FROM THE GULF TO ARARAT

C. E. HUBBARD

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Our Indian Escort. 18th K.G.O. Lancers.

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From the Gulf to Ararat

An Expedition through Mesopotamia and Kurdistan

BY

G. E. HUBBARD

SECRETARY OF DELIMITATION COMMISSION

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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1917

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PREFACE.

I HAVE to preface this book with an apology—and, worse still, an excuse. The apology is for venturing to publish at the present time the record of a journey which (except for quite the last stage) took place in that almost prehistoric epoch before the war. My excuse is twofold: firstly, that fifteen months of enforced idleness drove me into writing it; and, secondly, that subsequent events have contrived to add a special interest which it could not otherwise have claimed. Although in no sense a "war-book," it deals with countries which have been the scene of two, if not three, campaigns in the present war, and on this fact I rely to justify my temerity.

The first of these campaigns—taking them in the order of our journey from South to North—is the British Expedition to Mesopotamia. Its main features are so well known as barely to need repetition: the landing of our force at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab in November 1914; the battle of Fao and the fall of Basra; the expedition under General Gorringe up the Karûn to

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Ahwaz to safeguard the oil-fields and the pipe-line, ending in the successful "rounding-up" of the Turks at Amara; the storming of Kurna, the advance up the Tigris, the pitched battles at Kut-el-Amara and Ctesiphon, and, last of all, the gallant stand and ultimate surrender of General Townshend's force. But unless one has been to the country, seen the desert and the marsh and the date-groves lining the Tigris, and known—even in its mildest form—the heat of those limitless plains, it is impossible to conjure up any true picture of what our British and Indian troops went through, or fully to realise their extraordinary fortitude. I hope, therefore, to supply in the earlier chapters of my book a slight background for this campaign..

Apart from the actual fighting, moreover, a certain degree of interest must centre around the town of Basra, the port of Mesopotamia and the one important place which we occupy and administer. It is an interest, too, which is hardly likely to vanish with the end of the war. Without hazarding any rash guesses into the future, one may well recall in this respect the words of the Viceroy of India to the people of Basra, spoken during his visit to that town in January 1915: "The British occupation has raised problems which require prompt consideration and settlement. I have come here to see local conditions for myself in order the better to judge what measures are necessary. You are aware that we

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are not engaged single-handed in this great struggle, and we cannot lay down plans for the future without a full exchange of views with the other great Powers, but I can hold out the assurance that the future will bring you a more benign rule."

Coming next to Bagdad, Kasr-i-Sherin, and the Kermanshah road, which form the subject of Chapters VII. and IX., we enter the sphere of quite another series of operations. This was the route by which the Turkish troops entered Persia last year, hoping by joining hands with the German-led Persian rebels to wreck the influence of England and Russia in that country; only to retreat again by the same road after successive defeats by the Russians at Hamadan, Kangaver, and Kermanshah. At the time of writing, General Baratoff's troops have reached and taken Kasr-i-Sherin itself.

Finally, the Northern part—that is, Azerbaijan. The details of the fighting there are probably less familiar to people in England, but it will be remembered how in the autumn of 1914 the Turks, who were just then making a bold attempt to reach Tiflis, violated the Persian frontier near Urmia. The story of the wholesale massacre of the Christian (Nestorian) population by the Kurdish irregulars—who ravaged as far as Tabriz, burning hundreds of villages and driving the weak Russian

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garrison out of the province for the time being—reached us only in scanty paragraphs and an occasional letter or two in the Press. Of the events in the immediate neighbourhood of Urmia, I give a brief account in the last chapter of the book. As the tide slowly turned against Turkey in the Caucasus, and the Russians advanced towards Trebizond and Van, the invaders of Azerbaijan found their position untenable, and by the spring they were back again on their own side of the frontier. Thus have the tentacles of the great world-war reached out to and embraced practically the whole of that remote region of Western Asia which was the scene of the journey described in the following pages.

The substance of this book consists of little more than a record of personal experiences and impressions of the tribes and countries through which we passed. Politics lie outside its scope, and I have condensed within the limits of a single chapter what little I have to say on such general topics as the connection between our own country and Mesopotamia. Even the thrilling adventures which season so many travellers' tales play, I fear, but a small part in my narrative, and the utmost that I can confidently promise the reader is to conduct him (should his patience permit) by little-trodden paths "from the Gulf to Ararat."

MAY 1916.

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NOTE.

THE majority of the photographs which illustrate this book were taken by Captain Brooke, who has kindly allowed me to use them for this purpose; for a great number of the remainder I am indebted to Mr Wratislaw.

Captain Wilson has been of the greatest help to me in many ways, in particular by lending me his notes on various districts.

Finally, I have to thank Mr W. Foster, C.I.E., of the India Office, for enabling me to consult extracts from the early records of the Honourable East India Company, and the Editor of 'The Near East' for the loan of old files dealing with irrigation in Mesopotamia.

I have acknowledged assistance from other writers in the body of the book.

G. E. H.

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FROM THE GULF TO ARARAT.

CHAPTER I.

THE FRONTIER.

In the autumn of 1914, a few weeks after the outbreak of the War, a small party consisting of Englishmen, Russians, Turks, and Persians arrived on a snow-clad spur of Mount Ararat, constructed an unobtrusive stone pillar beneath the shadow of the great 17,000-foot peak, and swiftly dispersed, each to his own country. Such (thanks to the Hun) were the inglorious circumstances which attended the culminating act of seventy odd years of diplomatic *pourparlers*, special commissions, and international conferences between the four Powers concerned.

To give more than the barest outline of the history of the Turco-Persian frontier question during those seventy years is manifestly out of the question; the dossier containing its record being, I verily believe, of a length to stretch from

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end to end of the entire 1180 miles which constitute the actual frontier. At the same time, a short summary is, I think, excusable, firstly, in order to explain the origin of our journey; secondly, as an example (though happily not a very typical one) of the way a frontier comes into being; and thirdly, as a phenomenon of procrastination unparalleled even in the chronicles of Oriental diplomacy. Fate has contrived, moreover, to stage this particular scrap of history in her most dramatic style by arranging a "curtain" for each one of the three principal acts in the shape of a European war—the Crimean, the Russo-Turkish, and lastly the Armageddon of to-day.

You may trace on a map of Western Asia a dark line of mountains which, after disentangling itself from the confused mountain-mass of Armenia around Ararat, stretches S.S.E. to near the top right-hand corner of the Persian Gulf. On the map it looks, perhaps, rather a smudge than a line, for it spreads out to a great breadth in a series of parallel ranges. But the backbone or "chaine magistrale"—to borrow an expressive phrase—is in reality fairly clearly defined, and constitutes a huge barrier, difficult to cross in summer and impassable in winter, separating the great Persian plateau from the plains of Mesopotamia. It is, in fact—like the Alps or the Pyrenees, or, on a far larger scale, the Himalayas—one of Nature's frontiers, and nations have conformed to it as such from the

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earliest historical times. It served as a boundary on the East for Assyria, and on the West for Media. Often, of course, the countries on either side have been temporarily united within a single empire, as, for instance, when Alexander from the one side thrust through to India, or Khosroe from the other extended his dominions to the shores of the Mediterranean, or again when a human avalanche under Chengiz Khan or Tamerlane engulfed everything, and swept all frontiers clean out of existence. But sooner or later this great mountain range has invariably resumed its original *rôle* as a divider of nations, and in this capacity it has always formed the basis of the frontier negotiations between the Governments of Turkey and Persia.

These two Empires first came into contact early in the sixteenth century. At that time Persia was rapidly recovering from the devastation of the Mongol invasions, and finding again her entity as a nation. Her *risorgimento* happened to correspond with the amazing wave of success which carried the Ottoman armies as far afield as Egypt and Tunis, and, eventually, up to the very gates of Vienna. Suleyman the Magnificent, turning his attention momentarily towards the East, conquered Northern Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, and marched his armies down to Bagdad, which he captured in the year 1534. Then the tide turned in favour of the Persians. Shah Abbas—their Charlemagne—retook most of the Northern pro-

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vinces, expelled the Turks from Bagdad, and established a frontier along the Tigris. The pendulum having thus swung both ways, finally came to rest in 1639, when Murad IV. definitely won Bagdad for Turkey, and settled the frontier by treaty along very much the same line as it follows to-day.

It was almost exactly two hundred years later that England and Russia first became involved in the Turco-Persian frontier dispute. Murad's treaty had by then disappeared, the Turkish original having been destroyed in one of the big fires which are such frequent events at Stamboul, the Persian in one of the revolutionary upheavals of hardly rarer occurrence at the Persian capital. In 1842 frontier frays on a large scale brought the two countries to the brink of war. The Persians complained of an unprovoked attack by the Turkish ruler of Suleymania on their subject, the Vali of Ardelân, while the Turks retorted that the fertile district of Zohab, assured to them by the treaty of 1639, was still occupied and held by Persia. Another incident which had helped to bring matters to a crisis was an attack on Mohammerah by the Pasha of Bagdad, an account of which last exploit from the diary of General Tchirikoff is perhaps worth quoting as a sample of Arab warfare :—

"Ali Riza Pasha led his force from Bagdad down the right bank of the Tigris, conveying his provisions and supplies in boats.

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"For the defence of Mohammerah the whole Chaab tribe assembled to the number of about 25,000, as is asserted with evident exaggeration. The town was filled with them, those who could not find room in it occupying a piece of ground on the left between the palms and the desert.

"Ali Riza Pasha opened fire on the town with his artillery without delay. The Arabs replied from the wall with their gun, and with fire from small arms. But the fire of neither side carried far enough. Ali Riza Pasha went to his artillerymen, reproved them for firing so badly and for not putting enough powder in the guns, and promised 5000 piastres to any one who knocked over the gun in the town. Soon afterwards the Mohammerah gun burst, probably owing to the inexperience of the Arabs in regard to artillery, and to overcharging. Several men near the gun were killed. The Turks thought their fire had destroyed the gun, and they even name a young artilleryman, who, they say, fired a ball into a ball which had not yet left the Arab gun, and thus caused the latter to burst. This event produced a panic among the Arabs. The Turks then made an attack in three divisions, the artillery in the centre, one regiment of infantry on the right, the other, with the Muntefik, on the left.

"The defenders of the town all ran away before the Turks reached the walls. Thus the town was taken without fighting. Slaughtering and plunder

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followed. The town and all the surrounding villages were burnt down."

Events such as these naturally did not conduce to amity between the two nations, and it was the state of affairs which resulted therefrom that first brought Great Britain and Russia on to the scene.

Russia, having doubtless in mind the tranquillity of her newly acquired provinces of Armenia and Georgia, wished if possible to avert a war; nor could Great Britain, with her millions of Indian subjects and her trade interests in the Gulf, afford to look quietly on while the two Mussulman neighbours went for each other's throats. It must be remembered that Persia was at that period a military Power, and possibly quite a match for Turkey, enfeebled as she then was by two recent wars.

At this time Sir Stratford Canning — "the Great Elchi," as he came to be called—was our Ambassador at Constantinople, and his unique influence with the Porte, combined with that of his Russian colleague, was successful in inducing the Turkish Government to substitute the pen for the sword. The Persian Government having consented too, a commission was convened at Erzeroum to discuss the frontier question. Great Britain was represented by three Commissioners—Colonel Williams (the famous defender of Kars in the Crimean War), Major Farrant, and the Hon. Robert Curzon,[1] a cousin of the ex-Viceroy of

[1] Author of 'Visits to Monasteries of the Levant.'

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India. The last-named (whose literary genius admits of a fair comparison with that of the immortal Kinglake) has left in his 'Armenia' a vivid account of the extraordinary rigours and discomforts of the journey from Constantinople across the Black Sea to Trebizond, and from there on horseback over the mountains to Erzeroum, as well as of the rough, not to say dangerous, existence of the three Englishmen in that bleak Armenian town. He describes the primitive dwelling—half house, half stable—where the Commissioners were lodged in the company of a mixed society of nineteen lambs (who spent the day taking the air on the roof), one hen, a white Persian cat with her tail stained pink with henna, and a lemming "who passed his life in a brass-bound foot-tub." That any of the Commission survived to tell the tale is remarkable. The Persian representative was attacked by a furious mob of some thousands of Sunnis and besieged in his house for several hours; Curzon's two British colleagues were so nearly suffocated by charcoal fumes in their semi-subterranean home that they were only rescued in a fainting condition by the Russian Commissioner coming to pay a call; while Curzon himself had the following hair-breadth escape:—

"Mirza Jaffer, an old acquaintance of mine when he was Ambassador from Persia to the Porte, was too unwell to leave Tabriz, and Mirza Tekee was appointed Persian Plenipotentiary in-

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stead. On his arrival within sight of Erzeroum from Persia, all the great people, except the Pasha and the Commissioners, went out on horseback to meet him and accompany him on his entry into the town. There was a great concourse and a prodigious firing of guns at full gallop, which, as the guns are generally loaded with ball cartridge bought ready-made in the bazaar, though intended as an honour, is a somewhat dangerous display. Unable to resist so picturesque a sight, I had ridden out on the Persian road, though I did not join the escort, and, having returned, I was walking up and down on the roof of the house watching the crowds passing in the valley below, and looking at the great guns of the citadel which the soldiers were firing as a salute. They fired very well, in very good time, but I observed several petty officers and a number of men busily employed at one gun, the last to the left near the corner of the battery. At length this gun was loaded. A prodigious deal of peeping and pointing took place out of the embrasure, and, just as I was turning in my walk, bang went the cannon, and I was covered with dust from something which struck the ground in the yard in a line below my feet. On looking down to see what this could be, I saw a ball stuck in the earth; the soldiers had all disappeared from the ramparts of the citadel, and I found they had been *taking a shot at the British Commissioner.*"

But to return to our subject. The joint Com-

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mission sat at Erzeroum for four years, examining documents and interviewing important witnesses such as the Governor of Zohab and the Sheikh of Mohammerah, who travelled thither to give evidence. In 1847 their labours culminated in the Treaty of Erzeroum, by which the broad points at issue were settled, and a Commission of Delimitation was appointed to lay down the frontier on the spot.

This new Commission, on which Great Britain was represented by Colonel Williams alone, met at Bagdad in 1848, and proceeded to the southern end of the frontier. How evil a reputation for lawlessness the frontier then enjoyed is shown by the fact that their escort was settled at two battalions of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, and two guns, to be provided by each of the principal parties. Ostentation must, however, have been the chief motive when a gunboat with six guns was specially built to carry Dervish Pasha, the Ottoman Commissioner, from Bagdad to Mohammerah. Colonel Williams arrived at the latter place on the East India Company's *Nicrotis*, and after a great firing of salutes, as is reported, their work began.

From 1848 till 1852 they spent in travelling spasmodically up and down the frontier, their work delayed and disorganised by the obstructiveness of both the principals, and in particular by the erratic movements of Dervish Pasha—an over-zealous patriot, who thought to serve his

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country's cause by breaking away periodically on "tours of investigation," in the course of which he would erect a line of boundary pillars to suit his own personal views. At the same time the frontier zone was surveyed by British and Russian engineers, but all the efforts of Lord Palmerston and the Russian Foreign Minister could not reconcile the rival parties sufficiently to allow of a line being laid down on the ground.

The only records, so far as I know, of that journey exist in the Diary of General Tchirikoff, the Russian representative, which was published later by his own Government, and in a book devoted principally to archæological discoveries by Mr W. K. Loftus, an English archæologist attached to the Commission during part of its travels. Even Colonel Williams' official report is not extant, as that valuable record of four years' arduous toil, having reached England, had the misfortune to be dropped overboard near Gravesend, and found a sepulchre in the mud of the Thames. Negotiations continued after the Commission's return to Constantinople for rather more than a year, when the Crimean War broke out and brought them to an abrupt end.

When the war was over the frontier question was almost at once resumed. The first thing to do was to make a large-scale map of the frontier zone. For this purpose Commander Glascott, R.N., who had made the British survey, went to St

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Petersburg, where he and the Russian surveyors worked at their respective maps till 1865. When at last the maps were ready they were—apparently for the first time—compared, the result being that by the time eight out of the seventeen sheets which composed each set had been examined, four thousand discrepancies in names, places, &c., were discovered. As it was clearly useless for the purpose in question to have two maps which were so very discordant, the surveyors returned to their drawing tables and, by some surprising feat of cartography, so manipulated the two versions as to produce a single copy known henceforth by the euphemistic title of the *Carte Identique*. This map, executed on a scale of one inch to a mile, was completed in 1869, just twenty years after the first surveys were begun,—its English co-author having in the course of his labours risen from the rank of lieutenant to that of post-captain in the Royal Navy—a unique record, one may reasonably suppose, in the annals of the science. The share of this country alone in the cost of production ran well into five figures.

Now that the representatives of the Mohammedan Powers could sit in academic comfort round a map and discuss things free from the petty vexations of Oriental travel, there seemed at last every hope of a satisfactory end to the dispute. But after five more years of negotiation and correspondence, the only progress made was an admission by Turkey and Persia that

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the frontier lay "somewhere within" the zone (a strip averaging twenty-five miles wide) represented on the map, and an undertaking not to erect any new buildings or otherwise prejudice each other's claims within that strip.[1] The explanation is perhaps to be found in those influences which Lord Curzon summed up as follows in his Romanes Lecture in 1907 on "Frontiers." "In Asia," he said, "there has always been a strong instinctive aversion to the acceptance of fixed boundaries, arising partly from the nomadic habits of the people, partly from the dislike of precise arrangements that is typical of the Oriental mind, but more still from the idea that in the vicissitudes of fortune more is to be expected from an unsettled than from a settled frontier."

Fresh frontier incidents were continually cropping up meanwhile. Anxious to avoid a rupture, England and Russia again intervened, and appointed delegates to assist in the discussion, the British delegate being General Sir Arnold

[1] This stipulation, though frequently broken in other ways, was adhered to *au pied de la lettre* in one rather humorous instance. It was proposed to link up the two countries by a line of telegraph wires along the Bagdad-Kermanshah route. Here, as almost everywhere, there was a strip of territory to which each side laid jealous claim, and a terrible difficulty arose. Turkish telegraph wires are carried on iron posts, Persian on wooden sticks (one can hardly grace them with a more imposing name). To set up a row of either across the debatable strip might prejudice the other side's claim. A solution of truly Oriental ingenuity was found to the problem—the line was put up with iron posts and wooden sticks *set alternately*.

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Kemball. By a process familiar to any one who has watched the making of purchases in an Oriental bazaar, the two lines representing the rival claims on the map approached closer and closer by infinitesimal degrees. The *pazarluk* was almost concluded in 1877, when for the second time fate stepped in. The Servian War broke out, to be followed immediately after by the Russo-Turkish campaign.

After the Treaty of Berlin the frontier question was soon resumed, and once more a mixed Commission, including Sir Arnold Kemball, made the arduous journey to the frontier,—this time to investigate a local dispute concerning Kotur, a district not far from the new Russian boundary. Their efforts were entirely abortive, thanks to Turkish obstinacy, which has remained so persistent in the matter that this particular stretch of frontier (some thirty miles in length) had to be skipped over when the whole of the rest was finally demarcated in 1914.

By 1885 the British Government had spent, it is reckoned, over £100,000 in one way or another over the Turco-Persian frontier, with nothing to show for it except a few copies of a gaudily coloured map some twenty yards long and of doubtful accuracy, and the creation of a theoretical "frontier zone" which one of the parties at least made poor pretence of respecting.

There is nothing in particular to record besides a succession of unedifying disputes until 1906,

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when Persia's internal troubles became acute, and provided her neighbour with precisely one of those opportunities indicated in Lord Curzon's words already quoted. Turkey was quick to seize the chance, and before long her troops were twenty or thirty miles across the usually recognised frontier and deep into the Persian provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. These inroads continued for several years.

In the meantime the Anglo-Russian agreement was concluded, and Russia's sphere of influence in North Persia being now officially recognised, these violations of Persian territory became matters of concern to her as well as to the injured party. On one occasion a Turkish force actually came into collision with Russian garrison troops in Azerbaijan. Things were made worse by the waning of the power of the Persian Constitutional Government, and by 1913 so many regrettable incidents had occurred that yet again a Turco-Persian Commission met at Constantinople. Their sittings were so barren of results that again British and Russian mediation was called in. But this time the old farce was not to be allowed to repeat itself. Both the European Powers had now far more at stake: Russia because of her position in Azerbaijan, and England, among other reasons, because of the concession obtained by a British company for the monopoly of oil workings through a large part of Persia, some of the principal oil-fields discovered

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up till then being situated on debatable ground near the frontier zone. The energy of the respective Ambassadors at Constantinople had its result, and on November 4, 1913, a Protocol was signed by the Grand Vizier of Turkey and the Ambassadors of the three other Powers laying down summarily the frontier between the two Empires. A difficulty sprang up about the maps. Not one copy of the famous Carte Identique was forthcoming. The Turkish copy had, it appeared, been purloined by Izzet Pasha, the celebrated secretary of Sultan Abdul Hamid, for reasons best known to himself and his imperial master. All the other copies had disappeared. At length a battered tin cylinder, which for years had been accumulating dust in some corner of the British Legation at Teheran, was opened and revealed the searched-for map. The topographical difficulties were still too great, however, to allow of the frontier line being actually marked. At one place, for instance, the Turks resolutely claimed as their boundary a river whose name appeared on no map, and about whose position—or even existence—no one could give the slightest information. Farther south, for a distance of nearly 250 miles, the country was so uninhabited and little known that no data could be obtained on which to base even a general description of the frontier. The next step was to appoint a Commission of Delimitation, with the duty of settling the

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frontier line on the spot wherever it had been left vague and of demarcating the whole by putting up boundary pillars. British and Russian Commissioners were to participate in this, but under very different circumstances to those of the 1848 Commission. Their position—to borrow a metaphor from the "ring"—was changed from that of seconds to that of referees; in diplomatic parlance, they were attached as "arbitrating" instead of "mediating" members, and it was agreed that whenever the principals could not come to terms about any particular section of the line, they must refer the difference within forty-eight hours to the British and Russian members to arbitrate upon. The effect is illustrated strikingly enough by the fact that the 1913-1914 Commission finished the whole work, including a complete new survey of the frontier and the erection of two hundred and twenty-three pillars, in well under twelve months, as against the three years occupied by the peregrinations of their predecessors.

The Commission assembled at Mohammerah at the end of the year, and its experiences and adventures are set forth in the succeeding chapters.

The British Commission [1] (appointed partly by

[1] I must apologise for the loose use of the word "Commission" in the body of this book, meaning sometimes the whole Commission, sometimes the British section of it. The more correct term to describe the latter—"Delegation"—does not come easily to my pen, as "Commission" was the word always used, and I think the ambiguity, where there is any, is quite unimportant.

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Mr G. E. Hubbard. Lieut.-Col. Ryder, R.E., D.S.O., C.I.E. Capt. A. T. Wilson, C.M.G.

Capt. A. H. Brooke. Major H. M. Cowie, R.E. Mr A. C. Wratislaw, C.B., C.M.G. (*British Commissioner*). Capt. H. W. Pierpoint, I.M.S.

The British Commission.

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the Foreign Office, partly by the Government of India) consisted of the following officers: Commissioner, Mr A. C. Wratislaw, C.B., C.M.G.; Deputy Commissioner, Captain A. T. Wilson, C.M.G.; Chief of the Survey Party, Lieut.-Colonel C. H. D. Ryder, R.E., D.S.O., C.I.E.; Second in command, Major H. M. Cowie, R.E.; Officer in command of Escort, Captain A. H. Brooke, 18th (King George's Own) Lancers; Medical Officer, Captain H. W. Pierpoint, I.M.S.; Secretary, the present writer. Later on Captain F. L. Dyer, 93rd Burma Light Infantry, who was spending his leave learning Persian at Mohammerah when we arrived, was attached as Intelligence and Transport Officer.

Mr Wratislaw, a Consul-General in the Levant Consular Service, had some years before served at Basra as Consul and later at Tabriz as Consul-General, so was already well acquainted with the conditions in the extreme south and north of our route. Captain Wilson, who is an officer in the Indian Political Service, was formerly Consul at Mohammerah, and having travelled a great deal in the wilder parts of Persia, possessed invaluable experience of the Arab and Persian sections of the frontier. Both our Survey officers had acted on previous frontier Commissions on the borders of India and China, besides having accompanied Colonel Younghusband's expedition to Lhassa, the stories of which famous adventure always made our own

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journey seem depressingly tame and commonplace.

The Russian Commission, under Monsieur V. Minorski, corresponded to our own, but for the lack of a secretary and the addition of a naturalist, a most enterprising representative of science, whose enthusiasm remained undamped by the truly melancholy series of disasters which befell his collections. Major Aziz Bey of the Turkish General Staff represented Turkey; his deputy was also an army officer—in fact, there was only one civilian in their party. Persia's interests were upheld by Etela-ul-Mulk,[1] a member of the Teheran Foreign Office, and the non-military character of the Commission was compensated for by the addition of the Persian Director-General of Artillery, an up-to-date officer trained at the École Polytechnique and the Berlin Military Academy, who was attached as "Military Adviser." Each Commission had its own escort (the Russians having Cossacks), a doctor, and a staff of technical officers. The latter were all military engineers except the

[1] Every Persian, as I need hardly explain, who has attained to a certain position in civil or military life acquires an honorific and usually somewhat high-sounding title (which he often changes several times in a lifetime as he ascends in the scale). The Persian Commissioner's title may be rendered in English "The Brightness of the Empire." The Deputy Commissioner was "The Helper of the Sultanate," the Military Adviser "The Victorious Leader," and my fellow-scribe "The Beauty of the Kingdom"—an epithet which, I always imagined, must have been meant to refer to complexion of mind rather than of body.

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Our Turkish and Persian Colleagues.

Etela-ul-Mulk (*Persian Commissioner*).

Major Aziz Samih Bey (*Ottoman Commissioner*).

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Persian contingent, which consisted of an elderly and very devout gentleman of scientific tastes, who had been invested with the temporary rank of a General, and was fond of referring to himself and his colleagues as "we men of the sword" (though I do not think he ever girt one in his life), and two beardless youths, who were his pupils.

This is, very briefly, the story of a question which has worried Embassies and Foreign Offices for nearly three-quarters of a century. If its connection with our own country seems remote, it is the more striking as a specimen of the thorny bypaths along which the Government of a great empire inevitably becomes from time to time involved. We who have had, in the course of the last century or so, to delimitate between twenty and thirty thousand miles of our own frontiers, find ourselves forced by "the responsibility of empire" to lend a hand in settling other people's. Truly, to him who hath shall be given!

There is one noticeable characteristic of the Turco-Persian frontier which is due partially to the piecemeal and deliberate way in which it has been created. It supplies instances of practically every principle of delimitation known to the science. A frontier may be geographical, racial, linguistic, religious, or even purely artificial. That in question is all of these. In the broadest sense it is geographical, for it follows in the main a

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great mountain range. It is racial, in the south particularly, where it separates Iranian from Semitic, or, to be more specific, Lur from Arab; farther north, in Kurdistan, the division is, more correctly speaking, tribal. In the Pusht-i-Kuh region it is roughly speaking linguistic—smooth Persian dialect greeting your ear one side, and guttural Arabic on the other. Among the Kurds again the religious factor comes in, where an attempt has been made to leave Sunnis in Turkey and Shias in Persia. Finally, there is a stretch in the south where the frontier is frankly artificial, following stated lines of longitude and latitude.

Of physical features there is hardly one commonly used in frontier-making which we did not, at some time or other, apply: along the Shatt-el-Arab, "the line of low tide"; in the case of other rivers, one or other bank, or oftener still the "*medium filum aquae*"; in mountainous regions "the crest line" or "the watershed" (by no means synonymous terms), or else that much-disputed phrase "the foot of the hills." A certain section of the frontier was, as I have already said, fixed according to the "astronomical method" adopted so generally in Africa and North America, while at another point—where it was a question of creating an *enclave* round certain oil-springs—the line was drawn so as to describe an arc of circle. Strategic considerations came in here and there, as they do in the case of almost any mountain frontier, where the possession of a cer-

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tain pass may be worth an army corps to either side.

To conclude this brief survey of the frontier, I must say a word or two as to how the Commission worked. About three-quarters of the frontier had been, as I explained before, delimitated at Constantinople, the remaining quarter being left blank. In the case of the former part the Ambassadors had, so to speak, sketched the main outline, leaving the Commission to fill in the detail. A section of frontier would be described in the Protocol as following the crest of a certain mountain, for instance, and passing thence to a neighbouring peak, leaving such and such a village to Turkey or Persia as the case might be. The line being thus broadly indicated, the engineers went ahead, surveyed a strip of country eight or ten miles wide, and had a detailed map waiting for the Commissioners by the time they arrived. The latter then, after examining the map and the ground, met in solemn conclave and debated the precise line of the frontier, which when agreed upon was described in writing, marked on the map with red ink, and on the ground with a line of boundary pillars. Along the undelimitated part the matter was, of course, less simple. The only basis for the Commissioners' guidance was the *status quo* frontier of 1848—a very illusive ghost, as one may well imagine. The rival claims in this region were often as much as twenty miles apart, and a compromise was next door to impossible,

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so that in the end almost the whole of this section was settled by Russo-British arbitration. A dilemma used to arise when the frontier ahead was quite undetermined, which reminded one of the ancient conundrum as to which came first, the hen or the egg. The problem was, how you were to settle a given stretch of frontier before you had travelled along it, and how you could travel along it if you did not know where it went.

The outward and visible signs of our labours were, of course, the boundary pillars. Their composition depended, inevitably, on the nature of the surrounding country. While we were in the desert, where the only available material was mud, we built thereof imposing pyramids, destined, no doubt, to provide the archæologists of some future age with subjects for excavation and learned dispute. In the mountains, if the spot was accessible for a mule loaded with mortar, a rough pillar of masonry marked the boundary line. To erect these we had taken with us a staff of *soi-disant* masons, and on the occasion of the first stone pillar we formed a respectful circle round these craftsmen while they plied their trade. Having collected a great quantity of rocks they marked a circle on the ground and set to work from within to build a wall—the only application of their art, I suppose, with which they were acquainted. Such was their enthusiasm, that before long they had completely immured themselves, and a hole had

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to be knocked in the side of their self-made tomb to let them out. The product of their technique was magnificent, but it was not a boundary pillar, so we decided to rely henceforth on the light of nature. Sometimes the approach to a site was so precipitous that no four-footed beast could be got up, and on these occasions a large cairn of boulders had to suffice. In places the piety of the inhabitants saved us two or three hours' hard labour when the summit of the mountain was already crowned by a *nazargah*, one of those heaps of stones so common throughout the country, which, to quote Fraser's 'Kurdistan,' mark "where some local saint performed a miracle, or, perhaps, ate his breakfast." As it is the duty of every passing Moslem to add a stone to the pile, the saint's memory and the boundary mark are alike safe from extinction. This, alas, is more than can be claimed for most of our pillars. No token of government is popular with the Kurds, and we should have known—even if the candid blackguards had not occasionally thought fit to tell us so—that our carefully built monuments were lucky if they stood for a day once the back of authority had been turned. Their demolition, however, did little harm to anything except our *amour propre*, as the precise bearings of each were, of course, carefully recorded and its position marked on the map.

There are, lastly, a good many side issues which a Boundary Commission has to deal with besides the actual demarcation of the frontier. To give

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examples, there were in our case anchorage rights in the Shatt-el-Arab, water rights in places where the frontier intersected streams or irrigation canals, and, most important of all, the pasturage rights of the wandering tribes whose annual migrations take them from side to side of the border. Such were some of the divers problems which occupied and sometimes perplexed the Commissioners, and whose solution depended in a great degree on the conciliatory genius of the British and Russian members—reinforced, when occasion required, by that most powerful solvent of human differences which hails from the shell-riddled slopes of Champagne. But having now introduced, perhaps at all too great a length, the Frontier itself, it is high time to begin the account of our acquaintance with it.

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CHAPTER II.

MARSEILLES TO MOHAMMERAH.

I HAVE sometimes wondered what would be the result if you took the five hundred odd human beings who go to make up the passenger-list of a crowded P. & O., and boxed them up *on dry land* under just the same conditions as they live under on board ship. If no actual murder had been committed by the time you came to let them out at the end of a fortnight, at least I doubt if you would find a single one of the five hundred on speaking terms with the other four hundred and ninety-nine. There must be some magic about a sea-voyage which keeps most people, in spite of the monotony, on such excellent terms with themselves, each other, and all the world besides; but what the magic is I cannot guess, unless it be the pleasant anticipation of something awaiting them at the journey's end. In which case, our own prospect of a year or more under canvas and a thousand-mile march from the Persian Gulf to Mount Ararat should have assured us a particu-

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larly agreeable voyage when we sailed from Marseilles for Mohammerah on November 21, 1913.

The voyage, as things turned out, was extremely pleasant, but being "uneventful," as voyages usually are (which is to say, that we ran into nothing and no one fell overboard), I will not burden the reader with a detailed narrative of our three weeks at sea. In case he should, however, contemplate a similar trip to the Gulf at some future date, I venture to give a brief outline of the voyage with the help of a few extracts from my traveller's diary.

Ss. Mooltan, *Port Said*, *Nov.* 25.—Calm sea all the way from Marseilles. Flag-ship of Admiral Troubridge, Commanding the Mediterranean Squadron, in port here. We have taken on board the Christmas mails for Australia,—a record number of mail-bags, so they say.

Aden, *Dec.* 1.—Reached Aden last night and transhipped on to ss. *Salsette*, the Bombay "ferry-boat." Seeing the place for the first time at night, one's only impression is of a black mass of hill rising from the water's edge, with solitary lights twinkling on the slope and a row of bright illumination along the shore. One might be looking at the wooded slopes of St Cloud, with its brightly lit cafés lining the bank of the Seine. Reality, as seen by daylight this morning, very different. Nothing but the deadest, barrenest rocks and fort-like houses. We watched through the glasses strings of bizarre-looking, two-wheeled

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camel-carts, which seem to supply the local means of transport.

Ss. Dwarka, *Dec.* 5.—Left Bombay harbour this afternoon barely an hour after entering it on the P. & O. So much for my hopes of setting foot in India! It is fortunately only a thirty-hour run to Karachi, as the regular B. I. boat is laid up and the *Dwarka* is disgustingly small for what is often a rough passage.

Ss. Kola, *Dec.* 7.—Reached Karachi at midnight, changed steamers, and left again before sunrise. The skipper speaks cheeringly of the "Shimâl" we are sure to meet in the Gulf, and this boat turns out to be even smaller than our last. Really, this journey is like the "Rake's Progress"—we go one lower at each stage. Some of the other members of our Commission—Colonel Ryder and Major Cowie, our Engineer officers, with their Survey Party of about forty-five Indians, and Captain Pierpoint of the Indian Medical Service—were on board when we joined. Captain Pierpoint has a handsome setter-bitch and her puppy, who are to come with us on the Expedition.

Muskat, Dec. 8.—There is small-pox in the town, which prevents our landing. Nothing could be more picturesque, however, than the view from the bay. We approached past clusters of white pinnacle-rocks rising abruptly out of a deep blue sea, swung suddenly round a point, and came to anchor in a little natural harbour with rocky cliffs frowning down on it from both sides. At the

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farther end two rocks crowned by the ruins of Portuguese forts stand sentry on either side, and between them lies all you can see of Muskat—a sea-front of a dozen or so white houses built on a rocky base washed by the sea. There is a small coaling-station in one corner of the bay, and a fleet of high-prowed fishing-boats painted in stripes of white, yellow, and green is anchored in front of it. The face of the cliff on the opposite side is almost covered with the names, in huge letters of white paint, of all the British men-of-war which have patrolled the Gulf for generations past. Remains of Portuguese towers and bastions are visible all round, and we just get a glimpse between the mountains of the *hinterland*, where a force of troops from India is stationed at present to protect Muskat from tribal attacks, the interior being in a state of anarchy.

There is only one other ship in the harbour, an ex-tramp, which represents the Muskat navy, and is chiefly used, we are told, for taking the Sultan's wives on visits to Zanzibar, the two Sultans being cousins and on very friendly terms.

Dec. 9.—The promised "Shimâl" came. We were barely through the Straits of Ormuz and fairly into the Gulf when we ran into such a thick, black squall that the Captain turned the ship round for fear of running on to a reef. The worst of it was soon over and we were able to go ahead again. We have just stopped off a small island, a mere rock, where H.M.S. *Harold* is lying, to drop an engineer of Indian Marine whom we had on

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board. The *Harold* is typical of what our naval men have to put up with in the Gulf; she is nothing more than a Liverpool tug, with no accommodation but the deck, and spends her time cruising about these tropical seas after gun-runners. She carries two officers and a terrier-pup; the latter, not having seen one of his own species for months, went quite off his head at the sight of Sheila and Mick, the doctor's dogs, and tore madly up and down the top of the deck-awning barking himself hoarse.

Bushire, Dec. 10.—It seems that we are officially designated the "fast mail." This is not, as I at first supposed, a humorous allusion to our speed, which is a steady nine knots, but implies that our only ports-of-call in the Gulf are Muskat and Bushire. We are lying here in the roads four or five miles out from the town, and the cargo has to be lightered ashore. We put out several cases of whisky, which were loaded into special, so-called *haram* boats, as the ordinary lightermen are too good Moslems to have any truck with the forbidden liquid. The *haram* boats, it seems, are manned by crews of hardened agnostics, who, so far from refusing to handle the cases, are seldom known to deliver the same intact.

Talking to one of the ship's officers about cargoes for the Gulf, I have learnt two interesting facts,—one that there is a lively trade in Persian carpets from Manchester to Bushire (Persia's greatest port), and the other that the boats which visit Bahrein — where the great pearl-fisheries

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are — often carry consignments of sham pearls for judicious admixture with the real ones at the fountain-head, — at least so my informant assured me!

In the Shatt-el-Arab, Dec. 11.—We dropped Major Cowie at Bushire, whence he will exchange signals with Fao by cable in order to fix its latitude and longitude, and so give a starting-off point for the survey work of the Commission. Bushire itself is a "fixed point"—*i.e.*, it has been connected up with the survey system of India.

We reached the bar at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab early this morning, and, as usually happens, stuck. The most vigorous churning served only to cloud the sea all round with mud, so we had to wait till the tide rose and lifted the boat over. Just after entering the river's mouth we passed Fao on the right (Turkish) bank. Its only claim to notice is the Indo-European Telegraph Station, whence the cable crosses to Bushire on its way to India.[1]

The Shatt, of course, is a great, broad river, containing, as it does, the united waters of the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Karûn between its banks; but the palm groves on either side cut off from view most of the country beyond, and what there is to see of it is mostly dismal-looking swamp. It is a lifeless scene, and the only moving things in it are the occasional flocks of wild-fowl

[1] Fao was the scene of the first engagement by the Persian Gulf Expeditionary Force in the present war.

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which rise in front of our bows and wing their way up-stream, and a few naked riverain Arabs up to their waists in water cutting reeds, which they use for fish-traps. The banks are lined with these traps, which consist of narrow-mouthed enclosures so designed as to let the fish enter easily at high tide, but to give them no way of escape when the water falls again.

Some miles farther up—this time on the Persian bank—one rounds a corner and comes on a most incongruous sight. Rows upon rows of huge oil-reservoirs, of the same familiar shape as the great drums at a gas-works, stretch into the desert; along the bank in front stand bungalows, power-houses, and retorts for refining the oil, the whole linked together by a network of light railway along which little engines run clanking and shrieking. This turns out to be the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's refinery, the big enterprise which, like the Suez Canal, has the British Government as its principal shareholder. The oil-fields are 150 miles away, near Ahwaz on the river Karûn — from there the oil comes down in a pipe laid across the desert. In its refined state it is pumped into barges which lie alongside the bank—which, in turn, empty it into big tank-steamers anchored outside the bar.

Later.—We have arrived at Mohammerah, but have to put in several hours' quarantine before we are allowed on shore. It is a fine site for a town. The Karûn runs at an almost perfect right angle into

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the Shatt, and the town lies along its northern bank near the junction, the Union Jack over the British Consulate being nearly at the point. The Karûn here must be nearly as broad as the Thames at London, and is a fine fast-flowing river; its waters are bright yellow, and make tremendous whirlpools and eddies where they join the Shatt, so strong as to swing the bows of even an ocean-going steamer like our own—while it is a regular death-trap for small craft.

During the preliminary negotiations at Constantinople, Mohammerah had been fixed upon as the place of rendezvous of the four Commissions, and the date of meeting had been settled for the middle of December. We were the first to arrive, followed a few days later by the Russians, who travelled direct from Constantinople on board a Russian ship.

Our Turkish and Persian colleagues, however, entertained characteristically liberal views on the subject of dates and time-tables, and nearly a month passed before they appeared; though it must be conceded that the difficulties of their overland routes from Constantinople and Teheran respectively gave some excuse for the delay. It thus came about that we spent in all six weeks in camp at Mohammerah, and had ample time to fit out the expedition and see something of the neighbourhood.

Before it emerged from its obscurity into the

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Basra Creek.

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grim lime-light of war, the country at the head of the Persian Gulf was, I imagine, to the average person little better than *terra incognita*—a region only vaguely apprehended in connection with dates, oil-fuel for the Navy, or the Garden of Eden. Possibly I wrong the country—or the "average person"—but the vivid recollection of my own furtive and shamefaced hunt for an atlas when I first got orders to go to Mohammerah, encourages me to enter on a brief description at the risk of repeating well-known facts.

In the first place, all Mesopotamia is Arab country. The neat line which provides a northern limit to Arabia on many of our maps has no basis in fact, and even the frontier between the Turkish and Persian Empires, in this particular section, marks no ethnical or linguistic boundary. Indeed, the proportion of racial Turks in Irak and of racial Persians in Arabistan is almost negligible, and the spoken language is Arabic throughout.

Compared with the real Bedouin of the Arabian desert, the Arabs in the parts I am speaking of are a degenerate lot; they are largely agriculturists, and many of them live in towns like Basra and Mohammerah. They are divided into several large tribes—the Muntefik, the Shaab, the Beni Lam, Beni Turuf, and so on—and, with the exception of some of the riverain Arabs, are more or less nomadic, often sowing a patch of land with some crop or other and leaving it to grow till they return again after some months to reap it. The

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same spirit is reflected in their domestic architecture, which takes the form of reed and palm-leaf huts, which can be put up in a few hours and abandoned without regret.

These Arabs have a good many unamiable traits, not the least of which is their love of piracy. As long ago as 1780 (the letter exists in the archives of the Bushire Residency) the Factor of the East India Company at Basra wrote to his superiors at Bombay praying them to despatch a sloop to the Shatt-el-Arab to protect his cargoes lying in the river. The precaution is necessary even now, and previous to the war a gunboat was sent annually up the river at the season when the dates are being shipped, to protect the boats from pirates. These river vermin practise their trade in its most dastardly form, creeping on board ships at night and murdering the crew. Even during our short stay a British captain at Basra sleeping on board his vessel was killed in this atrocious way, the villains escaping arrest.

This immunity which the pirates generally enjoy is due to the ease with which after an exploit in Turkish waters they can escape to the Persian shore, or *vice versa*. Some years ago the British India mail-boat ran aground and a gang of pirates boarded and gutted her. They escaped, as usual, on to Persian territory, but this time, thanks to the energetic help of the Sheikh of Mohammerah, they were caught and brought to book and a large

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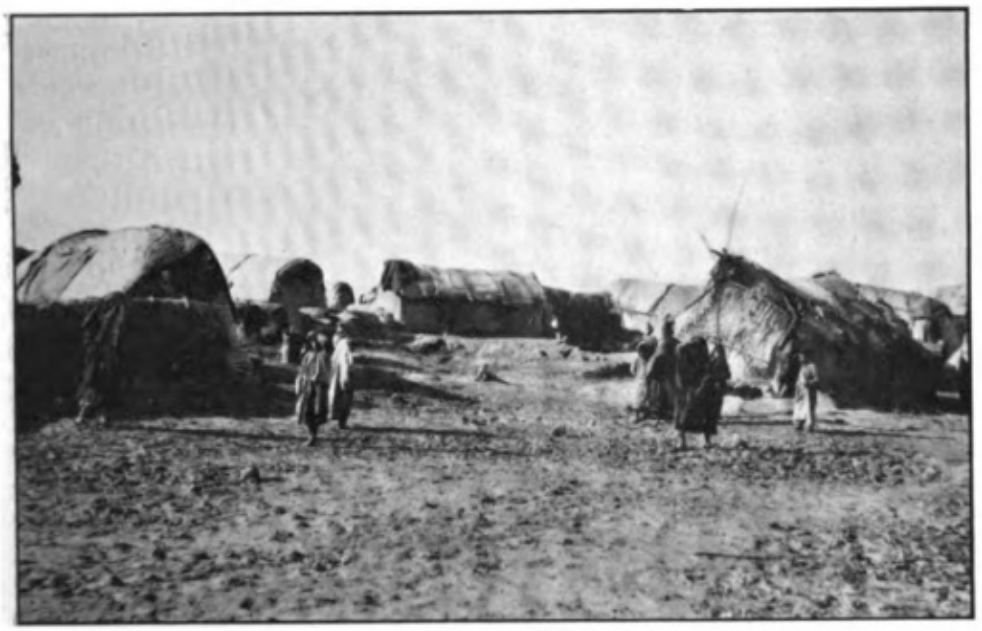
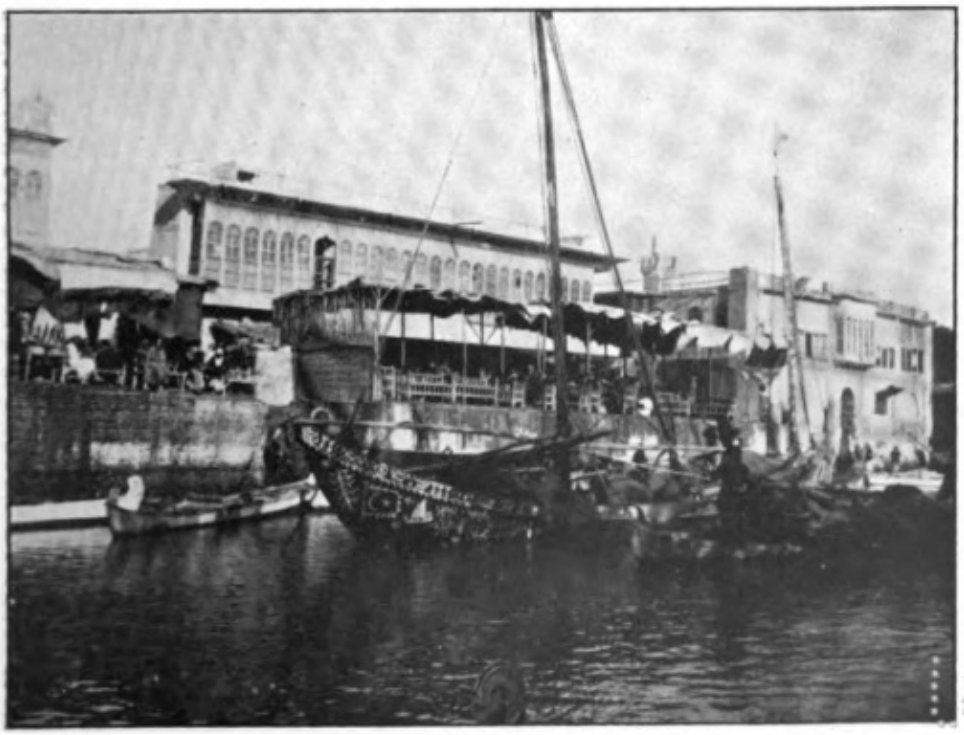


Arab Reed Huts.



The Ashar.

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part of the cargo recovered. As a graceful tribute to commemorate the event, the B.I. steamers always fired a one-gun salute as they pass the Sheikh's palace on their way up the river. The salute was returned from the Sheikh's battery on shore—not without some risk to the unfortunate gunner who used occasionally, when a certain young Third Officer fired the ship's gun, to get a charge of deck cricket balls whizzing round his ears.

The main features of the country can be summed up in three words—river, desert, and marsh, the river being, of course, the essential feature. The "Waters of Babylon," which once made Mesopotamia a rival with Egypt for the title of the "World's granary," still keep their fertilising powers intact. But the old dams, canals, and barrages are gone, and the productive land is now narrowed down to strips of palm grove fringing the river banks. Where the palm groves end the desert abruptly begins. There is nowhere that

> "Strip of herbage strown,
> That just divides the desert from the sown,"

where old Khayyám invites us to wander in blissful oblivion.

The desert itself is not of the good honest sand that one usually associates with the name. In the south at least, where it was once part of the delta, it is rich alluvial soil, good going for man and beast when dry but turning to the veriest quagmire

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of mud after rain or floods. The marshes have a character of their own, but I will speak of them again later.

The site of the Garden of Eden is located at Kurna, where the Euphrates and Tigris join—or so the school of pre-Darwinian theologists would have us believe. The crab-apples which grow to-day by the river's edge do indeed lend colour to the theory, but—unless conditions have radically changed—there is one, I fear, insuperable objection. Our erring ancestor's chief lament when ejected from Paradise was that he had to turn to and work. Now, in this country, nobody works—at least not what you can call work. Nature, by a bountiful provision, which says little for the good dame's powers of discrimination, absolves the inhabitants from all such necessity. The high tides at the head of the Gulf so bank up the Shatt as far as the junction of the rivers, that all the lazy Arab has to do is to cut a few canals and ditches and let the rise and fall water his land automatically twice a day. The date-palms, too, demand a minimum of labour, and in return for it provide him generously with food, fuel, and building material. I should doubt if there is another place in the world where the people do so little for their living, except perhaps the South Sea Islands.

Dates are exported to Europe in enormous quantities every autumn, and the export trade is chiefly in the hands of British firms established at Basra. Basra itself is not actually on the river,

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but lies about two miles inland, in a big clearing among the palms, and is a rather mean and dilapidated town—unless eighteen months of British administration has instilled into it a greater degree of self-respect. A fair-sized creek connects it with the Ashar, which is the port for the smaller vessels, but the big ships lie anchored in midstream opposite a long line of substantial brick buildings where the European merchants live and do their business.

It was from Basra that Sinbad the Sailor used to start on his voyages of adventure. At the time when his fabulous journeys were supposed to have taken place, Bagdad was at the height of its glory. The court of the Caliph, Haroun-er-Rashid, attracted thither all the riches and wits of the Mohommedan East, and the Caliph lived in a state of lavish splendour which has seldom been surpassed. One can dimly picture the scene at the port of Basra when a fleet of *dhows* sailed up from the Gulf laden with the slaves and pearls and spices which honest Sinbad describes with such relish. In these prosaic days, alas! you find instead a line of rusty sea-tramps full of Manchester cottons and iron-ware lying in the anchorage. At the Ashar itself, however, there are plenty of *dhows* to be seen, with their graceful, tapering masts and towering poops, painted often with gay designs in all the colours of the rainbow.

Thanks to the war, Basra has become a familiar name in our newspapers, while Mohammerah, lying

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on the other shore, has received at most a passing mention. But our connections with the Persian town have grown so much of late, and its progress promises to interest us so closely in the future, that, if the reader's patience can hold out a little longer, I should like to give one or two historical and geographical facts about it. Mohammerah also has been entered and occupied by a force of British troops—but some time ago; to be precise, in 1856. The occasion was the Persian war. That little-sung campaign fills very few pages in our military annals, and was remarkable chiefly for the almost complete lack of resistance on the enemy's part and the very short time it lasted. Persia had attempted to seize Herat, which we countered by despatching a force up the Gulf, bombarding Mohammerah, and sending a regiment—the Seaforth Highlanders—up the Karûn to capture the town of Ahwaz. The whole affair only lasted a little over four months, and now a few bits of shell ploughed up from time to time on the outskirts of the town and some gashes in the trunks of the older palm-trees are almost the only records of it left.

The importance of the place from our point of view is partly due to the creation of the Oil Company, who have their headquarters and a large English staff at Mohammerah, and partly to its position at the junction of two large navigable rivers. Persia is so cut off by mountain-barriers from its neighbours that the trade-routes to the interior are exceedingly limited. There are, of

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course, the Gulf ports, such as Bushire and Bunder Abbas, feeding parts of Central and Southern Persia, and in the north there are the Caspian ports and the Russian railway to Julfa, but throughout the 1200 miles of land frontier which separate the borders of Russia from the Gulf only two routes of any importance exist. One is the road from Bagdad to Kermanshah, which is closed as often as not by the turbulence and brigandage of the tribes; the other is from Mohammerah up the Karûn. Merchandise is transhipped at Mohammerah from the ocean-going steamers into antiquated stern-wheelers, carried up as far as Ahwaz, and thence distributed; but a scheme was on foot before the war for constructing a railway from Ahwaz to Khurremebad, which would enormously increase the importance of the route. A preliminary survey was made, and a party of British engineers went out to the spot in 1913; the rapacity of the tribesmen on whose goodwill the work depended was so bottomless, however, that the scheme was still held up when the war began.

The Sheikh of Mohammerah, Sheikh Khazal, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., has always been a loyal friend of the British, and his friendship has now stood the severe test of the war in Mesopotamia and the revolt of a large part of his subjects. He is a middle-aged Arab of liberal tendencies, though far too cautious to introduce any wholesale, ready-made projects of "civilisation" within his domain. Progress has to be a gradual affair in Mohammerah.

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His authority extends over the two tribes of the Shaab and the Muhaisin, which have to a great extent coalesced under their common ruler. These tribes are supposed to have immigrated from Arabia some 250 years ago and settled in Persian territory. Thanks to their remoteness from the centre of government, their difference of language and race, and the incessant rivalry between Turkey and Persia, they have remained very independent of the Shah and his Government, and the present Sheikh, having steered adroitly through the troublous waters of the Revolution, is now sovereign in all but name over the greater part of the province of Arabistan, a country nearly as big as Belgium. He levies his own taxes and makes his own laws, and the Imperial Government has only a shadowy representative in the person of the *Karguzar*, or Foreign Office Agent. The Sheikh's prerogative does not, however, extend to the Customs, though even here he is *ex officio* Director-General.

One other token of the Shah's authority I had all but forgotten — the Persian Navy. It lies anchored in perpetuity off Mohammerah, and consists of two pre-Dreadnoughts, once merchantmen, commanded by an ex-captain of the Belgian Mercantile Marine. Rumour has it that the Navy is immobilised owing to the fact that the flagship is without her engines, these necessary adjuncts to locomotion having been privily sold by a former commander, if rumour speaks true, when that

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Mohammerah. A Creek off the Karún.

Riverside, Mohammerah.

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gallant officer was particularly hard pressed by his creditors. However that may be, the vessels are kept outwardly smart and in good trim, and present a fine spectacle when, rigged out with bunting, they fire a royal salute on the Shah's birthday.

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CHAPTER III.

PRELIMINARIES TO THE START.

CHRISTMAS passed at Mohammerah with such a round of festivity and good cheer as to obliterate any feeling of exile on a far-off shore. Hospitality is practised in the Gulf in that open-hearted fashion which is the characteristic of English people in out-of-the-way parts, and our Christmas dinner at the Consulate with Major and Mrs Haworth, and the New Year fancy-dress ball at the house of one of the oldest British residents at Basra, were memories to be cherished fondly in the lean days to come. The mention of good cheer, by the way, brings to mind a little anecdote which is told of a wealthy and influential native merchant of Mohammerah, and is a nice illustration of the universality of that painful obligation which falls at times on the best of us, namely, of "keeping up appearances."

Hajji Ahmad, the hero of the story, is a personage much respected for his wealth and piety, but he has, I grieve to say, acquired from his English friends such a taste for whisky that he finds it

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hard to get through the morning without his "tot." A friend of his died one day, and after attending the funeral he joined a gathering of pious folk collected for the performance of religious exercises in memory of the deceased. Each man, as the custom is, had brought with him a little teapot full of water to moisten his lips when parched with chanting the Koran. Our Hajji's teapot contained a less innocent beverage, the odour of which reached the nostrils of a holy Mollah seated opposite. The Mollah, scandalised beyond words, rose and denounced the Hajji to the assembly. A horrified murmur ran round the room, but the Hajji's wit did not desert him; turning to a respectable fellow-merchant at his side with whom he had an important contract in prospect, he handed him his teapot, and with a surreptitious nudge of the elbow, bade him drink. The merchant took a gulp, and barely concealed the agony of his burnt gullet. "Whisky or water?" asked the Hajji in uncompromising tones. "Water, by God," loyally replied the merchant, realising the issue at stake. Whereupon the Hajji rose, full of righteous indignation, and hugging the teapot carefully to his bosom, marched from the room, vowing that he would have nothing more to do with such infamous slanderers.

Whence it is clear that there are religious hypocrites all the world over, who share the old pharisaical view concerning the "inside of the cup"—or, as in this case, of the teapot!

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The streets of Mohammerah are filthy beyond the power of description, but as all the European bungalows, including the bank and the club, lie along the river-bank, one goes everywhere by water, as if one were in Venice, and so avoids their horrors. For this purpose there exists a particularly well-adapted form of craft called a *belem*, as characteristic and almost as fascinating a boat as the fast-disappearing *caïque* of Constantinople. In shape it is a hybrid between a canoe and a punt, while it has a slight *soupçon* of the gondola added; that is to say, it has the general lines of the first, the flat bottom of the second, with a graceful curl of the bow and stern reminiscent of the third. The passenger reposes in cushioned ease in the middle of the boat, with two rowers in front of him and one behind. I call them "rowers," but in fact their functions are no less hybrid than the craft. When going against the tide they pole along near into the bank, using their long flexible bamboo poles so cleverly that the progress is quite surprisingly rapid and smooth; if, on the other hand, the tide is favourable, they unship round-bladed paddles, and your *belem* glides in mid-stream with an occasional quiet stroke to hold it on its course.

The town itself straggles for nearly a mile along the northern bank. Like many other Eastern cities it possesses a meretricious charm, hiding away an ignoble jumble of mud-built houses behind a singularly picturesque river front. Sliding past it in a *belem*, the impression one receives is

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of blue-painted balconies, tented coffee-shops, and fragrant gardens, with a few intervening creeks spanned by high-arched bridges of mellow brick-work.

While we were still busy with the thousand and one preparations for our journey, buying horses, packing kit, engaging servants, and so forth, the last of our belated colleagues arrived, and the official frock-coat *visites de cérémonie* having been duly exchanged, the work of the Commission began. The first meeting was held at the Prime Minister's house; he is a rich Persian merchant who, at the mature age of sixty, had left his native land some months before to pay his first visit to Europe and "Parees." His son, however, did the honours in a fine reception-room, hung round with forty or fifty oleograph portraits of crowned heads and presidents, past and present, ranging from the Shah of Persia to Kruger. The Turkish Commissioners differed from the rest in being soldiers instead of diplomats; indeed their whole party was organised on strictly military lines, very much to the disgust of my "opposite number," to use a naval phrase, who, being a Foreign Office Secretary accustomed to a civilian's life of ease and luxury, did not at all appreciate the rigours of field-service conditions.

Our first piece of active work was a trip down the Shatt to the river's mouth, on board the gun-boat *Marmaris*, the only war vessel, besides a

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couple of armed launches, which the Turks kept in these waters. The frontier follows the left bank of the Shatt, so all that had to be done was to fix the point where it first strikes the shore from seawards, and settle the case of a few small islands near the Persian bank. A few days later the solemn act was performed of erecting boundary pillar Number 1.

The occasion was one of great ceremony and not a little humour, and deserves, I think, some description. The site of the pillar is at Diaiji, a village a few miles up-stream from Mohammerah, where the frontier leaves the river to strike northwards into the desert. The whole Commission took part, and embarking this time on a Persian steamer (to equalise matters), steamed up to Failiyeh to pick up the Sheikh and his eldest son.

The palace faces on to the river, and is chiefly remarkable for an alarming wood-work erection painted brightest blue, supporting two heraldic shields, emblazoned with the Sheikh's initials in European characters. Adjoining the palace is his Highness's private theatre, and round about clusters a considerable village inhabited by his bodyguard, a ragamuffin crew of armed men, mostly of negro blood, who accompany their master wherever he goes—a necessary precaution in a country where the assassin's knife has accounted for more than one ruler.

We had towed up a small flotilla of boats, into

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which we embarked at the mouth of a canal. The Sheikh, who wore a long red cloak, travelled in a *belem* double the ordinary size, while the body-guard kept pace along the bank, not in the least embarrassed by having to wade waist-deep across side canals every few minutes. At one point there was a village on the bank of the canal, with a high wall outside. As the Sheikh's boat drew level with it, a chorus of feminine voices from behind the wall raised a chant of "Hosanna," greeting their chief as the people of Jerusalem used to greet their king. We proceeded up the canal for two miles in a stately procession, till, the tide falling, we found ourselves aground on the mud, and had to take to our legs. The Sheikh, after being shoved—*belem* and all—for some distance over the mud by the united strength of the bodyguard, and its being beneath the dignity of a Sheikh to walk on foot, had perforce to return home, leaving his son to accompany us and do the honours. The latter is a handsome youth, sufficiently civilised to drive a motor-car, and at the same time oriental enough to have been recently relieved of his governorship of a town for having too many merchants beaten to death!

Our path led through palm groves, and a very sporting element was introduced by the palm-trunk bridges, over which we had to cross the innumerable small canals. Formed of a single trunk sagging heavily in the centre, these bridges

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provide one with all the sensations of a tight-rope dance, and once on them it was difficult for some of our more corpulent colleagues, arrayed in their smartest uniforms and decorations, to retain the dignity they possessed on *terra firma*. After one or two partial immersions we arrived at the site of the pillar, and began the work of the day. First came the gruesome sacrifice of a poor sheep, whose life not even the British Commissioner's prayers could save. A stake was then driven in, and each of the four Commissioners having laid a brick round its foot, a body of local masons completed the edifice. When I spoke of the "work of the day" I was mistaken; that began after the pillar had been built. We walked back to the village, and there found a huge marquee erected by the Sheikh for our reception. We entered—and were dumb. Imagine a huge tent with tablecloths laid on the floor round three sides, and on them set such a sea of dishes that any attempt to count them was hopeless. I made a rough calculation by counting the dishes on a single section, and multiplying by the number of sections; the result worked out at something over two hundred and fifty. Four whole roast sheep formed the *pièces de résistance;* around them were ten dishes, some eight feet in circumference, heaped mountain-high with *pillau*, and each crowned with a roast lamb, twenty or thirty fowls on smaller dishes, and innumerable bowls of rice, hashes, and junkets. We sat reverently

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The Sheikh's Feast.

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down before this unheard-of profusion on a row of beautiful carpets. A touch of the vulgar West was, alas! introduced by the drinks, which consisted of whisky and porter; however, the latter seemed in keeping with the roast sheep, so we elected to drink that. All trace of the Occident was entirely dispelled, however, by the arrival of a grizzled old nigger in a long linen dress, and a beltful of cartridges round his waist, who acted the part of butler. The dishes in the centre of the cloth were, of course, far out of one's reach, so the old fellow kicked off his shoes, trussed up his skirts, and stalked boldly on to the "table." He wielded an enormous ladle, with which he piled up your plate from whichever dish you chose, unless he thought you looked particularly hungry, when he took your plate, and burying it bodily in a mountain of *pillau*, handed it back heaped a foot high. Finally, he tackled a whole sheep by the very simple process of seizing the body with one hand and a leg with the other, giving a hearty wrench and—handing you your joint. I was sitting fascinated by his huge black feet wandering unscathed among the multitude of dishes, when he turned round abruptly to give me my plate, lost his balance, and put his foot splosh into a luscious dish of apricots and chicken hash. He was not a whit disconcerted, however, but passed serenely on his way, leaving behind him an intricate design in brown and yellow on the tablecloth. We finished

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the banquet without making the smallest visible effect on the piles of victuals, and retired to coffee and cigarettes, while the retainers were let loose on the feast; half an hour later there was not a grain of rice left! In the meantime the tide had risen, and to every one's intense relief the *belems* were found waiting only a few hundred yards away to take us back to the ship. What would have happened if we had had to face again the single palm-trunk bridges, I shudder to think!

Our escort arrived from India a few days after the rest of us. It was commanded by Captain Brooke of the 18th (King George's Own) Lancers, and consisted of a native officer and 30 *sowars*. Captain Dyer of the 93rd Burma Light Infantry joined as Transport Officer soon after, and so our numbers were complete. The entire party, including 8 English officers, the escort, an Indian clerk, 4 Indian surveyors, and 40 survey-*kholassis*, servants, syces, *farrashes*, muleteers, and camp-followers of every description, totalled about 150 men. The Russians and Persians numbered rather fewer, while the Turks, who travelled very light, were scarcely more than 50. The Russians, I must remark *en passant*, emphasised the cosmopolitan nature of the Commission by bringing with them a Chinese *dhobi*, picked up heaven-knows-where, but a first-rate performer with the soap-suds!

The very formidable task of arranging beforehand for the transport and provisioning of such a party

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as our own across nearly 400 miles of almost uninhabited desert had fallen on the broad shoulders of the Deputy Commissioner, Captain Wilson, who had preceded the rest to Mohammerah for this purpose. He knew the country well, having acted as Consul at Mohammerah and travelled largely in Arabistan, as well as in the wilder regions of Luristan, which lies beyond the mountains; but armed as he was with an intimate knowledge of local conditions, a wide-spread reputation among the Arabs, and a quite inexhaustible fund of energy, it was still no light matter.

No mules were obtainable locally, so the whole complement of 230 odd had to be hired from places such as Shuster and Hamadan, the latter as much as 300 miles away. Camels were to be had, but an initial experiment with 50 of these beasts proved them, even in their native element, less suitable than mules for the sort of work in hand.

The latter appeared one morning out of the blank desert behind our camp, heralded by a great rattle of hoofs and carillon of bells, and accompanied by smiling muleteers apparently as little concerned as the beasts themselves at the prospect of a journey to Ararat and back. They formed such an intrinsic part of our existence throughout the expedition that I will start by giving the best idea I can of what a Persian mule-train is like. The owner accompanies his own beasts; if he is the proud possessor of 20 or more he is usually

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mounted on an arab mare, leaving *yetims* (*anglicè*, orphans) actually to drive the teams; if he has only half a dozen or so he goes on foot, with a diminutive donkey to carry his belongings and himself when tired. Every bunch of fourteen or fifteen mules is led by a *yabu*, a pony who performs the duty of a bell-wether to a flock of sheep. The mule carries his load on a wooden pack-saddle, a cumbersome high-peaked thing which never leaves his back day or night while on the march. The poor beast is thus debarred from that greatest of mulish joys—rolling, and it is a truly pitiful sight to see him, released from his load, lie down on the sand and struggle wildly to get his hoofs in the air, his efforts perpetually baffled by the projecting peak of his saddle.

The musical lady of Banbury Cross is quite thrown into the shade by the Persian pack mule, and even more so by his companion, the *yabu*. Though deterred by nature from wearing bells on his "fingers and toes," he more than makes up for it by the quantity which hang from every other part of his anatomy and transform him into a kind of ambulant belfry. An inventory of the trappings of a really self-respecting *yabu* would be somewhat as follows: Beginning at his head, he wears a headstall hung all over with tassels and little round bells, and thickly encrusted with blue-and-white beads edged with cowrie shells; the headstall broadens out over his forehead where it frames a round piece of looking-glass, giving

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Mules and a Yabu.

Two Muleteers.

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him a rather cyclopean air, while between his ears there nods an imitation bird the size of a thrush, covered also with beads. His neck is encircled by a broad strap handsomely encrusted in the same manner as the headstall, from which dangles a set of bells of ever decreasing size, fitting within each other after the fashion of Chinese boxes. His gaudily-coloured breeching is edged with scores of little bells, while to crown all there hang suspended on either side of his saddle, so as to almost brush the ground, two colossal bells nearly two feet high. I had the doubtful privilege of having a particularly swell *yabu* in my team whose owner had the distressing habit, on arriving in camp after it mattered not how many hours hard marching, of urging his beast into a furious gallop, while he executed a kind of devastating musical ride in and out of boxes and tent ropes, with such a chiming and clanging of bells as never was heard, and to the serious detriment of the contents of my *yakdans* bumping and bouncing on the poor animal's back.

The *charvadar*, as the Persian muleteer is called, is usually a cheerful fellow in spite of his hard life, and ours were no exception. When not on the march they spent all their spare time sitting beneath their low black shelters—they are too shapeless to be called tents—sipping eternal glasses of tea, gossiping and smoking their long-stemmed pipes, which when not in use they carry stuck through their cummerbunds; but during the idle

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days at Mohammerah they emulated the more active pastimes of the Indian *sowars*. One evening, hearing a great hullabaloo from behind the camp, we went out to see the cause, and found a tug-of-war going on between a team of *sowars* and another of Persian muleteers. The Persians were lusty fellows and were putting up a very good pull, encouraging each other all the time with shrieks of "Allah." Some bare-legged shepherds driving their flocks home had stopped on their way to watch the fun, and they in turn were presently joined by a party of the Sheikh's henchmen, Biblical-looking figures in the traditional flowing Arab dress, carrying long-barrelled, silver-bound rifles. Seeing after a while that their countrymen were in danger of being hauled over the line, the onlookers could contain themselves no longer, but rushed madly in and seizing the rope brought the proceedings to an abrupt close. Afterwards a party of our Persian servants and hangers-on indulged in the ancient and—it would seem—universal game of leap-frog. They were a queer crew. The "frog" was a genteel-looking individual, in a long blue frock-coat, with the Royal Arms on his hat, and was leapt over by a succession of the wildest creatures in ragged red or brown shirts, and bell-mouthed trousers reaching half-way down their legs, with greasy black curls waving, as they ran, from under the black felt *kullahs*—a form of head-gear which I can only

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compare to a French *casserole* turned upside down.

The sporting proclivities of the *charvadars* found their fullest scope, however, on the day of our gymkhana. It was a very *pukka* gymkhana. There were horse-races, foot-races, sack-races, tent-pegging, trick-riding, and a full-dress mounted display by the Lancers, but *the* event of the day was the half-mile mule race (owners up). There was a field of fifty, and they duly ranged up at the end of the course. But whereas one man can get a mule to the starting-point, no power on earth can make him start in any direction but the one he chooses. The direction these particular mules chose was at right angles to the racecourse, and in two minutes they had disappeared among the date-groves. They were duly retrieved and again faced the starter, and a minute later the whole lot came bucketing down the course with the thunder of a cavalry charge, led by our Deputy Commissioner mounted on a big white horse which performed the function of the humble *yabu*. Fifty mules with bells clanging and clashing, mounted by fifty madly excited riders clad in every colour of the rainbow, and bouncing like peas in the huge wooden saddles, galloping pell-mell in the wake of a British officer cantering along with all the dignity of the parade-ground, was a sight for the gods. The *charvadars* wondered why we laughed!

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The subsequent prize-giving was perhaps the most picturesque part of the show, when Mrs Haworth, the wife of the Consul, graciously presented prizes in turn to gorgeously-uniformed *sowars*, tattered camp-followers, respectable English residents, and, last but not least, to the hero of the mule race, a sturdy but bashful little fellow barely 5 feet high, with a long henna-stained beard, a green shawl round his waist, and gnarled brown legs bare from the knee downwards.

The work of the *corps technique* had all this time been going on apace, most of it devolving on the British members. It did not proceed without a slight mishap. Fao having been successfully fixed in relation to Bushire, Major Cowie set off thither one windy day to carry the connection up to Mohammerah. He took a motor boat and put his servant, kit, and four days' provisions in a *belem* which they towed behind. The *shimâl* was fierce and the river rough, and when half-way to Fao the *belem* shipped a wave and sank. The servant was rescued by the scruff of his neck, but kit and provisions went to the bottom, where they doubtless found a billet in the maw of a shark. The motor boat breaking down soon after, the unfortunate Major had to live on such charity as Fao can provide till he caught the next up-mail four days later. In the meantime, however, a British naval record was discovered giving the exact

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position of Mohammerah, and a base having been accurately measured at Mohammerah itself, a traverse was run up the Karûn to Nasiri near Ahwaz. It was from there that the regular triangulation was begun, on which is based the new map of the frontier.

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CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE LAND OF ELAM (1).

THE winter rains were comfortably over when, on February 14, we left Mohammerah on the first stage of our journey. The surface was dry but soft after the frequent floods of the last two months, and made the going perfect, while the air had that matchless combination of warmth and crispness which you find only among mountains or in the desert in early spring.

But before telling of the journey I must sketch roughly its scheme. The frontier, after leaving the celebrated pillar No. 1 at Diaiji, runs for sixty or seventy miles due north, turns due west for another twenty, and finally northwards again till it reaches a spot called Umm Chir, or "The Mother of Pitch." Beyond that there is a great stretch of 200 miles, where it goes in a fairly straight line north-west to Mendeli, situated on a latitude slightly north of Bagdad. These details are necessary to explain the Commission's wanderings. As far as Umm Chir the frontier could be marked on the

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map but not on the ground; for the reason that the first part of it runs through an arid desert too dry for travellers to pass through, the second part through an immense marsh (the Khor-el-Azem) which is too wet. The desert and the greater portion of the marsh being uninhabited, there was, moreover, no need for pillars even if it had been possible to erect them; so the frontier was made to follow convenient lines of longitude and latitude and left to look after itself. A rendezvous was fixed at Umm Chir, giving each Commission a fortnight to get there by whatever way it chose. The route selected by the British Commission formed roughly two arms of a triangle —the first arm running through the Arabistan desert parallel to the Karûn for about sixty miles; the other set at an obtuse angle towards the north-west, and passing along part of the river Kerkha and the northern edge of the great marsh.

One last thin thread of civilisation accompanied us for the first day or two of our march into the wilderness—to wit, the Persian State Telegraph. The line had been almost always reported "out of order" when we had wanted to send telegrams from Mohammerah during the previous six weeks, —once seen, what amazed one was that it is ever *in* order. A row of inebriated wiggly posts stretches across the desert; some have staples driven in to carry the wire, some have not. In the latter case the wire is simply twined round the post. Where two lengths join, the ends are

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twisted casually together, and sometimes for as much as a hundred yards on end the whole thing trails along the ground. And yet messages have been known to get through!

The desert at this season of the year, where not too much impregnated with salt, is covered with patches of young grass as smooth and as fine as the lawn of a cathedral close. Among the grass grow tiny aromatic plants, almost indistinguishable to the eye, but filling the whole air with a pleasant, keen smell. The effects of mirage are often startling. Our caravan, when on the march, straggled over two or three miles of country, and to any one riding somewhere near the middle the head and tail of the procession seemed always to be marching through a smooth, shallow lake; occasionally, for some unfathomable cause, the mules and men would execute a bewildering feat of "levitation" and continue their progress in the sky. Often we saw a lake spread out on the horizon, stretching a long arm towards us to within a few hundred yards; at other times a clump of palms or a group of mounted men appeared in the distance, only to resolve themselves, as we approached nearer, into bushes of low desert scrub or a grazing flock of goats.[1]

[1] Speaking of mirage, a curious incident is reported to have happened during the fighting between Fao and Basra at the beginning of the Mesopotamian campaign.

Our men, after a particularly courageous attack across the open desert (which at the time was such a sea of mud that they had to advance at the walk), reached the Turkish trenches and put the

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Sleep was hard to woo on our first night in the desert. The muleteers, either through laziness or fear of thieves, always left the bells on their mules and picketed the animals in line outside our tents. It takes some time to attune one's ears to the unwonted music, and what little sleep this "nocturne" spared us I and my tent-fellow sacrificed through ignorance of Persian custom. Both our Persian servants sported ostentatiously large European watches. We gave the order to be called at six *alla franca*. The noisy eruption of my boy at half-past three woke us from our recent slumbers. Curses and missiles having convinced him of his error, he fled—only to be followed by my companion's boy, with the same ill-placed zeal, an hour later. The watches, had we known it, were but a token of gentility, and implied no ability on their owners' parts to read the dial. In Persia you must learn to use a looser phraseology in regard to time, and regulate your hour of being called by "the break of dawn" or "sunrise."

On the afternoon of the second day's march

Turks to flight. The enemy were now in the same predicament as the British had been in just before, and provided a splendid target for our artillery as they floundered through the mire. A gunboat was lying in the river, and the men in the tops were watching the proceedings when they were surprised to see our guns suddenly stop firing, although the Turks were still easily within range. It transpired later that, to the eyes of the gunners on the desert level, the target had *disappeared into the mirage*.

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from Mohammerah there comes into sight a solitary group of trees, a pretty sure sign in this denuded country of the sacredness of the spot on which they grow. There among them, truly enough, gleamed the white dome of a saint's tomb. On reaching the place, we were puzzled to find the ground all around strewn with a number of shapeless forms covered with reed-matting. Wilson, knowing the country well, supplied the explanation. The buried *seyyid*, it seems, stretches an arm of protection over all objects within a certain radius of his tomb, and such is the odour of his sanctity that not the hardiest thief dare touch a thing within the circle. The shapes lying round were ploughs, hoes, and any other bits of property belonging to the semi-nomadic country folk, who, when the season's work in the fields is over, leave them here till they return in the following spring. The place has thus become a kind of "safe-deposit" for the entire neighbourhood.

But another, somewhat gruesome, class of goods is warehoused round the tomb—to wit, corpses. The warehousing of a corpse sounds a trifle indecent, but it is literally what takes place. Every true Shia cherishes in his heart the ultimate ideal of being buried within the shade of the holy shrine of Kerbela, where Hussein, Ali's son of tragic memory, lies buried. Many go to that spot to die; others are carried thither by pious relations after death. Those who perform the

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posthumous journey, however, have a burdensome condition laid upon them by the Turkish sanitary authorities — they must have been dead three years! So it comes about that a temporary resting-place has to be found for them; and here, by Karûn's bank, beneath the secondary shadow of the poor old saint, the little colony of pilgrims in purgatory wait patiently beneath their humble huts of reeds.

The country I am now describing was the scene of Layard's 'Early Adventures.' "Adventures" seems almost too mild a term for the amazing life he led among the cut-throat tribes of the Bakhtiari, Lurs, and Arabs; his wanderings in disguise were as daring as any of Sir Richard Burton's Arabian travels. It was between 1840 and 1842 that the future discoverer of Nineveh came to Arabistan. He was twenty-two years old, and, tiring of work in a London solicitor's office, had decided to try his fortune at the Bar in Ceylon. He conceived the astounding project of making his way thither overland. Passing through Constantinople, Syria, and Bagdad, Layard reached the Bakhtiari country at the moment when one of their principal chiefs was attacked by the Shah's army under a most bloodthirsty and unscrupulous eunuch known as the Matamet. The chief was forced to leave his mountain fastness and flee for his life into the plains of Arabistan, to find refuge with his friend the Sheikh of Mohammerah. The Matamet and his army pursued; and Layard de-

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scribes how the terrified Arabs broke down all the dykes and irrigation dams, so as to flood the country against the invaders; pulled to bits their huts of reeds (such as they still live in to-day), and made of the *débris* rafts on which they embarked with their families and what few goods they could take. Layard himself, alone and helpless—he had been stripped by brigands shortly before—managed to build a small raft for himself, and, joining the endless flotilla drifting down the river, at length reached comparative safety in the Sheikh's camp.

In those days the tamarisk, which grows in a thick tangle in many places along the Karûn's bank, was a favourite haunt of lions. The following is Layard's account of a quaint popular belief about the King of Beasts: "The lions are divided into Mussulmans and Kafirs or infidels. The first are tawny, the second dark-yellow with a black mane. If a man is attacked by a Mussulman lion he must take off his cap and very humbly supplicate the animal in the name of Ali to have pity on him. The proper formula is, 'O cat of Ali, I am a servant of Ali. Pass by my house (*i.e.*, spare me) by the hand of Ali!' The lion will then generously spare the supplicant and depart. Such consideration must not, however, be expected from a Kafir lion."

The natives are nowadays spared the necessity of such a momentous discrimination, as it is now ten years or more since the last lion was seen in

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this part of the world. Their quondam prey, the wild pig, live, in consequence, a safe and uneventful life on the river's bank. These, with the shy herds of gazelle which occasionally appear on the horizon, and the ubiquitous jackals whose howling makes night hideous, are almost the only four-footed beasts to inhabit this arid land. Birds, on the contrary, are very numerous—snipe, duck, partridges, and long-legged cranes, and, above all, sand-grouse.

The time of our journey through the desert was the sand-grouse flocking season, and one could ride for hours watching their amazing manœuvres in the sky. On the horizon would appear what looked for all the world like the thick cloud of smoke streaming from an express train. Suddenly the cloud condensed into a solid mass, and an instant later a point shot out of the mass into the sky like an exploding rocket, leaving a wedge-shaped train behind. The next minute a change in the direction of the flock's flight would make it vanish as if by magic, only to reappear farther along the horizon and commence its strange evolutions over again. How many scores of thousands of birds go to make up one such flock, and how they all find food, are questions which must puzzle the most learned ornithologist. They say the beat of wings is quite deafening when a flock of sand-grouse is still two miles away; but for this I could not vouch.

On the third day out from Mohammerah, when the emptiness of the landscape was beginning to

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grow oppressive, an indistinct whiteness which had been long visible on the northern horizon gradually resolved itself into the great snow-clad Bakhtiari range. Its 12,000-feet peaks formed a dazzling barrier between the plains across which our caravan was slowly crawling and the great tableland beyond, which is the real Persia. The hill tribes which live among these mountains, Lurs and Bakhtiaris, are among the wildest tribes in Persia, and the country has seldom been penetrated by Europeans, its chief explorer of recent times being Captain Wilson himself, the British Deputy Commissioner.

That night we camped at Umm el Tummair, "the Mother of Date Syrup," one of the rare villages dotted on or near the Karûn's banks. The method of nomenclature, of which this is a sample, is, of course, a favourite one among Arabs, who apply it indifferently to persons, places, and animals. The names they give are often delightfully expressive, such as "the Father of Long Noses," signifying a snipe. Applied to human beings they are apt to verge on the personal, as the following instance may show. The Sheikh of this particular village wished to inform us that he had seen one of our foreign colleagues who had gone on ahead of us by the same route. Our colleague was a little conspicuous by his corpulence, and the Sheikh (meaning no offence) expressed himself thus: "This morning the Father of Bellies brought honour to our village."

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On the Kerkha.

Crossing the Kerkha.

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From this point we finally parted company with the Karûn and struck across to the Kerkha, which here is only a short march away. The Kerkha is the modern name of the ancient Choaspes, whose water—though having nothing particularly tasteful to a European palate—had such a vogue among the old kings of Persia that, even on their remotest campaigns, they refused to drink any other, but had it brought to them daily in golden jars carried across the length of the Empire by relays of horsemen. The river rises near Kermanshah, meanders in a series of inconsequent windings to within a little distance of the Karûn, then turns northwards again, and ends by losing itself among the marshes. During the last part of its course it passes near a place called Howeiza, where some eighty years ago it gave a remarkable display of the fickle nature which it shares in common with all the streams of Mesopotamia. The river at that date passed through the town and watered the fertile lands around. Excellent crops were raised, and Howeiza was a very flourishing town of 30,000 inhabitants. One fateful day, however, the good folk of the place woke to find themselves left high and dry—the river had, in the night, abandoned its old bed and taken to another some miles away. Deprived in this way of the sole cause of its prosperity, Howeiza rapidly declined; in a short time the population had dwindled to a tenth, and nowadays the place is little more than a village.

At the point at which we reached it, near the

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village of Kut Said Ali, it was about 100 yards across and very deep. Fortunately we were still in the land of *belems*—though the rudely-built pitch-covered specimens we found here were but poor counterparts of the white, spick-and-span boats at Mohammerah. A small fleet of them ferried us and our baggage across, the horses were towed behind, and the mules, stripped for once of their pack-saddles, were herded together at the top of the bank and driven pell-mell down the steep slope into the water like Gadarene swine, where, finding all retreat cut off, they bravely struck out for the other bank. Some camels followed, tied head to tail in a string, and wearing a look of, if possible, even more abject despondency than they have on dry land.

A family of *seyyids* of great repute live in this neighbourhood. Those *soi-disant* descendants of the Prophet enjoy a position somewhat analogous to that of a country gentleman of fifty years ago; they do no work, and are supported in considerable luxury by the common herd. The head of the family came to call on the British Commission in the course of the afternoon, bringing with him his ten-year-old son, a particularly handsome and jolly-looking boy. Our kit was not yet unpacked, and no cigarettes could be found to offer to the visitor, so the Commissioner's cheroots had to take their place. The *seyyid* took one, eyed it dubiously, and lit it, but evidently found it not at all to his liking. Being too much of a gentleman to commit

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such a breach of manners as to throw it away, he solemnly handed it on, after a few puffs, to the little fellow squatting by his side. The urchin was still gleefully puffing at his cigar five minutes later when his father took leave,—we missed the inevitable sequel!

A range of low hills lay behind our camp, from the top of which one had a magnificent view of the country lying away to the north. The Kerkha winds through it in a hundred graceful loops and curls, and waters miles upon miles of splendid rolling country. Yet as far as the eye could reach the only sign of human handiwork was a solitary white tomb. At first it seems incredible that such a tract of land should be left absolutely desert—a sort of No Man's Land; but the reason is not far to seek. All this region is the happy hunting-ground of the Sagwand and the Beni Lam, two of the most predatory tribes in Asia. The Beni Lam have their headquarters down by the Tigris, near Amara, and were the chief Arab tribe to throw in their lot with the Turk against us in the present campaign. Seventy years ago they enjoyed the following unsavoury reputation among their neighbours, as quoted by a European traveller through their country: "The Beni Lam are not Arabs but Kafirs, who neither respect the laws of hospitality nor behave in any way as good Mussulmans. They are as treacherous as they are savage and cruel, and would cut the throat of a guest for a trifle." The cap still fits.

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These amiable tribes live almost exclusively by plunder and rapine, robbing and harrying the poor villagers, till the latter live in a state of constant terror of them. The consequence is that a huge tract of extremely fertile country, which a little labour in irrigating would make as productive as any in the world, remains barren and untouched. Only a week before our arrival the Beni Lam had swooped down on the flocks of Kut Said Ali and driven them off. They had avoided actually killing the boys who were guarding the animals, because they do not like the inconvenience of a blood-feud, but in order to delay their getting home to give the alarm, they had taken the poor little chaps and flogged them till they could hardly walk.

Once or twice we ourselves were taken for a raiding party by shepherds grazing their sheep in the plain. As soon as they caught sight of us, they would start to drive their flocks helter-skelter towards the nearest village, shouting with all their might and firing off their guns to attract help from the villagers. On the first occasion I galloped after them to reassure them—overtook them, and found myself looking down the muzzle of a loaded ·450—after that I left the reassuring to some one else to do!

One day's march from the crossing of the Kerkha brought us to the edge of the Khor-el-Azem. The caravan now turned off to skirt round

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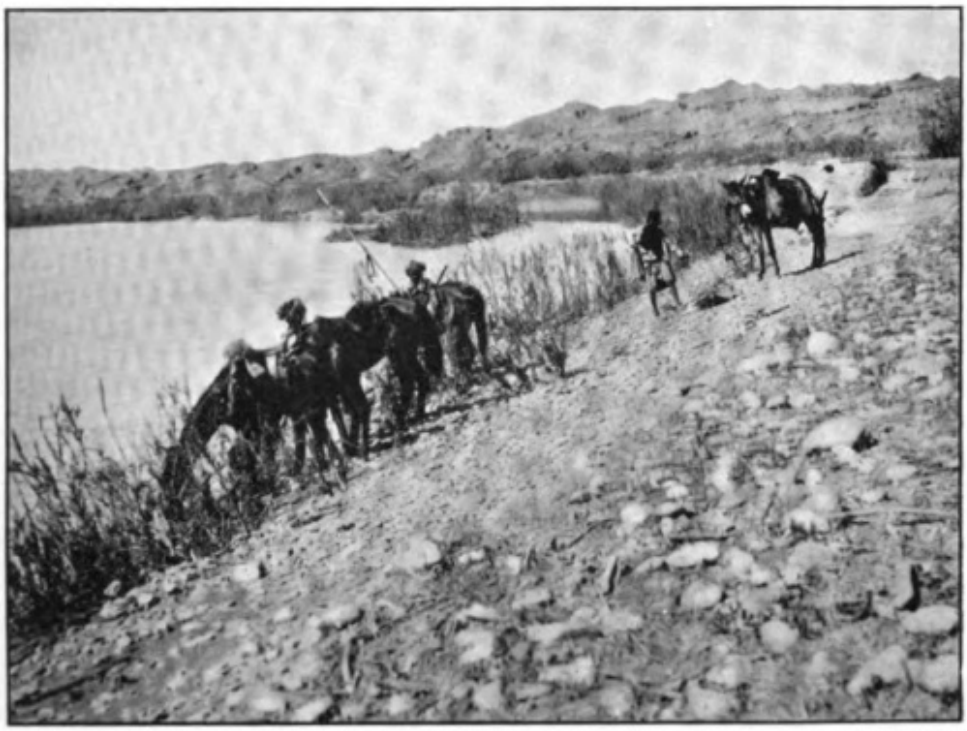

Escort Watering Horses.

House-building in Arabistan.

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the edge of the marsh, but I was lucky enough to be able to send my horse round with the main party and travel myself for two days by *belem*. The marsh scenery is wholly unlike anything I have seen elsewhere, and hardly less unique is its population of queer amphibious beings who live among their swamps, isolated from the outside world, and earning a meagre livelihood by growing rice and fishing.

I find several notes in my diary, made during our lazy progress down the stream, which I think will best give the impression of what the journey was like. The first is dated—

Feb. 22, *noon.*—We are floating down the Kerkha in a *belem*. Rather a tight fit—nine persons inside! It is a primitive tubby variety of the *belem*, with a tremendously long tapering bow curving back so as to give to the boat almost the outline of a Viking's ship. It is divided by two thwarts, and the first-class accommodation amidships is occupied by the Colonel, myself, and an Arab *seyyid* with a bright red henna-stained beard and a limitless capacity for making unpleasant noises and soliciting presents. It's drowsy work, drifting down on the stream with occasional bursts of frenzied energy when our *belemjis* churn the water with their paddles for a few minutes, and then relapse into idleness and droning Arab songs. The boats we meet coming up-stream loaded with cut reeds are tracked by

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a man on the bank, while his pal sits in the stern and steers the bow of the boat out from the bank. These marshmen wear very few clothes and are burnt nearly black.

2 P.M.—After lunch and a shoot on the bank, which is full of frankolin and hares, we are again paddling down-stream. The boatmen here seem never to have discovered the possibility of paddling one on each side of the boat; they give a few strokes together on the bow side, then swing over and do the same on stroke side; result—a very zigzag course and frequent sprinklings for the passengers. The river banks are populated by innumerable tortoises, who sit and crane their necks at us as we go by. There are solemn cranes standing sentinel here and there, and kingfishers, some of them blue, some black and white, flitting over the water. We have just passed the queerest group of birds sitting on the bank. There were about half a dozen of them, very grave hunchback creatures, rather like small penguins, but without any of the penguin's cheerfulness. They reminded me of a party of Scotch elders at a funeral, as they stood there silent and motionless and wearing the most dejected air imaginable. One had a gorgeous greeny-blue back, but the rest were in sober grey —perhaps his *harim*. The Arabs say they are called *wag*, and only the Bedouins eat them.

Later (*in Camp*).—We have arrived at Bisaitin, one of the biggest of the marsh villages. It

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stretches as a single row of huts for miles along each bank of the river, with side streets at intervals on canals leading off the main stream. The huts are long and narrow, the walls consist of bundles of reeds about six feet high, partly sunk into the ground and covered with a "barrel" roof of reed mats; they look very unlike any house you ever saw, being just a thick sausage with a big tuft sticking up at each end where the uncut tops of the reed bundles are allowed to hang over above the roof. Each village has one or two mud palaces where the big-wigs live, and all the life of the place goes on on the waterways. Half-way through the village we branched off down a side canal, came to a place where it broadened out into a shallow lake, and found the camp already pitched at the water's edge, so sailed right up to our own front door.

23rd, 9 A.M.—Back in our *belem*, this time with W. We have managed at last to dislodge Red Beard into the bows and can stretch our legs. For an hour we slipped past an endless succession of reed-huts, and crowds of staring Arabs and naked children lining the bank, very interested in their first view of a European—for this bit has never been travelled along before, as far as we know. Now and then we overtook another *belem*, and had animated if somewhat unintelligible conversations with the occupants. They start by saying, "There are some terrible fellows up the river where you are going; they'll cut your throats

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and bash your heads in" (actions to suit). We reply by pointing to our guns, and they clap hands and applaud our bravery. Then a large hubble-bubble is passed on board for our *belemjis* to have a couple of sucks at while we inspect their fish tridents.

A mile back the Kerkha abruptly came to an end amidst impenetrable reeds, and seeing no way out, we thought our guides had deceived us, but the marshmen turned out in force and pulled and shoved us over a bar into a hidden canal about five feet wide and full of other *belems*. It was a miniature Boulter's Lock, and we shoved and cursed and laughed until at last we got through, and are now meandering along a vague channel among the reeds which looks as if it would come to an end at every corner. We have taken on board a fine fish which some men we passed had just speared. I forgot to mention that to-morrow's dinner, in the shape of a live sheep, is tied to my thwart, and occasionally butts me in the back or nibbles my shoulder.

10 A.M.—We are still poling and paddling along this extraordinary channel, only a few feet wide, with a sharp turn every few yards, and an impenetrable wall of rushes six feet high completely shutting us in, so that all one can see is the sky and a few yards of water ahead and behind. Two other *belems* follow us, paddled by men cross-legged in the bows and crooning Arab love-songs. One hears birds but sees none, and it's roasting

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hot. I doubt if a white man could live here an hour at midday in summer.

W.'s wild footman is sitting behind him, a man from the mountains, who illustrates the delightfully characteristic Persian trait of telling any sort of lie to please his listeners. Whenever Red Beard says, "It is so many miles to so and so," or, "There will be good shooting at to-night's camp," the Shatir encores, "Yes, just so many miles," or, "Splendid shooting." Of course he knows we know he has just come from Luristan, and has never been within two hundred miles of the place before, but that doesn't worry him. I have just overheard W., in reply to an inquiry, explain in his best Persian that gamooses *do not* walk about the streets of London!

Camp at Umm Chir, 3 P.M.—We paddled for another mile through the reeds, then came out into a lagoon thick with water-fowl of half a dozen different sorts, with the desert sloping down to it beyond. This is the limit of the marsh, so we waded ashore through the shallows and came on a mile into camp.

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CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE LAND OF ELAM (2).

WHAT I may describe as the second stage of the frontier began from Umm Chir. We now had before us 200 miles of pure desert, so utterly bare that we were dèstined to travel 150 of them without seeing a trace of any human habitation. The way lay along the edge of the great Mesopotamian plain, a bare arid track, watered only by the scanty streams which come off the Eastern watershed of the Luristan mountains and flow down to the marshes which fringe the bank of the Tigris. A fair description of this region was left by a member of the Frontier Commission of 1849-52 in the following words: "It is extremely difficult country to travel through on account of the absence of habitations, the danger of attacks from the Beni Lam Arabs from the Tigris side, and the Lurs from the directions of the mountains, and the brackish and pitchy water which is hardly fit for use in winter and is quite undrinkable in summer. This country has no boundaries but the Tigris on the west and the Luristan mountains on the east.

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