

MOUNTAINEERING IN PERSIA.

IT was pleasant enough at Serassiâb. The porch or open veranda where the busy days were so delightfully passed was musical with the sound of falling water which poured into a tank encircled by a row of graceful pillars. At the end of a dense avenue of plane-trees an open pavilion could be seen, supported by columns and walls faced with glazed bricks, colored turquoise-blue, orange-yellow, and black. The Persians have few of the appliances that aid the artisan of America. They do not even use a square in masonry or joinery. But they bring to their aid industry and an exquisite taste which three thousand years of vicissitudes have not eradicated from the national character. Putting up a rough, crooked post, they build around it a shapely and elegant pillar. If carefully measured, it will doubtless show numerous departures from straight or symmetrical lines; but the general effect is so just and agreeable as to indicate invention and a remarkable turn for constructive decoration. The arrangement of glazed bricks of various colors in elegant designs is also a trait of Persian art in which great beauty and taste are often displayed.

But this is widely digressive from the object in view when I began this paper, which was to give an account of a little trip among the Elburz mountains after health and trout. A branch of this range, called the Shimrân, or Light of Persia, arose behind our house at Serassiâb to an altitude of thirteen thousand feet. In our evening rides we could also see the snowy cone of Demavênd soaring above the nearer range to a far greater height, still rosy in the glow of departing day, when all the nearer landscape had put on the sober mantle of twilight.

The Lar is perhaps forty-five miles from Serassiâb. And this is the way we were obliged to prepare for the trip in order to reach our destination. It was essential that we should take with us tents, bedding, crockery, and sufficient animals to carry ourselves, the servants, and the outfit. This required the employment of much talking and of an occasional thrashing when the insolence of the *charvadârs*, or muleteers, interfered with the clinching of a bargain. After several days of preparation all seemed ready for the start. One curious circumstance about the journey, however, was the fact that we were obliged to journey by night. The great heat makes it impossible to travel in Persia in the middle of the day during the greater part of the year. Our

departure was therefore so timed that we could have the benefit of the full moon. Once on the road, and winding through narrow lanes at a moderate walk, we were able to observe what an imposing procession we made. At the head rode the *giliodâr*, or equerry, mounted on a white Shirâzee Arab stallion. Two gentlemen followed, and next to them came several ladies on donkeys. The *tachtravân* was next in order, carrying the invalid of the party. This is a curious vehicle peculiar to Persia and Turkey. It is a covered litter borne between two mules, and contains sliding doors and windows. It is rendered reasonably comfortable by mattresses on which a person can lie at full length. The *tachtravân* of the wealthy is sometimes handsomely decorated, and mention is made of kings of Persia using it many centuries ago. But generally this conveyance is more heavily constructed than is necessary, owing to the difficulty of finding wood which is at once light and strong in Persia. The march of a *tachtravân* is necessarily tediously slow, but it is announced for a long distance by the strings of jangling bells carried by the gayly decorated mules, which do not, however, seem to appreciate the wealth and weight of ornament lavished upon them. On level roads the *tachtravân* is a real luxury; but when there is a steep ascent or descent combined with bad roads, this form of locomotion is not only very trying to the mules, but is also a severe strain on the rider, both on account of the exertion requisite in preserving his position and the nervous strain caused by watching the frequent peril of being hurled over a precipice. At the head of the leading mule marched a stately Arab, Abdullah Ibn Hassân. His gait was that of a prince; he was six feet in height, sparely built and perfectly erect. A camel's-hair tunic reached to the ankles. His head was muffled with a striped mantle bound around the forehead with a white cord. His swarthy features were haggard but yet handsome, and the dark orbs which flashed from under cavernous brows were marked by a proud and romantic melancholy, deepening into a glow of injured pride tinged with sadness when he was refused a backsheesh, as if he would reproach you for having disappointed the confidence he had reposed in your elevated generosity. What a standard is to an army was this son of the desert to our humbler train. He gave to it such a bearing that he seemed to be the chief

person in it, instead of a poor mule-driver earning twenty cents a day traversing the wastes of an ancient land,—a mule-driver by descent and the father of mule-drivers of the future. In looking at Abdullah Ibn Hasân I was led by a very whimsical turn of the mind to think of La Fotheringay, in Thackeray's "Pendennis." Did that great reader of human nature realize when he delineated her character what a type she is of a numerous class who are so richly endowed with lofty mien and aspect that until they open their mouths and betray themselves they pass for something far higher than they are.

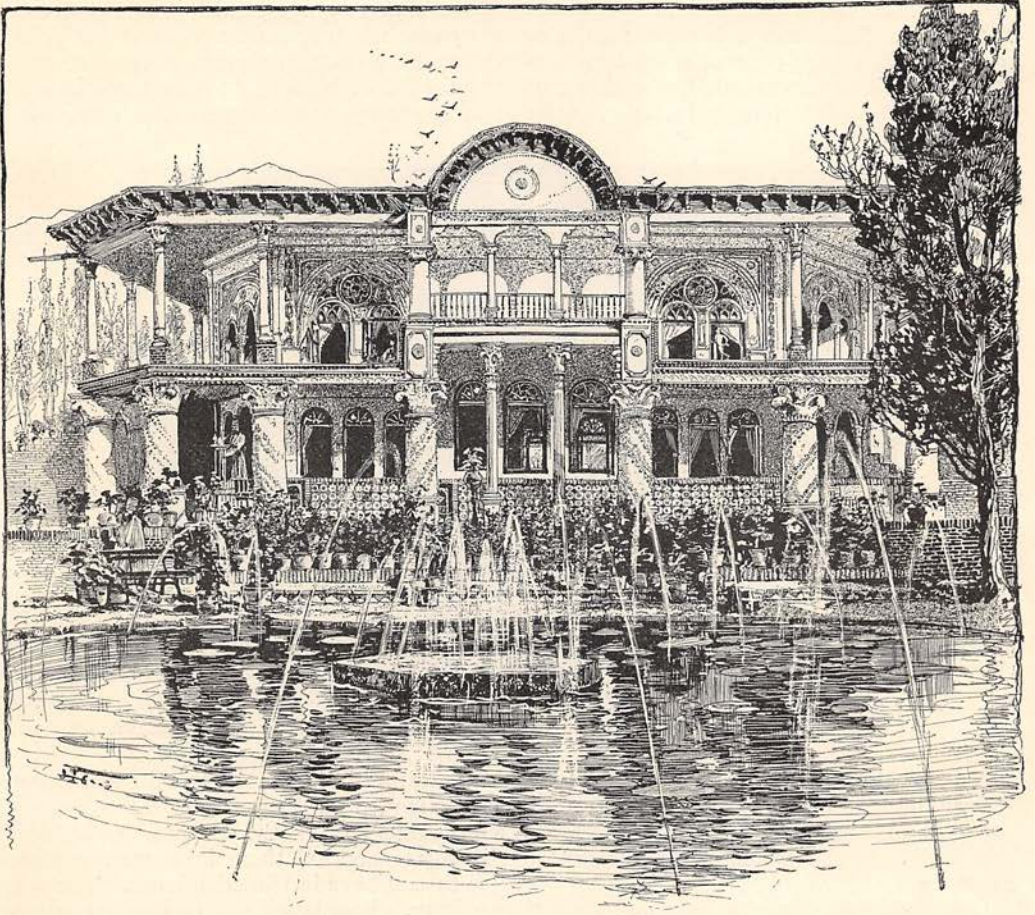
Our sumpter mules, thirty in number, had already been sent on several hours in advance, in order that the tents and supper might be ready for our arrival at the proposed camping-ground. Our path led us at first through narrow lanes of Tejrish and the adjoining village of Dezeshoob, and gave occasion to a considerable disturbance among the curs of those villages. Our passing also brought on our heads numerous remarks, not always complimentary, as we were foreigners and Christians, from the idlers smoking under the trees at the wayside places of refreshment. We were also saluted by the clamor of mingled blessings and curses from the professional beggars seated by the roadside, among whom must be included the filthy and half-idiotic santons, who, in a disgusting condition of nudity and dirt, depend upon the benevolence of the faithful for alms. They build a low hovel of mud under a wide-spreading tree, and pass their unprofitable lives in what they are pleased to consider service to God. Owing to their alleged sanctity one cannot always treat these lazy fellows as they deserve,—viz., with a sound thrashing for their impudence.

Emerging from Dezeshoob, we soon came to the superb country residence of the Naïb Sultanéh, third son of the Shah, and Minister of War. The grounds are arranged in terraces with pools and spouting fountains on each terrace, surrounded by shrubbery and lofty trees laid out with a pleasingly artistic air of negligence. After leaving the shaded avenues surrounding these elegant grounds, our train moved slowly over a treeless plain, which gradually ascended until the road entered the mountains. At nightfall we found ourselves in a pass noted for brigandage, and although the road has for some time been comparatively free from danger, and we had a military escort with us, it was deemed prudent for the party to close up its ranks, as stragglers might be attacked in the dark. The moon came to our assistance early, and was bright and welcome indeed when we reached the summit at nine.

We found the ridge so abrupt that we passed at once from the ascent to the descent; and here the greatest care was required to reach the plain without accident. The road for some distance followed the edge of an excessively steep mountain, which divided the gorge in twain like a curtain. To make room for the road the sharp edge of this elevation had been cut down. In many places we could look on either hand into a black ravine far below, shrouded in deep and seemingly fathomless gloom, untouched by the moon, which fortunately lighted up the hazardous path we were following. The lower half of the descent was very bad, as the road was there composed of loose shingle, and, besides being uncomfortably steep, often branched off in various directions. A party which had preceded us on a previous night lost their way in this place, and did not find it again until daylight. It was also with great difficulty that the mules were able to turn the abrupt corners of a precipitous, zigzag road without accident to the tachtravân.

Having at last accomplished the descent without mishap, we entered on a narrow plain, and soon reached a wayside resting-place with the usual *chenâr*, or plane-tree, which marks such spots in Persia. Under the enormous spreading shade were two or three booths offering bread, fruits, and tea to travelers; a fountain adjoining furnished us a grateful draught. On leaving this place we came to a deep, rushing torrent called the Jarje Rood, the latter word meaning river. Here were some remarkable cliffs springing directly from the stream. They were shaped like a stupendous fortress with bomb-proof casements. Several caves in the sides suggested embrasures for cannon.

We crossed the river on a massive stone bridge supported by arches. In the rainy season the river is often much wider than we found it, and overflows its banks. It was to this circumstance that the late Emin-e-Sultân, one of the most prominent men in Persia, owed his title and the origin of his good fortune. The Shah often comes to this spot to hunt, being a skillful and enthusiastic follower of the chase. In a garden near the river he has built a pretty pavilion, and usually takes a number of his wives with him. When the retinue is large the ladies live in tents. On one of these occasions the river, evidently desirous to show its independence of the royal authority, took a whim to overflow the banks and give the king and his attendants a good wetting. They were aroused from their sleep by the sound of rushing water, and found the river rapidly rising around their couches. In wild terror the royal wives fled



NOVGARÂN, COUNTRY SEAT OF THE NAÏB SULTANÉH.

to a safer spot, leaving everything behind them, including jewelry to a large amount. One of the lower officers of the court, aware of the loss and with an eye to his own profit, ordered his servants after the subsidence of the waters to search high and low for the lost treasure. Their efforts were crowned with success, and the officer caused them to be restored to the royal owners. The Shah was so gratified with the enterprise and zeal shown on this occasion by his subject, that he named him Emin-e-Sultân, and eventually promoted him to the charge of the mint and many other offices of great importance.

A short steep ascent from the bridge along the wall-like face of the lofty banks brought us to a noble plain, so white in the light of the full moon that it looked like a snow-land in the isle of dreams. Across the plain we now discovered two men approaching us at a tearing gallop. They reined up suddenly on reaching our train, and proved to be two of our servants who were on the lookout for us.

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After giving us directions as to where to find our tents, they returned to the camp at full speed, to order hot tea prepared on the *samovâr* ready for our arrival. Another weary half-hour followed ere our slow-moving train reached the massive shade of the gigantic plane-tree under which the tents had been spread, by the side of a pool and a brook which emptied into it. It was a most picturesque scene as we alighted, the white tents looming mysteriously in the gloom, lanterns moving hither and thither and flashing in the water, dusky figures grouped around the fire where our supper was cooking, and the broad moon above in the cloudless heaven, braiding silver spangles with the shadows.

The following morning being the Sabbath, we abandoned ourselves without reserve to the attractions of our camp, happy in the consciousness that we should not have to leave it until the subsequent day. To enjoy one's self by indulging in the luxury of absolute indolence, entirely free from *arrière pensée*, is

actually a task rather than a pleasure for most Americans. But one soon learns in the Orient that the only way to obtain the full benefit of rest, or entirely to appreciate the opulence of the attractions of Nature, is to lay aside for

of one of these gorges, which in this case was a narrow winding ravine scooped out of a ridge whose castellated peaks towered several thousand feet higher. At sunset this mountain was arrayed in a superb robe of purple.



A BIG PLANE-TREE AT GELANDEVĒK. (DRAWN BY HARRY FENN FROM A SKETCH BY S. G. W. BENJAMIN.)

the time the business and the burdens of life without reserve. Then and then only can one understand that there is enormous gratification in the simple consciousness of existence.

Our camp made quite an imposing appearance, consisting as it did of several large sleeping tents and a number of smaller ones for the soldiers and servants. We took our meals off a camp-table spread under the great chenâr. The tree was probably one thousand years old, and measured thirty feet in circumference several feet from the ground. A few feet higher up the gnarled trunk divided into several large branches which towered like the columns of a temple. This idea was intensified by the smooth gray bark that incased and gave them the appearance of hewn stone. Besides this patriarch of the plain, a beautiful grove of willows shaded our encampment. This spot is a favorite resort for the Shah, who comes here to hunt the panthers and ibexes that are found in the neighborhood. I should mention here that we were on the edge of the village of Gelandevĕk, at the head of a plain inclosed by mountains. This plain is called Hassardaré, or plain of a thousand valleys, because it is so undulating as to produce the effect of numerous separate plains, which again in turn wind into the gorges of the mountains. The camp was at the entrance

In a clearing between the wood and the village extended an open field yielding melons and vegetables. In the evening the lads of the village sported there in a manner very like that of boys in Christian lands. The tall gardener, whose beard was curiously dyed an orange-red with henna, also came down at that hour with his wife and daughter to gather melons. The women seemed to have hard work of it to keep their faces concealed with a loose mantle, and at the same time pluck the fruit. They were far less anxious about revealing their persons than their faces.

On the following day the gardener appeared at my tent door with a most attractive dish of honey in the comb. He offered it as a present, but we knew perfectly well what he meant by this. It is a custom and privilege of the lower classes in Persia to bring what they call presents to those above them; but they expect a corresponding pecuniary present in return. When this privilege is not abused by being exercised too often, it is usual to accept the present. But the custom is sometimes annoying, and I always reserved to myself the privilege of declining the offering. In this case the honey was too tempting and the demeanor of the man too respectful to admit of refusal, and he went away happy with a sum twice the value of the honey and equal to the profits of several days labor in Persia.

A while after this episode a troop of veiled women, stately in the long mantle which muffled them from head to foot, visited the camp. They had learned that a physician was one of our party, and desired to consult him. Improvising a medical office at once under a tree, the doctor sat on one of the roots, and proceeded to feel pulses and examine tongues. Their faces he could not see. It was a novel sight to observe this group of ignorant peasant women, in parti-colored garb, seated in a circle before him on the grass, giving him an account of their ailments. The traveler in the East is often requested to prescribe to the sick, be he actually a physician or no. I have been repeatedly requested to serve in this capacity, and sincerely hope that the list of mortality in non-Christian lands has not been thereby increased. Luckily neither coroner nor municipal records exist in the happy Orient. The physician, however, labors under a peculiar disadvantage in Persian practice even if his qualifications are not too carefully examined; for he is not permitted to see the face of his female patient, and is thus deprived of one of the most important points in forming a diagnosis. The native doctors require no other diploma to enter on the profession of medicine than a supply of infinite assurance sometimes called cheek. They are generally itinerants who go from village to village and announce their profession on arriving. Extraordinary remedies are given. Having prescribed, the physician decamps before the results become perceptible, aware that a common sequence is death. Fortunately for them, this result is generally quietly accepted as the fiat of Kismét, or Destiny.

Another question also came up for our consideration on Monday; this was the selection of the best route for us to take over the tremendous ridge that rose between us and the Lar. Having an invalid in a tachtravân to take with us, the question was much more serious than that of deciding which of various comfortable routes one should select to go from Boston to New York; for there are many roads in Persia over which it is impossible to take a tachtravân. We had intended to go by the route of Lavassân, in two stages. But hearing that the road over the Aficha Pass was practicable, and could be made in one stage, we found ourselves in a dilemma. Nothing is more difficult than to obtain precise and correct information about routes and distances in Oriental countries. In order to settle the question, we sent for the head men or elders of the village, who came to the camp and gave respectful attention to our inquiries, seated

under the great plane-tree and smoking with great dignity. They assured us that the route over the Aficha Pass was every way the most desirable. They pronounced the road to be good, and the distance, they affirmed, could be accomplished in eight hours. The former statement proved measurably true, while the latter we unfortunately found on trial to be correct only for horsemen excellently mounted and going at a gallop over many parts of the route, which was manifestly out of the question with such a train as ours.

After the departure of these worthies, we ordered the tents to be struck and the sumpter-mules to be loaded, and proceed in advance to prepare our next camp for us. The loading of so many implements on some forty mules, my own share of the number amounting to sixteen, was a task of several hours; but by one P. M. the loads were all started. After a comfortable siesta under the trees and a right jolly meal, we also got the passenger-train under way at half-past four P. M., the very earliest hour we dared to start, owing to the intensity of the heat before sunset. But we had many hours of the hardest mountain travel in Persia before us, and were anxious to reach our cots before one A. M. When one considers that in our party were included an invalid and two infants, with their nurses, two small boys under five, and a half dozen spinsters ranging from six to sixteen years, and some twenty-five animals loaded with passengers of various ages, the arduousness of the undertaking is better appreciated, especially if to this be added the fact that we were to wind along the edge of tremendous precipices over a pass thirteen thousand feet above the sea. I should add that the nurses and babies were carried in *kajevêhs*, which are basket-like



OLD BRIDGE AT GELANDEVÊK.

frames, slung on either side of a mule, and sheltered by a curtain. The peculiar advantage of the *kajevêh* on a narrow cliff road lies in the probability that, if one of the *kajevêhs* hits the side of a rock, the mule will be thrown off his balance and land with his load at the bottom of a ravine.

Our road lay for a couple of miles over the plain of Hassarderé, crossing several streams that were nearly dry. One of them was

spanned by a picturesque but dilapidated bridge with a single arch. I subjoin a sketch of it, as it is a characteristic example of the Persian mode of bridge-building. Some of the timbers employed for a staging during its construction are still to be seen there. It is a curious habit of the Persians to leave parts of the scaffold timbers obtruding, even in elaborate structures; for what reason it is difficult to tell.

Gradually ascending, we entered and passed through the village of Kardan, and came to a large waterfall at the left of two bridges. The old one was a fearfully narrow and ticklish structure, without a parapet and wide enough for only one horse. Happily our train was not obliged to risk this perilous passage, for a handsome new bridge of hewn stone, broad and parapeted, had recently been constructed by the side of the old one.

From this place the road rapidly ascended, passing along the edge of a ridge and looking on either hand over a landscape of the most magnificent description. On the lovely slopes and glens below, half veiled in the creeping shadows of the late afternoon or smitten by the long shafts of the setting sun, tilled fields, gardens, and picturesque villages were clustered in agreeable variety. Ever and anon, too, between the foliage one caught the magical gleam of a mountain stream dashing down over crags and precipices. Above, and on either hand, sublime peaks lifted their pinnacles golden in the radiance of a cloudless sunset. Those travelers who speak in light terms of the scenery of Persia are either unobservant of what they might see, or wedded to a special type of landscape; what is more likely, they have never been over the Aftcha Pass.

The road here was excellent and showed real engineering skill. Two hours' ride brought us to the village of Aftcha, which, like many villages of Persia, is an appanage of one of the men in power. His country residence may be seen prominently situated on one side of the ravine, at the bottom of which rests the village in a picturesque confusion of peasants' houses grouped amid the foliage in a most irregular but attractive manner. The steep, narrow entrance to the village was blocked by a drove of loaded donkeys as we approached. It was a characteristic incident of Persian travel when our *giliodâr* dashed headlong into this clumsy throng, thrashing heartily from side to side, hitting both men and animals with no trifling blows of his whip, and driving them back into a side lane to make room for our train. As we clattered noisily through the rough, tortuous streets of the village, every one came forth to gaze on such an unwonted scene. It

was no small matter to force the *tachtravân* through the narrow, tortuous lanes round abrupt corners. The difficulty experienced here was a foretaste of the obstacles that we were to encounter higher up the mountain.

The village of Aftcha may be considered typical. Persian villages are divisible into two classes: those of the plains, treeless and surrounded by a high, quadrangular wall of sun-dried bricks to protect them against the inroads of *Turkomâns* and *Kurds*; and those distinguished for their watercourses and trees, in ravines or lofty mountains, where springs and torrents encourage the growth of plane, mulberry, and poplar trees and orchards, and allow irrigating channels for the nourishment of vegetable plantations. Water is the most precious commodity in Persia. Except in the humid provinces north of the mountains adjoining the Caspian, there is neither rain nor dew for many months, and none too much the rest of the year. The cities are entirely dependent for water on subterranean aqueducts. Nothing can exceed the aridity of the vast plains of this ancient land; while on the other hand nothing can surpass the rank luxuriance of the verdure of its mountain villages, through which the roaring torrents dash all the year round.

Aftcha is one of these. As we emerged from its lanes and opened the upper side of the hamlet, we heard the roaring of a cataract, tumbling over a precipice and endowing the village to which it gave a name with rural comfort and beauty. In a small field on the right reapers were cutting the wheat with sickles, or gathering fruits in baskets and mantles. After crossing the torrent over an arched, parapeted bridge of colored bricks, we began to climb the mountain in earnest. We could see the road above us very distinctly, a serpentine line following the zigzag crest of an ascending spur, which led to the entrance of the pass. The sun was now below the mountains, but the twilight lingered for some time, and we made good headway before it was actually too dark to proceed with safety. On returning over the same road in broad daylight, I confess there were parts where the precipices on either hand were a little giddy, especially with a skittish horse or a *tachtravân*.

Fortunately, when the darkness fairly set in, rendered doubly intense by the lofty mountain walls on either hand, we came to a small level nook where it was deemed best to cry a halt and wait for the rising of the moon. Every one dismounted, and the animals were detailed in groups to several of the attendants. Several large boulders were scattered over this mimic plateau, and in a few moments our party had found a shelter from the night wind



A RELIGIOUS MENDICANT.

under these rocks. Lanterns and the fitful gleam of a fire soon shed a flickering radiance over the moving figures, but added extraordinary mystery to the opaque background of mountains that seemed to spring up abruptly only a few yards from us. In the mean time the ever-present samovâr or Persian tea-urn was busy heating water, and we found a capital cup of Russian tea refreshing indeed. To this we added cold boiled eggs and some sandjiâk or unleavened bread baked on the stones in a

thin cake. Two of the horses now took it into their heads to kick up their heels and make a bold strike for liberty; they dashed away towards Aftcha. This might have proved a serious incident, for they were both spirited animals, and it is no easy matter, the catching of runaway horses in such a place and at such an hour. Specter-like they flew down the road, one white as snow, the other black as night, but both a shadowy gray in the gloom. A dozen men at once started



THE TACHTRAVÂN.

in pursuit, while my hostler, springing on a quick horse, spurred after the fugitives. The flying bridles probably impeded their steps, for in a few minutes they were caught and brought back. But, on remounting my black Afghan, I found his ambition for a night adventure was not quite over.

After resting an hour, we began to see the light of the moon touching the peaks on the left side of the gorge and gradually creeping down the mountain-side, which changed from a black form to the appearance of a white mist. Then, with lanterns carried by the outriders both in front and rear of the procession, in order to indicate the road and prevent straggling, we recommenced our journey. The giliodâr received strict orders to keep a careful lookout; on the appearance of a sign that any one was falling behind, the head of the column was to be stopped and a messenger sent to ascertain the difficulty and dress up the line again. Of course we traveled single file, and this made it important that we should keep together; for the climb before us was full of danger, and if any accident should happen to some one in the rear of the column it might be some time before he was missed unless we exercised unusual vigilance.

Next to the giliodâr followed the tachtra-

vân, with a footman on each side to steady it in rough places. Immediately behind rode two gentlemen ready to spring off the horses any instant the tachtravân should be in danger of slipping over a precipice. After them followed a miscellaneous train of horses and donkeys, with kajevêhs and ladies and children; lastly, came several attendants and the escort of soldiers.

The moon long delayed bestowing the advantage of her rays on our devious path. The farther we entered into the heart of the mountains, the darker it became; for the mountain between us and the moon, although the sky above it was glowing as with a white fire, yet arose as we approached it and tantalized us with the constant hope of seeing the moon, while it persistently screened it from our view, and thereby increased the gloom which enveloped the hazardous

cliff-road up which we were slowly climbing. Every one was carefully watching his own animal, lest a false step in the dark should hurl him into the gorge below, when a sharp, long cry rang from the rear of the train, which was still on the zigzag below. At once a halt was called and a messenger was sent to find out the cause of the outcries. It was discovered that a loaded mule with a servant on his back had fallen over the edge of the road and rolled down. The man fortunately saved himself as the animal went over, but the mule was recovered somewhat the worse for wear, although able to continue the climb. Mules, like cats, are hard to kill.

Again the long procession began to wend its slow way upwards, over a terrific piece of road which often consisted of smooth rocks confusedly thrown together. On looking at that part of the road afterwards by daylight, I was astonished that we escaped without serious accident. Many of the party now found it convenient to dismount and climb on foot until the moon finally burst over the ridge with a light scarcely dimmer than that of day. But once again came the cry of distress from the hollow below. This time another mule had fallen over with damage to its load; but it had caught on a ledge and escaped with only some severe bruises.

But if the moonlight enabled us to see our way better, it also revealed to us more clearly the depths of the yawning gulf on our right, enveloped in mysterious gloom. The road, although a very good one in the main for a Persian mountain road, was in places of the most desperate character, while the short zig-zags and sharp angles of a path along one side of a steep gorge made it excessively difficult to carry the tachtravân and kajevêhs without accident. Many a time those riding near to the former leaped off their horses and rushed to the rescue, when those who were steadying the tachtravân found their strength insufficient to prevent the mules from slipping over the cliff or capsizing the heavy and cumbersome fabric. For the mules the labor was terrible, and I expected momentarily to see one of them give out. At one point of imminent peril there were eight men tugging at the mules and the tachtravân to force them safely around a sharp angle in the road.

In the mean time the hours were slipping by, and the time set for arriving at our camp had passed; but it was, notwithstanding, painfully evident that scarce half our arduous task was yet accomplished.

Finally, at two in the morning, we scaled the Aftcha Pass and stood on the summit of the ridge, thirteen thousand feet above the level of the sea. We had safely accomplished a feat never before undertaken on that road. For the first time a tachtravân had scaled the Aftcha Pass, and an American lady was the first woman who had ventured on the undertaking. From the sharp ridge on which we halted a few moments we looked down into the great volcanic valley of the Lar, twenty-five hundred feet below, and discerned at the farther side the shadowy form of the stupendous cone of Demavênd. Although yet thirty miles from us, it soared far above our position, and its snows gleamed in the light of the moon like a mighty phantom hovering in the heavens.

As it was two hours yet before dawn, and all were weary and hungry, it seemed proper that we should now dismount and find the rest we so much needed. But this was a joy to be deferred for several weary hours, for we had still to pick our way down the other side of the ridge and travel miles and miles across the plain to the spot where our servants had been directed to pitch the tents. The descending road, although following a zigzag course, was on the whole less difficult than the one we had just ascended; and by four in the morning the entire party were fairly on the plain and passing the camps of nomads, whose fierce watchdogs gave us a boisterous greeting. I may say here that one of the greatest ob-

stacles encountered in climbing the Aftcha Pass were the large trains of mules and donkeys carrying rice and coal to Teherân and the south of Persia. These stubborn animals are no respecters of persons, nor can more be said of their uncouth drivers. Whenever one of these trains hove in sight, our giliodâr and attendants had their hands full forcing these unruly trains to keep on the outside of the road.

At last dawn began to break on the heights



AN ILIYÂT WOMAN.

of Demavênd, which now soared above us mightier than ever. "Where can the tents be?" "I wonder if we shall ever get there!" were the exclamations constantly uttered by the ladies and children, who were half dead from exhaustion. Around us on every side were the rock-turreted walls of the great mountains inclosing the winding plain. But as dawn deepened into daylight we looked in vain for a glimpse of the longed-for camp. We were fording a rapid stream when a horseman appeared over a knoll galloping towards us at full speed. It proved to be one of my servants, coming to guide us. Here at last was a ray of hope; every heart brightened, and all were cheered by the good news that the camp was only half a *farsâkh*, or two miles, distant. The Persians, as described by Xenophon in the "Anabasis," still



MOUNT DEMAVÉND, FROM VALLEY OF THE LAR. (DRAWN BY HARRY FENN FROM A SKETCH BY S. G. W. BENJAMIN.)

measure distances by farsákhs or parasangs. The snow on the top of Demavénd blushed into a warm roseate hue as the sunlight burst into the broad effulgence of day. But on and on we journeyed without rest, stared at here and there by the flocks of mares and their foals pasturing in the meadows, or by the tawny, unkempt nomad children, who romped quite naked before the black tents. The two miles had been more than accomplished over the devious road which led us across one of the most desolate and extraordinary landscapes on the globe, before it dawned on us that the half farsákhs was a mere vague statement of the distance to the camp. No tents were in sight, although we now entered on a portion of the valley enlarging into a plain three or four miles wide. The horses and mules began to show signs of exhaustion; one of the mules carrying *kajevéhs* came down on his knees on level ground and threw a child out on the turf, face foremost. But now another messenger, who had been sent ahead to reconnoiter, returned to assure us that he had found the camp just around the foot of a high mountain directly before us, which concealed Demavénd. Forging the rapid current of the Lar River, and skirting this mountain, we at last came to a turn where the camp appeared, yet a mile away, and the tremendous dome of Demavénd springing ten thousand feet abruptly above the plain, apparently close at hand, but actually fifteen miles distant.

It was well past eight o'clock when we at last reached our tents in the valley of the Lar, and dismounted, sixteen hours after we had started from Galendevék.

The first word that ran unanimously through the camp was *tea*. Fortified by several draughts of the best refreshment for the weary yet discovered since the time of Adam, we resolved ourselves into a committee of the whole, to visit the land of Nod. "God bless the man who invented sleep!" ejaculated Sancho Panza, and the sentiment found hearty response in every bosom that memorable morning when we reached the valley of the Lar.

On returning to ourselves again, after a nap of long duration, we all once more with one accord cried breakfast. The universal longing found expression by a vigorous clapping of hands. This is a novel way, you may imagine, to express a sentiment of hunger. I should explain that this is a method of summoning servants in the East. When the servants raised the door of the tent they knew what we wanted, and said, "*Bally, bally, hazár dur,*" which is to say, "Yes, it is ready." Having satisfied the wants of our lower nature, as pietists and philosophers would say (rather hastily as it would seem, considering how dependent the brain is on the stomach), we were in a proper condition to take a survey of the situation. The camp, we found, was planted about the center of a rolling plain several miles long and about two miles wide,



THE BLACKSMITH.

completely hemmed in by rocky mountains, absolutely bare, but lovely in their very savageness, painted as they were by the various gray or ruddy hues peculiar to volcanic formations. About a thousand feet above the plain was a large patch of snow. At the south-western end the mountains separated, making a passage for the river. At the opposite end, also, the plain widened and gave into it a larger valley meeting it at right angles. But across the entrance stood a mighty eminence crowned by nature with rocks resembling a feudal castle; and beyond and far above soared the great mountain of Persia, Demavënd, the majestic and sublime, the peer of the noblest kings of the mountain world. The plain we were on was ten thousand nine hundred feet above the sea, and Demavënd rose ten thousand feet higher. No vegetation was visible on the deeply seamed slopes of the cone, but its summit was crowned with eternal snow, which extended down several thousand feet, mostly in the clefts of the deep ravines and precipices. I found by measurement that the slope of the cone has an average inclination of thirty-eight degrees, which is remarkable when one considers the extent of

the slope or compares it with some of the steepest of the world's volcanic peaks.

The valley of the Lar, although destitute of any sign of shrub or tree, is yet full of interest to the lover of nature. The river Lar winds along the center of the valley. This is a stream fifty to one hundred yards wide; the current is somewhat turbid, and rushes with great rapidity. The low banks rise gradually on either hand towards the mountains. These undulating slopes were dotted with black goat's-hair tents of the nomads, or blackened with moving patches, which as they approached were resolved into large flocks of goats. Herds of mares were also frequently seen accompanied by their colts, browsing on the short herbage, and wandering at will over this fenceless valley of desolation. These mares belonged to the king, and I was told fully two thousand are annually kept at the Lar, rearing horses for the artillery of Persia.

The Lar valley is in reality the bed of an enormous crater. At some remote period volcanic peaks have been upheaved above its crust, which have divided the surface into the chain of narrow and winding valleys that form the present great valley of the Lar.

Demavënd, the monarch of this elevated solitude, is, of course, a volcano, although quiet for many ages. The presence of this great scene of volcanic action on the borders of the Caspian Sea appears to be consistent with the now well-known law that volcanoes are usually found near the sea.

Our camp was pitched on the brow of a low plateau overlooking the river Lar. The party divided itself into three sections. My own camp included seven tents, with those for the servants. Our sleeping-tent was pitched on the edge of one of the numerous musical brooks which aided to feed the deep flood of the Lar. A curious feature attending the supply of water in the valley are numerous boiling springs. The bubbling action to which they are subject is intermittent, occurring every few minutes. Where our camp lay, forty of these springs were clustered within the space of a third of a mile, whence the spot is called *Shehel Chesmé*, or *Forty Springs*. Besides this group of forty springs, I may mention, among other interesting objects in the Lar Valley, the *Whitewater River*, which enters the Lar a milk-white stream tinged with a faint suggestion of green; near its source is found the *Devil's Mill*. It is externally represented by a large ferruginous rock with two apertures a few feet apart. On standing near the rock one hears a deep, perpetual, and mysterious roar far down in the bowels of the earth, as if demons were engaged in forging weapons for another war against the race of man. Naturally no one has ever ventured down to see the mighty works going on below, nor ever will in all probability; for a mephitic gas of deadly potency exhales from the openings in the rock which causes instant death to every living thing that breathes it. Around the rock there is ever a score or two of birds which have fallen dead on inhaling the air, and when I was there a bear was lying at the entrance stark and stiff.

For the members of the Alpine clubs Demavënd offers attractions well worth considering. Here is a peak a mile higher than *Mont Blanc*, which can be ascended with comparative ease by any one of strong legs and sound lungs and heart. The sulphur constantly forming at the top, together with the vapor and the extreme heat just below the surface, indicates that, although there is no record of any eruption of Demavënd, it is still by no means dormant.

I followed the course of the Lar River to where it rushes roaring out of a Tartarean gorge at *Peloure*, and is joined by several other streams. After the junction the Lar is called the *Harhaz*, and becomes one of the most important streams in Persia. I have

seen no river scenery elsewhere much grander than the gorge of the *Harhaz*. The river rushes deep and strong at the bottom of a narrow abyss which it has cloven for itself in the long course of ages. Hundreds, and in some places thousands, of feet above soar the wall-like precipices. Here and there on the green shelves far above are clumps of dense verdure and picturesque hamlets reached by winding and dizzy paths.

An interesting feature of the Lar Valley is also found in the *Iliots* who resort thither in summer with their flocks. *Iliot*, or *Iliyât*, is the name applied to the numerous nomadic tribes of Persia, who, to the number of nearly a million, under different names and in different clans, roam over the wilds with numerous flocks and herds. The *Iliyâts* of the Lar informed me that, wandering as they may appear, they are yet guided by invariable laws and habits. When the Lar Valley is covered to the depth of many feet with a dense mass of snow, these shepherds resort to the fertile district of *Veramin*, south-east of *Teherân*. When summer comes once more they scale the wild passes which surround Demavënd, and deploy their flocks over the volcanic valley to nibble the scanty herbage. But there is nothing random in this movement. By a sort of unwritten law each family and sect recognizes the rights of the others, and thus from year to year each without interference pitches its black goat's-hair tent in the same place. Each night the flocks are counted, and each month the tax-collector comes round and gathers in the monthly levy of four *shahis*, or three cents, on every sheep.

It may seem strange that in such a lonely spot, where, notwithstanding the presence of herdsmen and herds, one was almost oppressed by the savage sublimity of the landscape which inclosed us from the world and forced us to study the stars, and in a spot so elevated and so difficult of access, one should come to fish for trout, and, what is more, find them in abundance. But such indeed is the case. The river Lar is famed for its speckled trout, and we encamped on its banks well provided with the best rods and flies the English market could afford. We found the trout fickle enough, as elsewhere, and could never tell when or where to find them,—some days "coy and hard to please," and other days so abundant that magnificent strings of fish, averaging upwards of half a pound each, adorned the tent-poles, or graced the board around which we were gathered, with appetites whetted by the keen mountain air. We soon discovered that a trait peculiar to these Persian trout was an indifference amounting to contempt for the daintest flies we coaxingly

threw in their way. I concluded the cause of this phenomenon lay partly in the scarcity of flying insects at that altitude. But when we baited our hooks with young grasshoppers or frogs we discovered the favorite weakness of these epicures of the Lar.

But, after all, trouting at the Lar seemed secondary to the magnificent aspects of nature which constantly arrested the attention wherever one might be. The form of the great mountain pyramid was ever present, varying in appearance with every change of the atmosphere, and yet dominating over all other objects and haunting the imagination like the presence of a spirit. Sometimes, flooded with the glory of morning and dimmed by the haze of golden light, it retired to a vast distance. Then it would advance until it appeared to be but three or four miles away, disclosing a clear, sharp outline, and the various ruddy tints of the manifold rocks and abysses which seamed its tremendous slopes. Or anon the storm-clouds tossed across its bosom like ocean surges, and the crest alone was visible as if suspended from the zenith.

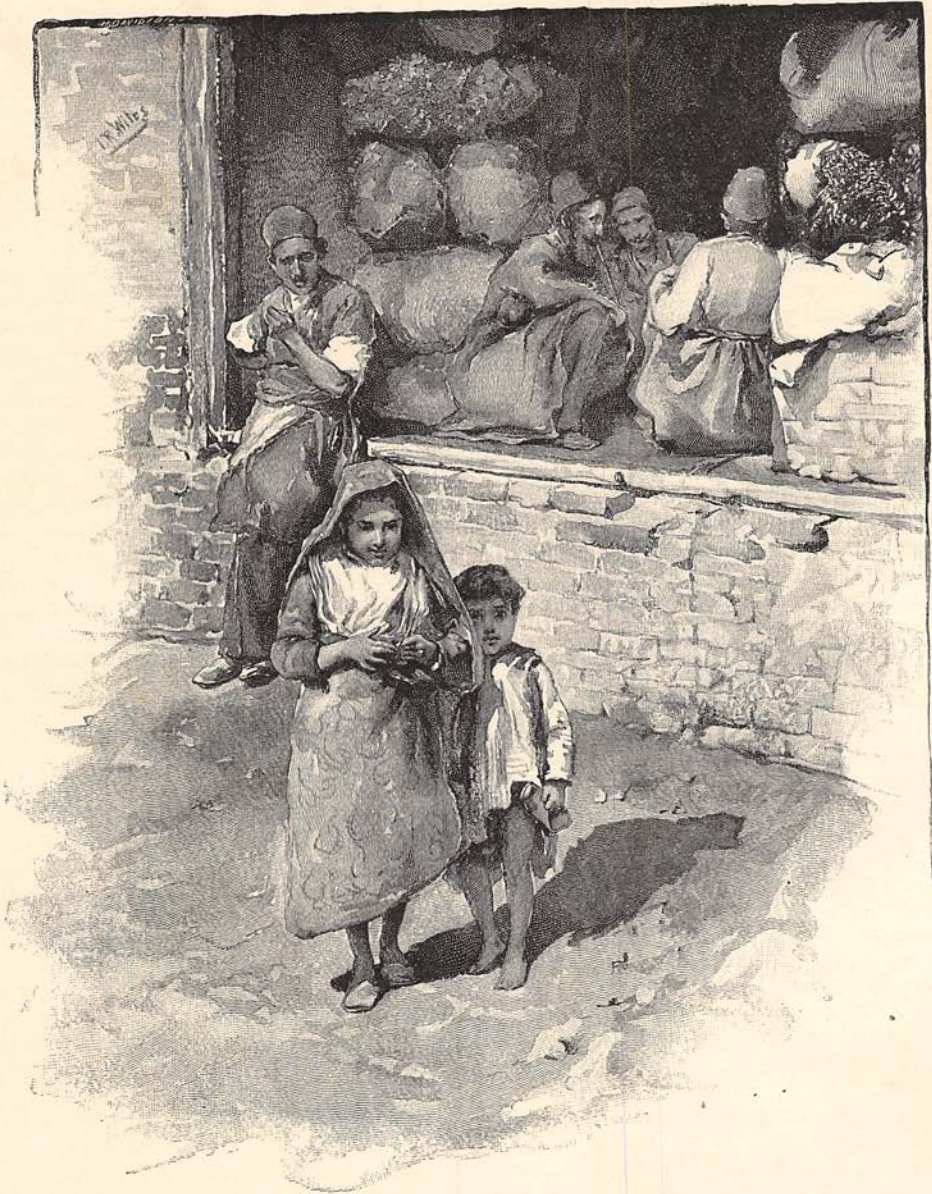
But the hour above all others to realize the impressive grandeur of this awful peak was towards evening, seated in the tent-door when the flocks were wending homeward to their fold among the rocks, where the black-eyed daughter of a race of nomads was waiting for their return. When the valley of the Lar and the mountains which inclosed it were gray in the creeping gloom of twilight, the summit of Demavënd was yet lit by the rosy fire of the vanished sun, and glowed like a star in the firmament. But at night, when all was dark and no sound broke the silence of the sleeping world except the low sound of the brook, no effect of nature ever impressed me more deeply than the presence of the great mountain, like a vast shadow thrown up against the stars.

One at the Lar reminded us vividly of America. This was the weather. One may well say that in the greater part of Persia there is very little weather. For nine months of the year the skies are serene, a cloudless azure by day, and at night a purple veil spangled with the countless gems. Towards noon a breeze from the plains sways the tree-tops, and at night the cool zephyrs from snow-capped mountains flutter the tops of the slumbering groves. When at last the leaves fall in November, and a spasmodic attempt at winter comes, the bright gleams of sunshine often intervening seem like a protest against such an intrusion upon a settled order of things, and the early spring restores the equilibrium of an atmosphere which has been only temporarily disturbed.

It was, therefore, with surprise that, after enjoying for some months an almost entire absence of weather, we found in the valley of the Lar an abundance of this material. The altitude of the valley, its peculiar form, and the near presence of a lofty peak were sufficient conditions for a state of things which went even beyond the preparations we had made to meet it. After we had been there several days the sky began to be obscured with clouds. At once the air became chilly; then the rain commenced falling, and every afternoon thereafter a heavy thunder-storm came up, grandly rolling through the gorges, but seriously interfering with trout-fishing, and, what was worse, soaking the tents and making them too damp to occupy with safety. On Demavënd the rain changed to snow, and the slopes of the peak were each evening whiter, although the heat of midday carried away much of the snow of the previous days. Several times the mercury fell from eighty-six degrees at noon to forty-five degrees at night. One after another of our party was attacked with chills, and the horses, accustomed to life on the warmer plains, showed indications of exhaustion.

We decided without delay to return. The tents were struck after breakfast, and the sumpter-mules sent in advance. At that time the heat was intense, and some of our number suffered with only the shelter of an umbrella to protect us from the sun-rays pouring into the valley, untempered by a breeze. But when at noon the rest of us mounted, we had to do so hurriedly, for a storm was thundering in the gorges, which overtook us before we were fairly out of the valley. Our camp that night was pitched on a green shelf hidden in the heart of the mountain that we had to climb to reach the Aftcha Pass. We arrived there at twilight. The horses were tethered by the side of a brook at the bottom of the gorge. It was an idyllic scene. The new moon hung over the dark edge of the mountain, and the fires before the tents added a superb effect to one of those hours which live long in the memory. But after dispatching a warm meal we were obliged to seek our cots, for word had been given for the tents to be struck at three.

Defiling slowly up the zigzag road, we reached the summit of the range an hour after sunrise. Then we rested, and turned back to take a farewell look at Demavënd from that magnificent point of vantage. A universal acclaim of enthusiasm burst apparently from the lips of all. Vertically below us lay the winding valley of the Lar like the bed of a mighty river. Beyond it the ridges rose and fell in endless succession like waves of the sea. A



SOME OF THE INHABITANTS OF AFTCHA.

bank of cloud closed in the receding horizon, and lo! far above it, and far above where we stood, soared the summit of Demavënd, majestic and alone. We were satisfied; that view compensated for all the toils and fatigues we had endured. "Let us go!" said one with a sigh; the exquisite sense of pleasure is sometimes allied to pain.

The descent from the Aftcha Pass was much more rapid than the night ascent had been; but, although we now had daylight in our favor, the difficulties scarcely seemed less, for the weary animals often slipped or stumbled,

and to be hurled over the precipices was not a pleasing prospect. Indeed, in some rugged places we were fain to dismount and trust to our feet. For the tachtravân the descent was attended with enormous difficulty, as the weight constantly tended to impel the poor patient mules over the edge of the road, and several narrow escapes did not add to our sense of security. But finally, after several hours of this sort of work, we came to a more level spot. The tall Arab charvadâr here began to pick up small stones and toss them back towards the other muleteers. "Why do you do that?" I in-

quired. "Because, praise be to God, the Preserver, we have at last got over the worst of the road, and now it will be easy going."

Happily his statement proved true, and ere long we were again meandering through the winding, leafy lanes of Aftcha. A halt was cried at the shops of the village. These shops were open to the road, and facing the orchards along the stream that dashed musically through the place. What attracted us was the fruit, which, for the first time in the season, we found both good and abundant. In a few moments every one of our party was busily occupied discussing the delicious grapes and melons which were liberally handed around. It was a curious spectacle, this little group of Americans on horseback, or in litters and kajevéhs, huddled together in a narrow lane of a hamlet in the heart of this distant land, eating fruit with keen zest, while the neighboring roofs, walls, and doorways were thronged with a picturesque assemblage of peasants, men, women, and children, gazing with eager eyes at so unexpected a sight. But although the curiosity of these simple people was so great that many a pretty young girl occasionally lowered her veil an instant to get a better view of the strangers, and the bare-legged urchins crept fearlessly among the horses to obtain more certain information concerning these queer foreigners, and the blacksmith forgot to raise his hammer, and the baker, lost in mute surprise, neglected the dough ready to be thrust in the heated oven, yet politeness reigned over the scene and not a word was said to disturb our content. On the contrary, several individuals offered to bring us water or volunteered information about the attractions of this lovely hamlet nestling in a hollow of the mountains and garmented in almost perennial verdure. It is on such occasions that one realizes how very handsome is the race which inhabits Persia. Nowhere are children to be found whose cheeks are more rich in bloom, or whose eyes are kindled with a brighter glow. Large-eyed they are, well formed, in their type of beauty akin to the Greeks and the Spaniards. Nor does squalor or poverty utterly rob the Persians of their native grace.

It was with a considerable sense of relief that we at last arrived at Gelandevék and found the tents ready for us, by the side of the old plane-tree. There we remained for several days enjoying the grateful shelter afforded by this venerable tree, under which it is quite possible Marco Polo encamped when passing through Persia eight hundred years ago. Among other facts which he re-

cords of this country is the statement that Persia was in his time celebrated as the land of plane-trees. It was in fact the country called by Polo the Arbor Sec, referring to the plane-tree, which was considered to be the tree that became dry at the bidding of our Lord. But Orientals maintain that it grew in Paradise and regard it with great veneration. This noble tree, which for purposes of shade can hardly be equaled, still prevails in many parts of Persia.

The tent we occupied was worthy of notice. It formerly belonged to a Persian general, who used it when accompanying the king or the army in the field. It was of a pattern peculiar to Persia, where it has been the custom for the court to spend the summer in tents. Consequently, the making of tents has been carried to great perfection in Persia, and has given good scope to the decorative talents of the native artists. My tent was of the sort called *kalemkâr*, the designs of the interior being done by hand, and the colors being also applied or stamped by hand. Nothing could exceed the extraordinary beauty of the intricate designs which completely covered the interior of this tent. Each panel had in the center an agreeable representation of the conventional figure of a cypress or tree of life, which we are in the habit of calling the palm-leaf pattern when we see it on Cashmere shawls. But this is an error; it is the cypress that is intended in this design. Around this figure were wreaths of flowers, interwoven with birds of paradise, and at the base of the picture were grotesque elephants pursued by hunters brandishing scimitars. Over the junction of the panels was a pair of exquisitely comical lions of the most ferocious aspect, bearing naked swords in their right paws. This is but a feeble description of the graceful and fertile fancy displayed in this intricate and lovely system of decoration. As in all Oriental decoration, the individuality of the artist was apparent in a score of repetitions; for while repeating the same general plan in each panel, the artist allowed himself to vary the arrangement of color in several places.

Another charm of our life at Gelandevék was the arrival of our mails twice a week, brought by courier from Teherân. The capital seemed far away, and yet a swift rider could reach our camp in six or seven hours. Letters from our distant home in America had a peculiar charm when read in the quiet scene of rural seclusion, thirty-five to forty days after they had received the stamp of the United States at New York.

S. G. W. Benjamin.