A JOURNEY IN KHORASSAN AND CENTRAL ASIA.

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AND

CENTRAL ASIA.

MARCH AND APRIL, 1890.

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CHAPTER I.

TEHRAN TO MESHED.

BEFORE writing an account of our daily travels during the above two months, it may be well to give a brief sketch of the geography and of the political importance of the countries which we traversed.

Khorassan is the north-eastern province of Persia, bounded on the east by Afghanistan, on the south by the Great Salt Desert, on the west by the other dominions of the Shah, and on the north by the recently acquired Russian province of Transcaspia. Its capital is Meshed, the sacred city of the votaries of the Sheite sect of the Mussulman religion, and till within very recent days no Christian was admitted within its sacred walls. Pilgrims flock

to it from all quarters of Persia, and the pious dead are carried thither for burial in coffins slung upon the backs of mules. The presence of corpses in a caravan reveals itself with unpleasant pungency to the traveller who meets or catches up the laden mules. What Mecca is to the Mussulman Sunis, that Meshed is to the Mussulman Sheites.

Last year, after much diplomatic pressure, the Russians succeeded in establishing in the city a Consul-General, and this privilege having been conceded to one nation, a similar privilege was immediately claimed by the British Government, who obtained the recognition by the Shah of Major-General MacLean, the Viceroy of India's agent on the Perso-Afghan frontier, as Her Majesty's Consul-General, to reside in Meshed itself.

The post held by General MacLean may be described as that of an outpost sentinel, whose duty it is to watch and report upon the Russian advance from the Caspian on one side, and Turkestan on the other, which, begun a quarter of a century ago, and increasing in velocity year by year, threatens to crush, or, rather, to absorb the

kingdoms of Persia and of Afghanistan, as it has already absorbed the khanates of Central Asia.

Central Asia is the vague term which for the purpose of this narrative may be held to describe the countries bounded by Khiva and the Kizil Kum Desert on the north, Tashkent and Kokan on the east, Northern Afghanistan and Northern Persia on the south, and the Caspian on the west. Its political importance lies in the fact that the whole of it has, within the last twenty-five years, become a Russian province. Its khans, or native princes, have been paralysed or overthrown by Russian diplomacy or by Russian arms. Alone the Khan of Bokhara maintains a position of quasi-independence, but his attenuated dominions, lying between the Russian provinces of Transcaspia and Turkestan, and traversed by a Russian military railway, may, for all practical purposes, be looked upon as forming part of the empire of the Czar.

A few days before starting on our journey, we received a telegram from Sir Robert Morier, Her Majesty's Ambassador at St. Petersburg, informing us that permission had been granted

to us to make use of the Transcaspian railway as far as Samarcand, and that the local authorities had been duly informed. This railway, being a purely military one, is under the direction of the Ministry of War at St. Petersburg, and is not open for ordinary passenger traffic. Application for leave to travel on it had been made on our behalf three months previously by the English Foreign Office, at the request of Sir H. D. Wolff, and the long delay which ensued before a favourable reply was received threatened at one time to prevent the due accomplishment of the object we had in view. Nor was this the only difficulty which we had to encounter. Kind and anxious friends warned us of the risks and hardships which a lady especially would have to encounter during a seven hundred mile journey on horseback through Khorassan, and although our experience of journeys on horseback in Bulgaria and in Roumania enabled us to gauge pretty accurately our own powers of endurance, it was difficult to maintain our determination to carry out our purpose in the face of strongly worded advice, without appearing unduly obstinate and

self-willed. From the outset, however, Sir Henry Wolff had cordially approved of the undertaking; and from General MacLean at Meshed, and Major Wells at Tehran, we received many valuable hints and much useful information.

With this preface I begin a narrative of our own personal movements.

Our party consisted of ourselves, Julia Chivers, lady's maid, and Ali Akbar Beg, Legation gholam, together with a 'chapar shaggard,' or post-boy, who was relieved at each station where horses were changed. Our baggage, which we had to carry with us on horseback, would have excited the curiosity and merriment of an English railway guard or porter. It was composed of three pairs of enormous leather saddle-bags, a 'mafrash,' or small leather portmanteau, constructed so as to be conveniently carried behind the saddle, a small leather valise, three pairs of holsters, besides blankets, waterproofs, and overcoats. The contents of the baggage were of a most miscellaneous description. A very limited wardrobe was allowed to each traveller, and

the greater part of the available space was taken up with provisions, pots, pans, and other cooking utensils, besides two or three small carpets and three large linen sacks, which, filled with straw at night and spread upon the bare floor, served as beds.

The stations at which horses are changed vary in distance from sixteen to thirty miles. They are all built practically upon the same model. Four high, square, sun-dried mud walls, with flat roofs, surmounted by battlements and flanked by four towers, as a defence against Turcoman raiders, enclose a small, open, square yard, usually filled with manure and filth of every description. Round the yard are ranged stables, in which are to be found half a dozen of the most wretched specimens of the equine race to be seen anywhere outside of a Spanish bull-ring. On entering the massive doorway, which is always carefully closed at night, two small rooms are discovered, the one on the right, the other on the left; these rooms are perfectly empty of everything except dust and dirt. There are no windows, and the fireplace is generally constructed in such a manner that

the smoke of the fire, which a cold and weary traveller causes to be kindled, seeks an exit through the door in preference to going up the chimney. As a natural consequence, the room is perfectly uninhabitable for the best part of an hour after one's arrival unless the traveller lies or crouches low on the floor, where the air is less impregnated with blinding smoke. Above the doorway, on the roof of the house, is the 'bala khaneh,' or upper room, which is only reached after a gymnastic performance specially painful to travellers whose limbs are stiffened by a fifty miles' journey on horseback during the course of the day. The steps of the small, winding staircase are about three feet in height, and many of them having crumbled away altogether, the ascent partakes much more of the nature of a mountaineering expedition than of the prosaic process of going upstairs.

The 'bala khaneh,' the origin of the English word 'balcony,' is a small, perfectly empty room, from ten to twelve feet square, generally with four unglazed windows and two doors, the wood of which having hopelessly warped can never,

under any circumstances, be properly closed. The advantage of the bala khaneh over the lower rooms is that it is rarely, if ever, used by native travellers, and its mud floor and dilapidated walls are, comparatively speaking, clean. It can, however, only be inhabited in fine weather, and its occupant's first care, after causing it to be swept out, is to obtain the loan of as many stable rugs and old carpets as can be secured, in order to check the intrusion of the cold night air through all the numerous apertures which invite its entrance.

Some weeks before leaving Tehran we had obtained a promise from the Amin ed Dowleh, the Minister of Posts, that fresh horses would be secured for us at the different stations in place of the worn-out beasts with reference to which recent travellers had made loud but hitherto ineffectual complaints. The Amin ed Dowleh regretted that it was beyond his power to place the station houses in anything like decent order, but he gave us an open letter addressed to the naib, or postmaster, of each station, ordering each one to place himself at our entire disposal, and to give, or to obtain

for us, any and every horse which we might wish to have. In justice to the naibs, it must be said that they obeyed their orders to the letter, and when the resources of their own stables broke down, as they occasionally did under the strain of having to supply five good horses, they unceremoniously, and in the most high-handed manner, impounded for our use the best horses to be provided in the village.

On the 6th of March, leaving our children in charge of their excellent nurse, Smith, we started from the British Legation, Tehran, early in the afternoon, under the best auspices. The weather was fine, but cool and cloudy, and we were accompanied through the town to the Khorassan Gate by a large party of friends on horseback. Following the usual Persian custom of making but a short journey the first day, in order that every body and every thing may shake down comfortably into their places, we arranged to halt the first night at the station of Kabut Gumbuz, twenty-four miles from Tehran. Major Wells, who, with M. Rakofsky, had resolved to accompany us one stage out of the twenty-four between Tehran and Meshed, had sent on his cook to

prepare dinner at Kabut Gumbuz, in order that we might pass the first evening in comparative luxury, and be, so to speak, let down easy.

Our road, after leaving the capital, followed the pass which divides the Kuh-i-Bibi Shair Banoo from the main range, and, after descending again on to the plain, which extends to Veramin, it skirted the hills, going due east to Kabut Gumbuz. The chapar khaneh, or post house, which is situated on the right bank of the Jagerood River, is a rough abode. It was occupied by Major Wells and M. Rakofsky, and on the floor of their room we partook of an excellent dinner with the appetite which a twenty-four mile ride in three and a half hours naturally engenders, whilst our straw mattresses were spread for us in a neighbouring house. Our night's sleep was partially disturbed by the barking of numerous dogs, and at five in the morning, Friday, March 7th, we were roused by the arrival of the Legation messenger coming from Meshed, who, stopping to change horses, inquired whether we had any letters for him to take to Tehran. After breakfasting at 6.30, we bade farewell to our two friends, and, with

fresh and fairly good horses, we started for Aivan-i-Kaif. For the first mile or two we crossed several streams with shallow fords, and, leaving the village of Kazran on the right and Sherifabad on the left, reached Aivan-i-Kaif at 10.45—twenty-seven miles in a little over three hours. Here we lunched in the bala khaneh, overlooking the stream of the Zamrood. The village, which contains three hundred houses, including a telegraph station, presents a flourishing appearance, surrounded by gardens and vineyards. The civil telegraph clerk in charge called upon us during luncheon, and, after partaking of a cigarette and a glass of cognac, undertook to send a telegram announcing our safe arrival to our friends at Tehran.

At 12.30 we resumed our journey. For the first three miles the road was good, and at six miles the defile of Surdar-i-Kuh was entered. It passes through a low range of clayey strata impregnated with salt, which, together with the warm sun, excited our thirst. The last mile of our ride lay over cultivated ground, and at twenty-one miles the post station at Kishlak was reached, after a three hours' gallop. Whilst

afternoon tea was being prepared one of the party enjoyed a bathe in a small neighbouring muddy stream, and his dressing gown, which he wore as he passed down the street of the little village, attracted the attention of the villagers, who, he fondly hoped, took it for a 'kelat' or robe of honour. At eight p.m. we lay down upon our mattresses, and enjoyed the sound sleep to which we were entitled by our forty-nine mile ride, in spite of being twice disturbed—once by the uproarious singing of an irrepressible dervish, and afterwards by the invasion of a large cat making a raid on the milk.

On Saturday, the 8th of March, we started at our normal hour of 7.15, the two previous hours having been, as usual, employed in dressing, breakfasting, shaking the straw out of our mattresses, and re-packing into the saddle-bags our clothes, blankets, provisions, and cooking utensils. Our road lay east and north-east, through a plain rich in cultivation and pasturage. We passed many well-watered villages, two of which, built upon artificial mounds, are especially remarkable. After a ten-mile gallop, which we accomplished in an hour and a quarter, during

part of which we were engaged in an exciting chase after a stray jackal, we reached the Persian telegraph station of Avadân. Here we received a telegram from Major Wells, giving us news of the Wallers' movements in India, and we sent messages to Tehran, with our compliments to the Amin-ed-Dowleh and the Moukbar-ed-Dowleh, ministers respectively of Posts and Telegraphs. From Avadân we passed several villages, and traversed an alluvial plain, which was eventually replaced by a gravelly desert. We passed through a large district covered with a white substance of a salt nature, used by the peasants as manure, and which is probably a kind of nitrate. We reached the village of Deh Namek, *i.e.*, the salt village, shortly before eleven. It is a very miserable place, consisting of about fifty poor huts round an artificial mound, where the water, from its close proximity to the Great Salt Desert is very brackish, and where there are no supplies of any kind.

At Deh Namek we met with our first difficulty in connexion with horses. We required five, and only four were forthcoming. After much useless wrangling, we were obliged to take

one of our tired horses on. Our destination was Lasgird, twenty-five miles distant. Our route lay east, north-east, and east, skirting the borders of the Great Desert, over a clayey and spongy soil, covered with camel thorn and scanty herbage, and utterly devoid of water. A ride of little under two hours brought us to the village of Abdullahabad, where we stopped for half an hour's refreshment in a Persian tea-house. Shortly after leaving Abdullahabad we met five Lasgird horses on their way back to Deh Namek, and knowing that the Lasgird stable would consequently be empty, we effected an exchange and continued our journey. Soon after this fresh start one of the horses fell heavily on his side, rolling over the rider's right leg, but fortunately without doing any harm. Our road presently led us through a narrow defile, passing a stream of water which is generally good, but which, much to our disappointment, on this occasion was too muddy to be drinkable. On emerging from the defile we saw at a distance of about two miles what looked like the ruins of the Colosseum at Rome, but which turned out to be part of the village of Lasgird, a number of

wretched dwellings built in terraces on a high round mound for safety against Turcoman raids. Lasgird is surrounded by cultivated ground, covered with flocks and herds, which till within the last three or four years constantly fell victims to borderland marauders. Shortly before five o'clock, on the lovely and spring-like evening which succeeded a hot and sunny day, we reached the fairly comfortable post-station of Lasgird, where we prepared to camp for the night, having accomplished forty-eight miles in the course of the day.

On Sunday, March 9th, we were called at five, and had our usual breakfast of tea, bread, sardines, eggs, jam, &c., at six, after which we started at 7.20 for our Sabbath Day's journey. Our luncheon goal was Semnan, twenty-two miles off. For the first six miles our route, which was easterly, passed over alluvial ground, which was much cut up by water-courses and liable to be very muddy in wet weather. At ten miles we passed the village of Surkab, from which point the road became stony and dry, over an undulating plain, and the last two miles carried us through the outskirts

of Semnan, consisting of small gardens, fields, cemeteries, and crowded bazaars. The town has a flourishing, busy look, and is plentifully supplied with good water, which, with a customary dash of whisky, proved more than usually refreshing after our hot three-hours' morning gallop. At 12.20, having spent two hours resting and luncheon, and having made use of the services of the telegraph clerk resident here, we started for a twenty-four mile ride to Ahuân. The road was long and rather wearisome, with a steep ascent, but our horses were more than ordinarily good, and we reached the wretched hamlet of Ahuân, situated amidst desolate mountains, at 4.30 p.m. At seven o'clock we had an excellent dinner, cooked as usual by our factotum, Ali Akber, on the roof of the house in one of the angles formed by the battlements.

Ali Akber's method of procedure on arriving at a station-house for the night was most methodical, and is worth describing. His first care was to remove the saddles from the horses, in order to prevent the weary animals rolling upon them, which they were always prepared to do on the slightest provocation. He would

then dispatch a man to fill our linen sacks with chopped straw to serve as bedding, whilst another, having cursorily swept out the bala khaneh, would be directed to place upon the floor some pieces of felt and of carpeting, and to hang others over the imperfect doors and square apertures called by courtesy windows. A samovar in the meanwhile would supply us with tea, and give us strength and energy to remove our riding clothes and ensconce ourselves in dressing-gowns and slippers. Dinner usually made its appearance by seven, and would consist of tinned soup, curried fowl or pilaffe, a joint of freshly killed lamb or mutton with biscuits and jam. Whisky was the staple article of drink, as being the most wholesome and convenient to carry. Dinner was of course served on the floor, and by dint of much practice we all became more or less adept at the art of sitting in the Persian fashion doubled up on our hams. By half-past eight, or soon after, no sound would be heard from the bala khaneh except peaceful or stentorian breathing, as each tired rider reposed on a mattress of straw, coiled up in a dressing-gown

and blanket. At Ahuân, however, we were much disturbed during the night by a travelling dervish, who clamoured long and imperiously for admission into the station, and went away roundly abusing its inmates as 'sons of dogs' when he failed to accomplish his purpose. The night air here was very cold, there was a sharp frost, and the tops of the neighbouring hills were covered with a thin coating of freshly fallen snow.

On Monday, 10th of March, we left Ahuân shortly before half-past seven. Our route lay north-north-east by north on a good, hard, gravelly road, over a gently falling desert waste, with hills on either side. We reached the station-house of Ghûsheh, where there is no village, before half-past ten, having covered the twenty-four miles in three hours. After an hour's halt for luncheon we pushed on to Damghan, following the line of telegraph over a hot, gravelly road and stony desert, passing numerous villages, including Daulatabad, with its triple wall and ditch. We reached Damghan, twenty-three miles from Ghûsheh, very early in the afternoon, and the post-station of

this town being unpleasantly notorious by reason of the presence within its walls of a peculiarly poisonous kind of bug, the 'gherib gez,' we applied to the Persian telegraph clerk for shelter in the telegraph station. Our request was most courteously acceded to, and two rooms were placed at our disposal, looking into a small square containing a few sorry shrubs and a tank with exceedingly dirty water. We found Damghan to be a hot and deadly dull place. In the course of the afternoon we strolled about among the narrow lanes which do duty for streets, but saw nothing except high earth walls and dilapidated mud houses, on the roofs of which a March sun was beating almost as fiercely as an August sun in England. The small children stared at and ran away from the inquisitive strangers, whilst the latter pitied them for having to live the whole of their lives at Damghan.

We dined as usual at seven, and eight o'clock found us stretched on our straw mattresses.

Our road on the following day, March 11th, lay east by north, over even, alluvial ground. One of the horses brought round for our party

proved to be an intractable kicker and was accordingly discarded, much to the relief of Chivers, its destined rider, and another substituted in its place. We reached Deh Mullah, twenty-six miles, in three hours and a half. Here there is a small village, with a ruined fort on a mound, and a large, square, post-station, looking more like a prison than a halting-place for travellers, and at 1.30 we left its dreary walls and continued our journey to Shahrûd, sixteen miles. Our route was north-north-east, by a well-beaten track, over a stony hill skirt; at times it followed the border of the eternal salt waste on our right, and at others skirted the hills on our left. Four miles from Shahrûd we were met by a party of horsemen, servants of the Prince Governor, gholams of the telegraph department, and, conspicuous in his smart and workmanlike uniform, one of General MacLean's orderlies, belonging to the Indian Cavalry Regiment of Guides. They saluted us, and falling in behind we galloped fast into Shahrûd, which is a large, walled town of six hundred and fifty houses, surrounded by gardens and vineyards, lying at

the foot of the spur of the Khanoar Hill. It is the most important town through which we passed on our way to Meshed, and it is, as nearly as possible, half-way between the latter place and Tehran. Shahrûd does a considerable trade with Astrabad on the north, to which place there is a direct telegraph line. It possesses a large water supply, and abounds in supplies of all kinds, including the obnoxious 'gherib gez,' which, for some mysterious reason, are rampant here. We made our way to the telegraph-station, which had been prepared for our reception, and found it to our delight to be a tolerably decent, two-storeyed house standing in a pretty garden. Three rooms upstairs had been placed at our disposal, one of which contained a table, three chairs, and a camp bedstead, the property of Mr. Stagno Navarra, who occasionally stays here when his duties of English Inspector of the Meshed and Tehran telegraph line require his presence at Shahrûd. Here we found a supply of tinned provisions—soups, sardines, jams, as well as a store of wine—claret, sherry, champagne, &c., which General MacLean had, with his usual

kindness and generosity, sent to cheer us on our way. In a letter from him which we also found here, he informed us that a similar store had been left with the 'naïb,' or postmaster, of each station at which we should sleep between Shahrûd and Meshed, and that his cavalry orderly, Hemmet Ali, would follow slowly in our rear to pick up and carry back to Meshed such fragments as might be left.

Within an hour of our arrival the head steward of the Prince Governor of Shahrûd called, with under-servants carrying large trays of different kinds of sweetmeats and bread. A sheep also was presented to us from His Excellency, which before long was converted into mutton for our dinner that evening. We sent back many civil messages, excused ourselves from calling on the ground that we had nothing but our travel-stained clothes in which to present ourselves, and, having rewarded the bearers of the gifts with money, we terminated our interview with the head steward.

The next morning, Wednesday, 12th of March, whilst waiting for our six o'clock breakfast, we strolled about the clean and

flourishing little town, and as we walked down one of the main streets we saw the inhabitants popping out of their little mud houses, like rats out of their holes, in order to perform their morning ablutions in a narrow stream running down the centre of the roadway.

We started at seven with excellent horses, accompanied to the outskirts of the town, through the busy little bazaars, by two mounted telegraph gholams. Our road lay south-west by south, following the caravan road for three or four miles, then, bending to the right, it crossed the Shahrûd plain, passed several villages, and crossed cultivated ground with watercourses. After twelve miles, the far side of the valley was reached, whence the road ascends between low hills for eight miles, when the highest point is reached, after which a winding descent of another eight miles brought us to the village of Armian (twenty-eight miles in four hours), a picturesquely situated but poor and dirty village on the bank of a stream, with walnut-trees and orchards. The weather was bright but cool, with a northerly breeze, and we elected to

lunch under the shade of some trees in preference to remaining in the chapar khaneh.

After lunch we continued with fresh horses, by a northerly and easterly track, to Miamai, which we reached at 3.30—sixteen miles in two hours. Miamai is a prettily situated village, with a small chapar khaneh adjoining an enormous caravanserai. It has large chenar-trees and many streams of water. Late in the afternoon I went out and selected for my bath a suitable pool under a shady tree by the roadside. My ablutions much interested the small children of the village, who watched me at a distance from the flat roofs of the houses, and viewed my proceedings with the same curiosity which London street boys would exhibit were the Shah to take to bathing in the Serpentine. Late in the evening, which was bright, clear, and balmy, Hemmet Ali arrived, having followed slowly in our wake on the same horse. We slept well in the bala khaneh, although startled once by the sudden appearance of a large cat, which came down the chimney, and on being pursued disappeared by the same route. Our first impression was

that she was in search of milk, but, later on, a mouse, having by the activity of its movements revealed its presence inside Chivers' pillow, in which it had been accidentally packed when the pillow-case was being filled with straw, we concluded that it and not the milk was the bait that had attracted the feline intruder.

From Miamai to Miandasht the distance is twenty-four miles, which we accomplished in three hours. Our direction was south-east by south, and for the first five and the last four miles the road was level and good, the centre part being rough, undulating, and stony. There is no village at Miandasht, but merely a large fortified and gloomy serai, occupied by about thirty families, including that of the telegraph clerk, who, together with his gholam, came out to meet us. We lunched on the floor of his office, and were much amused by the antics of his two little boys, aged five and six respectively, to whom we gave biscuits and krans. The father thoroughly appreciated our whisky, having apparently acquired a taste for strong drink when resident at Bombay, a place of

which he spoke as though it were a paradise on earth, which no doubt it is when compared with the hideously gloomy and painfully desolate surroundings of Miandasht, with its brackish water and its absence of supplies of any kind.

After lunch we started with fresh horses for Abbasabad—twenty-two miles. The road was good for about three miles, over a level, barren plain, when it entered a defile through a range of low, volcanic hills. Half-way we passed the serai and fortified village of Alhak, and about four miles from Abbasabad we were met by the naib, who escorted us to the chapar khaneh, which is one of the best, if not the best, on the whole road. We reached it shortly before four, having ridden the last few miles in the teeth of a strong equinoctial east wind. I went for a bath in a neighbouring kanant, where the water was quite tepid, probably owing to the volcanic nature of the ground, and at eight o'clock we retired to bed, having with difficulty closed up the numerous apertures against the strong east wind which was blowing.

When I went out on the following morning,

Friday, March 14th, about six o'clock, I found a regular north-east gale blowing. The sun rose in a great ball of fire, and the vast desert plain, which lay extended before me, was covered with a thin, sea-like mist, just like a storm in the ocean. We started at 7.30, by a good and level road, which skirted the hills on the left and the vast Desert on the right. We passed a native crawling slowly along, in charge of an exceedingly lame camel, for which he—under the impression, shared by most Orientals, that all Europeans are doctors—entreated us to supply medicine.

We reached the fortified village and chapar khaneh of Mazinan, twenty-seven miles, shortly before noon, and lunched in the portico. From Mazinan to Mihr the distance is twenty miles, and this with the good horses with which we were supplied we covered in two and a half hours. The road was good, but uninteresting, with hills on one side and the Desert on the other. Mihr is a pretty village with trees, cultivated ground, and many streams of water. The chapar khaneh was good, but, unlike the majority of them, was commanded by the

neighbouring houses, from the roof of which the inhabitants watched all our proceedings with irritating pertinacity, until they were driven off by threats and imprecations. It was a lovely, balmy, spring-like evening, but there was an ominous look in the setting sun, which portended a coming storm, though we little dreamt of what was actually in store for us.

Next morning, Saturday, March 15th, on getting up at 4.30 a.m., we found the wind blowing hard from the east and the sky gloomy and overcast. The stage that we had before us was a long one, thirty-two miles, and in view of this I had taken the precaution to send the horses belonging to Mihr some miles ahead to await our arrival upon those which we had ridden the night before. Our track lay over a gravelly and sandy soil, and as soon as we got clear of the village and cultivated grounds of Mihr, we found the easterly gale blowing up into our faces clouds of blinding dust, through which glared fitfully the struggling rays of the half-hidden sun. More than once the violence of the storm took away our breath, and at times it seemed as if the horses could scarcely make

head against it. On one occasion, owing to the thickness of the atmosphere by which we were surrounded, we got off the track and found ourselves hopelessly wandering in the wilderness. Fortunately I knew from the road notes with which we were furnished before leaving Tehran our general direction, and by consulting a pocket compass we eventually groped back on to the track, and after a twelve-mile ride from Mihr we reached a large brick serai, where we found and changed on to the horses which had been sent forward. After a short delay we continued our journey through the storm, passing at twenty-eight miles the village of Kashrood, and at thirty-two miles reached the commercial town of Sabziwar, having taken over five hours to cover the distance. Our eyes suffered considerably from the heat, as well as the dust, or rather sand, with which they were filled; but fortunately, in the carefully prepared medicine-chest supplied to us by Dr. Odling at Tehran, we found proper lotions with which to bathe them. Sabziwar is a fortified town of eighteen thousand inhabitants, in which a great deal of trade is springing up with Kuchan and Aska-

bad, and where the cultivation of cotton is greatly on the increase. The 'manzil,' or station house, where we lunched, is a very shabby one for so important a town as Sabziwar, and enjoys an unpleasant notoriety for thieving and plundering. The Persian telegraph clerk, who called on us during luncheon, brought us some Tehran telegrams and conveyed messages for us to our distant friends. He invited us to pay him a visit at his house in the telegraph station on our way out of the town, and to this proposal we assented. At 2.30 we mounted fresh horses, and riding slowly through the crowded and busy little bazaars, reached the telegraph office, where we were received with a rather amusing attempt at pomp and solemnity. On being ushered up the stairs, at the top of which we were received by our host and several of his friends, we entered a long room, at the far end of which we found two chairs, placed side by side. Upon these we seated ourselves like kings upon their thrones, whilst our entertainers crouched in Persian fashion on the floor, and an inquisitive crowd, pushing and hustling at the open door, stared to their heart's content at the strange

Feringhis. In the meanwhile, Chivers, seated on her horse and guarded by Ali Akber, was an object of great interest to those of the crowd who were forced to remain outside. After drinking tea, eating excellent short-cake, and exchanging polite phrases in our best Persian we took leave of our host, and resumed our journey at half-past three. Scarcely had we emerged from the town when we found ourselves exposed to the full fury of the sand storm, which had increased, instead of, as we had fondly hoped, diminished, in violence. Our route lay due east, over an undulating plain with gravelly soil, and our destination was the post-house of Zafarani, twenty-five miles distant, but after struggling for about fourteen miles against the storm, we resolved, in consequence of the night closing in, to seek shelter in a wayside village, Jouley, which was indicated to us by a wayfarer whom we chanced to pass. It was a wretched little place, a mere conglomeration of a few mud houses, and there being no 'manzil' or 'serai' of any kind, we had to depend upon native hospitality. A great dispute arose between some of the inhabitants as to who

should have the honour and profit of lodging us, and the quarrel at one moment became so violent that the gholam and I were forced to make a demonstration with our whips, in order to save the party from being torn to pieces by our would-be entertainers. Finally we decided to camp for the night in a small room burrowed out of a kind of mud platform or terrace, up which we clambered by some exceedingly defective steps; and as we curled ourselves up in our blankets for the night and listened to the wind raging pitilessly outside, we congratulated ourselves on having found, if not a comfortable, at any rate a safe and secure refuge from the storm.

On getting up the next morning, Sunday, March 16, we found it still blowing, but the violence of the wind, which was unpleasantly biting, seemed to have moderated. Our preparations took longer than usual, as our room was full of fine sand which had blown into it during the night, and had thickly powdered our clothes, saddles, blankets, &c. At eight o'clock we mounted, and proceeded in single file over a sandy and desert plain at a foot's

pace for about four miles, when we passed a huge caravanserai, into which, in despair, we turned for shelter. It was crowded with camels, donkeys, and native travellers, weather-bound like ourselves, and it was almost painful to see the cakes of sand clotted round the eyes of the unfortunate animals, which we knew from personal experience must have been causing intolerable irritation. Our own faces, in spite of veils, handkerchiefs, and spectacles, were plastered with fine sand, which adhered to the skin by means of the moisture running from our eyes. We found tea the best thing for washing our faces under these conditions, and we bathed our eyes with cooling lotions taken from our medicine chest. Our gholam said he had never experienced in all his many journeys so violent a sand-storm, and as we found it impossible to proceed we took possession of a half empty wool-shed, where we spread our carpets and prepared our luncheon. By this means we whiled away some three hours, every few minutes cautiously opening the door and peering out into the thick, stormy, and sand-laden atmosphere, in order to ascertain what

chance we had of reaching that day the post-station of Zafarani, which was only eight miles distant — so near and yet so far! Soon after twelve, fortified by our lunch and not relishing the prospect of spending the night in a desolate wool-shed, we hardened our hearts and sallied forth into the teeth of the storm. We could only proceed in single file at a walking pace; the sand was literally blinding, and each rider was only just able to keep the tail of the horse in front of him in view; no talking was possible, owing to the violence of the wind and the danger of being choked with sand. After one hour and a half of blinding torture we struggled into Zafarani, where we spent the rest of the day, bathing our sore eyes, and beating and brushing our clothes. During the night the storm continued raging, and in the morning when we awoke we found all our clothes, which had been so carefully cleaned, covered with a coating of fine sand. Chivers' disgust and indignation may well be imagined.

On going out about 6.30, Monday, March 17th, I found that the wind had slightly moderated, and as our course lay over rocky and

gravelly soil there was less danger of our again suffering as we had the day before. By eight o'clock everything was ready for a start; but we had scarcely mounted when rain and sleet came down in such torrents, beaten against our faces by the east wind, that we resolved to wait. In an hour, the storm having slightly moderated, we made a second attempt to proceed, enveloped in good waterproofs. Our destination was Shurâb, *i.e.*, 'Salt water.' The road was good throughout, though stony in some places and narrow in others. After three miles we began a gradual ascent into the hills, where the rain turned into fine driving snow; after nine miles we passed a large, empty caravanserai, where we took refuge for a short time, and then pushed on, fighting against a heavy snow-storm, until we reached the post-station of Shurâb, seventeen miles, where we lit a fire, dried our clothes, and lunched; but the post-boy with our luggage did not put in an appearance for two hours after our arrival.

We left Shurâb at 1.30 for a twenty-five mile ride to Nishapūr. Our route was east-

south-east, descending over undulating hills to a tract called Dasht-i-Garinab. The weather at first looked brighter, but ere long we found ourselves exposed to heavy, cold rain. At ten miles we had to cross a bridgeless water-course, and the banks being steep and muddy we were forced to dismount and lead our horses across; in spite of this the gholam's horse fell, and for a time seemed hopelessly bogged; having with difficulty extricated it, we pushed on over a soft, salt plain, into which the horses sank heavily — these were the worst horses which we had had on the whole journey, and for the last five miles they could scarcely proceed at a walking pace, which was all the more trying, because in the dim, misty distance, through the driving rain we could discern our destination, which we seemed utterly unable to reach. At 6.30, having taken five hours to do twenty-five miles, we literally staggered into Nishapūr, and finding the bala khaneh too cold and draughty to be occupied, we chose one of the small, dark, lower rooms, where we lit a fire and proceeded to dry our soaked clothes. At 9.30 we dined, having previously received a

formal visit from the Persian telegraph clerk, whom we politely entertained with as much grandeur and dignity as our limp condition and wretched surroundings would permit.

Next morning, Tuesday, March 18th, we were awakened by daylight shining through a hole in the roof just above our mattresses, so it was fortunate that no rain fell in the night. On going out about six we were delighted to see a gleam of blue sky, and although the air felt damp and raw and the neighbouring hills were covered with snow, the weather looked better and more hopeful than it had for several days. While waiting for early breakfast we strolled about the town of Nishapūr, which contains now only ten thousand inhabitants, and is a place devoid of interest, with the exception of the celebrated turquoise mines, which are situated twenty-eight miles to the north.

After breakfast we started for a twenty miles ride to Kadamgah, all of us having good horses with the exception of Chivers, who had to content herself with a rough chestnut pony. After going about two miles the wretched little animal fell, and sent his rider headlong into a

patch of cultivated ground. Fortunately it was soft falling, so no harm was done beyond the shock, which a pull at my brandy-flask speedily counteracted. The gholam was sent back to fetch a better and more trustworthy horse, whilst we remained for about three-quarters of an hour by the roadside, and watched native travellers—men, women, and children—as well as corpses, in coffins and without coffins, slowly wending their weary way to the sainted spots of Kadamgah and Meshed. At 9.30 we made a fresh start, over an alluvial plain and cultivated ground, studded here and there with trees and villages. For the first fourteen miles the country had a smiling, prosperous look, but the last six miles were over gravelly and stony ground. We reached Kadamgah, where there is a good post-house, a caravanserai, and a shrine of some note, at 11.30. Tradition says that a mark on a large stone at Kadamgah is the foot-print of the holy Imaum Riza, whose shrine is at Meshed. That saint certainly showed excellent taste in halting at Kadamgah, as it is a most picturesque spot, with beautiful trees and rich cultivation, but it is inhabited by Syeds, who

are, of course, a rascally lot. The horses at this place were such wretched scarcrows that we refused to take them, and decided to push on with our Nishapûr horses another twenty miles to Fakridood, where we knew General MacLean had sent his own horses to meet us. Our road took us past many villages, some in the plain on our right, others perched on offshoots of the mountains upon the left, and at three o'clock we reached the huge, draughty caravanserai of Fakridood, where we found three good riding horses, as well as an excellent lunch, prepared by General MacLean's servants.

After doing ample justice to all the good things spread before us, we started for a twelve-mile ride to Shurifabad, the last post-house at which we should sleep before reaching Meshed. A cold east wind was blowing, which seemed to threaten snow, but we were fortunately spared any further wettings. The road was uninteresting, skirting the mountain range, until the plain and village of Shurifabad is reached, where there is a strip of cultivation and a good supply of water. The chapar khaneh had been carefully swept out and a fire lighted by General

MacLean's servants, so we felt as if we were once more entering the circle of civilisation.

The next morning we started at 8.30 for our final ride—twenty-four miles, into Meshed. The road was rough over the mountains for about five miles, when a broad valley was crossed, after which there is an ascent over the spur of the mountain range which bounds the Meshed plain on the south-south-west. After crossing this spur the plain of Meshed, with the sacred city itself, burst upon our view. A descent of four or five miles brought us to the caravanserai of Turukh, where we were met by Mr. Stagno Navarra, who had ridden out to meet us, and from whom we received a very warm greeting. He told us that General MacLean would meet us near the city, but that he had not recovered sufficiently from his recent illness to ride out any great distance. We rode for some six miles along a broad road, with young trees on each side and cultivated ground, keeping the golden cupola of the shrine of Imaum Riza well in view, and met with no further mishap beyond seeing our gholam's weary horse stumble and

fall heavily, pitching its rider some yards over its head, but with the pluck and tenacity which distinguishes all Persians of Turkish or Turcoman blood, he was up and mounted in the twinkling of an eye. About two miles from the principal gate of the city we were met by General MacLean on horseback, accompanied by his escort of six Indian Sowars in full uniform, and six Turcoman gholams in their picturesque native dress; and with this escort we rode into the capital of the Khorassan. This city, like Tehran, is surrounded by a mud rampart, with a broad ditch about ten feet deep and thirty feet broad; it is about six miles in circumference, and is commercially of considerable importance, as it is the great centre of trade between India, Persia, and Bokhara. It is entered by six gates, all built on the same model; they are of wood studded with iron, and each one is flanked by two towers thirty feet high, loopholed and connected over the gate with a parapet. The defences of Meshed are, however, very weak, and the city, it is said, could be easily stormed by infantry without ladders. We rode along

the main street, the Khiaben, which is about 2700 yards long, through the bazaars, where much hot and even angry discussion arose as to whether the occupants of the side-saddles were men or women, and finally dismounted at 11.40 at General MacLean's house, where, for the first time for nearly a fortnight, we sat down at a table to a comfortable luncheon, instead of crouching upon the floor.

At Meshed we remained eight days, and recruited our strength in the hospitable house of General MacLean. It is impossible for us to do justice in words to all his kindness towards us. The greater part of the large, rambling, Persian house which he temporarily occupies, was given up to our use, all his servants and horses were placed at our disposal, and every morning early he himself would prepare, and serve personally at our bedroom door, an excellent 'pick-me-up,' most appropriately termed 'the Doctor,' which consisted of eggs shaken up in milk, and strengthened by a proper mixture of unlimited whiskey and curaçoa. A drink of this nature, made and served by the war-worn hands of a distinguished

cavalry general, possesses revivifying qualities of no mean order, of which we all speedily became living examples, and whilst the seductive beverage was being imbibed, the strains of a sweet-toned barrel-organ, worked by the same genial host, would reach our ears, at one moment in the shape of 'The Old Hundredth,' at another in that of 'La Fille de Madame Angot,' tunes of these opposite natures succeeding each other with the most laudable and indifferent impartiality.

The European society of Meshed is very small. It consists of General MacLean, Mr. Vice-Consul Thomson, Dr. and Mrs. Woolbert, the Russian Consul-General, M. de Vlassow, with his English-born wife, his secretary, and Mr. Stagno Navarra, of the Indian Government Telegraph Department, who, however, only occasionally resides at Meshed. Madame de Vlassow has a beautifully arranged house, where she and her husband dispense a refined and liberal hospitality to the rare and therefore much-appreciated strangers who appear in Meshed. General MacLean was engaged during our visit in negotiating the purchase of

a well wooded and watered garden, of twenty-five or thirty acres in extent, outside the walls of the town, upon which the Government of India contemplate building an English Residency. Not only—putting aside all political considerations—will it be a great boon to the Consul-General and his staff to have well-built English houses in which to reside, in lieu of a rambling and unimposing Persian abode, but the comfort and enjoyment of being beyond the walls of the town cannot be over-estimated. Inside the walls it is difficult for European gentlemen, and quite impossible for European ladies, to move a yard in public, either on foot or on horseback, without being accompanied by an escort of ferashes or foot and cavalry soldiers on horseback, and it is difficult under such conditions to get rid of the feeling that one is more or less of a state prisoner, nor are the chains the less galling because they are so heavily gilded.

During our stay at Meshed I was presented to the Governor-General of Khorassan, His Highness the Rookem-ed-Dowleh, brother of the Shah, whom in face and figure he much

resembles, although he is a man of far less active habits. His chief Minister, the 'Pishkar,' upon whom I also called, and who lost no time in returning my visit, is a jolly old Persian, very courteous, and possessing a strong sense of humour. The 'Karguzar,' or Foreign Office Agent residing at Meshed, during the course of my visit to him conducted me over his extensive and shady garden. We were accompanied during our stroll by a retinue of about twenty servants, and every few minutes my host would stop, call for his 'kalian' or water pipe,' and indulge, with much gurgling and puffing, in a few whiffs, which would give him energy to proceed, or rather to crawl, another dozen yards. On my return to General MacLean's house, I found that all the Persians whose acquaintance I had made, including Abbas Khan, our ex-Agent at Meshed, as well as our present Herat Agent, at that time absent on leave, had sent me the usual Persian offerings of welcome, and I consequently found myself the possessor of a small flock of sheep and lambs, and of a shop-full of sticky sweetmeats.

The only building of note in Meshed is the shrine of Imaum Riza, with its mosque and gilded cupola, which gleams far and wide in the Persian sun. Inside this sacred building no 'infidel' can, of course, enter. Hither flock yearly hundreds of pious votaries of the Shiite sect of the Mussulman religion, who once they have visited the holy spot are authorised to prefix the title of 'Mashdi' to their names. 'Mashdi Kennedy' would doubtless sound well in Mussulman ears, but to an Englishman there is a suspicious ring of 'Mister' pronounced somewhat thickly by one who has dined not wisely but too well. In the neighbouring cemetery are laid thousands of corpses, transported from different parts of the empire, who in their passage to their last resting-place have tainted the pure summer air with their odoriferous exhalations, whilst within the outer court of the shrine are collected criminals of every shade, who have taken 'bust' or refuge from the arm of the law or from the vengeance of their private pursuers. Once inside the 'bust' the refuge is sacred, and not even the Shah himself can drag him from the horns, so to

speak, of the altar. Here he therefore remains until he has successfully negotiated an arrangement with his adversary, either by paying a 'blood tax,' in case of murder, or by giving satisfactory guarantees for the discharge of any legitimate and ordinary debt.

Meshed, which has about 50,000 inhabitants, cannot in any way lay claim to the title of a manufacturing town, the only industry being the manufacture of silks and carpets, which are all, of course, made by hand. There are in the town 650 looms for silk weaving, 320 looms for shawl weaving, and 40 carpet-weaving looms. We were conducted over one small, pokey little establishment by its owner, a tall, lean Persian, where we saw several men and boys engaged with the looms. They work according to a pattern, and three or four men are employed at the same time upon one carpet, which if about twelve or fifteen feet square takes three months to make, and costs 15*l.* or 20*l.*

CHAPTER II.

TRANSCASPIA AND TURKESTAN.

On Friday, March 28th, we left Meshed on our 'march' to Dushak, accompanied by General MacLean, who provided tents, servants, horses, and mules. 'Marching' differs from 'chaparing' in being a much slower, but more comfortable, mode of travelling. The distance covered in a day's march varies from sixteen to thirty miles, and a small army of servants and mules is required to carry and look after the tents, camp furniture, and heavy miscellaneous baggage. General MacLean's camp consisted of one double-bedded tent for us, one sleeping tent for himself, one for Chivers, one 'parlour' tent, besides small servants' and kitchen tents; and the ease and rapidity with which this camp was pitched every evening and struck every morning was mainly due to the skill and experience of Duffadar, *i.e.*, Sergeant Ramazan

Ali Khan, of the Corps of Indian Guides, acting under the personal supervision of our gallant host.

We left Meshed after luncheon; a cool, cloudy day, with an easterly breeze, all riding horses lent to us by General MacLean, and we were accompanied for a few miles, on horseback, by Dr. and Mrs. Woolbert, Mr. Thomson, and Mr. Stagno Navarra. The camp had been sent on in the morning, with twenty-six mules, to our first camping ground, the village of Kanabis, distant sixteen miles. After passing the Naoghan gate, our road lay in a northerly direction, until we reached, at six miles, the Kashaf Rud stream, which is crossed by a good stone and brick bridge; then turning east-south-east, we passed through the large village of Kanegousha, in the neighbourhood of which General MacLean had an unsuccessful shot at some sand grouse. At sunset we reached the camp, which we found pitched just outside the village of Kanabis, which, like Kanegousha, consists of some seven hundred Afghan families, Sunis by religion, who emigrated from Afghanistan about fifty years

ago. Here we found abundant supplies, lambs, chickens, milk, &c.; and the inhabitants, who flocked out in great numbers to inspect us, were very civil and friendly in their demeanour.

The next morning, Saturday, March 29th, broke wet and drizzly, and after striking the camp about nine a.m., we rode for several hours wrapped in our mackintoshes and sou'-westers. Our destination was Huntalabad, and our road, after passing through the whole village of Kanabis, the inhabitants of which assembled in crowds on their flat, round roofs to witness our passage, lay north-east over a cultivated plain. After four miles it bent north-north-east over a line of low hills, crossing a line of 'kanauts,' or underground water-courses, and a plateau with scanty herbage, after which it descended a short, steep ravine, and entered at right angles a narrow and well-cultivated plain. Then, turning to the left, the track lay up the valley, north-north-east, under some high, overhanging cliffs, until the small fortified village of Namisar, inhabited by Hazaras, was reached. Here we made a halt for luncheon, and in the afternoon, the rain having cleared off, we con-

tinued along the valley, which widened at intervals, but was nowhere much more than a mile or so in breadth, until we reached the fortified village of Huntalabad, perched in a commanding position on the cliffs, where there is a certain amount of cultivation, but where supplies are with difficulty procured. The night was very cold, owing to our close proximity to the mountains, and we were glad to warm the interior of our sleeping tent with a 'mongol,' or large iron brazier filled with glowing embers.

Sunday morning, March 30th, however, dawned bright and sunny, and the pleasant change from the cold and wet of the previous day was greatly appreciated by us all. We struck our camp soon after seven, and proceeded north-east, after a mile ascending east-north-east by a short, steep path. After four miles we reached the foot of the Tamoura pass, the ascent of which was steep, rocky, and, in places, almost impassable for horses. After an hour's scrambling up a goat path we reached the summit, whence we enjoyed a splendid view, as far as the hills joining the

Russo-Persian boundary at Chacha. The descent only occupied about forty minutes, by a steep, but good, winding path, after which we entered a narrow valley running north-east, and bisected by a small, sedgy stream. On each side of the valley were rolling hills, planted in places with pistachio nut-trees, and occasionally we passed black, nomad tents, inhabited by shepherds, whose flocks of sheep and goats were extracting such sustenance as they could obtain from the scanty spring herbage which a summer sun would, before long, convert into a brown waste. Cantering along the banks of the stream, keeping the high Atok range in view, we reached the village of Persian Chacha, in the immediate neighbourhood of which we found a charming camping ground—a small, green meadow, surrounded by budding fruit-trees and streams of water, and sheltered from the north by frowning and inaccessible cliffs. Here, while the baggage mules, wearied by a long, stiff march of over thirty miles, were being unladen, and the tents being pitched, we refreshed ourselves with some of General MacLean's inexhaustible champagne, and lis-

tened to the bitter complaints preferred by the villagers against the high-handed proceedings of the inhabitants of Russian Chacha, who forcibly prevent Persian Chacha deriving the full benefit of its rich water supply, in order that a large portion of it may flow across the boundary.

On Monday, March 31st, we started at nine for a short day's march of some twenty miles to Karatagan, passing under the boundary cliffs in a north-by-west direction. We then followed along a narrow, barren valley, bounded on each side by sandy hills, where no sign of life was visible, save the sudden appearance of a small herd of deer, which, startled by our approach, skimmed swiftly across the valley and over the hills until they disappeared on the other side of the sandy and sun-beaten crests. After riding about ten miles, a distant view of the outer hills of Kelat-i-Nadiri was obtained, and four miles further on our good, but stony, track turned north, and winding in between some curious sugar-loaf shaped hillocks, brought us at noon, after a twenty miles' ride, to the well-wooded, well-watered, and cultivated village of

Karatagan, sheltered in an angle formed by steep, rocky cliffs. This village, which contains about a hundred and fifty Persian families, was formerly, owing to its prosperity, much exposed to raids from the dreaded Turcomans across the boundary, who not only plundered the produce, but carried off many of the inhabitants as prisoners to the slave markets of Merv and Bokhara. Since, however, the Russian conquest of Transcaspia, these lawless 'man-eaters,' the moss-troopers of the Persian hills, have been forcibly restrained from their predatory excursions, but the innumerable towers of refuge dotted over the plains, at a distance from each other of only a few hundred yards, are silent witnesses to the dangers with which agricultural operations were, within the last five years, carried on in these Persian valleys. In those days the Persian husbandman guided his plough and sowed his corn with a musket slung on his back, and at the first alarm he would abandon his work and creep into the nearest small tower, where he would remain in security until the horde of Turcoman horsemen had swept by, harrassing

and plundering hamlets and villages, and had returned within their own borders, carrying with them their human and agricultural spoil. The security which these Persian frontier villages now enjoy may be looked upon as some compensation for the severe pressure brought to bear upon the Persian Empire by the close proximity of the ever-advancing dominions of the Czar; whilst the Turcomans, now prevented by an iron hand from indulging in their predatory instincts, are gradually being formed by Russian officers into an irregular cavalry of no mean efficiency, who will, perchance, some day ravage the fertile districts of the Khorassan, not following, as of yore, their own wild fancies, but in more or less strict accordance with the rules of modern warfare.

On Tuesday, April 1st, we started for our final day's march to Dushak; our kind host resolved to accompany us as far as the frontier, but not to go further, in order to avoid arousing the extraordinary susceptibilities of the Russians, who, conscious probably of their present local military weakness, and of their own habit of spying and intriguing

in their neighbours' dominions, view with suspicion and ill-concealed hostility the visit of strangers in Transcaspia, more especially when those strangers are of English blood. Accordingly General MacLean left two small tents standing at Karatagan for his own use on returning that evening, but insisted upon our taking all the rest, together with his best servants, so that we might be independent of a possible offer of Russian hospitality at Dushak in the event of there being no train leaving for Samarcand upon our arrival at the railway station. Very dreary those two little tents looked standing on the borders of the wilderness as we started at nine a.m. in a north-west direction over a barren plain, on which some lean and miserable cattle were affecting to brouse. After four miles we crossed a range of sandy hillocks, and passed in front of the eastern face of the great Persian frontier fortress of Kelat-i-Nadiri. It is a strong, natural fortress, consisting of a plateau enclosed by a chain of heights which form a lofty, precipitous wall, penetrable only by certain paths. This plateau is about eighteen miles long, and from

six to ten broad, and is watered by a stream which finds its way to the Atok, near Abivard; the general elevation of the plateau is from four to five thousand feet; the whole circuit is about fifty miles, and contains eight small villages, with a population of about fourteen hundred souls. The land is said to be fertile and productive; but no strangers are under any pretext allowed to penetrate this mountain fastness, as it is well known that the greedy eye of the restless Russian invader is fixed with a covetous glitter upon this military prize. Eighteen miles from Karatagan, the valley along which we had been riding, due north, suddenly closes up, leaving but a narrow exit between some high cliffs. Though there was no formal indication of this being the frontier, neither guards nor frontier pillars being anywhere visible, General MacLean decided that it would be advisable for us here to separate. Under the shade of the rocks, near a pool of running water, in which hundreds of sheep, goats, lambs, and kids were slaking their thirst, we lunched for the last time in company with our host. Then, mount-

ing our horses, we waved him a last, sad farewell, as he watched us disappearing over some grassy hills, himself returning to the lonely camp left standing at Karatagan. A ride of six miles brought us down to the vast, sea-like plain of Transcaspia, on the horizon of which we could distinguish the signal tower of the Dushak railway station. Towards this we rode, steadily reducing the intervening distance, though at times to the impatient riders, and perhaps to the tired horses, it seemed as if Dushak would 'never come.' Two miles from the station we passed under the Sarraks telegraph line, and shortly before seven we dismounted at the most southern station of the Transcaspian Railway, and learnt that we should have no train till the next evening, there being only two post-trains a-week until the summer service should begin, when there would be three. We accordingly decided to encamp for the night in the immediate neighbourhood of the station, and as soon as the mules arrived, which, owing to the long march, was not till after sunset, we pitched our tents on a small, sandy plot of ground, our opera-

tions being watched by a small crowd of inquisitive soldiers and railway officials. The 'Nachalnik,' or station-master, sent us a civil message, offering us the use of the railway restaurant for a night's lodging, saying that it would be much more comfortable than tents. But we held a different opinion, and courteously declined the well-meant, but untempting proposal. The next morning the first sight which met our eyes was that of a Russian officer who lived in a small house close to which we were encamped, and who, apparently, had not seen our arrival or the pitching of the camp after dark, staring with bewildered astonishment from his garden gate at the extraordinary apparition of a row of English tents guarded by Indian soldiers, which had suddenly and silently arisen in the night. The problem was apparently too complicated for the torpid brain of the astonished Slav to solve unaided, so he eventually turned away in disgust to consult his better-informed and more wide-awake railway friends.

We spent the whole of the day at Dushak within our tents, owing to the oppressive heat,

aggravated by the scorching desert wind which was blowing, and made the place, as Duffadar Ramazan Ali Khan remarked, 'hotter even than Moultan, the hottest place in India.' Late in the afternoon I paid a visit to the 'Nachalnik,' a Russian of German origin, with a Polish wife, who received me very courteously, and refreshed me with afternoon tea. At 6.30 the 'post' train, consisting only of second and third-class carriages, with a refreshment saloon, and a large van, without seats, reserved for Mussulmans, made its appearance. With difficulty we all four obtained second-class places, as the train was full of military officers, with a few civilians, apparently merchants, going to Merv and Bokhara, and at seven o'clock we steamed out of the station, *en route* for Samarcand.

It is not our intention to give a long statistical or historical account of the Transcaspian Railway. Those who desire full information under these two heads cannot do better than consult Mr. Curzon's recent book, *Russia in Central Asia*, or an admirable paper read by him before the Royal Geographical

Society, and published in the proceedings of that Society in May, 1889. For the purposes of this private Journal it is sufficient to note that this triumph of Russian engineering is due to the fertile brain and indomitable energy of Lieutenant-General Annenkoff, who was summoned by General Skobeloff to assist in retrieving the military disaster which in 1879 the Teke Turcomans had inflicted upon the Russian arms under General Lomakin. Begun originally as a purely military railway, which contributed in a great measure to the successful and bloody storming of the Turcoman stronghold of Geok Tepe, the railway, built and even now exclusively worked by officers and soldiers selected from 'the railway battalions' of the Russian army, has gradually been pushed on over sandy deserts, through fertile oases, and across broad streams, until it stretches from Uzun-Ada, on the Caspian, to Samarcand, on the Zerafshan, a distance of nine hundred and sixty-five miles.

The first station of interest at which we stopped after leaving Dushak was one which 'bore the historical name of Merv,' six hours

distant from Dushak. By the bright moonlight we could see the modern Russian town on the west bank of the Murghab, whilst there appeared to be, with the exception of a dismantled fort, but little remains of the ancient Merv, which, in the words of Mr. Curzon, 'successively a satrapy of Darius, a colony of 'Alexander, a province of the Parthians, the site 'of a Christian bishopric, the seat of power of 'a Seljuk dynasty, and the residence and last 'resting-place of Alp Arslan and Sultan Sanjur; 'a prey to the awful scourge of the Mongol, and 'an altar for the human hecatombs of Jenghiz 'Khan; a frontier outpost of Persia; a bone of 'armed contention between Bokhara and Khiva; 'a Turcoman encampment, and a Russian town, 'has surely exhausted very revolution of For-'tune's wheel.'

When morning broke we found ourselves passing through the howling wilderness between Merv and Tcharjui, on the Oxus. Imagine the Atlantic Ocean during a great storm, when its waves are rolling mountains high, and threatening to engulph the ships riding over their crests, being suddenly transformed from salt water

into fine yellow sand, over which the eye can stretch north, east, south, and west without encountering any object save perhaps a solitary pointsman, waving a tattered signal flag in front of his half-buried shanty, or a few desert plants, which have been planted in places along the line in the hope of affording some slight protection to the permanent way, and an idea may be formed of the nature of the obstacles which the Russian engineers had to overcome.

During our passage across the Kara Kum Desert, our train encountered a south-east gale, which blew nearly the whole day, and drove clouds of powdery sand into the railway carriages. After crossing the great wooden bridge over the Oxus, we found the line in many places buried in sand, and our train was constantly brought to a standstill, whilst gangs of men, with spades and shovels, were sent ahead to clear the way. We did not reach the station of Bokhara until nine p.m., five hours late; but next morning we found ourselves, with improved weather, crossing a smiling and well-cultivated country, with trees, gardens, and orchards. We reached Samarcand in the afternoon of Friday,

April 4th, and after being delayed for some time at the station by a subordinate Custom House officer, who had carelessly or designedly allowed the railway porters to carry our luggage out of the station without going through the formality of a Custom House inspection, and who afterwards insisted upon making a minute search of all our effects in the middle of the road, surrounded by an insolent crowd, we drove four miles to the modern Russian quarter of Samarcand, and alighted at the 'Hôtel de Varsovie.' The road from the station was broad and metalled, and planted on both sides with avenues of tall poplars. We drove in a small Russian droshky, similar to those which ply for hire in St. Petersburg and other Russian cities, whilst our luggage followed in a one-horse cart peculiar to Samarcand and Bokhara. It consisted of a rough wooden platform, roofed in with wooden hoops and straw matting, and slung upon two enormous wheels, over eight feet in height. The driver, a native Sart, was perched, or rather crouched, like a monkey upon the horse's neck, and the whole conveyance, which presented an

irresistibly comic look, rattled along in a way that must sorely have tried even the hardened bones and muscles of Gholam Ali Akbar.

The Russian quarter of Samarcand has only sprung up since 1868, when the town was captured from the Khan of Bokhara by General von Kaufmann. A recent traveller, Mr. Arthur Hardinge, has well described it as :—

'Consisting of a collection of broad streets, or rather boulevards, closely planted on each side with handsome trees, and bordered with one-storied white-washed houses. These are generally detached, and in many cases stand within their own gardens, and their isolation from one another, and the grove-like look of the whole place, gives it a rural, or at least suburban, character, suggesting rather the outskirts of some continental pleasure resort that the streets of a populous town. The Governor's house, at the furthest end of the chief boulevard, is surrounded by lovely grounds, kept up with evident care, and the shade, the green lawns, and the sound of birds and water, produce a pleasant sense of coolness and repose very refreshing after the dust of the parched steppe. About a verst away lies the Sart, or native quarter, on the other side of a broad, open space,

upon which stands the fort, and which serves as a drill-ground for the troops.

'Rich and smiling as is the surrounding country, and full of villages, orchards, and gardens, the old Sart town itself is mean, squalid, and ill-built. The Bazaar is small and poor, and the seamy side of European influence is clearly visible in low drink-shops, kept by Jews and Armenians, and in an entire quarter of native houses of a still worse description. In the midst, however, of these shabby streets and lanes tower three splendid mosques, forming three sides of the Reghistan, a small square, which is the chief market and meeting-place of the town. Attached to each is a medresseh, or college, for the students of Mussulman theology and law, who are lodged for a small pittance in rooms, or cells, opening out into the courtyards of the mosques. Though devout worshippers still crowd them every Friday, there was a decayed, deserted look about these buildings, as compared with those of Bokhara, which seemed to speak of a decline of religious zeal, and in general of all energy and life, in what, in old days, was the chief home of Mahommedan culture in Central Asia. A knot of youths, chatting or reading in a corner, and gladly leaving their books to earn a copper by showing the Christian stranger over their mosque, and a few aged Mollahs, half-dozing over their Korans, or laboriously painting,

rather that writing, on long rolls, fresh copies of the sacred text, appeared the only representatives or survivers of the great legal and ecclesiastical class, once so famous for its religious learning, its fanaticism, and the political power it was believed to wield.'

We found the Hôtel de Varsovie, where we secured several rooms, tolerably clean and comfortable, and furnished with chairs, carpets, curtains, &c., all of which appeared wonderfully luxurious to travellers accustomed to Persian chapar khanehs. The proprietor was a fat, heavy Russian, with a buxom, good-natured wife, and amongst the servants we found a youth who spoke Persian, and who proved very useful to us as an interpreter. In the afternoon I called upon General Bibikoff, who commands the garrison in Samarcand, and to whom I had brought a letter of introduction. He received me very civilly in his small, one-storeyed house, and expressed regret that Madame Bibikoff, following the custom of all Russian ladies, would be unable to receive any visitors during the Holy Week, as she was busily engaged with her 'devotions.' In the course of conversation, General Bibikoff in-

formed me that Ishak Khan, the Afghan rebel and Pretender, is living quietly at Samarcand, under Russian protection, and is in receipt of an allowance from the Russian Government of 10,000*l.* a-year (100,000 roubles).

On the following day, Saturday, April 5th, I called on the Governor-General, Yafimovitch, and left a card, which was taken charge of by the porter, a fine, burly Sart, dressed in a long robe, and wearing a huge turban. I also called on his 'adjoint,' Colonel Poukaloff, but failed to find him at home. In the afternoon we hired horses and rode through the native quarter of Samarcand, passing numerous booths, crowded with white-turbaned Orientals, bartering, chaffering, smoking 'kaliân,' or water-pipes, and drinking tea out of Russian samovars and china teapots. We dismounted at the Reghistan, a quadrangle, surrounded on three sides by medressehs, or religious colleges. The ruined façades are still covered with the most magnificent dark blue, light blue, and white tiles, forming the most lovely designs. The courtyard was crowded with Mollahs, reading and expounding the Koran, who watched our pro-

ceedings with inquisitive interest. Mr. Curzon has declared that the Reghistan of Samarcand was originally, and is still even in its ruins, the noblest public square in the world.

'There is nothing,' he says, 'in the East approaching it in massive simplicity and grandeur, and nothing in Europe, save, perhaps, on a humbler scale, the Piazza di San Marco, at Venice, which can even aspire to enter the competition. No European spectacle, indeed, can adequately be compared with it in our inability to point to an open space in any western city that is commanded on three of its four sides by Gothic cathedrals of the finest order. For it is clear that the Medresseh of Central Asian Mahometanism is both in its architectural scope and design a lineal counterpart of the minster of the West. Instead of the intricate sculpture and tracery crowning the pointed archways of the Gothic front, we see the enamelled tiles of Persia framing a portal of stupendous magnitude. For the flanking minster, towers, or spires, are substituted two soaring minarets. The central lantern of the West is anticipated by the Saracenic dome, and in lieu of artificial colour thrown through tinted panes, from the open heavens shine down the azure of the Eastern sky and the glory of the Eastern sun. What Samarcand must have been in its prime, when those great fabrics

emerged from the mason's hands, intact and glittering with all the effulgence of the rainbow, their chambers crowded with students, their sanctuaries thronged by pilgrims, and their corporations endowed by kings, the imagination can still make some endeavour to depict.'

The other sights of Samarcand which we visited during our stay of one week in that place can only be briefly mentioned. The mosque of Bibi Khanoum, the Chinese consort of the great Timour, is rapidly falling into complete decay. Here is to be seen the great marble lectern, on which formerly reposed the gigantic copy of the Koran, said to be eight hundred years old, which was carried off by the Russians after the storming of Samarcand, and deposited in the great public library of St. Petersburg. A smaller, and far less ancient Koran, is carefull preserved in the cluster of the mosques and chapels forming the mausoleum of Shah Zindeh, which, too, is so rapidly decaying that in a few more years, unless some archæological society comes to the rescue, little will remain of any of these glorious monuments of ancient Samarcand, 'with their turquoise and sapphire, and

'green and plum-coloured, and orange tiles, 'crusted over with a rich, silicious glaze, and 'inscribed with mighty Kufic letters.' In the Citadel is to be seen, by special permission, the 'koktash,' or great stone throne of Timour Lang; and a short ride from the town, beyond the mounds of Afrasiab, leads one to the 'Tomb of Daniel.' It is a stone and plaster coffin-shaped construction, eighteen yards long, situated on a hillock, alongside of a small mosque, surrounded by trees, and overlooking the river. Around the tomb are planted long poles, surmounted by horses' tails, the standards of departed Uzbeg and Sart chieftains. Our guide would not allow any doubts to be cast upon the legend which names this spot as the last resting-place of the Prophet Daniel, and upon our remarking that the tomb was unnecessarily long, he retorted that it was well known that Daniel was a very big man.

Socially Samarcand is an exceedingly dull place. The Governor, General Yafimovitch, formerly an officer in the Chevalier Gardes of St. Petersburg, is a hipped and discontented valetudinarian, with a young wife, who does

little or nothing in the interests of society; whilst his second in command, Colonel Poukoloff, is a heavy, middle-aged officer, who served under General Kaufmann at the capture of Tashkent, in 1865, and has been vegetating and rusting at Samarcand since 1869.

The bazaars of Samarcand are both interesting and tempting. Here may be bought quantities of fine silks, of native manufacture, as well as fur, sheep, and lambskin caps, embroidered saddle-cloths, and silver horse-trappings. All this native industry could be greatly developed if the Russians, themselves after all only a half-civilised nation, did not treat it with the same ignorant contempt with which they view those magnificent relics of the past of which they are unworthy custodians.

During our visit to Samarcand, and indeed during the whole of the three weeks we passed in Russian Transcaspian and Turkestan territory, we were subjected to a police espionage and surveillance of a most ignoble and petty description. Having, on one occasion, ascended to the summit of one of the Reghistan medressehs, for the purpose of seeing the view, a report

was made to the local authorities that we had done so in order to take a photograph, or to make plans of the city and its defences. On another occasion I was honoured at Samarcand with a formal summons to appear at a police court and answer to a charge of having fraudulently endeavoured to evade the Custom House, and of having assaulted a Custom House officer. In vain I protested against the indignity of a British diplomatist being treated in this way; I was forced to appear in person, and to defend myself from a charge that was easily disposed of without any witnesses being called on my behalf, but during which I had an opportunity of closely inspecting a body of thirty Siberian prisoners, dressed in their convict uniform of long, grey cloaks, with big yellow crosses embroidered on their backs, guarded by a strong force of soldiers. No apology of any kind was made to me, and we left for Bokhara on Saturday evening, the 12th of April, carrying with us pleasant reminiscences of the beauty of Samarcand and its surroundings, as well of its native inhabitants, but with the worst possible impression of their Russian rulers.

A night's run of twelve hours, spent in a very uncomfortable second-class carriage, brought us to the station of Bokhara. The only incident worthy of note being the conduct of a young military officer, who made himself very disgreeable, by talking in our presence against England and English people in general, until he was forcibly stopped by the indignant interference of some of the passengers. Excuses were eventually made to us, on his behalf, on the ground that having been recently bitten by a mad dog he had taken to drink, and was consequently not altogether responsible for his actions.

On arriving at Bokhara station, at 7.30 in the morning of Sunday, April 13th, we found a close carriage waiting for us, which had been sent, together with a cart for our luggage, by M. Klemm, the kind and hospitable Russian Acting Political Agent, resident at the Court of the Khan of Bokhara. The carriage was drawn by three horses, harnessed unicorn fashion, and each horse was ridden by a Bokhariot postillion, dressed in gorgeous coloured flowing silk robes and large white turbans, whilst a Russian

Cossack rode beside the carriage as an escort. The drive from the station to the tower is about ten miles, over a shocking road. We passed numbers of Bokhariots of all ages in their brilliant native dress, leading and riding camels and donkeys, and after passing through the crowded bazaars, where our passage was constantly blocked by inquisitive and staring natives, we reached the hospitable doors of the Russian Political Agency. We were received by a native porter in a striped silk dress, who led us across a dreary yard, and showed us into a long room, containing two beds, three or four chairs, a narrow table, and a carpet. This was the guest-chamber, and two small rooms in addition were allotted to us, one for Chivers, and the other for Ali Akbar. Our room, which looked out into a large wilderness of a garden, was swarming with ants, but otherwise it was fairly comfortable. In the course of the morning we received a visit from M. Klemm, a rising and very agreeable young diplomatist of Danish origin. He was dressed in full uniform, as it was Russian Easter Sunday, and he was engaged in giving an Easter breakfast to his

guard of twenty Cossacks, and in receiving official visits of congratulations from Bokhariot ministers and Russian residents. At noon we adjourned for luncheon to his quarter of the Residency, and made the acquaintance of Madame Klemm, her mother, and several Russians.

During our three days' stay at Bokhara we remained the guests of M. Klemm, who placed all his servants and horses at our disposal. We visited the bazaars, which we found crowded with most tempting wares, silks, embroideries, arms, and brass and copper ware of quaint native manufacture; among the sellers were many Jews and Hindoos, the latter being distinguished by a red caste mark on their foreheads. Bargaining in the Bokhara bazaars is a work of considerable labour, as the buyer is surrounded by a crowd of spectators who take the liveliest interest in the proceedings, and vociferously express unasked their opinions with regard to the quality of the goods and the prices demanded.

Bokhara, on the whole, is for a tourist a disappointing place. The streets are rough and narrow, with high mud walls, and but few

buildings of any importance. The numerous mosques and medressehs are in a state of great dilapidation and decay. Bokhara is, of course, connected in English minds with the tragic death of Stoddart and Connolly, who, being sent in 1842 on a political mission, were cast into a subterranean dungeon, or pit, where, after suffering months of torture, they were eventually beheaded. This pit has now been filled up, and the Bokhariots profess to know nothing about it, or of the tragedy of which it was the scene, but there can be little doubt that the dungeon was under a small hillock, on the summit of which now stands the modern prison. This prison we visited, and found in it some twenty prisoners, ordinary criminals, several of whom were chained to the walls like dogs to their kennels, and all plaintively begging for food. In accordance with the usual custom we bought bread from a perambulating baker, which we gave to one of the prisoners, who distributed it fairly among his comrades, by whom it was quietly and thankfully received. In justice to the Bokhariots it must be said that this prison, though

not exactly an abode of bliss, or in any way coming up to the standard of an English prison, is not by any means the noisome dungeon which one might naturally expect to see.

The Amir of Bokhara, whose acquaintance M. Klemm did not seem to wish us to make, is a young man of about thirty, who is allowed by the Russians to manage the internal affairs of his country as an independent sovereign, on condition of leaving his foreign relations, and, if necessary, placing his small, and not particularly efficient, army entirely in Russian hands. Wedged in between the Russian dominions of Turkestan on one side, and Transcaspia on the other, and traversed by a military railway, which, as a great concession on the part of Russia, does not pass within ten miles of 'Bokhara the Noble,' the Amir is nothing but a humble vassal and servant of Russia, which does not occupy the country, because she derives all the benefits from it, which she can wish to obtain, without incurring the expense of its administration. The capital, which is about twelve miles in circumference, is still a great city, for it contains

a population of about one hundred thousand souls. Of these, according to Mr. Curzon, only one hundred and fifty are Europeans, nearly all of them Russians, Germans, or Poles. The majority of the native population are Tajiks and Uzbegs, and the gorgeousness of their apparel, even the humblest of them wearing the most gaudily coloured, and, in European eyes, the most costly of silk robes, lends an extraordinary brilliancy to their surroundings. Mr. Curzon has pointed out that Bokhara has long set the fashion in Central Asia in the matter of dress, and that it is the great clothes mart of the East. 'Here the richness of 'Oriental fancy has expressed itself in the most 'daring but artistic combinations of colour, the 'brightest crimson and blue and purple and 'orange are juxtaposed or interlaced, and in 'Bokhara Joseph would have been looked upon 'as the recipient of no peculiar favour in the 'gift of a coat of many colours. Too often 'there is the most glaring contrast between the 'splendour of the exterior and the poverty it 'covers. Many of the people are wretchedly 'poor, but living is absurdly cheap, and your

'pauper, undaunted by material woes, walks 'abroad with the dignity of a patriarch, and in 'the garb of a prince.'

We left Bokhara by the 7.30 morning train on Wednesday, 17th of April, driving to the station in the same carriage and with the same escort with which we had arrived. The Klemms travelled in our train on their way to Tchaijui, on the Bokharian frontier, in order to make arrangements for the approaching arrival of the Prince of Naples, the heir to the throne of Italy. The train was, as usual, crowded with military officers, and as there were neither *coupés* or lavatories, the discomfort was great, and the heat in the desert was very oppressive. We arrived at Askabad, the capital of Transcaspia, at noon on Thursday, the 18th of April, and were met at the station by M. Rodziewices, a secretary of General Annenkoff, who drove with us to a comfortable little house about a mile from the station, where rooms had been secured for us by Madame von Schoultz, the English-born wife of a Russian artillery general. The Schoultzs' are a Finnish family, whose acquaintance I had made ten

years before in a country house in Finland. At that time Askabad was a mere Turcoman settlement, and I little thought when I parted from them in the forests of Finland that our next meeting-place would be in the Steppes of Central Asia.

Askabad is a flourishing modern town, built in the ordinary Russian style, with broad boulevards, one-storeyed, whitewashed houses, and possessing a church with the usual green roof. The town lies in a barren plain, which in the spring contains a certain amount of scanty herbage, and it is about six miles distant from the Kopet Dach range of mountains, which here form the Persian boundary.

The following day we went to the station to witness the arrival of the Crown Prince of Italy, a young man, aged twenty-two, to whom we had been presented in 1887 at Malta. He was received by General Komaroff, the Governor of Transcaspia, a short, square, bald-headed man, who looks more like a university professor than a military commander. Indeed, his only military exploit has been the Khushk affair in

1885, when, with all the odds in his favour, he attacked and defeated a detachment of Afghans during the sittings of the Afghan Boundary Commission, and by so doing nearly embroiled England and Russia in a war. The trophies of this 'victory' are four English field guns, which were captured from the Afghans, and which, still surmounted with a V.R. and the crown, form the principal ornaments of Scobeloff Square, Askabad, and are proudly pointed out to travellers as being '*les canons anglais.*'

In the afternoon of the one day which the Prince of Naples spent at Askabad a review and a sham fight, representing on a small scale the storming of Geok Tepe, was held. The troops consisted of two battalions of sharp-shooters, some Cossack cavalry, artillery, and Turcoman irregular horse. The point of attack was the Turcoman village of Cashi, about three miles from Askabad. It is a lovely oasis, with trees and water, in the middle of the great Steppe. The most interesting part of the review, to a stranger, was the manœuvering of the Turcoman militia, or native irregular horse. They have only recently been enrolled

into the Russian service, and although at present consisting of only a few hundred men, could easily, it is said, in case of war, be increased to ten thousand. The men receive twenty-five roubles a-month and their arms, but they supply their own horses and wear their own native dress. During the sham fight which we witnessed this irregular cavalry executed a series of wild charges right into the kabitkas, or tents, of the villagers of Cashi, giving vent to blood-curdling and cat-like screams and yells, eminently suggestive of blood and rapine.

During our two days' stay at Askabad we were most hospitably entertained by Madame von Schoultz, whose husband was absent at St. Petersburg, and by her daughters. In her pleasant house we met Colonel Levashoff, the chief of the staff in Transcaspia, and his wife; and it was through Madame von Schoultz's intervention that we obtained, for the first time, a separate railway compartment for ourselves on the Transcaspian Railway.

We left Askabad by the mid-day train on Saturday, the 19th, occupying a very comfort-

able compartment furnished with divans, tables, and chairs, and having a lavatory and servants' compartment attached. A couple of hours' run brought us to the station of Geok Tepe, close to which is the celebrated Turcoman fortress where, in 1881, the Akhal Tekkes, to the number of forty thousand men, women, and children, made their last heroic stand for freedom, and were hopelessly defeated and cruelly massacred by General Skobeleff. The fortress is simply a gigantic square earthwork four miles in circumference, surrounded by a deep, broad moat, and defended by high, massive mud walls and towers. The two breaches made by the Russian artillery, through which the infantry charged, are still visible, and no great effort of imagination is required to depict the bloody scene which was enacted in the interior of this now deserted Turcoman fort. We reached Uzun-Ada at seven on Sunday morning, the 20th, and as our steamer did not leave till the following day, we accepted a kind offer made to us by M. Samozensky, a lieutenant in the railway battalion, holding the post of district inspector at Uzun-Ada, who kindly placed his

small, wooden, three-roomed house at our entire disposal.

Uzun-ada, which is the present starting-point of the Transcaspian Railway, well deserves the description given of it to us by a Russian lady, '*Un trou sablonneux.*' It consists of nothing but hills and valleys of deep yellow sand, which contrasts brilliantly with the dark blue of the sea and the lighter blue of the sky. Not a tree or a vestige of vegetation is anywhere visible, and life here in the small wooden huts which constitute the 'town' must be utterly dreary. The only excitement appears to be the bi-weekly arrival of the post-train from Samarcand, and the occasional arrival and dispatch of a Caspian steamer. When, as it seems likely, the starting-point of the railway is shifted further north to Krasnovodsk, which possesses better harbour facilities, Uzun-ada will disappear as a European settlement even more rapidly than it has come into existence, to the infinite delight of the unfortunate officials, civil and military, who are now compelled to make it their headquarters. The wharf of Uzun-ada was encumbered with

innumerable bales of cotton, which is grown in great and in increasing quantities in the Tashkent and Kokand districts, whence it is conveyed on the backs of strings of patient camels a distance of over two hundred miles to Samarcand, and transported in the Transcaspian Railway for conveyance to Baku and Astracan, *en route* for Moscow. The steamboat agent told us that last year 25,000 tons of this cotton were shipped, and this year a consignment of double that amount is expected.

CHAPTER III.

THE CASPIAN AND MAZANDERAN.

ON Monday, the 21st of April, the steamer *Caspic* arrived from Astracan, and in her we took passage for the Persian port of Meshed-i-Sar. Our friend, Lieutenant Samozensky, passed us through the Custom House without any difficulty, and after lunching with us on board, took leave. We were really sorry to part with him, as his kindness and hospitality to us had been of no common order, but in truth we were not sorry to leave Russian territory. All our movements, sayings, and doings had been jealously watched and reported upon by officers told off to spy upon us, and, with a few rare exceptions, we had received but scanty kindness and courtesy at the hands of Russian officials; those who formed an exception to the rule we invariably found to be of German, Polish, or Finnish origin, but

the genuine Slav, the officials whose names terminated in 'off,' 'eff,' and 'ow,' were hostilely suspicious, and at times overbearingly rude; their conduct, we fondly hoped, contrasts strongly and glaringly with the demeanour which we believe would be adopted by British officials in the native districts of India or in the disturbed quarters of Ireland towards a Russian diplomatist travelling obviously *en touriste* for the simple and avowed object of instruction and personal amusement. Some allowance must, perhaps, be made for the inability of the average Russian officer to realise the fondness of Europeans in general, and Englishmen in particular, for travelling on their own account for the simple pleasure of seeing new places. Many of the Russian officers whom we met had lived three, four, or five years in the same district without even going outside of it; they were extraordinarily ignorant and indifferent to the resources of their own newly acquired territories, and in some cases they did not even know the names of the stations on their own railway. Painful from one point of view as this ignorance may

be, it is not altogether to be deplored, for, if knowledge be power, the Russian position in Central Asia is under the present *régime* one of great weakness. Cards, dice, and drink, with dreams of frontier affrays, which may bring him decorations and promotion, are the only means which the average Russian officer possesses for killing time in those barren steppes in which his lot may be cast, and he is content to be but a simple atom in the fateful and irresponsible Russian advance which has hitherto borne down in Central Asia all attempts at resistance by the sheer weight of overwhelming numbers and of mysterious prestige.

The voyage from Uzun-Ada to Meshed-i-Sar occupies thirty-six hours, including a few hours' stoppage at the dreary and desolate Russian outpost of Tchikishliar, as well as at the Persian harbour of Gez, near Astrabad. At Gez there is a large natural harbour formed by a long, narrow spit of land, at the extremity of which is the Russian naval station of Ashrada. Here there are a couple of Russian dispatch boats, and one or two hulks; but the *raison*

d'être of this establishment has altogether disappeared now that the Turcoman pirates, against whose predatory excursions it was directed, have, like their brethren on land, been brought under the iron discipline of the Russian Government. The islet of Ashruda, on which are built a few small, attractive-looking houses, and which is planted with trees, shrubs, and herbage, is gradually being washed away by the action of the sea, and will necessarily, in the course of the next few years, be completely abandoned. Here we disembarked our only other first-class passenger, the young and good-looking daughter of the naval commandant of Ashruda, as well as several second-class passengers, including the wife of a naval lieutenant belonging to one of the dispatch boats in the harbour, who was accompanied by a large family of dirty children and a miscellaneous collection of the commonest house furniture, which would be a disgrace to the cottage of the humblest English mechanic.

We were introduced by our Captain, a cheery English-speaking sailor from Courland, to the Steamboat Company's agent at Gez. He is an

Englishman who has been many years in the Russian service, and who sensibly makes the best of his existence in the muddy little village, where he occupies a fairly comfortable house. From him I learnt that a concession of all the fishing in the Persian waters of the Caspian is held by a Russian merchant, who pays the Shah an annual sum of 45,000*l.* for the privilege, and makes a large fortune out of it. The whole of this northern part of Persia, in striking contrast to the sandy steppes we had left, is hilly, thickly wooded, and saturated with moisture; but as a natural consequence it is, during part of the year, a perfect fever bed. From Gez a night's easy steaming brought us to Meshed-i-Sar, which we reached at daybreak, and after being delayed several hours in this open and entirely unprotected roadstead, where passengers and cargo can only be disembarked in calm weather, we landed in one of the large flat-bottomed Persian barges, which came out about three miles to meet us, and which rolled and pitched in the heavy surf in a way which put the sea legs, or rather stomachs, of the passengers to a very severe test. On landing

we were met by our native agent resident at Astrabad, who had come to meet us, bringing with him four fairly good riding and five pack horses. Our head Persian servant, Kuli, also met us, bringing from Tehran about forty letters, besides bundles of newspapers, as well as provisions, wines, and other small luxuries, sent by the careful forethought of our 'nazir,' or house steward, McCormick. We lunched in the comfortable house, situated on the banks of a prettily wooded stream, of a Russian merchant, to whom we were introduced by our Astrabad agent, and at two o'clock we started, after the usual wrangling between the 'chavadars,' or pack-horse owners, who quarrel incessantly about their respective loads, for a short march of fourteen miles to Barfrush. Our direction was south, following the Babil river through a rich and well-cultivated country, covered with fine walnut, mulberry, and orange-trees. We passed numerous orchards and luxuriant gardens, and we reached the prosperous and smiling village of Barfrush, with its busy little bazaar, at sunset. Here we were lodged in a most comfortable house, belonging to a Persian, who holds the

post of Russian native Consular Agent, and who vacated all his well-furnished rooms for our benefit, and caused a most *recherché* dinner to be served. With Oriental courtesy he refused to sit at table, but busied himself with seeing that all our wants were attended to. The next morning, Friday, April 24th, he accompanied us, together with our Astrabad agent, for some miles on our journey to Amol, through a thickly-wooded country, where, owing to the recent rains, the going was exceedingly heavy. We parted from our companions after crossing the Babil river, and continuing our ride at a slow pace—partly in order that our caravan might keep pace, and partly to save our horses, as they laboured heavily through the deep rice swamps, which lie scattered at intervals in the overgrown jungles—we halted at fifteen miles, by the river side, for an *al fresco* luncheon. Our track at this point turned west, and just before arriving at Amol—a straggling and ill-paved village—we recrossed the river by a curious stone bridge, one hundred yards long, and not more than one yard in breadth. A striking proof of the heavy rains which, in the autumn

and spring, inundate the whole of this part of Persia, is seen in the solid tile-roofed houses, which appear quite palatial compared with the flat mud roofs to be seen in all the villages of Persia outside of the two northern provinces of Mazanderan and Ghilam. The 'kedkhoda,' or head man of the village, placed a large empty house at our disposal, and here we camped for the night, our rest being much disturbed by the presence of the vermin with which this otherwise decent habitation was horribly infested. At nine next morning we resumed our march, following for about eight miles the river Haraz through a thick jungle, and occasionally in crossing and recrossing the river, which was greatly swollen by recent rains, and by the melting of the snow on the mountains, our horses were almost swept off their legs. After thirteen miles we ascended a steep, rocky causeway, which has recently been repaired, and which, though sometimes unpleasantly narrow where it has been blocked by landslips, is perfectly practicable for horses and laden mules. Our destination was Parus, where there is no village, but merely a broken-

down old caravanserai, and about thirty large caves burrowed in the cliff overhanging the river, which afford accommodation to the numerous caravans that frequent this route. Fortunately for us a small house, recently built by a wealthy Persian as a summer residence, was tenantless, and it having been placed at our disposal by the caretaker, we camped with tolerable comfort for the night. We continued our march at eight a.m. on Saturday, 26th of April, after a somewhat disturbed night, proceeding in a southerly direction by a good rough track cut in the towering cliffs, which here overhang the foaming river Haraz. Occasionally we passed a wretched village nestling in the rocks, and after a twenty-four miles march we took up our quarters in a small caravanserai in the miserable village of Bandabourideh.

Next morning we left for a short day's march of thirteen miles to Raineh, proceeding in a south and south by west direction, and still following the grand defile along which we had marched the previous day. Just after leaving Bandabourideh we passed a spring of warm

volcanic water, in which several mule-drivers were indulging up to their necks in a luxurious bath. At four miles we passed an enormous bas-relief, carved in the face of the cliffs, representing the Shah on horseback, with ten of his ministers in full uniform, standing five on each side of his Imperial Majesty. The likenesses were good, and the work was remarkably well executed. It was done in commemoration of a journey made along this route some years ago by the Shah. At that time the track had fallen into such complete disrepair that this pass had become almost impracticable. Thanks, however, to the Shah, it has now been put into tolerable order, and although it is not a route feasible for delicate or nervous travellers, it is made frequent use of by caravans trading between the ports of Gez and Meshed-i Sar and the capital, Tehran.

Raineh, which is a large and prosperous village, is situated on the high left bank of the river Haraz, and nestles under the shoulder of lofty mount Demavend. It is surrounded with high crags and yawning precipices, frequented by innumerable golden-headed eagles, and car-

rion-devouring vultures. We were lodged for the night in a newly built house, belonging to a Persian Hadji, who was then absent at Amol. The cold here was very great, and we were glad to make use of mangols, or charcoal braziers.

The next morning, on rising at daybreak, we found to our dismay that snow was falling heavily, and was lying several inches thick on the ground. Our chavadar, in view of the stiff mountain pass which we had that day to cross, objected to leaving Raineh, but as we had no intention of being imprisoned for an indefinite time in this solitary Persian village, we compelled him to proceed. Wrapped in thick cloaks and waterproofs, with our heads bound up in 'Bashliks' and sou'westers, we clambered slowly up the dreary mountain pass in deep snow, proceeding in single file. All the mountain tops were lost to sight in the driving snowstorm. We took four hours covering twelve miles, and stopped for luncheon in a dreary little caravanserai, which we shared in common with several goats and innumerable cocks and hens. After an hour's rest, we proceeded on our

slow and weary way towards the summit of the pass, Imam Zadeh Hashim, but we had not marched for more than half an hour when, to our horror and disgust, we met our chavadar, who, having started in front of us, had turned back, declaring the route in the teeth of such a storm, to be quite impracticable. After some wrangling with this individual, who appeared to be even more obstinate than the ordinary run of Persian mule-owners, we left him to his own devices, warning him that if he did not turn up that night at our proposed halting-place—the village of Ar—he might apply in vain for his money. We then pushed on through the snowy mist, our gholam remarking that the chavadar's love of money would compel him to follow us, once he saw that we were fairly determined to continue our route. We passed several caravans of laden mules and donkeys, struggling in the deep snow, and every now and then came across a wretched beast which, having broken down in its struggles, had been left by its owner to perish in the snow, where, before long, it would become food for jackals and vultures. The descent from the

summit of the pass was steeper and even more difficult than the ascent. Our horses being utterly unable to keep on their legs, we were compelled to dismount, and we all slithered and tumbled about on the mountain side for nearly an hour, in a way which would have been ludicrous if it had not been painfully exhausting. Patience and tenacity at length met with their reward, and by sunset we reached the valley in which the village of Ar is situated, where, two hours later, we were joined by our truant chavadar, who was not a little proud of his own performance, and who was much surprised at the objurgations which were heaped on his devoted head for having kept us so long waiting in our soaked and travel-worn clothes, deprived of all the simple little comforts carried on the backs of his pack-horses.

The night which we spent at Ar was the last before reaching the civilisation of Tehran, as we had resolved to cover the thirty-six miles which separated us from our comfortable house in one day, and for this purpose had sent orders that our own riding horses should come

out half way to meet us. After a pleasant three hours' ride in the morning of the 29th of April along a well-cultivated and well-watered valley, we found them at a picturesque caravanserai on the banks of the river Jagerood. After lunch, during which we eagerly devoured the contents of a fresh consignment of letters brought by our grooms from Tehran, we mounted our own good horses for a final gallop home. After passing a well-built and prettily situated shooting-box of the Shah, we entered upon well-known and familiar ground, where we were met by a large party of riders, who had come out about eight miles to welcome the heroine of the expedition, and to congratulate her upon her plucky performances. In their pleasant company we rode gaily into Tehran and dismounted in the Legation gardens, which we had left exactly eight weeks before brown and bare, but which we now found a perfect Garden of Eden, with banks of flowers and streams of water, over which the rich spring foliage of the trees formed a vast green and refreshing bower, to which the eyes of travellers, sore and almost blinded by days and hours

passed amid desert steppes and snowy mountains, were but little accustomed. During our two months' wanderings we had travelled a distance of over two thousand miles, of which nearly one-half had been performed on horseback; and we had derived much useful knowledge and information with regard to the ways, habits, and political aspirations of Persians, Sarts, Uzbegs, Turcomans, and Russians, with all of whom we had been brought into contact during our wanderings in Khorassan and in Central Asia.

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