owning their origin to Sir Anthony Sherley, recruited from the lower orders of the country, and receiving their pay quarterly from the king. He describes them as a very useful body, 20,000 strong, and adds that 'in the beginning they were on the foot, but were afterwards mounted and armed with matchlocks and a fork to fire from.' From another source we learn that after Sir Anthony's departure Robert was made 'Master General against the Turks;' and that upon his return to Persia from a mission to the European powers in 1612, he brought with him from England 'Captain Thomas Powel of Hertfordshire, who was Colonel of 700 horse under the Persian.' It is interesting at this early date to read of English officers in the service of the Shah; and to know that English counsels were responsible for the earliest modern reform in the military organisation of Persia.

Decline under the later Sefavi kings

Nevertheless, throughout this and the succeeding century, the Persian army retained for the most part its original and almost immemorial organisation as a loose collection of irregular cavalry contingents. Even under Shah Abbas, when the army was at its best, there prevailed the most complete ignorance of scientific warfare, and battles were little else than desultory cavalry engagements on a large scale. In the campaign against Ormuz, which the Persians waged in conjunction with the English in 1622, the latter were amazed at the ignorance and backwardness of their allies.[2] Chardin says that, at the death of Shah Abbas, the effective strength of the army was 150,000 (50,000 Royal troops and 70,000 Provincial troops); Pietro della Valle says it consisted of 97,000 cavalry; but Herbert, though he advances larger nominal totals, also supplies a becoming corrective.

[1] Purchas' *Pilgrims*, vol. ii. p. 1806.

[2] Edward Monoxe, the agent of the East India Company at Ormuz, wrote as follows (Purchas' *Pilgrims*, vol. ii. lib. x. cap. 9): 'The Persians are ignorant of the art of warre, for they entred without feare or wit, and lost with shame what they might have maintayned with honour. Other defects I observed in the very sinewes of warre, such that I cannot but wonder that one of the Wonders of our Age, Sha Abas, should send over an Armie so weakly provided of money, armes, munition, ships, and all necessary furniture.'

Upon muster the Persian King can march 300,000 horse and 70,000 foot or musquetoons. Such force as he can readily advance but seldome exceeds 50,000, enough to find forage or provant in such barren countreys.

So rapid, however, was the decline in military strength and efficiency under the nerveless rule of the later Sefavi sovereigns, that Chardin, who was present at a review held before Shah Abbas II. in 1666, said that the same troops passed and repassed from ten to twelve times; and that a Persian naively remarked to him, 'We have a good army for reviews, but a bad one for war.' How bad a one did not fully appear till the Afghan invasion early in the following century, when the whole flower of the Persian army, over 50,000 strong, allowed itself to be worsted, and Isfahan to be beleaguered and ultimately taken, by less than half the number of Afghans, ill-equipped and exhausted with long marching and fatigue. On this occasion the Persian artillerymen are said to have discharged 400 shots from each of 400 cannon, and not to have killed 400 Afghans in all.

The army of Nadir Shah

Less than twenty years after this disaster we are confronted with the astonishing spectacle of a Persian conqueror overrunning Central Asia, upsetting kingdoms and empires, and in the eighteenth century presenting the phenomenon in Asia that Europe owed to Napoleon in the nineteenth. Hanway, who saw the army of Nadir Shah on the march, said that it consisted of 200,000 men, the cost of maintaining whom, officers included, was 100 crowns, or 25*l.*, a year apiece; so that the total military outlay was 5,000,000*l.* annually. It was, indeed, by exceptional generosity to his soldiers that Nadir ensured their enthusiastic loyalty, just as it was to his own military genius, to the terror of his name, and to the contemptible inferiority of the majority of the foes whom he encountered, that must be attributed his victorious career. I think it would be an unfair inference to draw from the conquests of Nadir, that the Persians only 150 years ago were the possessors of qualities which they have since entirely lost or abandoned. The bulk of his army were not Persians, but were drawn from the warlike tribes of his vast dominions, from Kurdistan and Georgia to Afghanistan and Beluchistan. The overthrow of the Mogul Empire, long tottering to its fall, was in no way a remarkable military achievement; and that, where his cavalry could not operate with advantage, the generalship or the

resources of Nadir were unequal to the situation, was shown by his unsuccessful sieges of Busrah and Baghdad, neither of which possessed fortifications of any strength. How completely the Persian army still retained its cavalry organisation is shown by the statement of Nadir's biographer, however exaggerated, that out of the 160,000 persons, soldiers and camp-followers, who composed the invading army at Delhi in February 1739, there was not a single individual on foot.[1]

Fath Ali Shah

The military spirit which the genius of Nadir Shah had to some extent revived was kept alive by the Kajar monarch, Agha Mohammed Shah, whose quite uncommon attainments have been somewhat obscured in history by the brutal ferocity of his acts. But it sank to a very low ebb under his successor Fath Ali Shah, who liked to stay at home and multiply the royal stock, and whose idea of kingly majesty was summed up in receiving a foreign ambassador in a blaze of jewels upon the Peacock Throne. He is even said to have tumbled off his horse with fright at the only engagement in which he assisted. In his reign, however, the military interest was shifted from Teheran to Tabriz, and from the sovereign to the Heir Apparent, Abbas Mirza; and the rivalries of England, France and Russia, ushered in that epoch of foreign, and especially of British, military tutorship, of which I have undertaken to speak in outline.

Army of Abbas Mirza. 1. French officers

It was to Abbas Mirza, the Vali-Ahd, residing at Tabriz as Governor-General of Azerbaijan, that Persia owed the reintroduction of European discipline, to which, since the abortive experiment of the Sherleys, exactly two centuries before, she had been a stranger. Stationed in the frontier province, which from the opening years of the century was exposed to the full brunt of Russian attack (Persia and Russia being then at war), he realised that without foreign assistance he could make no headway against a European foe. It was from Russian instructors that the first lessons in the simplest platoon exercises were taken; the Prince labouring so zealously that, in order to overcome the prejudices of his countrymen, he donned uniform and went through the daily drills himself, compelling his nobles to

[1] The character of Persian cavalry engagements in those days, and, indeed, (where they occur) down to the present time, is well expressed by Sir J. Sheil, when he compares the fighting of Persian horsemen to that of Persian dogs, alternately advancing and retiring, snarling, growling and yelling, but rarely coming to close quarters. (Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life, &c.*, p. 325.)

follow his example. Then followed the short period of French ascendency in 1807–8, and the mission of General Gardanne. Napoleon having promised the fullest military assistance, the latter brought with him a staff of seventy commissioned and non-commissioned officers, who set to work in Azerbaijan and Kermanshah in the drilling and instruction of large bodies of troops, with whom they attained some success. Of these the best known names were those of Trézel, Bernard, Lamy, Bontems, Fabrier, Reboul, Verdier.

2. British officers

England having tardily awoke to the danger involved in this rapid Gallicisation of the country upon which she had already spent such extravagant sums, Sir Harford Jones was sent out in 1808 by the British Government to oust the French and to negotiate a new treaty with Fath Ali Shah. In these objects he was entirely successful; and his treaty, which was signed in March 1809, contained a clause providing for an annual subsidy of 200,000 *tomans*, and as many British officers and troops, free of charge, as were required. It was in fulfilment of this contract that Sir John Malcolm, starting from India on his third mission to Persia in the following year, took with him a number of Anglo-Indian officers, who passed into the Persian service, and among whom were included the distinguished names of Christie, Lindsay, Monteith, and Willock. Sir Gore Ouseley, following Sir H. Jones from England, in 1811, was also accompanied by some English officers (one of whom was Major D'Arcy, afterwards D'Arcy Todd) and a detachment of English sergeants of the 47th regiment, to discipline the Persian infantry. Major Christie, of the Bombay army, undertook the charge of the latter body, or *serbaz*; Lieutenant Lindsay, of the Madras army, raised and commanded a corps of artillery, and worked with the most untiring zeal under the liberal patronage of Abbas Mirza. The latter, however, positively declined to humour his officer's partiality for a shaven chin among the Persian artillerymen, until one day a powder-horn exploded in the hands of a gunner and blew off his beard, after which unmistakable admonition of Providence, smooth chins became universal. Lindsay (afterwards Sir Henry Lindsay-Bethune) for nearly forty years from this date filled an important position in the Persian army, of which he subsequently rose to be Commander-in-Chief. Standing 6ft. 8in. in height, he reminded the Persians of their national hero, Rustam. In recognition of his services he was afterwards made a Baronet by the British Government, and received the local rank of Major-General

in Asia, as well as a salary of 2,200*l.* a year while in Persia. He finally died, and was buried in the Armenian cemetery at Teheran in February, 1851. In 1812, a rumour having reached Tabriz of reconciliation between Great Britain and Russia in Europe, Sir Gore Ouseley ordered the English officers in the Persian service to take no further part in the Perso-Russian campaign still proceeding in Azerbaijan. Abbas Mirza, however, pleaded so urgently, that two officers, Christie and Lindsay, and thirteen sergeants were permitted to stay. Christie paid the penalty with his life, being killed by a Russian officer while lying wounded on the ground, on the battle-field of Aslanduz, in October 1812. He was succeeded in command of the Persian infantry by Major Hart, of the Royal army, who, till his death of cholera at Tabriz in 1830,[1] occupied a position unequalled by that of any other British officer in Persia. He acquired an extraordinary influence alike over the king, who entrusted him with the money for the payment of the Azerbaijan troops, 'having more confidence in the honour of an English major than in that of his own son'; over Abbas Mirza, who never failed to support him, even when he ordered the Royal Princes to mount guard, and gave them no rations but dry bread for three days; and over the Persian soldiers, who, in spite of the strict discipline that he enforced, regarded him with respect and admiration. The termination of the Perso-Russian War by the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, was followed by a third Anglo-Persian Treaty, signed at Teheran in November 1814, in pursuance of the terms of which the British Government continued to supply officers for drill and discipline, arms and munitions of warfare, and the material and workmen for a foundry at Tabriz, where guns and shot of every description were cast, gun-carriages built, and very tolerable powder manufactured at a cost of 4*d.* per lb., in a mill outside the town.[2] The war with Russia being, however, at an end, and no immediate peril overhanging, Abbas Mirza, who was

[1] He died on the same day in June, 1830, as the British Minister, Sir John Macdonald Kinneir. Having expired outside the city, and the Persians having a prejudice against the conveyance of corpses through city gates, his body was dressed in full uniform, and brought in, sitting upright, as if alive, in a *takht-i-ravan*, or litter, for interment in the Armenian Church.

[2] Sir J. Sheil spoke very favourably of the foundry and arsenal of Tabriz; but Fraser, in 1821, delivered the following uncomplimentary verdict: 'The arsenal of Abbas Mirza is on a scale more suited to the shooting closet of a private gentleman than the magazine of a state.'—*Journey into Khorasan*, pp. 223–30.

lacking in stability of character or purpose, began to lose interest in army reform, and even treated his English officers with some suspicion. In 1815, in consequence of a dispute between Persia and England about the continuance of the subsidy, all English non-commissioned officers in the Persian service were ordered by the British Minister to leave the country, and here, accordingly, though some commissioned officers, e.g., Hart and D'Arcy, remained, the first period of British military tuition may be considered to have come to an end.

Strength of the Persian army

Nothing showed the meanness of Fath Ali Shah more clearly than his insistence, in the face of national danger, that the defence of Azerbaijan, which was the theatre of war, should be confined to Azerbaijan troops. Sooner than incur the expense of raising and disciplining a national army, he preferred to see his prestige shattered, and his kingdom dismembered. The army of Abbas Mirza, of which I have been speaking, consisted of 12,000 men, raised in corps of 1,000 each from different tribes or localities in the province. These were known as the *serbaz*, i.e. those who staked or played with their heads, a charming euphemism for the profession at that time of a Persian soldier. In addition, Abbas Mirza had a regular brigade of cavalry, 1,200 strong, and a corps of horse artillery (Lindsay's command) with 20 field-pieces. The Persian army consisted, in addition, of a force of 8,000–9,000 *janbaz*, i.e. those who staked or played with their lives, who were attached to the king, and were inferior to the *serbaz*, both in pay, clothing, and discipline. These were recruited from the outlying districts and tribes, and included two Bakhtiari regiments, who were reported as very tractable by their English officers. How great a difference existed between the army thus composed, and that of the preceding century, will have been made evident by the details and figures which I have given of its organisation.

Effects of the European system

It might be thought that by the institution of a regular army on the European plan, and by the employment of European officers, armaments, ammunition, discipline, and skill, Persia would have gained considerably in military strength. Such was not the case. The English officers found the men docile and intelligent; but the Persian officers could not be otherwise described than as the greatest rascals in the world. Led by such superiors, what could be expected of a force brought face to face

with European troops? Under these circumstances *sauve qui peut* was apt to be the general order, and a Persian infantry soldier is said to have naïvely remarked to his English commander, 'If there were no dying in the case, how gloriously the Persians would fight!' But it was in its effect upon the military spirit and resources of the country as a whole, that the disastrous consequences of the change were most seriously felt. Prior to the reign of Fath Ali Shah, the military strength of Persia had consisted in its inexhaustible supplies of light horsemen, furnished by the tribal chieftains, who, on the feudal basis of a military contribution, preserved a nominal independence. Each of these great khans or Ilkhanis lived in state and in comparative isolation from the central authority, among his own clansmen, keeping large studs of the finest breeds of Persian, Turkoman, and Arabian horses, and encouraging the spirit of horsemanship and patriotism among his followers. This system was absolutely broken down by the policy or the fears of Fath Ali Shah, who set himself to disintegrate the authority of these feudal barons, and shearing the locks of the Persian Samson, found, when it was too late, that he had sacrificed his strength. It is said that when General Yermoloff, the Russian Commander-in-chief in Georgia, heard that Abbas Mirza had begun to form a regular army, he exclaimed, 'God be praised! I shall be able to get at them now, which I never could do before.' Not less emphatic was Malcolm, who saw clearly that in a country as backward as Persia, and possessing governing institutions and a national character so foreign to the civilised idea, it was to an irregular army alone that the safety of the kingdom must be confided:

> An army cannot be maintained in a state of discipline and efficiency for any length of time unless its pay be regular and its equipments complete; and this can never be the case except in a state where the succession to the throne is settled, where the great majority of the population are of peaceable habits, and where establishments are permanent and the laws respected and administered upon principles well understood, and not liable to be altered at the will of the sovereign and of his delegates. That a regular army, by the influence of its example and habits of order, may be instrumental in promoting civilisation, there can be no doubt; but this change must coincide with many other reforms, or every effort to render it effectual to the great end of national defence will prove abortive, and terminate in disappointment.[1]

[1] *History of Persia*, vol. ii. cap. xxi. *fin.*

The highest authority, however, that I can quote is that of Sir H. Rawlinson, who was himself some years later an officer in the Persian army, and who enjoyed unrivalled opportunities of forming a judgment upon the matter. These are his words:—

It can be proved that whatever benefit Persia may have derived, as far as regards the centralisation of the power of her monarch, from the introduction into her armies of European discipline, she has been, as a substantive power, progressively weakened by the change, and rendered less capable of sustaining pressure from without. . . . To a nation devoid of organisation in every other department of Government a regular army was impossible. It thus happened that, notwithstanding the admirable material for soldiery which was offered by the hardy peasantry of Azerbaijan, and the still hardier mountaineers of Kermanshah; notwithstanding the aptitude of the officers to receive instruction; notwithstanding that a due portion of physical courage appertained generally to the men, the disciplined forces of Persia were from the epoch of their first creation contemptible. Beyond drill and exercise they never had anything in common with the regular armies of Europe and India. System was entirely wanted, whether in regard to pay, clothing, food, carriage, equipage, commissariat, promotion, or command. At the same time a false confidence arose of a most exaggerated and dangerous character; the resources of the country were lavished on the army to an extent which grievously impoverished it; above all, the tribes, the chivalry of the Empire, the forces with which Nadir overran the East, and which, ever yielding but ever present, surrounded, under Agha Mohammed Khan, the Russian armies with a desert, were destroyed. Truly, then, may it be said that, in presenting Persia with the boon of a so-called regular army in order to reclaim her from her unlawful loves with France, we clothed her in the robe of Nessus.[1]

3. Period of decline

After the disappearance of the greater part of the English detachment in 1815, Abbas Mirza once again hankered for the fleshpots of France; but his resolution to employ officers of that nationality was soon abandoned, and Colonel D'Arcy was sent instead in charge of some Persian youths for instruction in England. Some French officers were, however, engaged to train the Kurds in the army of Mohammed Ali Mirza, the eldest son of Fath Ali and Governor of Kermanshah, and a regiment of lancers was formed in Azerbaijan by a Colonel Drouville,[2] and was passed on in a state of decline to Lieutenant Willock.

[1] *England and Russia in the East*, pp. 30–1.

[2] *Vide* his work, *Voyage en Perse* (1812–13), 2 vols., 1819.

Then ensued a long period of apathy, until, in August 1826, Russia having for some time assumed an attitude of studied provocation, war again broke out on the N.W. frontier. The effects of the preceding lethargy were soon visible. Persia cut a very sorry figure on the battle-field, and, after the war had lasted for a year and a half, and had resulted in sufficient Persian discomfiture, it was closed by the Treaty of Turkomanchai in February 1828. After the death of Hart in 1830, Colonel Shee was the only remaining English officer of any rank in the Persian service.[1] He and some English drill-sergeants, among whom was Sergeant Gibbons, whom I have before now quoted, accompanied Abbas Mirza on his campaign in Khorasan in 1831–2; but the successes of the Prince in that expedition, in which he successively reduced Kerman, Kuchan, and Sarakhs, had a most unfortunate effect upon the temper of the Persians, who became inflated with unreasonable pride, and thought themselves good enough to conquer any enemy without European assistance. One of the most curious elements in the Persian army at this time was a corps known as the Russian Deserters, being the half of a battalion who had been taken prisoners by the Persians on the march to Shisheh in 1826, and had enlisted in the service of their captors. They were commanded by a Colonel Samson Khan, a Russian serjeant-major who deserted his countrymen, married the daughter of the Vali of Georgia, and betook himself to Persia. These *Bahaderan* (or grenadiers) were well paid, and fought well for their new masters, until finally disbanded about 1840. Colonel Stuart described them in 1835 as 'wearing heavy shakos with high green plumes, red coutees with wings of blue cloth and white lace, loose white trousers and high boots.'[2]

4. English officers

The expedition of Abbas Mirza into Khorasan and against Herat, the siege of which place was only raised because of his death in the autumn of 1833, had re-aroused the languishing solicitude or alarms of the Indian Government, and a more decisive step in support of British interests was now taken by the Governor-General, Lord W. Bentinck. A considerable supply of arms and accoutrements was despatched to

[1] Stocqueler (*Fifteen Months' Pilgrimage, &c.*, vol. i., p. 170) says that in 1831 the only European commissioned officers still in the service of Abbas Mirza were Captains Shee, Burgess, Littlejohn, and Borowski (a Pole). Captain Mignan in 1830 (*Winter's Journey*) had mentioned Colonel Shee, Lieutenants Burgess and Christian, and eight sergeants.

[2] *Journal of a Residence, &c.*, p. 187.

Persia in 1832–3; and in March 1834, six months before the death of the old king, Fath Ali Shah, there arrived in Teheran a large detachment of officers and sergeants from India, with ample provision for every branch of the military service. Included among the officers were the names of Sir Justin Sheil and Sir H. Rawlinson (both of them afterwards Ministers to the Persian Court), Colonel Farrant (afterwards *Chargé d'affaires*), Colonel Passmore, in command, Colonel Stoddart (murdered in Bokhara in 1842), and Colonel D'Arcy Todd, who was placed at the head of the artillery. Colonel Sheil was sent to recruit a regiment among the Shekaki tribe in Azerbaijan; Major Rawlinson was given the command of regiments drawn from the two famous Kurdish tribes of Kalhur and Guran, and in 1836 marched with part of the army of Bahman Mirza, Prince Governor of Kermanshah, through Luristan and Khuzistan to Shushter.[1] Sir H. Bethune was now again in Persia, and, upon the death of the old king, was placed in command of the army, which safely and expeditiously conducted the new sovereign, Mohammed Shah, to the capital, and seated him upon the throne. In the same year (1835) he crushed the rebellion of the king's uncle, Husein Ali Mirza, the Firman Firma, at Shiraz. In the re-awakened burst of military activity, a sum of 2,800*l.* was granted to him for two years for the re-establishment of a foundry; and he was authorised to lay out 400*l.* in the purchase of musical instruments! Two thousand rifles and accoutrements and 500,000 flints were despatched from England as presents for the Shah; and Lieutenant Wilbraham and eight sergeants of the Rifle Brigade came out in 1836 to instruct the Persians in the use of the European arms. Such were the character and the dimensions of the last serious attempt made by the British Government to remodel the army of Persia.

Army of Mohammed Shah

A very good account of the army at this period has been left by Colonel Stuart, who came to Persia in 1835 as private secretary to the British envoy, Sir H. Ellis.[2] The relics of old and the introduction of new uniforms, the varying age and character of the weapons employed, and the *bizarre* combination of Eastern and Western ideas, rendered it a decidedly peculiar institution. When the envoy reached Zinjan, he was

[1] He wrote an account of this march, and of the country traversed, entitled 'Notes on a March from Zohab to Khuzistan,' in the *Journal of the R. G. S.*, vol. ix. (1839).

[2] *Journal of a Residence, &c.*, pp. 186–94.

met by an *istikbal*, consisting of 'twenty regular lancers commanded, in English words, by a sergeant of our 4th Light Dragoons, and forming part of a body of 100 men raised in the Khamseh district, drilled and disciplined by Mr. Farrant. They wore red jackets, loose blue trousers, and Persian caps; and were armed with swords, holster pistols, and lances with red and blue pennons.' The Khamseh Lancers, however, were soon voted too expensive a luxury by the king, who found that their keep cost 4*l.* daily; and, accordingly, they were disbanded, and Colonel Farrant was told off to instruct the Royal Bodyguard, or *gholams*.

Failure and withdrawal of the English contingent

This second English experiment was even less successful than the first. Persia was not at the time face to face with an overwhelming national danger; and the new sovereign, Mohammed Shah, was inflamed with preposterous ideas of personal military renown. The British officers were not well received from the start, and were subjected to constant humiliation from the spite and jealousy of their Persian colleagues. They were not even informed beforehand when reviews were going to take place. Among the regiments whom they were expected to lick into shape, they found it difficult to contend with the turbulence and rascality, the thieving and drunken propensities, of the recruits. After three months' hard work, Sheil wrote, 'I begin to think it hopeless to endeavour to establish a *nizam* (regular army).' And again:—

> With no power except that of the lash and such authority as from personal character they could acquire for themselves—no control over the pay or rations, which were always embezzled, or over promotion, which was always bestowed from corrupt motives—it is not surprising that the English officers did not effect more than was done. If they could not enable the Persian troops to contend successfully with the regular troops of other nations, they at all events gave the Persian artillery and infantry the means of beating an unlimited number of Afghans, Koords, and Toorkomans, or irregular Persian troops.[1]

It was owing, however, to political and diplomatic rupture in the first place that the experiment broke down. In the second year of his reign, Mohammed Shah commenced the execution of a design long cherished by himself, but avowedly repugnant to England, by marching against Herat. The growing ascendency of Russia, and the strained relations with Great Britain, were illustrated

[1] Note C to Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life, &c.*

by the insulting dismissal of all English civil and military officers from the royal camp in the summer of 1836; and when, after two years of ineffective protest and diplomatic duelling, Sir J. McNeill finally hauled down his flag and quitted Persia, all British officers in the Persian service were ordered to do likewise. Thus abruptly and futilely terminated the last appearance of British officers upon the parade grounds or battle-fields of Persia. Failure though the experiment may have been, viewed in the light either of immediate consequences or of its bearing upon Anglo-Persian relations, it yet remains true that, such as it is, the Persian army, even at this day, exists only by virtue of what British officers did for it in the past; and that though other nationalities may have stepped in to claim, or more frequently to ruin, the harvest, yet whatever of drill, or discipline, or efficiency, is still found among the soldiers of the Shah, has sprung from the seeds which were so laboriously sown for thirty years by the exertions, and were even watered by the life-blood, of Englishmen.[1]

5. French officers

Upon the retreat of the English detachment, the French, who seem throughout the century to have occupied a position analogous to that of a second string in a racing stable, again appeared upon the scene. Sir H. Layard encountered them in the Shah's army at Hamadan in 1840;[2] and his companion, Mr. Mitford, was in their company at Teheran a little later.[3] The

[1] Sir H. Rawlinson, in a lecture delivered before the Royal United Service Institution in 1858, mentioned as an illustration of the resourcefulness developed in the Persian artillery under Sir H. Bethune, the fact that, at the siege of Herat in 1837–8, when the Persian army was lacking in heavy guns, the artillerymen collected all the copper trays belonging to the chiefs in the camp, and the bells off the mules, improvised a foundry, made moulds, and cast three large 64-pounders on the spot. It was true that two of these guns burst immediately, and the third before long. But still it was a great achievement in a desert. It was, indeed, the Persian artillery who responded to European tuition more quickly than any other branch of the service, and who longest retained the efficiency thus acquired. Fraser, who saw them in 1834 in Khorasan, described them as 'light-hearted, willing, active men, who cheerfully put up with privations and hardships. In the performance of duty they were alert and ready; and no European troops could have handled their heavy field-pieces better in difficult ground. In fact, the passes over which they dragged them with little aid from pioneers or tools would have made a European artillery officer stare' (*A Winter's Journey*, vol. ii. p. 293). De Bode bore exactly analogous testimony to the artillery in the army of the Motemed-ed-Dowleh, when operating in the difficult Bakhtiari mountains in 1841 (*Travels in Luristan*, vol. ii. pp. 18, 19).

[2] *Early Adventures*, vol. i. pp. 255, 265.

[3] *Land March from England to Ceylon*, vol. ii. p. 6.

experiment was a complete failure and was sooner or later abandoned; nor would it be worthy of mention, even among the forgotten episodes of history, had not one of this French contingent been General Ferrier, who, after leaving the Shah's service, made the journey through little-known parts of Persia and Afghanistan, that resulted in his interesting work 'Caravan Journeys,' wherein may be found one of the most notable tributes to British rule ever paid by a rival pen. The estimate of the material with which they were called upon to deal entertained by the French officers may be judged from the saying of one of their number quoted by Binning:—[1]

> Les soldats n'ont ni discipline, ni respect, ni obéissance pour leurs chefs. Ces derniers n'ont aucun sentiment de leurs droits, de leur devoir, de leur dignité, et sont incapables de guider ou de reprimer convenablement leurs subordonnés.

The French having disappeared, the Persians in their search for military pastors and masters descended a little lower in the international scale; and about the middle of the century the military science of Europe was represented at Teheran by a number of Italian officers, refugees from Naples and Venice, and by a few Hungarians and Austrians, lent to the Shah by the Emperor of Austria. The latter appeared upon the scene in 1852, in the person of four officers, a doctor, a chemist, and a mineralogist. Two died in Persia; the rest vanished in 1858 and 1859. The Italian refugees arrived in 1854, six in number, and lasted a longer time; for between the years 1865 and 1870, Mr. Mounsey speaks of them as appearing in plain clothes, without swords, but armed with stout sticks, with which they belaboured the men; a spectacle calculated to draw tears even from a civilian. In 1859 another French mission turned up, under Major Brognard, who brought with him four commissioned and four non-commissioned officers, a bandmaster, and a mechanician for the arsenal. All left in 1861.

6. Italians, Hungarians, Austrians, and French

Dissatisfied with these experiments, and disgusted at the calamitous defeat experienced by a Persian army at Merv in the autumn of 1860, the Shah now bethought himself again of his ancient allies and once more applied for British assistance. It was characteristic of the attitude of the British and Indian Governments

[1] *Journal of Two Years' Travel*, vol. ii. p. 294.

towards Persia at this time, and of the superb indifference displayed by both to British interests in Central Asia, that the proposal fell through owing to a petty squabble as to the share of the expense to be borne by the Indian and Persian exchequers.[1] Once again, in the year 1870, the request was renewed; but the criminal reign of masterly inactivity being then in its prime, it was again refused, the plea for rejection being the charge that Persia was engaged in hostilities against British allies in the shape of Afghanistan and Beluchistan. As late as 1874, Sir H. Rawlinson still recommended 'an experimental contingent force of 10,000 men raised, armed, fed, paid, clothed, disciplined, and commanded by British officers;' but his voice was as that of one crying in the wilderness, and the demand is one that, so far as we can judge, is not likely to be immediately renewed, and might now be attended with difficulties that would not have been encountered at an earlier juncture. Vain though the experiment of a regular army may have been in the earlier years of the century, the presence of British officers with the Persian troops could not fail to have been attended with salutary political consequences; whilst there are districts in Persia where their labours, if energetically supported, might have resulted in an invaluable addition to the defensive strength of the kingdom.

7. Renewed demands for English officers

On the occasion of his second visit to Europe in 1878, the Shah was particularly impressed with the reception accorded to him, and with the sights arranged for his edification, in Vienna; and the result of this satisfaction was an arrangement by which a large staff of Austrian civil and military officials was again placed at his disposal for a period of three years, in order to reorganise both branches of the Persian public service. Eleven officers, including a colonel, a major, three captains, and five lieutenants, arrived in Teheran in January 1879; and the scheme propounded for their employment was the formation of seven battalions of 800 each, or a total force of 5,600 men, in the province of Irak, Sultanabad being the organising headquarters, and a year being allowed, at the end of which time the troops were to be presented in spick-and-span order to the Shah.

8. Austrian officers

[1] Even at this late period the names of one or two Englishmen still figured in the Persian Army List. About the year 1860, Colonel Dolmage, formerly a surgeon, was superintendent of the arsenal and powder-mill at Meshed, and a Major Young was also in the Persian service.

Needless to say, this brave forecast was not realised. The Austrian officers, who do not appear to have been of a high stamp, made little or no attempt to learn the language, squabbled with each other and with the Persian Government, and finally, for the most part, retired in disgust. After their disappearance, a number of non-commissioned officers of the same nationality were either engaged or kept on as drill instructors to the Persian infantry and artillery; and a relic of the Austrian régime still survives in the person of the Austrian corps, consisting of Persians who were drilled by the Austrians as officers of regiments belonging to the so-called Corps d'Armée d'Autriche, which has since been disbanded and resolved into the territorial elements from which it sprang. The officers linger on, but no longer receive any pay.

Simultaneously with the introduction of the Austrian element, the steadily increasing influence of Russia at Teheran was exemplified by the appearance upon the scene of Russian officers, uniforms, equipment, and drill. Colonel Dumantovitch, an officer who had served under General Tergukasoff in the early Turkoman campaigns, with three commissioned and five non-commissioned officers, was engaged to organise a regiment on the Cossack model at Teheran. Very effectively did the Russians proceed with their work. One thousand Berdan rifles, costing 3*l.* apiece, and some steel cannon for two light field batteries were presented gratis to the Shah by his very good friend the Emperor of Russia; swords were manufactured at Teheran on the Russian pattern at a cost of 12½ *krans*, or 7*s.* apiece; the men were dressed and accoutred without the smallest deviation from the model of the West; and the Shah could presently congratulate himself upon a faithful reproduction of the genuine Caucasian article. At the present moment there are three of these Persian Cossack regiments, drawing pay for a nominal strength of 600 each—i.e., 1,800 men; though in reality they consist only of two regiments of 600 each—i.e., 1,200 men, represented, however, as three regiments with a reduced strength of 400 each. Their full complement of Russian officers is one colonel, three captains, one lieutenant, and ten non-commissioned officers; but when I was in Teheran these had been reduced to one colonel, one captain, one lieutenant, and six non-commissioned officers. I shall have something more to say about them when I come to an enumeration of the component

9. Russian officers

parts of the existing army. In the present year it has been decided to raise a fourth and similar regiment of Persian Cossacks among the Kurds, Timuris, and other tribes of the north-eastern frontier.

Surviving foreign element

In addition to the Russian officers, relics of the successive waves of foreign military importation which I have described still survive in Persia in 1891 in the person of seven Austrian officers, six of whom are generals, and one a major, a French bandmaster dignified with the rank of a general, an Italian and a Bulgarian chief of instructors, an Italian head of police, and two Prussian officers, acting as professors in the Royal College. This is the flotsam and jetsam that the receding tide of polyglot military influence has left stranded upon the dubious shore-line of Teheran.

Modern army

From this brief historical retrospect of the Persian army in the past, and particularly during the nineteenth century—the information contained in which I have derived from a great number of sources that have nowhere else been collated—I turn to an account of the Persian forces as they now are. Roughly speaking, the army in Persia may be said to consist of three constituent parts:—

1. A large number of irregular cavalry furnished by the frontier, or nomad, or warlike tribes, and commanded by their chieftains or khans. These must by no means be confused with the irregular horse, as the term is employed in the military annals of England or India. In Persia they are in no sense a drilled, organised, or disciplined body of men, but consist of rude tribal levies, raised without fixed method from such districts or clans as possess fighting material, horses, and a frontier to guard; and while the staple of which they are formed is masculine and robust, yet, in the absence of discipline, and still more often of pay, they are apt to constitute a greater danger than protection.

2. A semi-regular army of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, equipped, clothed, and drilled on more or less European lines, and constituting the bulk of the defensive forces of the kingdom.

3. An irregular infantry militia (*tufangchis*, or matchlock men, *shamkhalchis*, and *jezailchis*), raised and supported by local districts and cities for the protection of life and property within their own borders. Nominally, this is a large force, only called out in cases of dire emergency. In reality, it is an insignificant and

contemptible body of men, armed with obsolete weapons and performing with much reluctance the duties of local guards.

The numbers of these various elements are as follows. I am obliged to adopt a probably unprecedented classification, and to arrange them under four headings, representing respectively:—(1) the hypothetical Army List of the Persian Government, which is an official record based upon imagination; (2) the nominal strength liable to be called out for active service; (3) the number alleged to be habitually under arms; and (4) the actual number at present serving with the colours. There is probably no other army in the world that can be depicted by its apologists or its critics as figuring in so many categories.

Numerical strength

The theoretical Army List of the Shah, published in the 'Sal Nameh,' or 'Annual Official Gazette,' gives the total of the Persian army as 200,000—150,000 in the regular army and 50,000 in the militia or reserves. These figures may be dismissed without either comment or examination.

1. The Army List

The nominal strength liable to mobilisation is as follows:—

2. Nominal strength

Irregular or Nomad Cavalry	16,350	Camel Artillery (*Zamburakchis*)[2]	80
Semi-regular Cavalry	2,493	Austrian Corps	169
Regular Infantry	63,700	Militia	3,600
Artillery[1]	4,000		90,392

I next come to the third heading, containing the alleged effective strength under arms:—

3. Effective strength

Irregular Cavalry	12,427	Austrian Corps	169
Semi-regular Cavalry	2,493	Militia	2,000
Regular Infantry	25,000		
Artillery[3]	1,800		43,889

Finally, deducting for false returns, deficient complement, and men on leave, the number actually serving with the colours at the present moment is believed to be about 30,000 men.[4]

4. Number embodied

[1] 540 officers and 3,460 men.

[2] 10 officers and 70 men.

[3] With 164 guns.

[4] The information which I have since received renders a fifth column necessary, depicting the still smaller total under arms in the spring of 1891. This total relates, except where otherwise specified, to infantry. Teheran, six battalions, nominally of 800 men each; Khorasan, Meshed, one battalion; Kelat-i-Nadiri and Sarakhs, one battalion; Kerman and Persian Beluchistan, one battalion; Fars, one battalion; Luristan and Burujird, one battalion and four guns; Isfahan and

I pass on to say a few words in explanation of the various items in the above lists, commencing with the irregular cavalry. Their elementary constitution I have roughly sketched. The best of them are the Kurds in the north-east and north-west, the Timuris in the east, and the various Iliats, or nomad contingents—such as the Bakhtiaris,—in the south-west. Sir H. Rawlinson, speaking from personal experience, once described the tribes on the western frontier, 'those inhabiting the range which runs from Ararat to Shiraz, as the very *beau idéal* of military material, the men being athletic, strong, hardy, and active.' The contribution of each tribe or district is regulated by the number of families or tents, and has varied greatly at different epochs. The commanding officers are generally the chief khans of the tribe, or one of their near relations, with the title of *sertip* or *serhang*, irrespective of the number of men under their command. Subaltern officers are usually designated *yuzbashi* or *panjabashi*—i.e. 'head of 100' (centurion) or 'head of fifty'—and also *naib*, or lieutenant. The officers have no regular pay, but when away from their camping grounds and on active service receive rations. The subalterns and men receive pay varying from 65 *krans* (1*l.* 17*s.*) to 1,000 *krans* (28*l.* 10*s.*) per annum, the latter being the pay of the royal *gholams*, or Shah's bodyguard, who are mostly khans and men of means. They also receive rations, 6½ pounds of barley, and 13 pounds of straw per diem. Including pay, rations, and allowances, the pay of the irregular cavalry soldier ranges from 4*l.* 12*s.* 6*d.* to 31*l.* 12*s.* per annum. The *sowar*, or trooper, usually sells his fodder, and accordingly his mount is apt to present a lean and woebegone appearance. But these very animals, as soon as they get a little food into them, are capable of astonishing feats of endurance. They are all entire horses, not, as a rule, above 14½ hands in height, but hardy, active, and sure-footed, and commonly fast. They are great weight carriers; for all the worldly goods of the *sowar*, his bedding, and the night clothing for his horse, are

Irregular cavalry

Yezd, one battalion and 400 cavalry; Astrabad and Gurgan, one battalion; Kermanshah and Kurdistan, one battalion; Azerbaijan, Tabriz, 1½ battalion and 100 cavalry; Moghan (on Russian frontier), one battalion and two guns; Urumiah, half company and two guns; Suj Bulak half company. Total under arms: seventeen battalions, or, at the most, 13,000 men, and 1,800 artillery. Nevertheless the Official Army List for 1890–1 continues to report 44 regiments under arms, or 35,200 men (and 35 regiments, or 28,000, on leave), as well as artillery 2,900 under arms, and 2,990 on leave!

packed into the saddle-bags which he throws across its back. In the thick felts which cover it from head to tail, the Persian horse is quite independent of the stable. These excellent animals can be purchased anywhere for very cheap sums, from 6*l.* upwards, and, when in marching trim, they easily accomplish from 24 to 30 miles in the day in any weather, over a country that would break the heart of a more highly-bred beast. Their riders have no uni-

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forms, but provide their own mounts, kit, and arms, the latter consisting, as a rule, of a native rifle, a short, straight sword, and a pistol. They are for the most part splendid horsemen, being trained to ride from childhood, and being able to perform remarkable feats of agility or marksmanship while proceeding at full gallop. Herodotus said that the ancient Persians taught their sons three things —to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth.[1] Though the

[1] Herod., lib. i. cap. 136.

last-named precept has long ago been expunged from the ethical code of their descendants, the Persians still observe the first prescription, while at 'drawing the long bow' they are unequalled in the world. These irregular cavalry are the sole modern survivors of the mounted hosts that scattered the legions of Rome, that followed the banner of Tamerlane, and that crossed the Indus with Nadir Shah. Numerically weak, ill-armed, and undisciplined as they now are, they might vex, but could not withstand, a European army. It is conceivable, however, that if one half the trouble and one quarter the money were expended upon them that have been squandered upon the *nizam*, or Persian infantry, they might still be consolidated into one of the most formidable bodies of light cavalry in the East. The latest list of territorial distribution which I have been able to procure divides the levies of the various squadrons—varying in strength from fifty to seven hundred men—as follows: twenty-three Azerbaijan squadrons, twenty-four Khorasan, one Astrabad (Yomut Turkomans), one Shahrud, one Kerman, five Gilan and Mazanderan, four Irak (including the Bakhtiari), four Burujird, four Khamseh, six Teheran, three Arabistan (Feili and Bakhtiari Lurs), four Kazvin, five Kermanshah, one Gulpaigan, one Kamareh, two Luristan, one Shiraz, one Hamadan.

What I describe as semi-regular cavalry consists of certain regiments, drilled, equipped, and armed after European patterns.

Semi-regular cavalry. 1. Isfahan regiment

Of these there are now three regiments, one at Isfahan and two at Teheran. The first-named is called the Foj-i-Fath-i-Nasiri, and is under the supervision of the Zil-es-Sultan. In pursuance of the Prince's well-known partiality for the German military system, the soldiers of this regiment are accoutred so as to imitate the Prussian Uhlans. They serve only six months in the year, and receive only six months' pay, which, in the case of the privates, amounts (rations included) to 233 *krans* (6*l.* 13*s.*) apiece. Both officers and men provide their own horses; but they are equipped, lodged, and armed at the expense of the State, privates and non-commissioned officers receiving one uniform per annum, or, if their services are required for more than six months in the year, two uniforms and rations for the extra period. The numbers, military ranks, pay, and rations of this regiment are set forth in the following table:—

REGIMENT OF ISFAHAN

Rank and number	Muwajjib, annual pay per man	Jireh, daily rations per man—Wheat	Alik, daily horse allowance		Totals for Regiment per annum in krans			Grand total of pay and allowances per annum
			Barley	Straw	Muwajjib	Jireh	Alik	
	krans	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.				krans
1 Sertip (General) . .	6,000	78	156	312	6,000	362 tons of wheat, at 30 krans per kharvar of 650 lbs. = krans 37,440	724 tons of barley at 15 krs. per kharvar, 37,440 1,448 " straw at 5 krs. 24,960 krans 62,400	
1 Serhang (Colonel) .	4,000	39	78	156	4,000			
1 Nazem (Inspector) .	3,200	19½	39	78	3,200			
2 Yawar (Major) . .	1,800	19½	39	78	3,600			
4 Sultan (Captain) .	1,200	9¾	19½	39	4,800			
1 Ajudan (Adjutant) .	1,800	19½	39	78	1,800			
1 Beirakdar (Flag-bearer), with rank of Sultan	1,200	9¾	19½	39	1,200			
8 Naib awal (1st Lieut.) .	1,200	4¾	9¾	19½	9,600			
8 Naib doyum (2nd Lieut.) .	840	4¾	9¾	19½	6,720			
1 Polis mayur (Provost?) .	1,800	9¾	19½	39	1,800			
1 Tabib (Surgeon) . .	3,000	19½	39	78	3,000			
1 Mushrif (Accountant) .	3,000	19½	39	78	3,000			
1 Vekil-i-Kul (Sergeants)	420	3¼	6½	13	420			
4 Vekil Bashi (Sergeants)	380	3¼	6½	13	1,520			
16 Vekil awal (Sergeants)	370	3¼	6½	13	5,920			
16 Vekil doyum (Sergeants)	346	3¼	6½	13	5,536			
8 Sarjuki (Corporals) .	334	3¼	6½	13	2,672			
525 privates . . .	320	3¼	6½	13	168,000			
					232,788	37,440	62,400	332,628

Seeing, however, that the regiment is only called out and paid for half the year, the actual cost is as follows:—

		Krans
Pay	half the above amounts	116,394
Rations		18,720
Horse allowance		31,200
Surgeon's allowance		1,200
Uniforms		18,000
Barracks		5,000
		190,514 = £5,443

2. Cossack regiments

The two Teheran regiments are the so-called Persian Cossacks, who are supposed to be the peculiar glory of the capital and the pride of the Shah. One of these regiments is composed of men of the Muhajer tribe, and is designated therefrom; the other is called the Bumi regiment. Both are under the immediate supervision of Russian instructors; but, for some unexplained reason, the Muhajers get better pay than the Bumis and are regarded as the senior regiment. I saw these men upon

parade and frequently in the streets. They have a smart and workmanlike appearance, being dressed in a facsimile of the Russian Caucasian uniform, consisting of a shako, and long brown *tcherkess* or pelisse, drawn in by a belt round the waist. Thanks to the unremitting exertions of their Russian instructors, they are probably the best stuff in the Persian army; though the detach-

COSSACK REGIMENTS OF TEHERAN

Rank and number	Muwajjib, annually per man	Jireh, daily rations per man	Alik, horse allowance per diem			Totals for regiment per annum			Grand total of pay and allowances per ann.
			Barley	Straw	Hay	Muwajjib	Jireh	Alik	
I. Muhajer Regiment									
		The first and second lieutenants, the N.C. officers, and the privates, 589 men altogether, receive daily rations of 3¼ lbs. of bread, 2½ oz. cheese, 6½ oz. meat, and, in summer, 5½ oz. of grapes once a week, rice and curry. Rations are compounded for at 8 shahis per diem.	Horse allowance is compounded for as follows: Barley, 15 krans per kharvar (650 lbs.) Straw, 4 krans ditto Hay, 10 krans ditto						
	krs.		lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	krs.	krs.	krs.	krs.
1 Sertip (General)	14,000		39	78	19½	14,000	589 men at 8 shahis per man per diem = 85,994 krs. per annum.	662 tons barley, 34,250 krs. 1,324 " straw, 22,830 " 331 " hay, 11,415 " 68,495 "	
1 Serhang (Col.)	3,000		19½	39	9¾	3,000			
2 Yawar (Major)	2,400		16¼	32½	8⅛	4,800			
4 Sultan (Capt.)	1,800		13	26	6½	7,200			
1 Ajudan (Adjt.)	1,800		13	26	6½	1,800			
8 Naib awal (1st Lieut.)	1,200		9¾	19½	4⅞	9,600			
8 Naibdoyum (2nd Lieut.)	840		9¾	19½	4⅞	6,720			
1 Mushrif (Accnt.)	1,500		13	26	6½	1,500			
1 Tabib (Surgeon)	3,000		16¼	32½	8⅛	3,000			
1 Vekil-i-Kul (Col. Sergt.)	400		6½	13	3¼	400			
4 Vekil (Sergt.)	350		6½	13	3¼	1,400			
8 Sarjuki (Corp.)	315		6½	13	3¼	2,520			
560 privates	300		6½	13	3¼	168,000			
						223,940	85,994	68,495	378,429
II. Bumi Regiment									
1 Sertip (General)	12,000	—	—	—	—	12,000	—	—	
Other officers and N.C. officers, same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	Same as I.	
560 privates	180	—	—	—	—	100,800	—	—	
						154,740	85,994	68,495	309,229
Extras for I. and II.									
Russian Instructors (1 colonel, 2 captains, and some N.C. officers); pay, rations, and allowances	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	80,000
1 interpreter, with rank of general	8,000	None	39	78	19½	8,000	—	660	
						8,000	—	660	88,660

ment that was sent against the Yomut Turkomans near Astrabad in 1889, is said to have borne its due share in the general ignominy. The men supply their own horses, but receive an extra allowance of 100 *krans* per annum for 'wear and tear' of animal. Barracks [1] and stabling are provided at the Government cost. The privates of the Muhajer regiment receive pay and rations to the annual value of 655 *krans* (18*l.* 14*s.*); those of the Bumi regiment to that of 535 *krans* (15*l.* 6*s.*). The subalterns, non-commissioned officers, and privates receive also per annum one uniform of European cloth, one uniform of Persian woollen stuff, two uniforms of thin cotton, and one pair of boots, amounting in all to an annual value of 100 *krans*. Their arms and accoutrements, viz., Berdan rifle, sword, saddle, and bridle, are also furnished by the State. One of the chief causes of the superior efficiency of these troops is that the men are paid, from the Persian Treasury it is true, but through the hands of the Russian officers. The latter, however, do not control the promotion, which is a corresponding source of weakness. I append the foregoing table of the two regiments. To sum up, the annual cost of the two regiments, if kept at their full complement, would be as follows :—

		Krans	Krans
Instructors			80,000
Interpreter			8,660
Regiment I.	Pay	223,940	
	Rations	85,994	
	Horse allowance	68,495	
	Medicines	1,200	
	Wear and tear of horses	58,900	
	Uniforms	58,900	
			497,429
Regiment II.	Pay	154,740	
	Rations	85,994	
	Horse allowance	68,495	
	Medicines	1,200	
	Wear and tear of horses	58,900	
	Uniforms	58,900	
			428,229
Barracks and stables maintenance			10,000
			1,024,318
			or £29,266

[1] Persian barracks are built on the model of caravanserais, and consist of a number of empty rooms, without windows, but with an extra allowance of door, on the four sides of large open courtyards. The soldiers have no beds, but sleep on the floor or on carpets.

Neither regiment, however, is kept up to its full strength; and they have sometimes been less than 300 strong; although no corresponding reduction takes place in the number of superior officers and instructors. The average annual expenditure is

INFANTRY OF THE ZIL-ES-SULTAN

reduced by the deficient complement to about 20,000*l*. About 30 of the privates have been taught music, and form a military band.

The regular infantry rest upon a territorial and tribal organisation. They are recruited in no fixed numerical proportion, but in the most arbitrary fashion from provinces, districts, villages,

or tribes, the selection of the individual and the command of the whole being left to the chief or governor of the area concerned.

Regular infantry

Some districts, accordingly, supply far more than their due quota, others much less. There is great lamentation when the order for a levy of recruits comes round, the lot of the Persian *serbaz* being so supremely unattractive that few would voluntarily espouse it. As a rule the villagers settle among themselves the choice of recruits, clubbing together in order to pay an allowance to the courageous individual (or to his family in his absence) who is willing to go. This informal payment is known as *khaneh-wari* (i.e. home pay), and varies from 3 to 20 *tomans* a year, the average being 8 to 10 *tomans*, or about 3*l.* 10*s.*; but the soldier cannot count upon it with certainty, and in many cases it is not paid at all. Service is for life, unless the soldier can scrape together sufficient money to buy a discharge from his colonel, or can bribe a substitute to take his place; and the ranks contain, on the one hand, beardless boys of fifteen or sixteen, and, on the other, many greyheaded and toothless old dotards who can scarcely hobble through the movements on parade. Christians, Jews, and Parsis, as well as the cultivators of crownlands, are exempt from military service. Theoretically, out of every three years the infantry soldier is supposed to spend two on service and one at home. But if this were so, a far larger number would be found with the colours than is actually the case. As a matter of fact, considerably more than half the regiments are disbanded; and of those that are mobilised, few display more than two thirds of their nominal strength. In the case of each infantry regiment the latter consists of ten companies, each of 100 officers and men—i.e. a total of 1,000. The actual strength is ten companies, with an average of seventy each, or a total of 700. The complement of officers is as follows:—One commanding officer (sometimes *sertip* = general, sometimes *serhang* = colonel), two majors (*yawar*), one adjutant (*ajudan*), ten captains (*sultan*), ten first lieutenants (*naib-i-awal*), ten second lieutenants (*naib-i-doyum*), ten ensigns (*begzadehs*), one quartermaster (*vekil-bashi*—a captain or lieutenant), one bandmaster (a captain or lieutenant). The non-commissioned officers of each company are: one sergeant, four corporals (*sarjuki*), and eight chiefs of tens (*on-bashi*).

The following is a table of the nominal pay of the Persian infantry. While on active service all three allowances are supposed

to be received; when not on active service the last alone, not, however, entirely in cash, 30 out of the 80 *krans* being so paid, and the equivalent of the remainder being supplied in two *kharvars* of wheat. A deduction of 20 per cent. is also uniformly made on the salaries of all officers from the rank of major upwards:—

Pay and rations

Rank	Military pay	Rations	Home pay
	Krans	Krans	Krans
Private	70	90	80
Corporal	80	90	80
Sergeant	90	90	80
Sergeant-Major	190	138	80
Ensign	190	126	80
Second Lieutenant	190	126	80
First Lieutenant	280	126	80
Captain, Adjutant, Standard Bearer	580	540	80
Second Major	1,000	1,140	80
First Major	1,200	1,140	80
Colonel (Serhang)	4,000	1,860	0
3rd Class Sertip	7,500	3,000	0
2nd Class Sertip	9,000	3,960	0
1st Class Sertip	12,000	6,000	0

Outside the capital the Persian soldier is seldom seen in a complete uniform.[1] Articles of private clothing fill the gaps left by the inadequate or absent official garb. The ordinary uniform for regiments of the line is a tunic of coarse blue serge, with a brown leather belt, trousers of the same, and a shako of black lambskin with a brass badge in front; but it is rare to find a soldier who possesses the entire equipment. Theoretically, every private is supposed to receive two suits of cotton, one suit of cloth, and two pairs of boots per annum; whilst, every two years, when the regiment is disbanded, he is entitled to a bonus of six months' pay to help him home. The former he seldom receives; the latter never. I have seen soldiers in many parts of the world, but rarely have I seen such creditable specimens of manhood so woefully attired, or so dismally furnished.

Uniforms

[1] The parti-coloured diversity of Persian uniforms is no new thing. Two and a half centuries ago the Factors of the East India Company at Isfahan wrote as follows to the Directors: 'The King (Shah Abbas) has determined to distribute 2,000 cloths (pieces) to his soldiers, who are to the number of 35,000, in yearly pay. The colour should be hare colour, deer colour, popinjay, peach, brimstone, red, green, and such-like light colours.'—*Calendar of State Papers* (East Indies), vol. iii. No. 577.

Army reform

Army reform has been essayed by the present Shah, but has shared the same premature fate as have the majority of his ill-digested undertakings. The Amir-i-Nizam, whom he put to death in 1851, had turned his statesmanlike attention to the military, in common with the other resources of the country; and, had he lived, the army of Persia might to-day have been a very different body to that which it is. Again, in 1875, the Shah, under the influence of the powerful minister, Mirza Husein Khan, who then guided his counsels, promulgated what we should describe as a new army warrant, containing the most extensive reforms and involving a practical reconstruction of the entire army. Conscription was ordered, and the term of compulsory service fixed at twelve years. A permanent peace-strength of the army was instituted; promotion according to length of service was guaranteed; and provision was made for regular payment and retiring pensions. In common with most reforms in Persia, these salutary measures remained a dead letter, and have never been carried into execution. The old haphazard system continues, and will survive till it crumbles under the iron heel of a conqueror.

Territorial distribution

In 1886, the Persian Army List gave the territorial distribution of the regiments of the line as follows. Allowance must be made for the customary exaggeration, the majority of the regiments being unmobilised.

Name and District of Regiment	Garrison stations
26 Azerbaijan Regiments (nominally 800–1,000, really 600–700 strong)	Tabriz, Teheran, Miandoab, Ardebil, Suj Bulak, Meshed, the Russian and Turkoman frontier
12 Khorasan Regiments (Karai-Turshiz, Bostam, Semnan, 2 Kain, 3 Kerman, and 3 regiments of *Tufangchis*, 1 Kerman and Beluchi, 1 Astrabad, and 1 Meshed)	Sarakhs, Astrabad, Kain, Nasratabad, Teheran, Beluch frontier
7 Mazanderan Regiments	Astrabad
1 Gilan	Enzeli
5 Isfahan	Isfahan and Mohammerah
5 Khamseh	Meshed and Kelat
4 Demavend	Teheran
3 Kazvin	Teheran
4 Kermanshah	Kurdish frontier
6 Kezzaz and Ferahan	Bushire, Bunder Abbas
1 Gerrus, 1 Kamareh, 1 Gulpaigan, 2 Luristan, 1 Malair, 1 Nihavend, 4 Hamadan, 1 Kurdistan .	Shiraz

The *personnel* of the artillery is officially supposed to consist of fifteen battalions, and of the following regiments, more than half

of which are never embodied: thirteen Azerbaijan regiments, and one each from Khorasan, Astrabad, Shahrud and Bostam, Kerman, Isfahan, Burujird, Khamseh, Karaghan, Arabistan, Kazvin, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Gerrus, Kezzaz, Luristan, Malair, Nihavend, Hamadan, Teheran, Saveh, and Shiraz. Artillerymen receive double the pay of the soldiers of the line, but the same rations. The scale is as follows:—

Artillery

Rank	Military Pay	Rations	Home Pay
	Krans.	Krans.	Krans.
Private	140	90	80
Corporal	160	90	80
Sergeant	180	90	80
Sergeant-Major	380	138	80
Ensign / Second Lieutenant	380	126	80
First Lieutenant	560	126	80
Captain / Adjutant / Standard-Bearer	1,160	540	80
Second Major	2,000	1,140	80
First Major	2,400	1,140	80
Colonel	5,000	1,860	—
3rd Class Sertip	7,500	3,000	—
2nd Class Sertip	9,000	3,960	—
1st Class Sertip	12,000	6,000	—

Of the arms it is impossible to speak with much respect. I have given the figures of guns available for use—i.e. alleged to possess carriages and to be in a more or less serviceable condition—as 164. There are four Russian guns of 8·7 centimètre calibre on the Krupp model. These are the best. The Austrian *régime* has left its mark in the shape of a large collection of muzzle-loading Uchatius guns, which are stored in the various arsenals in Teheran and the provincial capitals. Thirty of these are 7-centimètre mountain guns for mule batteries, divided between Teheran and Tabriz. At Teheran there are also eight Uchatius of 9-centimètre and ten of 1-centimètre calibre, as well as 72 rifled brass guns, made at Teheran, but possessing no carriages, and 350 venerable smooth-bores of every pattern and calibre from 24-pounders to 12-pounders, without carriages and absolutely worthless. A few of them are exhibited in the artillery square at Teheran, with the object of demonstrating to the inhabitants the overwhelming defensive strength of the place. At Tabriz, in addition to the mountain guns mentioned, there are eight Uchatius

Guns

of 9-centimètre, at Isfahan eight of 8-centimètre, two of 7-centimètre, and 17 others at the various frontier posts; while at the latter are also distributed 200 old smooth-bores of the antiquated and valueless character already described. The superior guns are seldom, if ever, taken out of the arsenal, and the men are consequently quite untrained in working them. Of regular field batteries with full complement of horses there are none. I saw a large number of steel shells in the arsenal, the material of which I was informed had come from mines in Mazanderan.

Arms and ammunition

The arms of the line are even inferior to those of the artillery. The bulk of the infantry are armed with the old muzzle-loading percussion-cap musket known as Brown Bess, which was in use in England before the Crimean war and in Prussia till 1863. In the frontier provinces, such as Seistan and Khorasan, the militia still carry matchlocks of a palæozoic pattern, which they fire from pronged rests, projecting like hayforks from the underside of the barrel. Stored in the Teheran arsenal for great occasions, and for occasional use on the Kurdish or Turkoman frontiers, are 10,000 breech-loading Werndl rifles, for which, however, there is said to be no reserve supply of ammunition, and which have rusted and deteriorated from long disuse. There are also 20,000 chassepôts and 30,000 tabatières (transformed muzzle-loaders), which had been captured by the Germans in the Franco-German war of 1870, and were sold by them to the Shah during his first visit to Europe for 16*s.* each. They and their ammunition are equally contemptible. The bulk of the latter is manufactured in Teheran, near to which there is a powder factory, while small arms are fabricated in the arsenal opening on to the Meidan.[1]

The Arsenal

I paid a visit to the Arsenal, where I was courteously received by two Austrian officers and conducted round the premises, consisting of a series of workshops opening on to garden courts. The Shah was about to pay his annual visit of inspection, and accordingly everything was in spick and span order. Here are an iron foundry, the chief products of which appeared to be copies of florid European statuettes for the decoration of gardens and public places; a percussion-cap factory, bought in France and conducted by an Austrian; and shops for the

[1] The arsenal of Teheran was started by Haji Mirza Aghassi, the Dervish minister of Mohammed Shah, who had all the love of the ancient Athenians for something new.

manufacture or repair of belts, straps, and saddlery, with ox and buffalo hide from Hamadan, of musical instruments and water-cans, and of common swords for use on the parade ground and in the streets, the better blades being of Russian steel. Three hundred men were said to be employed in this arsenal, but a very small proportion of these appeared to be in the building. When I ventured to remark upon the inferior quality of a good many of the articles, I invariably received the same reply—viz., that they were 'seulement pour l'exercice,' and that all the best arms and accoutrements were hidden away for critical emergencies. What can be the efficiency of an army that rarely sees or handles the weapons which it would require to use in time of war, I leave my readers to conjecture.

The Persian soldier and his arms

On the various occasions when I came across the Persian soldiery, I used frequently to examine their muskets, which I almost invariably found to be not only of antiquated pattern, but in a state of great dirt and decay. The *serbaz* take no pride in their arms. Colonel Stuart mentions them as using their firelocks as leaping poles in crossing a stream. I have seen somewhere a story of a Persian infantry soldier who was handed a rifle with ejecting process, and who, when the empty cartridge flew back and hit him in the chest, fell over, convinced that he was mortally wounded. When their rifles finally become so choked with dirt as not to go off, the nipple is unscrewed, the barrel is planted in water, and a ramrod with a rag is worked up and down the barrel, which is then left in the sun to dry. Poor as is the execution which he can effect with this venerable weapon, it may be inferred that, when on great occasions the *serbaz* finds a breech-loading rifle placed in his hands, he is quite as likely to inflict mortal damage upon himself as upon the foe.

Camel artillery

The Sal Nameh still continues to present on its imaginary roll-call the small corps of *Zamburakchis* (literally wasplets) or camel artillery, which was one of the military fancies of the earlier Kajar kings. They consisted of a small body of men, in orange uniforms, with green and red flags, mounted on camels, and working swivel-guns from their backs. In the time of Fath Ali Shah they always fired a royal salute when the king mounted or alighted from his horse.[1] Though still existing on paper, this

[1] There is a picture of them in Lady Sheil's book, p. 185; and also as a frontispiece to M. von Kotzebue's *Narrative of a Journey*.

superannuated and utterly useless contingent may be eliminated from consideration, as certain never again to be mobilised.

Austrian corps

Of the Austrian corps I have already spoken. The idea was that this corps, in reality a small brigade organised on the Austrian model, should serve as the nucleus of a new system for the whole army. In common with most other schemes of Persian reorganisation, the scheme came to nothing, and its only survivors are the young European-trained native officers, who are drafted as instructors into the various infantry regiments.

Cost of the army

A Diplomatic Report in 1886 returned the army expenditure of the preceding year as 613,000*l.*, plus 81,000 *kharvars* of grain, valued at 55,000*l.*, or a total of 668,000*l.* I have seen other reports in which the total varied from 585,000*l.* to 850,000*l.* The revenue tables, which I publish elsewhere, return the expenditure for 1889 as 1,800,000 *tomans*, or 524,000*l.* But I cannot be sure that these figures are quite exhaustive; and in Persia I received, from a reliable source, the total of 2,500,000 *tomans* as the real annual outlay on the army. This was equivalent, at the then rate of exchange, to 714,000*l.*, which we may accept as the mean annual charge. If we contrast this with the five millions sterling of Nadir and further remember that a large fraction of the smaller sum never reaches the army at all, we may find a far from imperfect clue to the lamentable decadence of the military resources of Iran.

Persian officers

Having now analysed and explained in detail the various ingredients of the Persian army, I pass on to say something of the system as a whole, of military administration in Persia, and of the *personnel*, both of the officers and the men.

Of the Persian officers as a class no one has ever been found to speak except in terms of contempt. Ignorant of military science, destitute of *esprit de corps*, selected and promoted with no reference to aptitude, they are an incubus under which no military system could do otherwise than languish. When it is known that the command of regiments is sometimes inherited, sometimes vested in the hands of infants, and commonly bought and sold, a high stamp of officers is an impossible result. The theory would appear to be that an officer in Persia, like a poet elsewhere, *nascitur, non fit.* A child of eleven years of age was, at the time of my visit, a field marshal in the Persian army and, at the Royal levée which I attended at Teheran, stood between the Commander-in-Chief and an

octogenarian veteran, no mean type of the system which prevails through the entire hierarchy from general to ensign. Patronage and promotion in a regiment are in the hands of the colonel, who makes such a good thing out of the distribution, that the goodwill, so to speak, of his post is a marketable commodity, like that of a public-house in England, and has to be purchased for a fixed sum upon appointment. He sells commissions to his subordinate officers, he sells exemptions from service and discharges to the private soldier, he makes his *mudakhil* out of the rations and pay, and he frequently only advances a portion of the latter, subject to a usurious discount. Cases are well known of men being appointed generals or colonels whose whole life has been spent in civilian avocations, and, when a regiment is raised, it not infrequently happens that of the officers not one has ever worn a uniform or attended a drill. To obtain the higher commands large sums, varying from 200*l.* to 700*l.* or even 1,000*l.*, are paid by the would-be *sertips* or *serhangs*. If the superior ranks are more commonly filled by men of good family, frequently, as I have pointed out, by hereditary descent, the lower grades of commissioned officers, from the *yawar* or major downwards, are drawn from the middle and lower classes, and occupy no social position whatsoever. Finally, it may be said of the Persian officer, that on the battle-field he suffers from an ineradicable disposition to run.

Royal College

It should be said, however, in justice to the Shah and his son, the Naib-es-Sultaneh, that efforts have been made by both to turn out, by means of properly organised instruction, a superior body of officers to that which has hitherto existed. The Royal College, which was started by the present sovereign soon after his accession, somewhat upon the model of a French *lycée*, and which I visited and have described, contains a military department, where, under the instruction of two Prussian officers, military science is taught. I found thirty pupils in the Artillery, and forty-five in the Infantry class.

Naib's College

Not satisfied with this establishment, or anxious to emulate it, the Naib (who is Commander-in-Chief) started a separate military college in 1885, which contains 150 pupils, and entails an annual charge upon the military budget of 10,000 to 12,000 *tomans*. The curriculum is exclusively military, and the design is to turn out an improved type of officer. There is not the slightest necessity for two of these institutions, and there is

already some jealousy between them, the pay, uniform, &c., which are part of the endowment of the king's college, acting as an attraction which the Naib's college cannot equal. What the type of officer may be that the latter will ultimately produce remains to be seen. The cadets that I saw were very young boys.

Military hospital

While I am upon the subject of military reforms, I may mention two other schemes whose inauguration followed the first European journey of the Shah, and was itself speedily followed by their collapse. One of these was a Staff College, under a Danish officer. The other was a military hospital with twenty beds. An annual endowment was granted by the Shah, and regularly disappeared into the pockets of the hospital superintendent; and no provision appears to have been made for staff, medicine, or treatment. One day the Shah announced his intention of visiting the hospital, which, as usual, was empty. The superintendent was equal to the emergency. Twenty soldiers were hurriedly brought in from the barrack or bazaars, placed under the coverlets and instructed to groan when the sovereign walked in. Nor could anyone complain, seeing that the experiment was equally agreeable to all parties.

The rank and file

The average stamp of Persian officer being what I have described, it is not to be wondered at that his quality reacts with disastrous force upon and is reproduced in exaggerated proportions among the men. During the half-century since the Persian *serbaz* has ceased to be put through his exercises by British drill sergeants, and in the absence of any equivalent tuition, and the chronic stint of equipment, rations, and pay, he has sunk to a very low position in the scale of efficiency, courage, and fighting power. Military service is distasteful to him from the start. He is rarely, if ever, a volunteer. Ill-fed, ill-clad, and unpaid, in the intervals of service, and often while actually with the colours, he ekes out a scanty subsistence by plying the trade of a butcher, or porter, or money-changer, or common labourer in the bazaars; from which employment he emerges on parade days, struggles into a uniform supplied from the depôt, and, his perfunctory duty fulfilled, returns to his civil avocation. Even the men in uniform and actually embodied are usually to be seen slouching about the bazaars anyhow, and doing nothing. It is perhaps in respect of his pay that he is most to be pitied; for the money leaves the State chest in the first place, and

CADETS OF MILITARY ACADEMY AT TEHERAN

it is only because of the organised peculation of his superiors that it percolates in such attenuated driblets, after long periods of time, to the miserable private. Small wonder if, when the occasion arises, he wreaks a sweet revenge upon his own commanding officers by showing the white feather. Though in the Russian campaigns in the first quarter of the century the Persian infantry sometimes fought well, cases of amazing cowardice were frequently forthcoming. Upon one occasion a corps of the Hamadan regiment ran away at the sound of their own signal gun. It was from no mean experience of similar incidents that a Russian officer once ventured on the paradox: 'Persia can be conquered with a single company without firing a shot; with a battalion it would be more difficult; with a whole regiment it would be impossible, for the entire force would perish of hunger.' In the various fights that have taken place since the second Russian war, the Persian army has covered itself with singularly uniform disgrace. The siege of Herat by Mohammed Shah, in 1837–38, owed its miserable failure at once to the gallantry of Eldred Pottinger and to the astounding incapacity of the beleaguering force. In the short Anglo-Persian campaign of 1857, 10,000 Persian soldiers fled before 300 English red-coats on the Karun. In 1860 the Persian army sustained an ignominious defeat at the hands of the Merv Turkomans; and a well-disciplined European force of about 15,000 to 20,000 men could probably overrun and conquer the whole country, so far as actual fighting was concerned, without difficulty.

Parade of the Teheran garrison

At Teheran I witnessed, by the kind invitation of the Commander-in-Chief, a special parade of the city garrison, nominally 7,000 men, but not at that time more than 4,000 strong, in the Meidan-i-Mashk or Champ de Mars, on the west side of the Meidan-i-Tupkhaneh. In addition to the infantry two batteries of artillery, including a mule battery, 400 of the Persian Cossacks, and a corps of cadets from the Military College, were on the ground. A riderless horse, furiously galloping about, reminded me of a precisely similar incident at the great review held before the Shah in Windsor Park in 1873, when a Persian officer was deposited upon mother earth in sight of the whole field. The infantry battalions marched past in four companies of 120 each, or a total for the regiment of 480 men. Three Azerbaijan regiments, two of Turkish nationality, which have always supplied the best fighting substance to the Persian ranks, made by

far the best exhibition. They were composed of fine stalwart fellows, well built and powerful, and with a higher average of stature, in all probability, than any British regiment of the line. But the equipment of the greater number, and the marching, were deplorable in the extreme, and it was sad to see such good stuff so hopelessly misused.[1]

Regiments on the march

Elsewhere on the road from Meshed to Teheran I met a regiment of several hundred men on the march. From van to rear it must have struggled over a length of road of about six miles. The men were in every nondescript variety of costume, with casual fragments or interpolations of uniform showing between. They shambled along on foot in singles, couples, or groups, their arms, kit, and cooking-pots in the case of the less poor being packed upon asses, in that of the majority being carried on their own backs. A few led horses and camels were employed to carry some of the camp equipment. The officers, in mufti, were encountered at intervals, leisurely ambling on mediocre steeds. In the absence of any provision for transport or commissariat, regiments on the march help themselves as best they can from the country or villages which they traverse. They are consequently regarded as an unmitigated curse by the peasants, and my native servant told me at Yezdikhast that on a former occasion when he visited the place he found the plank bridge withdrawn and the village in a state of triumphant isolation, owing to the passage of a Persian regiment, against whose exactions the inhabitants protected themselves in this thoroughly mediæval fashion. Sir H. Layard was at Hamadan in 1840, just after a Persian army had passed that way, and the picture drawn by him of devastated fields, pillaged bazaars, ransacked dwellings, and cut-down orchards justified his concluding remark that 'Hamadan looked as if it had been taken and sacked in war.'[2] It was the same practice, a cen-

[1] I can see neither honesty nor wisdom in repaying the courtesy of the Naib-es-Sultaneh, which I have acknowledged, by a conversation such as the following, that took place between a French officer, the *compagnon de voyage* of M. Orsolle, and H.R.H. (*Le Caucase et la Perse*, p. 277):—

N.-e.-S. 'What do you think of the Persian army?'

F. O. 'I have been astonished at the regularity and precision of the Infantry manœuvres. Under your Highness' direction, the army has made surprising progress.'

N.-e.-S. 'What do you think of Teheran?'

F. O. 'It is a magnificent city.'

[2] *Early Adventures*, pp. 248, 275.

tury earlier, that drew from the reflective Hanway the following ratiocination :—

> It seemed to be established as a custom in Persia for military people to pillage wherever they go, at least to compel the peasants to procure provisions for them. This is the occasion of the latter being deaf to all importunities on any principle of humanity or the laws of hospitality.[1]

It remains only to add that of army administration there is practically none. Arrangements for commissariat or transport do not exist, there is no ambulance corps, contracts for clothing are sold to the highest bidder, and the last thing in which there is any uniformity is uniform. In fact, a more irregular army, in the most literal sense of the word, does not exist on the face of the globe. Irregular in its enlistment, dress, arms, ammunition, discipline, and service, it would be strange if its conduct were not irregular also.

Military administration

For the lamentable condition of the Persian rank and file, the system, and not the individual, is indeed primarily responsible. Military administration falls under the same category as civil administration in Teheran, presents the same features, and is disfigured by the same vices. A smart, or imposing, or plausible appearance covers deception and fraud, and the canker of peculation eats its way into the vitals of the service. This applies equally to pay, to armament, and to organisation. Commissions, as I have pointed out, are bought and sold. If a seeming paradox may be permitted, the soldier has even to pay for his pay; for a certain portion is deducted by his superior officer as discount upon anything approaching punctual payment. The secret of a reorganisation of the Persian forces would be a Government guarantee of regular pay. In peace the army is now a loose aggregation of slovenly units, in war it degenerates on the least provocation into a rabble. But by such simple means, and with capable officers, it might in a few years be converted into a creditable body of men.

That there is no intrinsic improbability in such a transformation, but, on the contrary, that there is in the *personnel* and stamina of the Persian recruit the basis of a military establishment of quite uncommon excellence, may be proved by the opinions of a long succession of competent authorities.

Qualities of the Persian recruit

[1] *Historical Account, &c.*, vol. i. p. 236.

Sir H. Rawlinson spoke as follows at the Royal United Service Institution in 1858:—

As an animal a Persian is the finest creature in the world, for an Oriental he is so certainly. They are fine muscular men, and their powers of endurance are quite exceptional.

And again, in 1879:—

There are no people in the world who afford better rough material for military purposes than the Persians. The physique of the men is admirable, and their power of endurance is great; the absence of all habits of intemperance is very important,[1] while the general intelligence and personal courage of the men is beyond all praise. If the Persian material were placed at the disposal of a European power who would encourage and take care of the men, and develop their military instincts, a fine working army, very superior, in my opinion, to anything that Turkey could produce, might be obtained in a very short period of time.

With regard to the endurance and marching powers of the Persian infantry soldier, Sir H. Rawlinson stated that he once calculated the daily distance travelled in a continuous march of 2,500 miles made by the army of Abbas Mirza, and found that it averaged 21½ miles, a performance which he rightly described as quite unique in history.[2] Upon one occasion the men of his own regiment, being disbanded, reached their homes, which were 154 miles distant, on foot on the third day.

Sir J. Sheil, speaking from an even longer experience, said:—

Though the Persian never attains the wonderful precision of an English soldier—I doubt if he ever could—he has a very satisfactory readiness in comprehending and attaining the really essential points required in a regiment of infantry. A single battalion has a perfect facility in forming a line, or square, or column, even when unaided by European officers; but when it comes to be increased to a large body, and is required to move, then indeed it is chaos; they settle the difficulty by not moving at all.[3]

[1] But it is unfortunately not true. Sheil said of the Afshar regiments in Azerbaijan, that 'both officers and men were the most drunken set of fellows that I ever encountered. Drinking is not an uncommon vice in the Persian army; but at Urumiah, where wine is abundant, and tolerably good, it passed all bounds.' (Note C, p. 335.)

[2] Sir F. Roberts' famous march from Kabul to Kandahar, a distance of 314 miles, in August 1880, only averaged 15¾ miles on the marching days.

[3] Note C to Lady Sheil's book, p. 334. Compare also p. 382, where is an estimate of the Persian soldier almost identical with Rawlinson's.

I might also quote the opinions of Sir F. Goldsmid, Colonel Val. Baker, and Captain Napier, who spoke in a similar sense; but I will content myself with citing the verdict of Sir C. MacGregor, who turned a critical eye upon every branch of the military establishment that he encountered in Persia, and who, in his blunt but expressive way, said of some regiments that he inspected outside Meshed:—

> They are all composed of more or less fine material. To look at them without the eye of a soldier was simply to condemn them as a rabble of dirty, slouching-looking ragamuffins; but regarded as food for powder by one who knows the style of article required, they are by no means to be despised. They are dirty, slouching-looking ragamuffins certainly; but, brought into trim by English officers, they would very soon become fine soldierly fellows. . . . They are, taken as a general rule, men of fine physique and very hardy muscular frames, and just the fellows to make into very fine soldiers, but they are shockingly neglected by the Government. . . . God has given the Shah as fine a body of men as could be wished for, but he does nothing whatever for them.[1]

Chance of reform

From this collection of expert opinion, which I make no apology for having quoted, seeing that a lay judgment on the matter might be open to suspicion, it will be seen that, wretched as is the Persian army at the present time, contemptible as is its equipment, and low as is its *morale*, there exists in the country, and particularly in the Western provinces, the material out of which, under a more salutary régime, a Persian soldiery might again be created, worthy of its ancestral renown. I confess that, so long as the present system continues, I do not see much chance of such a consummation. Elementary reforms—such as the issue of a single and simple manual of drill (to consolidate and supersede the discordant fragments of half a dozen different systems), the entire overhauling of the arms and ammunition, the institution of a proper code of military punishment, the promulgation of some system of promotion other than one based upon bribery and corruption, a permanent organisation of the regular infantry, and a resuscitation, under less haphazard conditions, of the powerful force of irregular cavalry which the country is still capable of producing, and better tuition for officers of all classes—might be introduced, and are sorely needed. But as long as the whole administration remains

[1] *Journey through Khorasan*, vol. i. pp. 287, 294–298; vol. ii. pp. 2, 3, 13–19.

rotten at the core, and the army is regarded as a profitable source of plunder for embezzling officials, instead of an instrument of national defence and an outlet for the manhood of the nation, so long will disgrace attend the Persian arms, and the Lion and the Sun be no more than a boastful symbol of disaster.

Future of the Persian army

Sir H. Rawlinson has hazarded a prediction as to the future of the Persian army, which I must cite as a justification of hopes that might otherwise be thought premature. He said in the lecture before referred to:—

Persia can never become a rich, or a producing, or a manufacturing country;[1] but it will doubtless be turned to great account some day or other as a nursery for soldiers. The Persian, considered as a mere animal, is so very superior to any other Asiatic, to an Indian, or Turk, or even Russian, that it is impossible to avoid foreseeing that, as any European war becomes developed in the East, the military resources of Persia must be called into action. In fact, it seems that we could not have a more formidable engine of attack and offence launched against India than a Persian army commanded by Russian officers. In the same way we could not have a more efficient instrument of defence than the same army led by British officers or by officers acting in our interests.

The march of time and the revolution of Fortune's wheel have rendered it unlikely that Great Britain will ever enlist in her service the stalwart Turks of Azerbaijan or the hardy Kurds of the Turkoman and Kurdish frontiers. If these are fated to be the mercenaries of a foreign power, it will be neither from Calcutta nor from London that they will draw their pay. But it may well be that the nomad tribes of the south, from the Persian Beluchis on the east to the Iliat Bakhtiari and other Lurs on the west, may one day stand in line with British red-coats in the defence of their native country.

[1] I must guard myself from being supposed to agree with this dictum.

CHAPTER XVIII

RAILWAYS

It came on made highways, from far cities towards far cities; weaving them, like a monstrous shuttle, into closer and closer union.

CARLYLE, *Sartor Resartus*, bk. ii., cap. ii.

There, methinks, would be enjoyment more than in the march of mind,
In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind.

TENNYSON, *Locksley Hall.*

HAVING previously discussed the subject of roads, present and prospective, in Persia, I now pass to the question of railway extension, and the conditions that favour or retard the undertaking. Every prominent man in Persia, from the Shah downwards, professes to be keenly alive to the importance of introducing railroads into the country, and can only return to the question why they are not forthwith commenced the ambiguous but stereotyped rejoinder that 'there are obstacles in the way.' The Grand Vizier assured me that he regarded the opening of railways in the country as the only method by which Persia could repay the debt of gratitude she owed to Europe for the hospitable entertainment of the Shah. He said that when, upon his recent return, he exchanged the splendid lines of Europe for the abominable tracks that lead from the Persian frontier, he almost wept at the contrast. I received similar assurances of sympathy or support from the Governor-General of Khorasan, the Ilkhani of Kuchan, the royal princes, and every minister with whom I conversed. How then comes it that with this consensus of favourable opinion no progress is made, and that the railroads of Persia are still limited to two short lines of a few miles in length which are detached undertakings and not parts of a general scheme?

Professed interest in railways

The geographical configuration of the country affords in itself some clue to a reply. Every railway from the coast must perforce climb from the sea level to that of the elevated plateau, varying from 3,000 to 4,000 feet in height, which constitutes the bulk of Persia, and upon which all the great cities are placed. The passes conducting to this plateau are commonly of

Physical obstacles

great altitude and steepness, ranging from 4,000 to 8,000 feet in height, and being as a rule so precipitous that even mule traffic upon them is not unattended with danger. Herein lies a preliminary obstacle, conquerable indeed by engineers, but only at a hazardous cost to the pocket either of Government or of shareholders. It is not, however, by the impediments of Nature one half so much as by the selfish impulses of man that the introduction of railways into Persia has hitherto been retarded. The question has been, and is still, one not of science but of statesmanship; and is debated not in the offices of engineers and contractors, but in the cabinets of ministers and the chancelleries of ambassadors. In the hands of these parties, and wrapped in a perpetual mist of conspiracy and intrigue, the railway movement in Persia has for over twenty years been generally in a semi-animate and sometimes in an acute condition. If the correspondence thereupon that has passed from the various legations in Teheran to the great capitals of Europe, and more especially to St. Petersburg and London, were collected, it would provide a bonfire that would blaze for a week. A brief history of its leading incidents will enable us to understand, more quickly than would any other method, the reason why no 'Bradshaw' has ever yet been able to devote a page to the time-table of Persian railways.

The famous Reuter concession in 1872 was not the first railway concession that had been granted and signed by the Persian Government. Concessionaries of various nationalities had already been at work, and between 1865 and 1871 a French, a German, an Austrian, and an English syndicate had successively been authorised to proceed. These schemes came to nothing, being of unsound origin, or sufficient capital not being subscribed in response to the appeal. Then came the notorious Reuter agreement, that literally took away the breath of Europe and handed over the entire resources of Persia to foreign hands for a period of seventy years. Included in this gigantic monopoly, the remaining features of which I have elsewhere described, was the immediate construction of a railroad from the Caspian to the Persian Gulf, and the exclusive right of building all other railways in Persia. Land for the requisite building purposes was to be given by the State, free of cost, as also were sand, gravel, and stone. No duties were to be levied upon either the materials or the men employed. The Government was to receive twenty per cent. of the net profits,

The Reuter Concession 1872

and the reversion of the entire establishment at the end of seventy years. Baron de Reuter at once commenced operations. The preliminary route from the Caspian was surveyed, engineers were sent out, and a few miles of earthwork were constructed in the neighhood of Resht in order to escape forfeiture of the caution money. But the intense and angry hostility of Russia, the indifference of England, steeped at that time in abysmal ignorance of all things Persian, and the stubborn antagonism of the Persian reactionaries, easily defeated a scheme whose colossal proportions rendered it impossible from the start, and, on the Shah's return from his European tour, a fictitious excuse was easily discovered and the concession was revoked.

Falckenhagen Concession 1874–75

Less ambitious schemes for some time afterwards occupied the field. In 1874 General or Baron von Falckenhagen, a retired Russian engineer officer, who had constructed several lines in Georgia, came out to Teheran; and, ostensibly on his own account, but in reality strongly backed by the Russian Government, pressed for a line from Julfa, on the north-west Perso-Russian frontier, to Tabriz, in connection with a Russian line from Tiflis to Julfa. According to this scheme the Persian Government was to guarantee six and a half per cent. for forty-four years on the capital of the company to be raised, five per cent. interest, and one and a half per cent. as a sinking fund; no concession was to be granted to any other line within a radius of 100 miles; and the company also proposed to arrogate to itself the customs of Tabriz. This proposal was sufficiently cool and barefaced to arouse the opposition of the Shah, in spite of the imperious pressure exercised by the Russian Minister.[1] A modified concession was subsequently in 1875 proposed by the Shah, in which the Persian Government guaranteed three per cent. on the nominal capital of the company, reserving to itself the control of the expenditure of the line, and demanding forty per cent. of the revenue received after six per cent. had been paid on the nominal capital. General Falckenhagen could not procure the funds for working the concession thus framed, and the project fell through. It is needless to say that it was

[1] Sir H. Rawlinson said of the Falckenhagen Concession, which, however, he did not name, 'There can be no question that the interference of the Russian Government in this matter has far transcended the limits of advice or even solicitation tendered by a friendly power, and has given a rude shock to the Shah's independent authority.'—*England and Russia in the East*, p. 340.

designed solely in the interests of Russian trade or aggression; whilst its rumoured extension in the direction of Baghdad was equally intended to give access to a part of the Turkish Empire which Russia may some day find it not incompatible with her respect for the eighth commandment to appropriate.

Alléon Concession 1878

In 1878 a French-Armenian of Constantinople, M. Alléon, representing a Paris firm, obtained a concession, also inoperative, from Resht to Teheran. An Austrian engineer, Herr von Scherzer, even traced a line for the railway, avoiding the lofty Kharzan Pass over the Elburz by a circuitous route through the Bakandi Valley, and climbing the central plateau by serpentines with a gradient of one in thirty-three. The project came to grief because of the refusal of the Persian Government to give a guarantee for the seven per cent. interest promised on the capital to be raised.

American and English Concessions

In the succeeding years, Mr. Winston, American Minister Resident, and an eccentric personage, very nearly obtained an extensive railway concession, but was baulked at the last moment. The English Government were on the verge of a similar success, with a line from the Upper Karun to Teheran. This, however, came to nothing. When a line asked for or conceded to an English firm or English representatives is finally refused, there is never any doubt as to the quarter from whence the opposition has been inspired. This could be proved to demonstration.

Boital Concessions 1882

Finally, a M. Boital, who is a concessionary on a large scale, and who has, at different times, received concessions for gasworks and electric light at Teheran, and for the construction of roads, obtained a group of railway concessions, the chief of which was a line from Resht to the capital, to be continued later on from thence to Bushire. In the grant were included branch lines in connection with the main system, and the right to work all mines within a distance of ten kilomètres on either side of the metals. The works were to be opened in 1885, and the concession was to run for ninety-nine years, caution money to the extent of 500,000 francs being lodged by M. Boital in Paris, as security for the fulfilment of his part of the contract. Nevertheless, the Nemesis that overhangs all projected undertakings in Persia was not to be baffled, and the Boital proposals experienced the customary fate.

One, however, of the Boital group of grants, in itself the least intrinsically important, did eventually struggle into the light of day. Among the concessions obtained was one for a small Décauville railway from Teheran to the famous shrine of Shah Abdul Azim, situated about six miles south of the city. The remains of this distinguished saint repose beneath a gilded dome, and are said to be visited by over 300,000 pilgrims yearly from Teheran, the easy distance from which renders the sanctuary a favourite place of holiday as well as religious resort. The Décauville project came to nothing, and some of the rails are said to be still lying where they were landed at Bushire. The concession, however, was sold to a Belgian syndicate, under the title of La Société des Chemins-de-fer de Perse, who saw in this opening the starting point of what might possibly become the much-talked-of trunk line of the future from North Persia to the Gulf. The capital of 2,000,000 francs was subscribed in Belgium, an additional three millions having since been raised by the issue of bonds in order to meet the heavy outlay, and to purchase a tramway concession; the engines were built in Brussels, and brought in pieces, *viâ* Batum and Baku; the rails came partly from Belgium and partly from Russia, and were transported at a terrific cost (I was told 4*l.* for each pair) from the Caspian to Teheran. The station, platforms, offices, and workshops were constructed on a scale worthy of the terminus of a possible future main line from the capital to the south; an eighty-centimètre gauge was adopted, and in July 1888 the line was opened by the Shah.

Shah Abdul Azim railway

Its early progress was impeded by an unhappy accident, which arrayed against it the superstitious hostilities of the native population. A Persian leaving the train at Shah Abdul Azim while it was still in motion fell on the rails and was run over and killed. The crowd immediately attacked the engine-driver, a Russian, who defended himself with a revolver, but was savagely knocked about and hurt. The ill-feeling thus aroused has since been allayed; but the traffic has not answered to the expectations formed of it, and financially the speculation is believed to be a failure. There is, of course, no goods traffic whatever on the line, while the distance is too short to render its advantages for passenger traffic obligatory, the Persian pilgrim or holiday-maker who has the entire day at his disposal preferring to take things leisurely and to ride to and from the shrine on his donkey.

Its success or failure

The cost of tickets for the single journey is two *krans*, one *kran*, and one half-*kran*, according to the class, and the receipts, which on festival days in summer have risen as high as from 200 to 500 *tomans* ($3\frac{1}{2}$ *tomans* equal 1*l.*), sink on ordinary days in summer to from ten to thirty *tomans*, and in winter as low as from three to five *tomans*, and even less, in the day. The company possesses four locomotives and twenty-one wagons, and employs five European officials and sixty Persian workmen. The engines are entirely driven by the latter. It is to be hoped that this company, which must be applauded for its enterprise and for the excellent character of its establishment, may ultimately procure a concession for an extension southwards, or be able to part with its plant and premises on favourable terms to some other company more lucky in its fortunes.[1] In any case the 'Gare du Sud' is ready built at Teheran, from which passengers in the twentieth century may be able to book their seats for the Gulf.

Teheran tramway

Anxious to recoup itself for the losses thus incurred, the same company in 1889 bought a tramway concession from the same M. Boital, the lines of which, extending at present for a distance of about five miles through the streets of the capital, were opened to traffic during my stay in Teheran. The company already possessed 12 tramcars, and had ordered 36 more; a stable of 150 horses, mainly from Russia; and a staff of 40 workmen. Unfortunately, the line had been badly laid, transverse sleepers being employed, and the rails projecting considerably instead of being laid flush with the street. It was contemplated later on to continue the existing lines through the city to the north, and possibly to extend them towards the mountain suburb of Gulahek. I have since heard that the Teheran tramway service, at which the Persians looked somewhat askance in its early days, has proved a great success, and that it has been continued towards the northern outskirts of the capital.

New lines

In the spring of last year, 1891, this company, which now calls itself the 'Société des Chemins-de-fer et Tramways de Perse,' and is understood to be financed from Moscow, has procured permission from the Shah to extend the Shah Abdul Azim line in a south-easterly direction towards some quarries of gypsum, limestone, slate, marble, and building stone,

[1] A concession for the extension to Kum was actually granted in 1888, but had no results.

which exist in the hills in that quarter; but the line so extended is nowhere to penetrate more than 30 kilometres from the city, and is to be available for goods traffic only. Simultaneously the ubiquitous M. Boital has received a concession for a similar narrow-gauge line, not above 80 kilometres in length, from Teheran to the Feshend coal mines in the Elburz, about half-way between the capital and Kazvin. These concessions are relatively insignificant, and have so far led to nothing; but in Persia any relaxation of tradition or practice is deserving of welcome.

Mahmudabad-Amol railway

Persia's second railway, which I have already had occasion to mention in my chapter upon the Northern Provinces, is positively the creation of native enterprise and the property of a native individual. Perhaps this may explain the fact that, for all practical purposes, it is worthless, and at the time of my visit could not be otherwise described than as a fiasco. Teheran is at present approached by two caravan routes from the Caspian—that from Resht, *viâ* Kasvin, which is a ten days' march, and that from the small port of Meshed-i-Ser, which is only seven days' march, but crosses a very steep country and offers at present few facilities for transport. Twenty-four miles west of Meshed-i-Ser is the roadstead of Mahmudabad, whence a track leads over a flat country to the town of Amol, a distance of twelve miles, from which point commences the ascent into the Elburz range, whose spurs approach to within six miles of the town. Amol is only six days' march from Teheran. It occurred to a Persian merchant, who is Master or Farmer of the Persian Mint, that he might reasonably swell the profits already derived from debasing the metal currency by constructing a light railway from Mahmudabad to Amol, and thus acquiring the monopoly of the shortest caravan approach to Teheran, and, as a consequence, of the export and import trade to and from the Caspian. The idea was praiseworthy, but the execution fell short of the mark. At Mahmudabad he built a magnificent caravanserai and several shops. He began by employing Belgian engineers and ordering Belgian rails; but here his enterprise appears to have become exhausted. He failed to take any steps to remove the bar at Mahmudabad, or to render it an accessible port; he omitted to pay the Belgians, who withdrew in disgust; he parted with his German engine-driver on the same grounds. The line (of 4 ft. 8½ in. gauge), left in Persian hands, was badly engineered and abominably laid, with rotten sleepers and rickety

bridges; and, according to the reports that I received, the rolling stock consisted only of a dozen uncovered trucks and one locomotive, driven by an African negro, which had either blown up or broken down, and traffic was at an absolute standstill. The original project was to continue the line from Amol with a horse tramway to the foot of the mountains. Whether anything will ever be made of a further projection is doubtful, owing to the steepness of the mountain range that supervenes. Haji Mohammed Hasan, the Master of the Mint, is evidently a man of some energy, as the large works, with machinery for timber-cutting and sugar extraction which he has set up at Amol, testify. But that he is qualified to be the pioneer of successful railway enterprise in Persia is open to serious doubt.

Further concessions

At the time of my visit in the autumn of 1889, a Russian named Palashkofski, of the Transcaucasian Railway, was on the hunt for railway concessions, and was said to have succeeded in procuring one for a line from Gazian on the Enzeli lagoon to Resht. I have heard nothing further of the project which, I imagine, has found its way to the well-filled limbo of the Persian still-born. Soon after, in 1890, two Russian contractors, M. Raffalovitch, formerly Persian Consul at Odessa, and M. Poliakoff, appeared upon the scene, and advanced a colossal scheme of railroad and custom-house monopoly. Lines from Julfa *viâ* Teheran to Bunder Abbas, from Julfa to Mohammerah, from Julfa to Teheran, and from Teheran to Meshed, are said to have been successively discussed. The negotiations did not even reach as precocious a stage of development as have so many of their predecessors; and the disappointed contractors finally retired with nothing better than a concession for a *mont-de-piété* or a national pawn-shop on a large scale in their pockets. This institution has since opened its doors at Teheran, and besides lending, undertakes banking business also; being evidently designed as a sort of Russian counterblast to the British Imperial Bank.

Summary of impediments

The narrative which I have here compiled of the history of railway concessions in Persia will have given some idea of the obstacles with which such undertakings have to contend. The reactionary party in Persia, with whom the *mullahs* usually side, are opposed to any innovation which may tighten the grip of Europe upon their country, and hasten the end of their lengthy but inglorious reign. Even if

Persian hostility be dormant or appeased, there is not that security which, in the absence of a Government guarantee, will tempt capitalists or even speculators to embark upon so dubious a venture. They have no surety that a change of sovereign, a political convulsion, or a foreign war might not be the signal for confiscation. How many of the abortive schemes of the past have been ruined because of the refusal of the Persian Government to grant a fixed guarantee, these pages will have made clear. Furthermore, the long list of unsuccessful appeals to foreign capital will have shown that, in the eyes of Europe, railways along the majority of the lines projected are not likely to be of a commercially profitable nature.

Dearth of native material

This, it must be said, arises not so much from a disbelief in the remunerative capacity of the country itself through which the line might be laid, as from the enormous cost of plant and rolling stock, all of which, at any rate in so far as it consisted of metal, would have to be imported into the country (if from the north, through the gauntlet of the Russian Custom-house), and when required in the interior would have to be conveyed by mule or camel back, unless, indeed, the American plan were adopted of making the railway carry forward its own material as it advanced from the coast. I confess I have been amazed at reading in a recent publication by a writer signing himself 'Persicus' and claiming an eighteen years' acquaintance with the country, the following sentence :—

> There are other circumstances which would facilitate the construction of railways in Iran, namely, the existence of any quantity of good stone for metalling up the permanent way, of wood for sleepers, and of metals, the mines of which, *when opened up, will suffice for the requirements of the country without having recourse to importation.*[1]

The calm assertion of the concluding lines, which I have italicised, should render the unique knowledge of the author of exceptional value to the Mining Corporation, now engaged in exploiting the mineral resources of Persia. It is, however, to such rash misstatements that much of the foreign ignorance and confusion about the country are due. In this particular case Persia

[1] *Vide* an article on 'Roads and Railways in Persia,' in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* for January 1891, the second of a series on the Regeneration of Persia. Their too sanguine author makes the mistake of habitually confusing the future with the present tense.

happens to be notorious for its general dearth of wood; for the lack, so far as discovery has hitherto proceeded, of seams of coal qualified to supply the needs of an extensive railway service, or of naphtha in sufficient quantities to take its place in the engines; and for the absence, in situations where they can be worked with profit, of iron mines, capable of producing the material for rails. All these *desiderata* may conceivably be forthcoming in the future; and the prospect is far from discouraging. But to assert that they are now, or will shortly be, accessible is to substitute conjecture for fact, and to render poor service to the cause of Persian regeneration.

Russian antagonism

Greater, however, than any impediment, either physical or commercial, to the introduction of railroads into Persia that has hitherto been mentioned, is the political obstacle imposed by the stubborn and selfish antagonism of Russia. I shall have occasion in my concluding chapter to add something about the general attitude of that Power towards Persian reforms; but what I shall here say about her policy in the matter of Persian railways, will afford no mean illustration of my later thesis. This I assert without fear of contradiction, that, whenever and whatever the scheme propounded, the bitter opposition of Russia may be counted upon as a certain factor in the case of any railways in Persia but those specially aligned to suit Russian commercial or strategical needs, i.e. railways running from the Russian frontier, either in Azerbaijan or in Khorasan, or from the Caspian to Teheran. With the exception of these lines, which would facilitate Russian ascendency and that alone, the Russian influence at Teheran is steadily cast in the scale against any other Persian railway that may be proposed. This is no hypothetical assumption, but can be demonstrated beyond the possibility of doubt by events which have occurred during the last three years.

Railway prohibition

When the British Minister at Teheran, in the autumn of 1888, obtained from the Shah what is commonly called the Karun Concession, i.e. the opening to navigation, not by Great Britain alone, but by all countries, of the Lower Karun River from Mohammerah to Ahwaz, many British newspapers committed the error both of exaggerating the importance of the concession, which in its undeveloped state has up till now been almost valueless, and of extolling the successful diplomacy that had extorted it. The concession itself was one which had long

been demanded, and which it was known would ultimately be made. It involved no monopoly for British trade, and indicated no peculiar resuscitation of British influence. Seeing, however, that these merits were loudly claimed for it by the English and European Press, the Russian papers started a counter agitation, proclaimed that Russia had been worsted in a diplomatic duel, and insisted upon some corresponding advantage to redress the shattered balance. Prince Dolgorouki, the Russian Minister in Persia, received instructions to apply the screw at Teheran; and the result of his combined threats and persuasion was the signature of a document by the Shah which gave to Russia the refusal of any railway concession in Persia for a period of five years. In other words, no foreign company or individual could obtain authority to construct a railway in Persia during that period, unless or until Russia had herself received a similar permission or commenced similar operations. Russia, in fact, had it placed in her power either to promote railway enterprise in Persia to-morrow by starting a company or applying for a concession herself, when she would certainly not long remain alone in the field; or absolutely to close the door for five years against any railway enterprise at all by declining to exercise her own preferential right.

Further extension

Such was the state of affairs when I was in Teheran, and after describing it, I not unnaturally observed in the columns of the 'Times':—

> Here, therefore, is presented to Russia the opportunity of showing how far she is genuinely interested in the development of the country, and whether she is prepared to use her power as a sullen barrier to progress or in the interests of much-needed reform.

What is her own interpretation of the document, and what is her real attitude towards the opening up of Persia, have since been made evident in a manner that has more than justified my early suspicions. The first act of the new Russian Minister, M. Butzow, upon arriving at Teheran in 1890 with instructions to insist upon some Russian equivalent to the recent British successes in the matter of the Imperial Bank, the Mining Corporation, and the Tobacco Régie, was to secure a prolongation of the railroad prohibition for another period of five years, or for ten years in all from 1889; and Russian diplomacy has since been openly congratulating itself on having stifled the railway movement at its birth, and retarded the first step towards the ultimate regeneration of Persia for another

decade. No attempt is made to argue that Russia has extorted this privilege as a guarantee for a fair, or even a preferential consideration of her own interests, when the question of assigning railways to foreign powers comes up for settlement. The refusal has been demanded, and the diplomacy that has exacted it is extolled, for no other reason than that it throws back the Europeanisation of Persia for a further period, and consequently arrests the fast-spreading commercial and political influence of Great Britain in that country.

Ineptitude of Russian policy

Personally, I do not think that the Russian diplomats are wise in their generation. Apart from the fact that their attitude in this matter can only confirm the suspicions already entertained by the Shah and his ministers, that Russia's interest in Persia is exclusively a selfish one, and that she prefers stagnation to progress because she prefers a debilitated to a robust patient, I believe that, judged from their own standpoint, the policy of the Russians will, in this case, recoil upon themselves. I am by no means certain that an interval of ten years, during which the commercial and industrial enterprises recently started can be steadfastly and tranquilly pursued; during which roads, the natural precursors and feeders of railways, are constructed throughout the country; during which more extensive information is gained as to the mineral and other resources of Persia; and during which European systems of business, management, and administration become familiar to the people, will not be of the greatest advantage both to Persia and to the European well-wishers for her future. Above all, I incline to the opinion that the power most likely to profit by such a respite is not Russia, but Great Britain, inasmuch as it is by British and not by Russian capital that the natural resources of the country will be developed in the interim, and that it will be upon more reliable data than at present exist, that England will ultimately take up the question of railroad extension in Persia, of which every year that passes renders the final settlement more likely upon British lines. In Persia, however, it is never wise to look too far ahead or to predict too confidently of the future, and circumstances may occur to induce the Russians to repent of their present conspiracy and to hurry on the very consummation which they are now so anxious to avert. We may, therefore, not inappropriately take advantage of the prevailing inaction to examine the various directions and routes from or

along which railways in Persia would be feasible, and may endeavour in this way to form some sort of plan of campaign upon which, as soon as the favourable moment occurs, British commerce or capital may proceed to act in the future.

Possible lines of rail in Persia

Railroads in Persia, or from its frontiers to the interior, may be classified according to the direction from which they may be expected to enter or to traverse Persian territory—i.e., either from the north, the east, the south, or the west. Along the north there are four possible lines of approach. The first of these, if we commence our survey from the north-west angle of Persia, would be a line from Tiflis, or from some other station more to the east on the Tiflis-Baku Railway, *viâ* Erivan and Julfa to Tabriz, and thence *viâ* Kazvin to Teheran, following more or less closely the present postal route from the Caucasus to the Persian capital. As I have pointed out, a concession for such a line has once, if not more than once, been granted, and at one time the Russians talked confidently about its early execution. Such a line would possess certain commercial advantages, at least to Russian industry. It would lead directly from Russian territory to Tabriz, the mercantile capital and largest distributing centre of Persia. It would open up the wealthy and fertile province of Azerbaijan, and it would facilitate the Russian import trade into the interior of the country. I do not myself, however, think that it is likely, for some time at least, to be undertaken, and certainly not to be carried beyond Tabriz—for the reason that the project would be too distinctively Russian to interest the capital of other countries, and that the returns would, for a long while, be too small to pay any interest to Russia upon her original outlay. Already the proximity of her frontier provides her with an easy access to the Tabriz market, while her monopoly of the Caspian gives her the choice of more than one entry into Teheran. British goods would only profit by such a railway in the case of its being carried beyond Tabriz, which, since the final abolition by Russia of the Caucasian transit trade in 1883, they approach overland from Trebizond. The volume, however, of this trade beyond Tabriz is not sufficient to make the matter one of paramount moment to British commerce; the more so as other projects are in existence for approaching Teheran from the south or west, whereby English trade would be much more decisively and solely the gainer.

1. Tiflis-Tabriz-Teheran

Proceeding in an easterly direction, the next railway proposals that we find have been mooted are those for a line along the western coast of the Caspian from Baku, *viâ* Lenkoran, Astara, and Resht, or from Resht alone, to the capital; and further east from Meshed-i-Ser to the capital. In connection with the first of these schemes, it is to be noted that the Russians, in laying the Tiflis-Baku line, constructed a particularly fine station at Adji-Kabul, seventy miles west of Baku, with an admitted view to such an extension. Either of these schemes would be executed solely in the interests of Russia; neither could be expected to pay.[1] Between either Caspian port and Teheran intervenes the main chain of the Elburz mountains, which, except in a country giving promise of immense traffic, might anywhere be considered as a formidable barrier to railroad aggression. Concessions for the former of these railroads—i.e. Resht-Teheran—have frequently been granted, but very charily taken up. The Russians would do far better to insist upon the improvement of the road from Resht to Kazvin, and upon the removal of the obstacles to disembarkation and the reverse that at present exist at Enzeli. Considering that this is their main line of entry into Persia, and is only 200 miles in length from the Caspian to the capital, it can only be regarded as typical of Russian supineness in such matters that both the roadstead at Enzeli and the road from Resht are left in a condition so unpropitious to the free ingress and egress of merchandise.

2. Baku-Lenkoran-Resht-Teheran

3. Meshed-i-Ser-Teheran

Before the Russian occupation of Transcaspia, a line of railway running from Gez, in the south-east corner of the Caspian, to Astrabad, and thence up the Gurgan Valley on to the plateau of Bujnurd and Kuchan, found some favour with Russian strategists as an easy mode of advance upon Meshed or Herat, to an army operating against either of which places it would bring up supplies both from Khorasan and Mazanderan, and, also, by means of the Caspian, from Russia itself. Such a line would have been entirely destitute of any commercial character or value, and would have been designed with the sole purpose of abetting Russian aggression. It need not now be discussed, seeing that all necessity for its construction has been obviated by the later conquests of Russia and the Transcaspian Railway of General Annen-

4. Gurgan Valley

[1] Surveys for a line from Adji-Kabul to Astara are reported to have been ordered in December 1891.

koff, which have placed her in a position of such overwhelming superiority with reference to Khorasan, that a separate railway is not needed to expedite her advance, and which have opened to her other and far better avenues of approach either to Meshed or Herat.

5. Ashkabad-Kuchan-Meshed

I have, in the fifth chapter of this volume, discussed the project of a railway from the Russian capital of Transcaspia, *viâ* Kuchan, to Meshed, which route I have there minutely described. It will have been evident from what was there said that, simple as would be the construction of a railroad across the almost level plain from Kuchan to Meshed, neither the Russian nor the Persian sections of the made roadway between Ashkabad and Kuchan have been engineered with a view to rails being laid upon or near to them, and that it may, accordingly, be presumed that Russia has abandoned any such notion.

6. Dushak-Sarakhs-Meshed

While I was at Meshed, however, another and far more feasible project of railway connection between the Russian dominions in Transcaspia and the capital of Khorasan was mentioned for the first time, and is said to have been referred to a special military committee in the Caucasus, by the Governor-General of which territory, Prince Dondoukoff-Korsakoff, it was believed to be strongly recommended. This was the scheme for a Russian branch line from the station of Dushak on the Transcaspian Railway to Meshed. Such a line would, in all probability, pass *viâ* the frontier outpost of Sarakhs, and would, in that case, constitute a first instalment of the ultimate Russian extension to Herat, thereby killing two birds—by threatening both Meshed and the Afghan frontier—with one stone. In the spring of the past year (1891) it has been announced that General Annenkoff is pressing strongly for the Dushak-Sarakhs extension; whilst later reports render it likely that the same result will be attained by a branch line, not from Dushak, but from Karibent on the Transcaspian Railway to Sarakhs. Up to that point the undertaking might menace, but would not be a violation of, the agreement with Persia. It could only be extended into Persia — i.e. towards Meshed—by abandoning the policy embodied in the document referred to, and thereby throwing open the door to foreign railroad competition in other parts of the country. For these reasons, and because the military position of Russia with reference to Khorasan is already so well assured as to render any

considerable outlay upon a railway unremunerative, I incline to the opinion that not yet awhile will Meshed be brought into connection with the Russian system, although the Sarakhs extension may very likely be commenced, and although, when such a junction is finally effected, the above will, in all probability, be the line pursued. I need hardly add that the Persians—who, in spite of their weakness, are very sensitive about Meshed—would regard any such project with extreme aversion.

7. Teheran-Meshed

Some writers have recommended a railway from Teheran to Meshed, a distance of about 550 miles. Having ridden the entire distance myself, I can aver that the physical obstacles to such a work are so insignificant as not to merit consideration. The description, however, which I gave of the road, its desolate and untilled plains, and its mouldering cities, will show that, in my judgment, such a line could not possibly be a profitable venture, and that it would be folly to undertake it. Some authorities, however, are of opinion that the grain-producing districts between Teheran and Shahrud might sustain a line which would certainly give them an immense impetus. The connection of Meshed with Teheran would undoubtedly enable a larger amount of English piece-goods to enter the bazaars of Khorasan than is at present the case, but the principal avenue of ingress into Khorasan for English or Anglo-Indian trade must continue to be, as it is now, from the south, rival competition from that quarter being impossible; and British energy will do wisely to direct itself to the improvement of those routes rather than to the attempted recovery of lost ascendency in the north.

8. Seistan railway

Turning from the north to the east frontiers of Persia, I have already, in a chapter on the Seistan question, indicated my opinion that the safeguarding of British, i.e. Afghan, interests and the spread of British, i.e. Indian, trade in that quarter can most effectively be achieved by the introduction of railways into this part of Persia in connection with the English frontier railway in Beluchistan. The stations of Darwaza, Quetta, Kila Abdullah, or Chaman, upon that railway are all possible points of departure whence an extension might be pushed either *viâ* Nushki to the south of the Amran range, or, in a more northerly direction, to Seistan, from which point a connection is obviously desirable with the important industrial and agricultural centres of Kerman and Yezd. The Indian Government is reported to be opposed to the

construction of the preliminary section of this railway, on the grounds that it would involve considerable expense, that for a time it might require to be guarded, that it would be open to flank attack from the north, and that there would be no immediate commercial return. The latter objection applies to every single railway, without exception, that might be devised or made in Persia. No railway would pay for three, or four, or five years. On the other hand, the potential resources of Seistan and the uses of a new entrance for Indian and exit for Persian goods across the east border are so great that I believe such a railroad might in time become a profitable speculation. The other questions appertain to the sphere of strategy, which I have touched upon in an earlier chapter, and which I will dismiss with the remark that no strategical railway has ever been laid that has not had to pass through the ordeal of these or cognate objections.

9. Trans-Persian line

Such a line would, undoubtedly, before long be succeeded by branches from the Indian Ocean or Persian Gulf, the starting-points of which might be Pusni, Gwadur, or Chahbar; or, in deference to the existing trade routes, Bunder Abbas. The advantages to British trade of such an opening up of south-east Persia, involving, as it would, more intimate communication with the central and north-east provinces, would be as great as would the gain to Persia resulting from the new and more expeditious outlet for her exports in opium, cotton, and dried fruits. The optimist whose vision ranges into the far future will contemplate the extension of a railway system thus inaugurated through the heart of Persia, *viâ* Isfahan, to Shushter, and an ultimate junction with lines running north to Teheran and west to Baghdad. Such a prospect has great theoretical attractions, and its realisation would be the saving of Persia. Optimism, however, is a plant to whose growth the climate of Persia has, so far, given none but the most meagre encouragement, and I prefer not to project my gaze into so nebulous a future.

10. Bushire-Teheran

The project of uniting Bushire with Teheran by a direct line passing through Shiraz is one that I do not believe will ever be realised, owing to the enormous difficulties of the country between Shiraz and the sea. A series of parallel ridges, which, from their character and steepness, may almost be described as ladders, and which rise to a height of over 7,000 feet above the Persian Gulf, separate the two places, and could only be

pierced or crossed by a railway at an expenditure out of all proportion to the probable return. The fact that Bushire, in spite of its scanty recommendations as a harbour, is the principal trading port on the south coast, has tempted people to suppose that it must be the necessary terminus of a Trans-Persian line and to ignore the physical obstacles of which I have spoken. The existence and probable exploitation of a far easier and more advantageous avenue of entry a little further to the west will relegate the Bushire-Shiraz proposal to the limbo from which it ought never to have emerged. The objections that render impracticable this particular section of the trunk line from north to south do not, of course, apply to a line from Teheran to Isfahan, which is quite feasible, and may possibly be realised in the future.

11. Mohammerah-Burujird-Teheran

The easier and more commodious route, to which I have alluded, is, of course, that from the upper waters of the Karun river, through the big towns of the grain-producing provinces of West Persia in the direction of the capital. There appears to be a consensus of opinion that the railroad most likely to pay in Persia would be one starting from Shushter (or, perhaps, more probably from Mohammerah), and running northwards through the Lur country to Khorremabad and Burujird, whence, on the one hand, connection would be easily established with Kermanshah or Hamadan on the line from Baghdad to Teheran, and, on the other, *viâ* Sultanabad with Kum, and thence with the capital. The new southern port of Persia would be several hundred miles nearer to the capital, and even to Isfahan, than is Bushire, and would be separated from neither by any such impracticable barrier as the *kotals* of the Shiraz-Bushire caravan road. Furthermore, besides attracting to itself the export and import trade of the Persian Gulf, such a line would traverse one of the richest corn-growing regions of Persia, would serve large cities, and open up a new approach from the south and the sea to as far north as Azerbaijan. In other words, local would be superadded to foreign traffic; and from their united proceeds a surplus ought in time to be struck out. Nor, as I have indicated in speaking of the road at present in course of construction along the same line, should the prospects of passenger traffic on such a railway be overlooked. In Persia, the principal streams of human movement are those that circulate between the shrines and tombs of the famous dead. The access to no fewer than five such holy resorts would be

facilitated by a Mohammerah railroad—viz., to Kum on the north, the final resting-place of the illustrious Fatima, sister of Imam Reza of Meshed; to the shrines of Kerbela, Nejef (or Meshed Ali), and Samara, all in close proximity to the Euphrates or Tigris, and the last depositories respectively of the hallowed dust of Husein, Ali, and Imam Hasan Askeri; and, not least, to Mecca itself, whither the devout Shiah who aspires to become a Haji must go once, at least, in his lifetime. When we consider the hundreds of thousands of persons of both sexes who yearly wend their laborious way over vast distances to these consecrated spots, and remember the extraordinary fondness for railway travel of the normal Asiatic, we may infer no mean return from the booking-offices of a line which would accommodate so many pious inclinations.

12. Baghdad-Teheran

Continuing westwards, we complete our circuit of the entire Persian frontier when we approach the often-suggested line of rails from Baghdad to Teheran. The distance would be 500 miles, and the important towns of Kermanshah and Hamadan would be passed *en route*. Already a great deal of merchandise enters and leaves Persia by this route, and Europeans in Teheran, desirous of importing some object or article which they are specially reluctant to expose to the perils of the *kotals* between Bushire and Shiraz, are in the habit of sending it up river to Baghdad, and transporting it thence to the capital. This line might be expected to do a considerable business, though it would be a costly one to construct, the ascent from the Chaldæan plains to the Persian plateau being very steep and difficult. But neither in goods nor in passenger traffic could it compete with the line last sketched, nor would it tap the resources of so extensive a country, nor be so easily reached from the sea.

Indo-Mediterranean railways

The mention of a Baghdad-Teheran line suggests a concluding reference to the schemes, of which less is now heard than was once the case, of a Euphrates Valley railway, approaching Baghdad from the Mediterranean and the north-west. Or, perhaps, seeing that other routes than that of the Euphrates basin have been suggested and supported, it would be better to include all projects of a transcontinental line entering Persia from the west under the generic title of Indo-Mediterranean railways, India being the ultimate destination and the Mediterranean the starting-point in each case, and Persia merely constituting a link in the intervening connection.

The writings of the late Sir W. P. Andrew, of Commander Cameron, and others, and the evidence and report of the Select Committee appointed by Parliament to examine the question in 1872, have familiarised the public with the arguments in favour of a railway to India by the Euphrates or Tigris valleys, and with the possible lines of country that might be traversed. Starting on the Syrian seacoast, opposite Cyprus, either from Suedia (the ancient Seleucia) or Alexandretta (Iskanderun), or Tyre, or Tripoli, or Ruad Island (Aradus)—all of which maritime bases have been recommended by different experts—the railway would proceed in an easterly direction to the Euphrates, either on a northerly line *viâ* Aleppo, or on a southerly line *viâ* Palmyra. The Euphrates reached, the railway would either follow the right bank of that river to Busrah and ultimately to the port of Grane or Koweit on the Persian Gulf—a total distance of approximately 1,000 miles—or would cross the Euphrates, strike eastwards to the Tigris, and descend the latter river, so as to bring Baghdad within its scope—a bridge being again required at this spot—proceeding thence, as before, to Busrah or Koweit. Broadly speaking, these were the main proposals placed before the Parliamentary Committee and discussed in the volumes referred to. The minimum estimated cost of such a railroad, if constructed as a light line upon a metre gauge, was 6,000,000*l.*; the maximum, if constructed as a permanent highway upon the European 4 feet 8½ inch gauge, or the Indian 5 feet 6 inch gauge, varied from 8,500,000*l.* to 10,000,000*l.* At Busrah or at Koweit—more probably at the latter, because of its excellence as a harbour—shipping would again be resorted to, and would be continued either to Kurrachi, or, as some proposed, to Cape Jask, whence a land line would conduct along the Mekran coast to Kurrachi. Such, in outline, was the scheme for supplying a shorter and alternative land route to India that recommended itself to so many authorities, was urged by such able advocates, and excited so much popular attention in the 'Seventies.'

Euphrates Valley

In the very fact that neither the attention which it then excited nor the voluminous literature to which it gave birth have saved it from an almost complete extinction, might be discovered an inferential argument against this scheme. Its superficial attractions, judiciously dressed up in a garb of patriotism, were such as to allure many minds; and I

Objections to the scheme

confess to having felt, without having ever succumbed to, the fascination. Closer study, however, and, still more, a visit at different times to both sides of the country concerned—viz. to Syria and to Mesopotamia—have convinced me both that the project is unsound, and that it does not, for the present at any rate, lie within the domain of practical politics. Without recapitulating the *pros* and *cons* of the question, I will briefly marshal the arguments that have led me to that conclusion.

Physical

The grounds upon which such a railway should be advocated, and by which the policy of constructing it must, in the last resort, be determined, are fourfold—physical, political, military, and economic. I believe that in each of these respects the scheme of a Euphrates Valley railway, if tried, will be found wanting. The physical obstacles consist in the character of the country and in the climate. Dismissing the preliminary difficulty that would be encountered in piercing the Syrian coast range as one that engineers might reasonably be expected to overcome, there remains the fact that, upon the more northerly of the lines suggested, there are no places of the faintest importance before reaching Baghdad except Antioch and Aleppo, and that the railway, for the most part, would pass over bare and uncultivated plains, whilst upon the more southerly or Palmyrene route it would traverse what cannot be otherwise described than as a waterless desert. The temperature on these sandy wastes is excessively torrid and trying during the summer months, and I decline to believe that during half the year any general in the world would consent to pack his soldiers into third-class carriages for conveyance across these terrible thousand miles, at least if he anticipated using them in any other capacity than as hospital inmates at the end. Still less would he do so if, as contemplated by an extension of the scheme, to which I shall presently refer, this section of a thousand miles were only the forerunner to another and longer continuation, through a tract of country even less prepossessing.

Political

I have been astonished in wading through the literature on the subject to note the almost absolute unanimity with which the wishes or attitude of Turkey in the matter have been ignored. The country traversed is from end to end under Turkish dominion; not a rail could be laid, or a bridge constructed, or a ticket taken, or a dividend paid—or, as is more likely, not paid

—without Turkish consent. And yet the line suggested is one that does not profess for one moment to consult Turkish interests or views; it neither opens up her resources nor connects her populous centres; it does not save her from Russian aggression on the north nor add to her own defensive strength in the south; it has, in fact, been discussed and decided solely in its bearing upon British interests and upon the safety of the Indian Empire. But are we entitled to assume that Turkey is so very warmly interested in either? My own experience of the Turkish Government in Asia is that no axiom is dearer to its heart than that charity not only begins but stays at home; and that, if there is a people or a government at whose expense the Ottoman officials love to assert their independence in a vexatious spirit, it is the British. Before, therefore, we calmly discuss the question of making a thousand-mile railway in our own interests through Turkish territory, would it not be as well to ascertain what the Porte thinks on the matter? I have very little doubt myself as to what would be the nature of the reply.

Military

Considering that the project is advocated almost solely on military grounds, it should at least be invulnerable in those respects. I doubt exceedingly whether this could be said of a Euphrates Valley railway. Not only, in the impetuous desire to take a bee-line to India, without considering the intervening country, does it, as I have pointed out, ignore the true strategical line for the defence of Asia Minor, which lies greatly to the north (within the radius of Urfa, Diarbekr, Mardin, and Mosul); but, laid as it would be across a lengthy and utterly unprotected stretch of country, this railway would be peculiarly exposed to attack, and would consequently provide a most unsafe line of communication in time of war.

Economic

But strongest of all are the fiscal and commercial objections. I do not see how such a line, running through such a region, could possibly be expected to pay; and I should indeed be loth to incur the responsibility of advising any Government to saddle itself with even a limited guarantee. I fail to see how it could pay, for three reasons: (1) because of the tremendous initial outlay; (2) because the line would not pass through either an agricultural or a mining district, and local traffic would be practically *nil*; (3) because through traffic, either of passengers or of merchandise, would be small—far smaller

than has ever been anticipated; and the receipts at the two ocean termini would not avail to compensate for the utter lack of intervening receipts. I hazard the statement that the returns from merchandise would be small, because I do not see how it could pay any trader to incur the heavy additional expense of railroad carriage, as well as the risks and delays of one, and possibly of two, transhipments en route, in order to save four or, at the most six, days in the voyage from England to India; and that the returns from passenger traffic would be equally insignificant, because I know that travellers to and from India, whether soldiers, or civilians, or ladies, or infants, want as much air and physical stimulus as they can get, and would by no means consent to be cooped up for days in stifling railway carriages, exposed to the dust, and heat, and fatigue of a long journey over such a country. If I were a shareholder in the P. and O. Company, I would not, except for the possible loss of the mails, be in the least alarmed at the competition of such a railway.

Summary

These are the principal objections which appear to me to disqualify and condemn the scheme of a Euphrates Valley railway to India. Since the construction of the Suez Canal, the need for such an alternative route has to a great extent ceased to exist. Without desiring to embark upon larger political theses, I would venture to say that, in keeping a firm hold upon Egypt, and a safe watch upon the Suez Canal, and in quickening and cheapening the maritime service between England and India, are to be found far preferable methods for ensuring rapidity of communication between the two parts of the empire in time of danger.

Schemes of Persian railroad continuation

I have hitherto discussed the Euphrates Valley railway in its Syrian and Mesopotamian sections, terminating on the threshold of the Persian Gulf. I must not omit, however, to notice that schemes have been projected for continuing the line of rails by land for the entire distance to Kurrachi. One of these schemes contemplated the construction of a line along the northern or Persian shore of the Gulf, from, say, Mohammerah, *viâ* Bushire, Lingah, Bunder Abbas, Jask, and Gwadur, to Kurrachi. Such a plan seems to me to be destitute of even the most elementary recommendations, and to fail far more conspicuously if subjected to the fourfold test that I have previously applied, than even the Euphrates Valley scheme. It would

be costly, absolutely unremunerative, useless to Persia, and perilous to health.

Shushter-Shiraz-Bunder-Abbas

There are, however, two other lines of Persian extension, which have been discussed or recommended by the eminent authority of Sir F. Goldsmid,[1] and which are, therefore, deserving of careful consideration. In either case, starting from Baghdad, in connection with a Euphrates or Tigris Valley railway, the line recommended would pass in an easterly direction through Persian territory, avoiding the Gulf, by Shushter and Ram Hormuz, or possibly by Hawizeh, and Ahwaz, to Behbehan, whence an existing caravan route would be followed to Shiraz. From Shiraz two lines of communication are available to the sea; a northerly line by Fasa, Darab, and Forg,[2] or a more southerly line by Lar, both debouching upon Bunder Abbas. Thence the railroad would be continued along the Mekran coast to Kurrachi.

True line of Central Persian communication

Of this scheme I will merely say that it would meet with physical difficulties by no means easily or cheaply overcome, that it predicates the long Mekran coast continuation, for which I have no liking, and that it appears to me to forsake the true line of Trans-Persian railway communication, which I should be inclined to place a good deal more to the north. If ever a railroad is built in a transverse direction across the breadth of Persia, it will surely not be by so southerly or unremunerative a line that it will be conducted. The true line would seem rather to be one that shall unite the great agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial centres of Persia, and that shall be constructed with reference to Persian as well as to British requirements. Such a line is more likely to be found along the track Baghdad, Kermanshah, Burujird, Isfahan, Yezd, Kerman, which I believe to be the ultimate route of through communication by rail, in the far distant days when such a development becomes possible. What I have elsewhere said with reference to a Seistan railway will show how this scheme might connect with the Indian railways, and how it would possess the

[1] *Vide* a Lecture entitled *On Communications with British India under Possible Contingencies*, read before the R. U. S. I. on June 14, 1878; and a paper on *A Railway through Southern Persia*, read at the British Association in September 1890, and printed in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* for December, 1890.

[2] Explored by Mr. J. R. Preece in 1885. Vide *Supplementary Proceedings of the R. G. S.*, vol. i. 1886, Part III.

further advantage, if ever constructed and brought into communication with Europe, of depositing the British soldier, not merely at Kurrachi, but on the Afghan frontier itself, and at the probable theatre of war.

Asia Minor Trunk railway

Should such a line ever be realised, and should it be connected with the Mediterranean, and thereby with Europe, the junction is more likely to be effected by correspondence with railroads already in existence in Asia Minor, than by the construction of a separate debouchure and port in the Syrian recess of the Levant. There are, at the present moment, three separate railway systems in Asia Minor. The first conducts from Scutari, opposite Constantinople, to Ismidt, fifty-six miles, and is now being continued to Angora in the heart of Asia Minor. The second runs from Smyrna to Dinair, 230 miles in the interior. The third is a short line of forty miles in length, connecting the port of Mersina, near Tarsus in Cilicia, with Adana. The engineering difficulties of railroads in so mountainous a country as Asia Minor are great, the impediments arising from the vices of Ottoman administration are many, and the commercial returns are, in any case, for some time likely to be small. But it is conceivable that in the future the first two of these lines may be joined, or that the first of them may be protracted to a point at which it would ultimately connect with the Trans-Persian line which I have sketched. In such a case, the long-talked-of overland route to India might be supplied by the Oriental Express running from Calais to Constantinople, in conjunction with the Asia Minor railways, continuing from the other side of the Bosphorus. In the far-off future a supplementary connection with the Mediterranean might be supplied by a Syrian line. But the whole of these projects appertain to a distance so remote that I shall not live to see them realised, if realisation ever comes, and that prophecy approximates with suspicious closeness to conjecture.

Egypto-Arabian line

I have heard suggested another alternative overland route to India, in the shape of a railroad from Port Said, at the mouth of the Suez Canal, across the heart of Arabia, to some point on the Persian Gulf. Such a scheme appears to me to suffer from all the disadvantages of the Euphrates Valley route in an exaggerated degree, without any of the redeeming compensations. The children of Israel wandered for forty years in a section of the intervening wilderness; but I should be sorry

to assign so modest a term to the sorrows of those who might embark upon so desperate an undertaking.

Conclusion

I have discussed the various suggestions for Indo-Mediterranean railways in this chapter, because in every scheme that has been or can be put forward, Persia, by its geographical position, plays a prominent part, and because the future of Persian railways is consequently endowed with a more than local importance. Not only is this the case, but, behindhand as Persia now is, it is conceivable that an impulse or a direction may be imparted to future developments by her initiative; and it is, therefore, in the highest degree desirable to frame an opinion about railroad policy in that country with a view to all contingent relations. In my circuit of the Persian borders I have indicated in outline the more feasible of the many schemes that have so far emanated from the brains of those who wish well to Iran, either for her sake, or, as is more frequently the case, for their own. The backward and ill-developed condition of the country, the absence of security in certain parts, the opposition of Russia, and, above all, the want of patriotism or enterprise on the part of the Persian Government, are obstacles with which even the most promising of these projects will have to contend. They may retard the commencement of operations, they may defer financial profit to a late period. Nevertheless, railways in Persia, if a questionable metaphor may be permitted, are in the air. From the Cabinets of statesmen it is but a short step to the desk of the contractor and the workshop of the engineer. That a country affecting a high civilisation can permanently resist civilisation's choicest agency and most powerful means of influence is out of the question.[1] When even China has already constructed a short railway, and contemplates a grand trunk line several hundred miles in length, the kingdom of a sovereign who has three times overrun Europe by rail can hardly linger behind. It will be as impossible for Persia to pursue a policy of exclusion in this respect as it is in another sphere of action for Japan to remain faithful to

[1] A more material impulse may be communicated by the high price of grain in the big cities, and elsewhere by the waste of crops, both arising from the lamentable dearth of transport. At Damghan barley was recently selling at 8 *krans* per *kharvar*, while in Teheran the current price is 50 *krans*. Meanwhile at Kum and Kazvin the price is 20 and 24 *krans*, but there are no means of transporting it. In 1890 it was actually found profitable to export corn from Sultanabad by camel to Baghdad, and thence to London.

a religion in which she has long since ceased to believe, and which is incompatible with her moral and intellectual aspirations. In the long run caravans are doomed in the one country just as Buddhism is in the other. And perhaps not in this century, but certainly before the next has run its course, this land of a single miniature line of rails will fill its due quota of pages in the 'Bradshaw' of the world.

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