

OVERLAND FROM INDIA.

BY SIR DONALD MACKENZIE WALLACE, K.C.I.E.

I.—BOMBAY TO BUSHIRE.

THE above title is not quite correct, for the route in question is not altogether overland. From Bombay to the head of the Persian Gulf I went by steamer, touching at a number of interesting places by the way. First of these was Karachee, a busy little oasis on the shore of the Scind desert, not far from the delta of the Indus. Karachee aspires to become a great commercial port for the vast grain-producing region of the north-west, and believes she could compete with powerful Bombay as far east as Delhi and even to Cawnpore, which is now an important centre both for grain and for manufacturers, if only she could get a direct railway constructed to these places. More than once she has memorialised the Government on this subject, and she has adduced strong arguments in favour of her proposals, but financial considerations have hitherto prevented her proposals from being adopted. Meanwhile she is striving, not unsuccessfully, to develop her trade with the north-west, and has thrown out two long arms into the sea to protect the ships that come into her harbour. And it is not merely from the commercial point of view that her harbour is of importance. It plays also a by no means insignificant part in the general scheme of Imperial defences, as the port nearest to the north-west frontier. Of this fact an official recognition has lately been given in the shape of new forts on the shore with heavy guns, which would doubtless give in time of war a good account of any hostile ship of war that might come within range.

Almost immediately after sailing out from between the two long arms of the harbour we can see in the distance the point on the shore where the north-west frontier of India reaches the sea. It is not marked by any colossal delimitation pillar or other visible sign, and even if we were travelling by land we should probably pass from British territory into independent Biluchistan without being conscious that we had crossed a frontier. Nor would we be one whit less safe in the land of the so-called independent tribes, for the Biluchees have none of the fanaticism and little of the predatory character of their Afghan neighbours on the north, and they are well under the control of our political officers, who contrive to maintain order in these wild countries without the help of uniformed policemen and the penal code. I happen to know a good deal about the recent history of Biluchistan, and I can say confidently that if ever the history of British India comes to be written in detail, one of the most satisfactory chapters will be the record of the work done by these plucky, muscular, hard-riding Britons, with their rough-and-ready methods tempered by sterling honesty and a sturdy sense of justice.

The Sultan of Muscat.

After touching at Gwador, a poor fever-haunted village on a natural, half-protected harbour, we leave the Biluchistan coast and make for the western point of the Arabian

Peninsula. Here we find shelter from a roughish sea in the little bay of Muscat, a picturesque indentation in a bold, bare, rocky coast. The town, which gives its name to the bay, and which has occasionally played a subordinate part in Arab history, nestles on a narrow bit of shore at the foot of an amphitheatre of precipitous rocks, on the crests of which are perched a series of primitive forts, very useful as well as ornamental, for they are still required to protect the place against the marauding Arabs of the interior. Indeed at the moment of our arrival a little army of these troublesome people were threatening the town, and I was in hopes that I might have an opportunity of seeing from the walls some dashing exploits of Arab chivalry performed in the bloodless style of modern Arab warfare. These hopes were soon dispelled. As soon as the steamer cast anchor, a fine barge, propelled by a dozen swarthy, stalwart Arabs in magnificent scarlet uniforms, came alongside and took me to the British Residency, where a native Indian gentleman who was temporarily acting as Resident hastened to assure me that the town was quite safe from attack. Though the Sultan's recent attempt to disperse the enemy's forces had proved unsuccessful, his rival had not since ventured to advance. Even the satisfaction of making a reconnaissance was denied me, for the enemy was encamped at a distance much too great to be got over in the few hours at my disposal. I had to content myself, therefore, with visiting the Sultan in his palace—if a very ordinary, moderate-sized, oriental house can be called by that name. His Highness is a boy of about eighteen, son and successor of the late Seyyid Turki, who was long a British *protégé*, and who was not ungrateful for the support frequently afforded him by the timely appearance of a British gunboat, ready to shell any besieging force. The son does not appear to have the ability and energy of his father, but he is an intelligent, amiable youth, amenable to good advice. The interview I had with him was of the ceremonial, uninteresting kind, but when I rose to depart he insisted on accompanying me to the gate and there presenting me to his "gate-keeper," a magnificent Persian lion, who did not look at all amiable, but who assumed a respectful attitude when his master spoke to him in a commanding tone. From the palace I went to visit the only European merchant in the place, an enterprising Scotchman, who admitted that Muscat was a little out of the way, and might not suit a man fond of society and amusement, but maintained that on the whole it was not a bad place to live in, the only serious drawback being the frightful heat in summer. His principal occupation consisted in exporting dates to America, a new trade, which is assuming considerable importance all along the shores of the Persian Gulf and even into Mesopotamia. In Muscat, which has no date-palms of its own, or any other kind of vegetation, the supply is obtained from the oases of the interior.

Towards evening the wind died away and we spent the night pleasantly sailing across a calm sea to the Persian coast, which is here low and tame, with mountains in the background. First we touched at Jask, which is simply a transmitting station of the Indo-European telegraph, built on a long solitary spit of sand and inhabited by a few European officials with their families: then at Bender-Abbas and Linga, small commercial towns with open roadsteads, which look bright and pretty enough when seen from a distance, but squalid and miserable when inspected more closely.

From Linga our direct course lay along the coast to Bushire, but we had on board a great many bags of rice for Bahrein, and accordingly we steered for that curious island which lies near the other side of the Gulf, close to the so-called "Pirate Coast"—a designation which has not yet entirely lost its primitive meaning. As these pirates carry on their trade in a peculiar way perhaps I ought to say something about them. They do not prowl about and attack ships, like the pirates of history and romance: indeed, the great majority of them do not belong at all to a sea-faring race. On the contrary they are Arabs who live at some distance from the coast, and who begin their expeditions by seizing boats which they find drawn up on the beach or anchored near the shore. If the boats do not already contain enough of plunder, they are used for raiding expeditions like those of the old Norsemen. And woe to the undefended village which receives a visit from them! Serious raids are now, however, a thing of the past, and our political officers could, without difficulty, completely put an end to this form of lawlessness if they were allowed a free hand. Unfortunately, in this part of the world the efforts of the Government of India to maintain the *pax Britannica* are regarded with profound mistrust by Turkey, and marauders often escape punishment by taking refuge in Turkish territory. Any action taken against such criminals might,

it is thought in Constantinople, give an appearance of legitimacy to our peculiar political position in the Gulf, whereas that position cannot be reconciled with the Sultan's pretensions to sovereignty over the whole of the Arabian Peninsula and the adjoining waters. Persia, too, has interests in this region; and Russia is suspected of a desire to appear on the scene.

The Sheikh of Bahrein.

In these circumstances the local native potentates try to steer their barks cleverly—sailing sometimes very near the wind—among the conflicting diplomatic currents, and none have hitherto been more successful, if I am rightly informed, than the Sheikh of Bahrein, whose island we were about to visit. Having clearly recognized that, whatever the future might bring forth, the English are for the present far more powerful than any of their rivals, he has placed himself at their service, to the advantage both of himself and of law and order in the Gulf. To the Turkish officials on the mainland, and to his co-religionists generally, his conduct does not perhaps appear in quite so favourable a light as it does to us, but that is of no practical importance.

Having heard much of the Sheikh whilst I was still in India I was anxious to see him, and as soon as the steamer cast anchor I sent a messenger to say that I should be happy to pay my respects if convenient and agreeable to him. In the course of the evening the reply came that he had already been informed of my intended visit to the island and would be glad to receive me next morning.

Before sunrise I was on deck, and even before going on shore I was amply rewarded for the effort of getting up so early. As the sun rose the tiny ripples on the light-green water became tipped with crimson and gold, and the greyish-brown masses on the land dissolved themselves into variously coloured, well-defined objects. Our steamer was anchored in a broad bay, about half a mile from the shore, on the left of which was a town of some size, and on the right a large number of palm trees with much thick undergrowth. To the left of the town, and further away, was another island with a town and a large fort upon it, and beyond the palm trees and underwood rose the ruins of a mosque with minarets. There seemed hardly a breath of air, but the bay was alive with little sailing craft, flitting about with a speed which suggested some occult means of propulsion. One of these, bearing the British flag, soon came alongside, and I was greeted by the British political agent, a polite, amiable native, who informed me that the Sheikh had crossed over from the farther island, where he usually resides at this season of the year, and was awaiting my visit. At once I went ashore and found before the gateway of the Chief's house a large group of retainers, any one of whom might have made a living in London or Paris as an artist's model—all of them plentifully supplied with old-fashioned weapons which would have excited the envy and cupidity of a bric-a-brac hunter. The house itself in its dimensions and appearance was even more modest than the "palace" of the Sultan of Muscat, but the owner of it looked a much more interesting personage than the young son of Seyyid Turki. His features could not be called handsome or regular according to any of the usually recognized standards, but the expression was pleasing, his manner was singularly graceful and dignified, and in his mouth the rough, guttural sounds which make Arabic such an unmelodious language were in some degree softened. In his deep lustrous eyes I thought I perceived a great fund of Oriental diplomacy, but I was perhaps *reading into* them what I had previously read in official papers concerning his sayings and doings. About these sayings and doings I should have liked to have a long confidential chat with him, but I felt that, as I was merely a tourist making a ceremonial visit, it would be highly unbecoming in me to go beyond the polite platitudes commonly used on such occasions. It was, however, not without a feeling of regret that I took leave of him with no prospect of ever seeing him again, for it seemed to me that I was losing an opportunity of being initiated into the secret history and most recent phases of piracy and politics in the Gulf, an interesting subject which occasionally forces itself upon the attention of the Government of India.

From the Sheikh's house I rode out to the Fountains, which are, after the Sheikh himself, the most interesting thing on the island. On them, and in a lesser degree on the pearl-fisheries, depends the prosperity of the population. As the island is low and flat one would naturally suppose that fresh water must be scarce, but in riding out of the town one finds frequently streams of clear, sweet, running water, far exceeding in amount

the requirements of the inhabitants, though it is copiously used for irrigation. In the streams are lots of fish resembling trout, which dart away in shoals as soon as they discover they are being looked at from the bank. The streams all come from the Fountains, which are about three miles distant from the town, near the ruined minaret which I had seen from the harbour. Here stood evidently an ancient city, of which only a few ruins remain. The Fountains fortunately are still as brisk as ever. The biggest of them bubbles up into a great circular pool and fills a rapidly flowing canal about four feet wide and two feet deep. But where does all this water come from? It is difficult to say, but we may safely presume that as there are no hills in the island it must come by submarine channels from some high ground on the distant mainland. No doubt geologists could explain all about it, but to the unscientific tourist it seems very wonderful. The direct and indirect effects are more easily understood than the causes. Thanks to the plentiful supply of water it is possible to raise good fodder and rear fat cattle, and I afterwards heard on the Persian coast that Bahrein butter was in great request.

Some miles beyond the Fountains an English archæologist had recently been making excavations, and I should willingly have visited the spot but I found it was too far off. This was something of a disappointment for me, for I was interested in Bahrein antiquities, having often encountered the name of Bahrein when studying the early history of Islam; nor was I altogether consoled by the assurances of the natives that nothing had been found, because I knew that in the mouth of an ignorant Oriental the phrase means simply that no treasure in the form of gold or silver has been brought to light. At a later period of my journey I met the archæologist in question, but he did not volunteer any information and I did not venture to question him, because I have generally found archæologists to be very reticent people. When they have been lucky and are on the track of finding more they are naturally afraid of putting others on the scent; and when they are unlucky they do not like to talk about their mishaps. Regarding these Bahrein excavations a report will be made, I believe, in due time to the British Museum.

From Bahrein we steered once more for the Persian coast, and next morning we anchored off Bushire close to the *Persepolis*, a ship of war which comprises the whole of the Persian navy. She was built in Germany, and her officers are all Germans. Soon after we had cast anchor I was installed in the house of the British Resident, enjoying the comforts of an English home. Wherever the Englishman goes he carries a great deal of his own country with him, and very pleasant it is to light on a bit of England in the far East.

II.—A TRIP UP THE KARUN.

In the original programme of my journey I had determined to go from Bushire up the Tigris to Bagdad, but I now determined, for reasons which need not here be enumerated, to cut out this part of my programme, and my kind host offered me as compensation a trip up the Karun, a river about which there had recently been a good deal of diplomatic correspondence. Attentive newspaper-readers will remember that our Minister at Teheran had succeeded in the teeth of much opposition on the part of Russia in getting the Karun opened for foreign trade. The Cabinet of St. Petersburg had accepted the fact with tolerably good grace, but the newspapers of St. Petersburg and Moscow had raised an angry wail over what they considered a serious blow to Russian trade and Russian political influence. By preventing the transit of foreign goods across the Caucasus, Russia had practically excluded her competitors from the markets of northern Persia, and hoped to extend gradually the sphere of her commercial influence to the southward. Any improvement of the means of communication from the south must necessarily interfere with the scheme by facilitating the import of English goods from the Persian Gulf. From the Russian point of view, therefore, the opening of Karun to foreign trade was certainly undesirable, but with all due deference to my friends in the Russian press, I cannot help thinking that their manner of dealing with the subject is a little illogical. They abuse in no measured terms what they call the English commercial system, and at the same time they call upon their own Government to emulate and surpass it. And unfortunately they misunderstand and misrepresent what they condemn. They cannot believe, for example, that goods from France or Russia can be imported into a British colony or dependency on the same terms as

goods manufactured in Lancashire ; and many of them evidently imagine that all non-English manufactures are rigorously excluded from India by a protective tariff ! Tell a Russian that a British colony can establish a protective tariff against English goods, or that the Parsee mills of Bombay are now successfully competing with the mills of Lancashire not only in India but also in the Chinese markets, and he will receive your assurances with undisguised incredulity. If he condescends to argue he will probably say that it is quite impossible that the notorious commercial selfishness and tyranny of England could admit such things !

The Sheikh of Mohammerah.

I was thinking of all this as we steamed up the Gulf on board the *Lawrence*, a fine paddle-steamer of the Indian navy, which has been placed at the disposal of the Resident in order that he may be able to visit without delay such places as Bahrein and Muscat, where his presence may at any moment be required. Our immediate destination was Mohammerah, a small Persian town at the junction of the Karun and the Shatt-el-Arab, the broad river formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris. At the mouth of this river we noticed the fortifications recently constructed by the Turks to prevent any steamer going up to Bassra and Bagdad without the Sultan's permission, and two or three hours later we cast anchor at the mouth of the Karun, where a deputation from the local Sheikh came on board to welcome the Resident. The Sheikh himself did not come on account of a diplomatic illness of a peculiar kind, which was afterwards explained to me. It seems he is a remnant of the old Persian system of administration, according to which the greater part of the country was governed by semi-independent chiefs, who owned allegiance to the Shah, but who did not allow any interference from Teheran, and who paid as little money as possible into the Imperial treasury. This primitive order of things is now being replaced by a centralized administration, and the Sheikh of Mohammerah, whose jurisdiction extends a considerable way into the interior, has not yet accommodated himself to the new system. As yet the Government has refrained from using force against him, but he shrewdly suspects that the forbearance hitherto displayed may at any time suddenly come to an end, and he has made his preparations accordingly. On the other side of the Shatt-el-Arab, in Turkish territory, he has built himself a house, where he generally spends the night, and where he is said to have deposited a large portion of his treasures. So long as he is on the Persian side he always takes elaborate precautions against being arrested or kidnapped, and a boat is said to be constantly in readiness to convey him to the house across the river ! When the *Persepolis* visits Mohammerah his diplomatic illness prevents him from going on board, and in order to give this diplomatic illness a semblance of reality, he refrains from going on board the war-ships of other nations. Hence his not coming in person to visit the Resident.

Mohammerah is a miserable little place surrounded by palm trees, and so little above the level of the river that it ought to be very swampy and unhealthy. It looked from the water so uninviting that we did not visit it, but at once got on board a big steamer belonging to Messrs. Lynch and Co., which was waiting for us. On that steamer we sailed up the Karun about 120 miles to Ahwaz. Of the voyage I have little to say. The tourist in search of scenery should not go to the Karun, for its banks are as flat and monotonous as those of the Rhine below Cologne. Of architectural remains there is nothing except the tomb of a comparatively modern Moslem saint, which cannot be described as a great work of art ; and the villages and encampments on the banks as we passed up seemed to be all, with one exception, deserted. The fact that the houses were in good repair surprised me till I heard the explanation, which is worth mentioning as throwing some light on the manners and customs of the natives. At certain seasons of the year, especially at sowing-time and harvest, the villages and encampments are inhabited, and thereafter the communities emigrate in a body to other places, where they find a cooler climate and better pasture for their flocks. Though subjects of the Shah these semi-nomadic people are not Persians, but Arabs, and they endeavour—doubtless for good and sufficient reasons—to avoid all contact with the Persian officials. Of the river itself all I need say is that it is a broad, rapid, muddy stream, which meanders about in a very capricious way, with here and there a very sharp turning. Our captain assured me, however, that it was comfortably deep and much more easily navigated than the Tigris, because the channel was more clearly defined and there were fewer sandbanks. That it was not absolutely free from

these obstacles to navigation I can testify from personal experience, for we ran aground on one of them and remained fast for twelve hours ; but this incident ought not to damage the reputation of the Karun as a fine, navigable river, for our captain was on his first trip, and the local pilots had little or no experience in steering large double-decked steamers.

“ *Monsieur, le Susa est prêt.* ”

At Ahwaz the further advance of our steamer was prevented by a dam composed partly of a natural ridge of rocks and partly of an artificial wall, which had no doubt been constructed in old times in order to raise the level of the water for purposes of irrigation. Above the dam was another long stretch of navigable river, of a hundred miles or more, reaching to the town of Shuster. On this upper reach was a small Persian steamer which the authorities were ready to place at our disposal, but we had not sufficient time to take advantage of the offer. As soon as the chief authority of the place—a colonel of artillery who had been to Europe and had learned to speak French—discovered that we did not wish to go farther he appeared before me, and, drawing himself up in an attitude of “attention,” announced in a formal tone : “ *Monsieur, le Susa est prêt !* ” The *Susa* was the name of the little steamer, and the gallant colonel explained to me that he had received instructions to assist me in every possible way and was most anxious to carry them out. I thanked him, and politely told him—what he knew already—that I had no intention of going any farther, but the more I impressed on him that I did not want the steamer, the more pertinaciously did he inform me that she was at my disposal and ready to start. In the hope of escaping from his importunity I retired first to various quiet corners of the upper deck, and finally to the privacy of the dining-room ; but into each new retreat my persecutor pursued me, and no sooner had I settled down comfortably than I heard a voice behind me saying, “ *Monsieur, le Susa est prêt !* ” Finding ordinary politeness ineffectual, I assumed a sterner tone, and asked him how often he wished to be told that I did not want the steamer ? The gallant officer was not at all abashed by this rebuff. Without answering directly my question, he gave me to understand that what he really wanted was some sort of certificate for his superior that he had shown all possible zeal not only in my service, but likewise in that of the trading company which was trying to open up the Karun for traffic. Now I have had considerable experience in the section of Oriental diplomacy which aims at obtaining certificates of merit for people concerning whose merits the person addressed cannot possibly have any direct or indirect knowledge beyond the unsupported assurances of the petitioner himself, and I have always declined to write or endorse such documents. In the present case I had no inclination to depart from my rigid principles, and I confined myself to a promise that I would let the colonel’s superior know that he had placed the *Susa* at my disposal. With a very bad grace my friend had to rest satisfied with this promise, and I had soon reason to congratulate myself that I had not allowed amiable weakness to commit me to anything further, for a short time afterwards the local representative of the company—a young Englishman who told his story in quiet, veracious style—related to me some of his recent experiences, and gave me a glimpse of how things are done in the Persian official world. The young man’s duty was to receive the goods brought up from Mohammerah and to pass them on to Shuster by the *Susa*, of which I had heard so much. He was a young gentleman who was quite capable of taking care of himself and looking after the interests of his employers, but he was watched and guarded by the officials as if he had been a wayward child in a well-regulated nursery. Though the country round was as safe for an Englishman as an English county, he was not allowed to go out riding, or shooting, or walking alone, lest he should be attacked and murdered by ill-disposed persons ; and he could not even go into the village to buy provisions without special permission and the attendance of a policeman. In the carrying out of his duties he was equally hampered by the undesired, but ever-present, paternal solicitude of the authorities. In short, he found himself a prisoner under a pretty rigorous system of discipline ; and his efforts to forward goods by the new route met with much resistance from the captain of the *Susa*, who had spent the best part of his life as groom to a Pasha, and who could not be made to understand the elementary principles of business. As a remedy, or at least a palliative, to these evils, I suggested a little baksheesh judiciously applied, but both the young Englishman and a superior of his who happened to be on board, shook their heads sceptically. They had already

had in Turkey much experience in the art of applying baksheesh, and had always easily come to terms with the officials concerned, but they found the Persians much more difficult to deal with ; and the illustrations they gave me brought out very clearly a characteristic difference between Persian and Turkish administration. The evils of the latter are softened by weakness, apathy, and carelessness ; whereas Persian official supervision forces its way into the minor details of private life, and its representatives show remarkable energy and tenacity in squeezing money out of all classes of the population. The unofficial subjects of the Shah are squeezed by the officials immediately over them, and each official in the hierarchy is squeezed by the one immediately above him. In Turkey, as in Persia, the administration is a sort of squeezing machine ; but in Persia it is a machine of a far more complicated, more searching, more efficient type. We must remember, too, that in Turkey the officials have other resources besides the product of squeezing : they are all entitled to salaries of some kind, and their monthly allowance, though always a good deal in arrear, is generally paid sooner or later. In Persia the majority of the officials appear to receive no salaries whatever from the Exchequer.

III.—A THOUSAND-MILE RIDE ACROSS PERSIA.

Persia is one of the few countries where one can still have a long ride—I mean a ride of a thousand miles or so—without making elaborate preparations beforehand. The modern blessings of good roads and railways are fatal to the more primitive, and in some respects more agreeable, mode of locomotion ; but these blessings are not yet enjoyed by Persia, and are not likely to be conferred on her for some little time to come, notwithstanding the Shah's visit to Europe and his Majesty's laudable desire to push his country forward on the road of progress. For the present, railway enterprise in Persia has not got much beyond a little toy line from Teheran to a venerated shrine in the suburbs. There are, it is true, the beginnings of another little line near the shore of the Caspian, and a number of grandiose projects on paper, but the little railway which has actually been begun is a very insignificant affair, and the grandiose projects cannot be regarded as within a measurable distance of realisation. Lately I had an opportunity of studying one of these projects in a bulky printed pamphlet, which proved by reasoning and statistics that the line would be strategically most important and commercially very remunerative, but my confidence in the writer's conclusions was a little shaken when I discovered that the imaginative projector had never seen the country to be traversed, and had not even a general idea of its most prominent natural features. As for roads, I have only heard of two which are suitable for wheeled vehicles, and they are, taken together, only about two hundred miles in length. In these circumstances, the art of riding is something more than a mere accomplishment, and it is not surprising that the Persians ride much and well. They are not perhaps in all respects finished horsemen, but they fulfil at least two elementary requirements of the art—they can keep their seat, and they can make their animals go at a decent pace.

But how is the tourist who has no horses of his own to travel about the country ? On the main roads he has the choice between two modes of locomotion, the one by caravan and the other by galloping post. The caravan method is not exactly what its name suggests. We would naturally suppose by the term that it meant travelling in a large company, but in reality the caravan need not be composed of more than one or two horses and a similar number of attendants. The essential is that the same animals, horses or mules, must be used during the whole journey, and consequently not more than one stage, or at most two stages, can be done in a day. By the other method, on the contrary, the horses are changed at the end of every stage, and the traveller may ride all day—and all night too if he chooses. By caravan you can travel anywhere in Persia : by galloping post you can travel only on the routes which have post-stations. If you ride by the road from Bushire to the Caspian you will have experience of both methods.

As far as Shiraz, a distance of about 180 miles, there are no post-stations, and consequently horses or mules must be hired for the whole journey. A Tcharwadar ready to supply them can easily be found, and he will undertake to land you in Shiraz in six days. Though he begins by assuring you that it is quite impossible to do it in less, the offer of a good baksheesh will probably get the six days reduced to five, especially if you consent to go by boat to Sheif, a few miles up the coast, and make this your starting-point. This arrangement has the advantage of saving a tedious march along the sandy shore of the Gulf, and I adopted it without hesitation.

Arrived at Sheif in the early morning I found two horses and three mules waiting for me, the horses for myself and servant, and the mules for the baggage. There was, of course, the usual difficulty in getting the baggage distributed and equipoised, and then off we started on our thousand-mile ride! When I say "we" I mean myself and servant, for the three muleteers went on foot and were to accompany me only as far as Shiraz. All three were good-natured, cheery fellows, good specimens of their class, which is renowned all over Persia for honesty and fidelity. The Tcharwadar naturally likes to drive a good bargain and may haggle for hours over the terms, but if he once makes a contract there is very little danger of his failing to fulfil it, and whatever is confided to him may be regarded as quite safe in his keeping.

The Road to Shiraz.

The first part of the road to Shiraz lies near the sea-coast, beginning on the shore and gradually approaching the foot of the mountains. A great part of the way it passes through cultivated fields and close to villages with flat-roofed houses, and two or three times we have a pleasant halt of a few minutes at a cool fountain shaded with trees. The cold water and the shade are both very agreeable, for on this low-lying strip of land the sun is very hot at the beginning of April, and a long ride, even at slow caravan-pace, has a tendency to make one thirsty and languid. Towards sunset we arrived at Borazjun, a goodly-sized village, which is said to be twenty-eight miles from Bushire. For the accommodation of travellers there is a large caravanserai, but I found much more comfortable quarters in the house of the clerk in charge of the telegraph office, an amiable, English-speaking, well-educated Armenian, who gave me a great deal of interesting information about the locality and its inhabitants. This was my first experience of the telegraph stations on the line, and I may say once for all that my agreeable first impressions were always confirmed. The officers employed on the line—some of them Armenians, but the majority Englishmen—are without exception most kind and hospitable, and the traveller's only regret on leaving these kind strangers is that he has so little prospect of ever being able to make a return for the hospitality received. On the ordinary Persian high-roads the traveller has to put up with caravanserai accommodation, which is of a primitive and anything but luxurious description. The caravanserais are large rectangular buildings composed of cells opening into a court. They have been erected by the Government or by rich private individuals for the protection of travellers at night, without distinction of persons, the rule of the establishment being—first come, first served. This rule requires, however, a short commentary, for the word "served" must not be taken in its strictly literal sense. There is in fact no service supplied, and as a set-off to this, there is no bill to be paid in the morning. On arrival the guest takes possession of any unoccupied cell he pleases, and makes himself as comfortable as he can in it by means of the resources which he has brought with him. These will probably comprise two carpets—one to be hung up as a door to keep out the cold, and the other to be laid on the floor—bedding, cooking-pots, dishes and food. On the premises he must not expect to find anything beyond drinking-water, fuel, fodder for the animals, and bread for himself and servant. The latter ought to have brought with him all other food required, together with the art of cooking it. If he is a fellow of the right sort he will quickly sweep out the cell and make it comfortable, and then prepare a meal of three or four courses. The time for preparing the repast may be usefully and agreeably employed, if one knows the native dialects, in chatting with the muleteers, some of whom are intelligent men, well acquainted with the less frequented parts of the country.

Should the caravanserai be in the neighbourhood of a village it is possible that milk and fresh eggs may be procured, but it is better not to trust to the possibility of obtaining such local supplies. Altogether there is no difficulty in "roughing it" in a tolerable way in these primitive hostelries, and the traveller has often occasion to feel grateful to the charitable personages whose good works took the form of caravanserai-building. On this route, however, it is rarely necessary for the English traveller who has brought introductions with him to have recourse to the caravanserais, for he can easily arrange to spend the night always at a telegraph station or rest-house, and he will there find himself much more comfortable.

(To be continued.)



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III.—A THOUSAND-MILE RIDE ACROSS PERSIA.—*Continued.*

The Road to Shiraz.



ON leaving Borazjun next morning I had still two or three hours on the low hot strip of land between the Gulf and the highlands, the discomfort from the heat being increased by the strong, disagreeable smell from the naphtha-springs, which pollute the air for miles around, but which have not yet been turned to any useful purpose. Then the road suddenly turned to the right and went up a bare, narrow valley to a crest of no great elevation. From this crest a rocky gorge led down to a wider valley, through which flowed a fine, greenish-tinge driver. As soon as I caught sight of the broad, rapid stream, I hurried forward to quench my thirst, but was grievously disappointed. The beautiful, clear water was bitter, and I heard the muleteers behind shouting to me not to drink it. When they came up they told me that the water was both bitter and unwholesome, and called my attention to a suspicious white efflorescence on the rocks near the water's edge. Evidently the water was impregnated with some sort of chemical salts easily precipitated in the form of a white powder. What it was I did not discover, but I concluded that it could not be very poisonous, for the large draught I had taken before noticing the bitter taste produced no bad effects.

As in the water, so also in the rocks and soil, the presence of unusual chemical substances was apparent.

Some parts of the road are well worthy of the landscape-painter's attention. Take, for example, the great plain of Kazerun, surrounded by high mountains and with a fine lake at one end: or the pretty "valley of oaks" lying close under the rocky range of the Piri-Zen; or the little lake of Dest-Arjun embedded in hills, on the other side of the Piri-Zen.

From the "valley of oaks" the path rises in zigzags over a wide, steep expanse of boulders, among which our mules and sure-footed ponies had to pick their way for two or three hours. At last we arrived at a big caravanserai with a stream of clear, sweet water running past it, and congratulated ourselves that our troubles were nearly at an end; but we found to our disappointment that we were not much more than half-way up, and when we finally reached the top we had a terribly long descent to Dest-Arjun, over boulders as big, as slippery, and as closely packed together as those on the other side. It seems incredible, and it is not a little characteristic, that the

great trade-route connecting northern Persia with the sea should be left in such a disgraceful condition. To construct a good road might perhaps be too expensive an operation; but surely a decent mule-track might be made by the expenditure of a little manual labour. Near the caravanserai I found an old man engaged on the work as a volunteer. He had taken a vow, I was told, to devote the remainder of his life to the task; and I was glad to have an opportunity of encouraging him in his laudable design by the bestowal of a little baksheesh. Of course he has not been able to accomplish much single-handed, but he has shown that very much might be done at a comparatively small outlay.

Shiraz.

Having received the promise of a good baksheesh, my muleteers more than kept their promise of getting me over the first section of my journey in five days; for about noon on the fifth day they could point ahead triumphantly to some patches of green on a great arid plain, and assure me that these were the famous gardens of Shiraz. The view was not at all what I had anticipated. The Persian poets had taught me to expect at Shiraz something which might, with a moderate stretch of imagination, be called an earthly paradise, but what I saw before me did not suggest anything of the kind; and a closer inspection only confirmed the first impression. Either Shiraz has sadly degenerated since the classic period of Persian literature, or the poets of that time indulged in an amount of poetic license which would hardly be tolerated in our realistic, matter-of-fact days.

If I could not admit that Shiraz might properly be called an earthly paradise I found it at least a very agreeable place to live in for a few days—thanks chiefly to the kindness of an English doctor attached to the Telegraph Department whom I had never seen before, but who treated me as an old friend. Under his experienced guidance I visited the bazaars, the konak of the Governor, the tombs of Hafiz and Saadi, and all the notable things of the place. At the same time I had to make preparations for the remainder of my journey to Teheran, a distance of about six hundred miles, which had to be traversed by the so-called “galloping post.” When I had reduced my baggage to what I considered a minimum, I called in the post-master, and he decided that four horses would be required—one for myself, a second for my servant, a third for the postboy with a portion of the baggage, and the fourth a baggage horse. This was, I feared, rather too large a party, but I could not well cut down my baggage much more, and for my consolation the post-master told me that on the Shiraz-Teheran road I should easily find as many horses as I required. The prediction was on the whole justified, but I would advise future travellers to restrict themselves, if possible, to three animals. The baggage horse is constantly either lagging behind or straying from the road, and the consequence is a considerable amount of delay and annoyance. A party composed merely of the traveller, servant, and postboy, is much more compact and manageable.

The Road to Ispahan.

It was a bright, crisp morning when I started from Shiraz, and the cool invigorating temperature accompanied me the whole way. If I had reason to complain of the temperature at all it was of the cold rather than of the heat, and the cold did not trouble me much. Only once or twice, when I had to spend a windy night in a “bala khaneh” with open windows, did I feel the cold at all disagreeable. The intending tourist must not, however, suppose that the journey can be made thus comfortably at all seasons of the year. The road runs along a high plateau, traversed by hills, which is very cold in winter and very hot in summer. During the winter months there is often intense cold with deep snow, and in the hot season travellers generally travel at night and rest during the day. The tourist, therefore, who wishes to do the thing comfortably should choose either the spring or autumn. Of these two seasons the spring is to be preferred. The landscape, which is at all times bare and brownish-grey, has then some tinges of verdure, and the air is marvellously transparent. So great, indeed, is the transparency, that I was often strangely deceived as to distances. A hut, a tree, or a big stone by the roadside, would seem to be only a few hundred yards ahead, and I found to my surprise that it took perhaps half an hour’s hard riding to reach it.

A Bala-Khaneh.

I have used the word "bala-khaneh," and I ought perhaps to explain what it means. Imagine, then, in a village or on the open plain, a long, low, rectangular building of yellowish-brown unburnt bricks, resembling a primitive fort with miniature battlements. In the middle of the façade is a square truncated tower, in which is an arched gateway below, and a room with two or three windows above. If you enter the gateway you will find yourself in a square court, three sides of which are composed of flat-roofed stables, and the fourth of rough, simple accommodation for human beings. The building is a "chapper-khaneh" or post-station, and the upper chamber above the gateway is the "bala-khaneh," or apartment for travellers. It is simply a bare room with earthen floor and without a vestige of furniture of any description. If the inmate wants to indulge in the luxury of a chair, table or bed, he must bring such articles with him. As a rule the traveller carries with him merely carpets and bedding, and rests or takes his meals in a squatting or reclining posture after the manner of Orientals. He may have with him one or two small carpets to serve as window-frames and curtains on the windward side of the apartment, but if it is very cold he will do well to go down to the post-master's room by the side of the gateway. There the smoke, it is true, may incommode him a little, for it has no way of getting out except through the door, but if he lies flat on the ground he will escape at least the thickest of it. He will have there, too, the society of the post-master, which may be agreeable or otherwise according to circumstances. Frequently this functionary is a Tartar, morose and taciturn, but occasionally you will meet a bright, intelligent, talkative fellow, who will tell you all he knows—and a good deal he does not know—about the village, the neighbourhood, and the world in general. A few cups of weak tea, half filled with sugar after the Persian fashion, will help to loose his tongue.

A Fall.

The distances between the post-stations differ greatly. Sometimes they are under fifteen, and occasionally over thirty miles. On a stage of moderate length the horses are supposed to do eight miles an hour, and they will easily do that or more if they are in fair condition and have had a good rest before starting, but even under these conditions they have a will of their own and have to be humoured. On leaving the station, however impatient you may be, don't attempt to go off immediately at a gallop. If you do your animal will resist, and will probably get sulky or obstreperous. Go for a few hundred yards at a slow walk, then increase the pace to a jog-trot, and when you have been well shaken for five or ten minutes, get him into an amble and keep him at it. The amble may not seem very fast, but it will take you over your eight miles an hour comfortably, and it has the advantage of being not at all fatiguing—a consideration not to be despised if you mean to cover quickly a long distance. I do not know what the record in this respect is, but I have myself repeatedly done over a hundred miles in the twenty-four hours. The system I followed was to ride on so long as I could get horses and to rest when waiting for them. In this way one is pretty sure to get at least six or seven hours for sleep out of the twenty-four. Once, however, it happened to me that there were fewer delays than usual, and I went on continuously for over thirty hours with no halts beyond those required for changing horses. Of course this system can only be adopted by one who is pretty tough, and who possesses the faculty of being able immediately to go to sleep anywhere and at any hour of the night or day.

The horses are supposed, as I have said, to go about eight miles an hour, but there are great variations from this average. When the poor animals are in bad condition or tired they can hardly be induced to go beyond a walk or a jog-trot, and they sometimes absolutely break down, in which case fresh ones have to be procured from the next station. On the other hand they will sometimes go at a good hard gallop the whole way, with only one or two halts of a few minutes to let them recover breath. It is in these circumstances that one thoroughly enjoys this kind of travelling, and the excitement of it is increased by the probability of a fall, for even the good horses are not always sure-footed, and in a long journey one must always expect a few "croppers." One night, I remember, I had got capital horses and we were going along in splendid

style, with just enough of starlight to see the road dimly before us, when suddenly at my side there was a splutter and a smash, and I saw the post-boy's horse take a header on the road, and then perform an evolution that looked in the dim light very like a *salto mortale*. When I had pulled up and returned to the spot I found the horse on a heap of baggage, and the post-boy on his back groaning some three yards off. The unfortunate youth declared himself severely hurt, and his groans increased in proportion to my expressions of sympathy; but when I had convinced myself that he had no bones broken, I changed my tone and ordered him to get up. At once he stopped whining, and it became evident that the groans were intended simply to excite my commiseration, which might possibly take a pecuniary form. By this I do not mean to insinuate that Persian post-boys are a soft, whining set. On the contrary they are generally hard, plucky fellows; but even the best of them would probably not consider it very wrong to obtain by stratagem a little additional bak-sheesh from a Feringhee.

The Ruins of Persepolis.

From Shiraz the first day—that is to say, the first hundred miles—is the most interesting. A few hours' ride brings you to the grandiose ruins of Persepolis, which are only awaiting thorough excavations to throw a flood of light on ancient Persian civilization. Few cities have had such a long life. Existing already in the time of Cyrus, it was enlarged and embellished by Xerxes and Darius, plundered by Alexander the Great on his way to India, and was still a place of some note in Mohammedan times. At present the ordinary domestic buildings have entirely disappeared; but at the edge of the plain, and leaning against the slope of a low range of hills, there is still a gigantic terrace of stone-masonry, on which are some forty colossal columns and extensive ruins of what was probably a cluster of magnificent temples. Here at many points I noticed traces of excavations, which had been made, I was told, quite recently by French archæologists, but they did not seem to be at all in proportion to the extent and importance of the ruins. I spent an hour or two examining the columns, walls, and curious bas-reliefs, and would willingly have visited also some minor ruins on other parts of the great plain, but the sun was already nearing the horizon, and I was anxious to reach before dark a picturesque defile through which I had to pass some way ahead.

A Night Adventure.

In this I did not succeed, for the defile was further off than I had supposed, and night had closed in before it was reached. There was just star-light enough to show that the glowing descriptions I had received of it were not exaggerated. High precipitous cliffs hemmed in on both sides a noisy stream which I had to ford several times, for the path wound along the gorge in serpentine fashion. Certain prudent acquaintances had advised me not to pass here at night because the place had rather an evil reputation, and some of the Eliauts—the dwellers in black tents—were encamped in the neighbourhood. But I knew that the robbery of a European is a very rare occurrence—if indeed it ever happens—in this part of the country, and I presumed that evil-disposed persons would hardly expect to find a traveller passing through the defile at such a late hour on a dark night. I pushed on therefore alone so as to enjoy in solitude—some faint traces of youthful romanticism *will* cling to one even in middle age!—the beauty of the pass, and for some time I congratulated myself on having got away from my attendants. The defile seemed very grand, and I noticed in the cliffs several dark holes which looked like caverns, and which in any case would have done very well for robbers' caves in a melodrama. If they were really used by robbers, as my servant afterwards assured me, their inmates must have been away from home or asleep, for they showed no signs of life. It was only when I had nearly reached the end of the defile that I began to question the wisdom of having indulged in solitude. Here the path entered a long narrow passage—a very tight fit for a horseman—which had evidently been hewn in the rock, and which would have made artistically a very good entrance to an Inferno. Having proceeded along this narrow, roofless corridor for a considerable distance, and seeing no end to it, I began to suspect that I might have wandered from the right path, and I thought it well to wait for the rest of the party. When half an hour had passed without bringing any signs of them I considered my suspicions confirmed, and soon I

had a second confirmation. I had stopped at a point where a cleft in the outer wall of the corridor enabled me to see dimly the other side of the valley, and in that direction I heard the sound of voices. On listening attentively I convinced myself that they were the voices of my servant and of the post-boy shouting to each other, and I accordingly shouted likewise to attract their attention. At length a response came in the form of a semi-articulate shout, which I interpreted as a request to move on. I hesitated to comply, for the shouters were apparently on the other side of the stream, but we were too far apart for discussion, so I pushed on, and after going for a mile or two I found them waiting for me. They had found the long corridor too narrow for the baggage horse, and they had consequently been obliged to ford the stream and take a path on the opposite side of the valley. Soon after this we passed on the roadside a white, rectangular building on a slight elevation, which is generally believed, on the authority of Herodotus, to be the tomb of Cyrus, but which local tradition assigns to the mother of Solomon. As it is well known to archæologists I need not attempt to describe it, and, to tell the whole truth, the darkness prevented me from seeing it very clearly.

*Yezdikhast.*¹

The only other curious thing on the way to Ispahan is Yezdikhast, a quaint old town perched on the top of a precipitous rock, and yet at the same time on a level with the surrounding plain. This sounds a paradox, but it can easily be explained. A river has worn in the plain a deep precipitous ravine about 350 yards broad, but an abrupt block of conglomerate 300 yards long, harder than its surroundings, has resisted the action of the water and remains a natural fortress, very useful for defensive purposes on condition of no artillery being used. Every inch of the top has been utilized for buildings, except a narrow, longitudinal strip in the middle which serves as a thoroughfare, and even this is more like a tunnel than a street. At one end of it a drawbridge connects the rock with the bank of the ravine and the outer world. What adds to the curious look of the place is, that the natural rock and the dried bricks used as building material are of the same colour, so that for a spectator outside it is difficult to say where the rock ends and the buildings on the edge begin. Altogether a curious place, to be recommended to those who are in search of "old-world bits."

Ispahan.

Towards afternoon on the fourth day after leaving Shiraz, I reached the top of a low range of hills, and saw before me on the plain, straggling along the banks of a pretty river, a great city with blue bespangled domes, and little patches of verdure among the masses of brown houses. This, I knew, must be Ispahan, and, despite my impatience to arrive at my destination, I stood for a long time admiring the scene. To me it seemed much more beautiful than Shiraz, and, with all due deference to the immortal poets who have made Shiraz the theme of their enthusiastic verses, I retain this opinion. The great advantage which Ispahan possesses is, that it has a river flowing through its midst, and the want of this in Shiraz is hardly compensated for by a distant view of a great lake. The poets were, I suspect, influenced by personal associations. Whatever one may think of the comparative merits of the two places, there is no doubt that the inhabitants of Shiraz are naturally more sympathetic to persons of a poetical temperament than the Ispahanis. The Shirazis are for the most part light-hearted, sociable people, loving good cheer and jovial company, and apt to forget the injunctions of their religion, ament refraining from wine and other intoxicating liquors. The Ispahanis, on the contrary, incline rather to the commercial ideal, their prominent characteristics being indicated by the well-known old story of the Ispahani merchant who fed his servants on dry bread and put the cheese provided for them into a bottle, advising them to rub their bread outside, so that they might in a certain sense enjoy without consuming the expensive delicacy! Whether the native merchants of to-day maintain this ancient reputation for niggardly frugality I cannot say, for I did not remain long enough to make the acquaintance of any of them; but I am quite sure that the biggest foreign merchant in the place, a hospitable German, had no leanings in that direction. He kindly acted towards me the part of the good Samaritan, and was constantly giving me agreeable proofs that Ispahan was after all

¹ Two views of Yezdikhast appeared in the January number of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, pp. 327, 329.—ED.

not so very far out of the world, by providing me with all manner of European comforts, including an unlimited supply of excellent Vienna beer. Being greatly surprised to find such a beverage on the banks of the Zendarud, I inquired how it got there, and was informed that it had been brought by sea from Trieste to Bushire, and thence on the backs of mules by the same road along which I had been travelling. How any bottles were fortunate enough to survive the passage of the Piri-Zan I cannot imagine; but I was assured by my host that the breakage in transport is trifling, a fact that reflects great credit on the Persian muleteers. So far as natural obstacles are concerned it would be much easier to bring such things by the Black Sea and the Caspian, but on that route the Russian custom-houses intervene. In order to preserve Persia as a happy hunting ground for her own manufacturers, Russia refuses, as I have already said, to allow the transit of European manufactured goods through the Caucasus, and consequently it is only through the southern ports, or by the long overland route through Turkey, that Persia can carry on trade with Western Europe. Hence, from the commercial point of view, the great desirability of opening that Karun route of which I have already spoken. It would bring Ispahan and Teheran nearer to the sea-coast by several days.

A Visit to the Zil, Eldest Son of the Shah.

In Ispahan there are not many recognized "sights" which a tourist must visit, and I had little or no time to visit the few that exist, for my impatient, importunate friend in Teheran was telegraphing to me daily to "hurry up." I found time, however, to stroll about a good deal in the streets and bazaars, and to pay a visit to the Prince-Governor, the Zil-es-Sultan, who is one of the most interesting personages in Persia. The Zil, as he is familiarly called, is the eldest son of the Shah, but as his mother was a mere peasant girl when the king of kings first deigned to cast eyes upon her, the title and prospects of heir-apparent belong to a younger brother, whose mother is a princess of the blood. It is generally believed that, so far as personal qualities and administrative capacities are concerned, the peasant-girl's son has unquestionably the better right to the throne, and it is often asserted—rightly or wrongly I cannot pretend to say—that at the death of the present Shah the succession will probably be disputed. However this may be it is certain that there is a rivalry between the two brothers, the Zil being regarded as the representative of good government and national progress, and the Veli-aht, or heir-apparent, as the representative of conservative stagnation and priestly influence. Besides this the Zil is supposed to be a partisan of England, while his brother is believed to have strong Russian proclivities. In mentioning these popular conceptions I have no wish to attribute to them very much importance, for I have generally found that in the East, still more perhaps than in the West, the popular political horoscopes of young princes are very liable to be belied by events. Heirs-apparent rarely fulfil as sovereigns the good or bad expectations entertained of them before their accession, partly perhaps because the expectations never had much real basis, and partly perhaps because fuller knowledge and a sense of responsibility naturally produce a change in a man's opinions and principles of action. It may well be that the Zil is an ambitious man, for he is an Oriental of far more than average energy and ability, who has already tasted the sweets of power; but it does not necessarily follow that in the event of his father's death he would strike a blow for the throne. On the other hand, it must be admitted, that some facts might be adduced in support of this idea, and a year or two ago these facts were cleverly used by his enemies at Court with the result that he was suspected by the Shah of harbouring treasonable designs, and he consequently fell into disgrace. At that time he was Governor-General of Southern Persia, with a considerable military force under his command, and having over-estimated his influence at Court, he resigned his office in the conviction that he would thereby strengthen his position. To his astonishment his resignation was accepted, and when he was afterwards in a certain sense reappointed, he was granted merely an insignificant part of the power which he had previously possessed. Many people believe that his prospects are now completely shipwrecked, and that he has become what diplomats call "*une quantité négligeable.*" Still, I was anxious to see a man of whom I had heard so much, and I was glad to receive, after my arrival at Ispahan, an intimation that his Highness would be happy to receive me in the afternoon. At the appointed hour I arrived on horseback at the palace, and was conducted

through a long series of courts and passages to a hall tastefully decorated in the Persian style, in the centre of which was a small tank with a fountain. Here, close to the fountain, sat the Prince, in a plain semi-official costume, and at his side a gentleman who was evidently a European, and who turned out to be his Highness's French physician. When I entered the Prince rose, and as he returned my salaam I was struck by the haughty dignity of his demeanour, and by a curious cynical expression which was anything but agreeable or sympathetic. This is, I was afterwards told, the expression he habitually wears at public functions, but he can be extremely agreeable when he likes, and of this he soon gave me ample proof. Before we had finished sipping our first cup of coffee his features had relaxed, and by the time we had reached the second cigarette he had become quite pleasant, and had shown me that he was by no means destitute of a certain sense of humour. One answer which I gave him I had purposely framed in such a way that it might be taken either as a most commonplace remark or as a covert allusion to recent events in his career. For a moment he looked at me with a stern, hard, searching glance, as if to inquire what my real meaning was, and then he seemed to conclude from my face that something more than a commonplace remark was intended, for he began to talk of the events which were in my mind. For obvious reasons I refrain from reproducing the conversation, but I may, without indiscretion, indicate briefly the general conclusions to be drawn from the Prince's remarks: that in his recent fall he had been the victim of intrigue and calumny, that he understood the real interests of his country, and that he had these interests sincerely at heart.

The general aspect of Ispahan is thoroughly oriental. Near the Governor's palace there are some fine mosques, large squares and wide avenues planted with trees, while the rest of the town is composed of narrow lanes confined between blank, windowless walls, in accordance with Mussulman notions of domestic privacy. Some of the lanes and streets are bisected by a stream of running water, and this constitutes a very agreeable feature when the channels are kept clean and the flow of water is abundant; but it is not at all pleasant when the stream assumes, as it often does, the nature and peculiarities of a common sewer. The Armenian Christians, who form a large proportion of the inhabitants, have adopted for their domestic architecture the same style as their Mussulman fellow-townsmen—all the windows of their houses looking into an inner court, and nothing but a blank wall and a strong door being seen from the public highway. They are said to be an indolent people, subsisting chiefly on the subsidies sent them by well-to-do relations who have emigrated, and found in foreign countries a favourable field for the remarkable commercial aptitudes of their race. As Christians they enjoy the highly-cherished privilege of drinking wine and other alcoholic beverages, and they take care that this privilege does not lapse by prescription. We may, perhaps, hope for better things in the next generation; for many of the children receive a good, sound education in the English Mission School, under the able direction of the learned Dr. Bruce; but probably most of these educated youths will seek their fortunes abroad and leave the stay-at-home community pretty much what it is. The ambitious lad who sees no scope for his talents in a Persian provincial town, and who has heard a hundred times the old stories about Armenian Whittingtons leaving Julfa with a few coppers in their pockets and rising to be famous merchant-princes in Calcutta and other great commercial cities, naturally dreams of making such a career for himself. If the great commercial resurrection which some people are at present anxiously looking for in Persia ever really takes place, all this will be changed; and the educated young Armenian will find congenial and lucrative occupation nearer home. Already in the Telegraph Department some places which were formerly reserved for Europeans are ably filled by Armenians of Julfa. The late Persian ambassador in London, one of the most able and respected dignitaries of the kingdom, was originally a Julfa boy.

The Road to Teheran.

I had intended to remain only thirty-six hours in Ispahan, but I was kept waiting twenty-four hours longer by the post-master. This delay left me only three days for the journey of three hundred miles to Teheran. On condition of finding tolerably good horses at all the post-stations the journey could easily be made in that time. As there were evidently plenty of travellers on the road it was much more likely that at

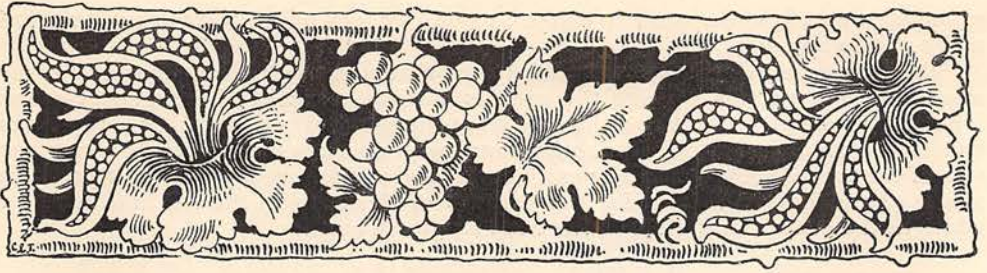
some of the stations I should find only tired horses or no horses at all : and so it turned out. Instead of going along comfortably at the regulation pace of eight miles an hour, I often found it impossible to maintain half that pace. A general idea of the journey may perhaps be conveyed by a short extract from my waistcoat-pocket diary :—

“*Thursday.* I start at 7.30, and after nearly an hour’s jostling through narrow streets and crowded markets I get clear of struggling Ispahan. Towards sunset I reach a range of high hills—they are sometimes called mountains—and as night closes in I have to go slowly, for the path is often steep and always rough, and experience has taught me that in the dark all Persian post-horses are not as sure-footed as could be wished. About 9.30 I get to the camp of an English telegraph official who, in spite of being unceremoniously roused out of his first sleep, receives me cordially and offers me refreshment. He kindly invites me to spend the night in his tent, but I determine to push on. Near the top of the pass, where I find large patches of snow, the moon rises and supplies good light for the descent to the village of Kohrud. Finding horses there, I veto the suggestion of my servant who thinks we have done enough for one day, and decide to go on at once.

“*Friday.* I descend slowly for several hours in the bed of a stream, through a fine rocky gorge, which is at one point dammed across to form a large reservoir, and reach the town of Kashan shortly after sunrise. My Tartar servant looks an utter wreck, but after giving him an hour’s rest I push on all day, and in the evening get to the curious old town of Koom. Here I spend an hour with a hospitable telegraph official, who makes me acquainted with the agreeable light wine of the country. Continue my journey with good, fresh horses and an active, intelligent postboy who knew his business thoroughly, but finding it impossible to keep awake even at the gallop, I call a halt at Rahmetabad, and make arrangements for having four hours’ sleep. It is thirty-nine hours since I left Ispahan.

“*Saturday.* Up at half-past three and off before five ! Riding on ahead I take a wrong road and thereby lose two hours, but eventually I find a guide to conduct me across country to the post-station, where I find my servant and baggage. The next stage lies through a rather pretty country, and at the end of it I am detained two or three hours for horses. When I do get them they look a weedy, tired lot ; and my apprehensions as to their breaking down on the road are only too fully justified. The pack-horse can hardly be induced to go beyond a walk, and before we have gone a third of the way my servant runs up to me on foot and declares that his horse won’t move a step further. Taking the only good horse of the lot, I gallop on alone, with the intention of sending back fresh animals for those whom I leave behind. A good supply of horses at the next post-station enables me to carry out this intention, and at the same time to push on without delay, and for more than an hour we gallop along in splendid style, but then it gradually becomes very dark, and we have to moderate our pace. I confess to having always a foolish feeling of delicious exhilarating excitement when galloping quickly along through the thick darkness, trusting to the good eyes and sagacity of the horse to find his way, but the postboy will generally decline to risk the breaking of his horse’s legs and his own neck to afford you this satisfaction. Long before reaching my wished-for destination, I have to rein in both my steed and my impatience, and to content myself first with an amble, and then with a jog-trot. At last, near midnight, the postboy halts, and I see before me the dim outline of a large massive building. This is the city gate, but alas ! the great door is shut and there is no sign of light or movement within. We knock lustily and long, and when on the point of retiring in despair we hear a gruff, sleepy voice inquiring who is there ? I reply that I am an Englishman, and that the English ambassador is expecting my arrival. Slowly and cautiously the bolts are withdrawn, and I am allowed to advance a few steps. The sleepy guardian, after consulting with one of his fellows, admits that orders have been received to let an Englishman pass into the British Legation, but I must show a ‘*ruznameh*’—a document to prove that I am the Englishman in question. It is impossible for me to comply with this request, but I suggest that a few small pieces of silver might serve the same purpose, and the suggestion is warmly approved. I was not yet, however, quite at the end of my journey, for after leaving the gateway I seemed to be again in the open country, and I had still nearly an hour’s ride before reaching the Legation, where my visions of a good supper and a comfortable bed were fully realized.”

(*To be continued.*)



OVERLAND FROM INDIA.

(Concluded.)

By SIR DONALD MACKENZIE WALLACE, K.C.I.E.

III.—A THOUSAND-MILE RIDE ACROSS PERSIA.—Continued.

Teheran.



TEHERAN has often been described before, and is not a particularly interesting city. It was quite an insignificant place until about a century ago, when the new dynasty of the Khajars made it their capital. We must not expect, therefore, to find in it either venerable remains of ancient history as at Persepolis, or great architectural works of the best period as at Ispahan. The Khajars are a Tartar race more gifted with rude energy than artistic taste, and long before they rose from obscurity the creative art of Persia had far passed its zenith. Artistic feeling,

however, and to a certain extent artistic execution, may still be found among the Persians; and the tourist in search of the beautiful in art will even now be rewarded for a diligent search in the streets and bazaars of the modern Persian capital. But the general aspect of the city is not at all imposing. The older part is the ordinary labyrinth of narrow, crooked lanes which is commonly found in Oriental towns, with here and there an open space decorated with trees and a tank. The newer quarter, on the contrary, delights in broad, straight avenues with numerous walled gardens, which give it a semi-suburban look. This semi-suburban look naturally increases as we approach the outskirts, and in some parts we have to pass through cultivated fields before we reach the city walls. The whole place has thus an unfinished appearance as if it were still growing, and many people will tell you that in reality it is growing very fast both in numbers and prosperity, but I did not remain long enough to form any independent judgment on this point.

Teheran has, however, at all times one peculiarity which can atone for many defects—a magnificent view of the great Shirman range close at hand, with the splendid, snow-capped conical peak of Demavend towering up to a height of nearly 20,000 feet. And these high mountains are not merely picturesque adjuncts of the city, they protect it from the cold north winds in winter; they give it cool breezes in the hot weather; they supply it with an abundance of beautiful clear water, which an extremely dry climate makes peculiarly grateful; and they afford the richer inhabitants delightful summer retreats. All the members of the Corps Diplomatique, and many of the native dignitaries, have their summer quarters on the lower slopes, within an easy ride of the Legations and the public offices.

From Teheran the direct route to Western Europe lies through Kasvin to Resht and Enzeli, on the southern shore of the Caspian, where one gets a Russian steamer to Baku. From Baku there is a railway through Tiflis to Batoum, on the Black Sea, and there one finds steamers either to Constantinople or to Odessa, both of which are connected by rail with Paris. Having been already four years and a half absent from England I felt much inclined to take one of these direct routes by which I could reach home comfortably in a fortnight, but I had received permission from the Russian

Government to visit Merv and Bokhara by the new Trans-Caspian Railway, and I felt that such a good opportunity of getting a peep at Russian Central Asia ought not to be thrown away. I decided, therefore, to make for Uzun Ada, the railway-terminus on the Caspian, but I unexpectedly found great difficulty in obtaining the requisite information as to how I could get there. It seemed pretty certain that I must embark either at Meshed-i-Ser or at Bender-i-Gaz, but a truly Oriental vagueness pervaded the minds of the best authorities regarding the roads to these two ports, and the movements of the steamers touching at them. Meshed-i-Ser was evidently by far the nearer of the two, but on inquiry I discovered that the road to it was very bad and very poorly supplied with post-horses, and that the so-called "port" was an open roadstead capable of being used only in calm weather. Thus it was very uncertain how long I should take to reach the "port"; and supposing I arrived in time, it was doubtful whether the sea would be calm enough to admit of my getting on board. The idea of sitting idle for a week, or perhaps a fortnight, in a miserable little village built on a feverish swamp was not at all agreeable; and I felt it would be better to ride a hundred miles or so further to Bender-i-Gaz, where the steamers can touch in all weathers. Unfortunately on this route likewise there was an element of uncertainty. No one could say confidently how long the journey would take. By the advice of the best authorities I allowed myself eight days, and I did it in five days and a half.

The Meshed Road.

In the first place I had to ride some two hundred miles by the galloping post on what may be called the Great Eastern road which leads to Meshed. I had been warned that the post on this road was very badly organized, and at the end of the first stage I had a disagreeable proof that the warning was well-founded. The post-master was absent; the horses in the stable were lean, miserable, tired animals; and the post-boy would not undertake to start before midnight. Being impatient to get on I opened negotiations with some Jews in the village close by, and soon concluded an arrangement by which I should get horses from them at once. So far all was well; but when the horses were brought to the station to be loaded the post-boys raised objections, and a free fight ensued. For some time I tried to restore order and effect a compromise, but I had to give up the attempt in despair: both parties had evidently old scores to pay off, and considered that a general day of reckoning had come. Only once did I interfere actively, at the risk of coming in for a share of the blows. An old Jew, so decrepit that he could hardly walk, tottered into the struggle and began laying about him with a heavy stick as long as himself. Very soon he was knocked over, and seemed in such imminent danger of being beaten to death or strangled that I abandoned for a moment my principles of non-intervention and made a rush with my servant to rescue him. The fight must have lasted more than an hour, with occasional interludes during which the combatants rested so far as their hands and feet were concerned, and like certain heroes of the *Iliad* gave free scope to their tongues. I must say, however, in justice to Homer, that the vituperation of even his most sharp-tongued heroes is mild and refined in comparison with the language used on the occasion I am describing. Though disgusted with the brutality of the scene, and maintaining a strictly neutral attitude, I inwardly hoped the Jews would win so that I might have good horses to continue my journey; and I congratulated myself when they finally remained masters of the field. But my satisfaction was short-lived. The commander of the Hebrews, having routed and silenced the enemy, delivered to his followers in an excited tone an oration, apparently eloquent but to me unintelligible, and then suddenly withdrew his forces. In vain I urged him to follow up and complete his victory by fulfilling his agreement with me, and I even offered to double the sum I had promised. Fired with martial ardour, he had now a soul above bargaining. Without condescending to give me any explanations, he strutted away majestically to his village and I saw him no more. The following stages were by no means so bad, but they were far from satisfactory, and it took me three days to reach Demgan, which cannot be much more than 200 miles from Teheran.

The Road to Bender-i-Gaz.

Here I had to leave the great Eastern post-road and strike northward across the hills to the Caspian. A muleteer with a good team undertook to bring me to Bender-

i-Gaz, the port of Astrabad, in three days, and I made a contract with him accordingly. From the great Meshed road to the Caspian is a journey of about two days and a half. The first day we wound our way slowly up to the top of a range of hills, and then descended into a fine, well-watered valley, where we passed the night in a village built on terraces on a steep hillside. The next day the road was still more beautiful. We began by climbing up to a considerable height, and then went down the bed of a stream through a long, deep, winding gorge, at the end of which I looked back and saw rising to a great height one of the most magnificent walls of rock I had ever beheld. I saw by the way many strange creatures whose character and habits I should have been glad to hear something about. The one that most frequently attracted my attention was a big black beetle, which acted as scavenger on the road, and whose energy and perseverance might fairly challenge comparison with those of the proverbial ant. He was generally to be seen transporting a ball of matter much bigger than himself—rolling it before him when on level ground or on an upward incline, and fixing himself tightly into it when he rolled it down a slope. Often when toiling upwards his precious burden would break away from him and roll down into the hollow, but he would always scamper after it and begin the labour afresh with the calm, dogged determination of a Sisyphus. And it is not merely the perseverance of this little animal that is deserving of admiration. His engineering talent is likewise worthy of respect. When he meets with an obstacle on his way he first tries to turn it, and if this does not succeed he makes a nice smooth road along which his big ball may be rolled.

In the well-wooded valley at the foot of the great wall of rock there were probably plenty of these industrious beetles, but the representative of the animal creation which there chiefly attracted my attention was a creature much more familiar to English eyes—the common magpie. During an hour or two I saw there as many magpies as I have ever seen in England in as many months, or perhaps as many years, and I could not detect in them anything distinguishing them from the European members of the species. When I had seen twenty or thirty of them I remembered the modern augurs who predict joy, grief, marriage, and death by the number of magpies which cross their path; and I could not help thinking that in this pretty valley of the Elbruz these prophets would often find themselves sorely puzzled, and would have to add a good many verses to the doggerel which forms the text for their divinations.

The latter part of the day's journey lay through a valley which, so far as general appearance went, might have been in some remote part of the Scottish Highlands, and this impression was confirmed when I found, near the brink of the "brawling burn," a charming little bit of greensward be-sprinkled with real genuine forget-me-nots. My servant, who generally had reason to lament my inexplicable impatience to push on under all circumstances, could not understand why I should wish to linger in such a spot, where there was nothing to eat and nothing particular to do; but as I could not imagine any Persian equivalents for such expressions as "home associations" and the like, I refrained from attempting to satisfy his curiosity, and I presume he fell back on the common explanation of such recondite phenomena—that British eccentricities are quite unfathomable.

Towards evening we ascended the hillside, and found in the forest a little village where we were to spend the night. At first the inhabitants did not show themselves at all inclined to give us accommodation, but when we told them that we should pay them for everything we might receive, they became much more hospitable, and gave us an empty house in which to spend the night. It looked uninviting, but had at least one advantage over more comfortable quarters—it helped me to comply with the request of the muleteers that next morning we should make a very early start. The reason for this request was that the time required for reaching Bender-i-Gaz was very uncertain. With fine weather and the road in tolerably good condition we might reach it in six or seven hours, but during heavy rains it might take twice as long, or be altogether impossible. Having had some experience of Persian exaggeration, I was a little sceptical about the difficulties so graphically described, but my scepticism was very soon cured. Though there had been no rain for a day, or two, the mules were soon plunging up to their knees in mud, and at some places it was difficult to advance at all.

Our path lay through the great forest that covers the northern slopes of the Elbruz range throughout the whole length of the provinces of Ghilan and Mazanderan. So far as I could observe, nothing is done by the Government or by private individuals

for the regular exploitation of this forest. The young trees have to struggle up without human assistance, and the old ones are allowed to rot, so that if the traveller goes a few yards off the path he probably sinks up to his knees in soft mould, formed by centuries of decomposition—a capital nursery for fevers as well as for new vegetation. A Russian who had built some wooden houses on the shore of the Caspian assured me that the timber was too soft for building purposes, and this may be one of the reasons why it is not more extensively used. This is a question which may be left for decision to the company which has recently been formed for developing the natural resources of Persia: for my own part I confine myself to remarking that from the picturesque point of view the forest is admirable. Nothing could be more beautiful than some of the fine old trees—their gnarled trunks and fantastically twisted branches, covered with ruddy, dark-brown, velvet-like moss, standing out against the delicate, light-green tints of spring foliage. At some of the most beautiful spots I instinctively looked about for a “fairies’ ring,” but truth compels me to admit that I could find no trace of the little elves who would have been here so thoroughly at home. Perhaps in Persia the fairies, like other respectable people, refrain from dancing, and this would account for no fairies’ rings being discovered.

Bender-i-Gaz.

In spite of the bad state of the road we reached our destination early in the afternoon. Bender-i-Gaz turned out to be a mere village, built on a marsh close to the water’s edge, and even the famous harbour did not make the expected impression, because the long spit of sand which protects it from the storms of the Caspian is so low as to be hardly visible from the shore. To the ordinary naked eye all that can be seen is a little low island near the eastern end of the spit. This is Ashurada, which was occupied by the Russians in the time of the Empress Catherine, and which has since been used by them as a naval station. It looks a miserable place, and so near the level of the water that the few wooden buildings which are the only signs of its being inhabited seem in danger of being swept away by the first heavy sea rolling in from the north. In reality, however, there is no danger of such a catastrophe, for the settlement has now existed for about a century, and nothing of the kind, so far as I could learn, has ever occurred.

The Terminus of the Transcaspian Railway.

From Bender-i-Gaz I proceeded on a very comfortable steamer, propelled by petroleum and fitted up with the electric light, to Uzun Ada, the terminus of the famous Transcaspian railway. Here I landed, and made a most interesting tour in Transcaspia and Turkestan, including a visit to Askhabad, Merv, Bokhara, Samarcand, and Tashkent; but as this was a digression, and cannot be regarded as a part of the overland route which I am describing, I refrain from asking the reader to accompany me to those places. On my return to Uzun Ada I took steamer to Astrakhan, and thence sailed up the Volga to Syzran, from whence I came home by rail through Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Berlin. The whole tour, including the Transcaspian digression, had lasted a little over three months. Without such digressions, a well-seasoned traveller, who requires no blank days for rest, and can ride a thousand miles in ten days, might do the journey easily enough in six weeks.