

FROM
PERSIAN
UPLANDS

F. HALE

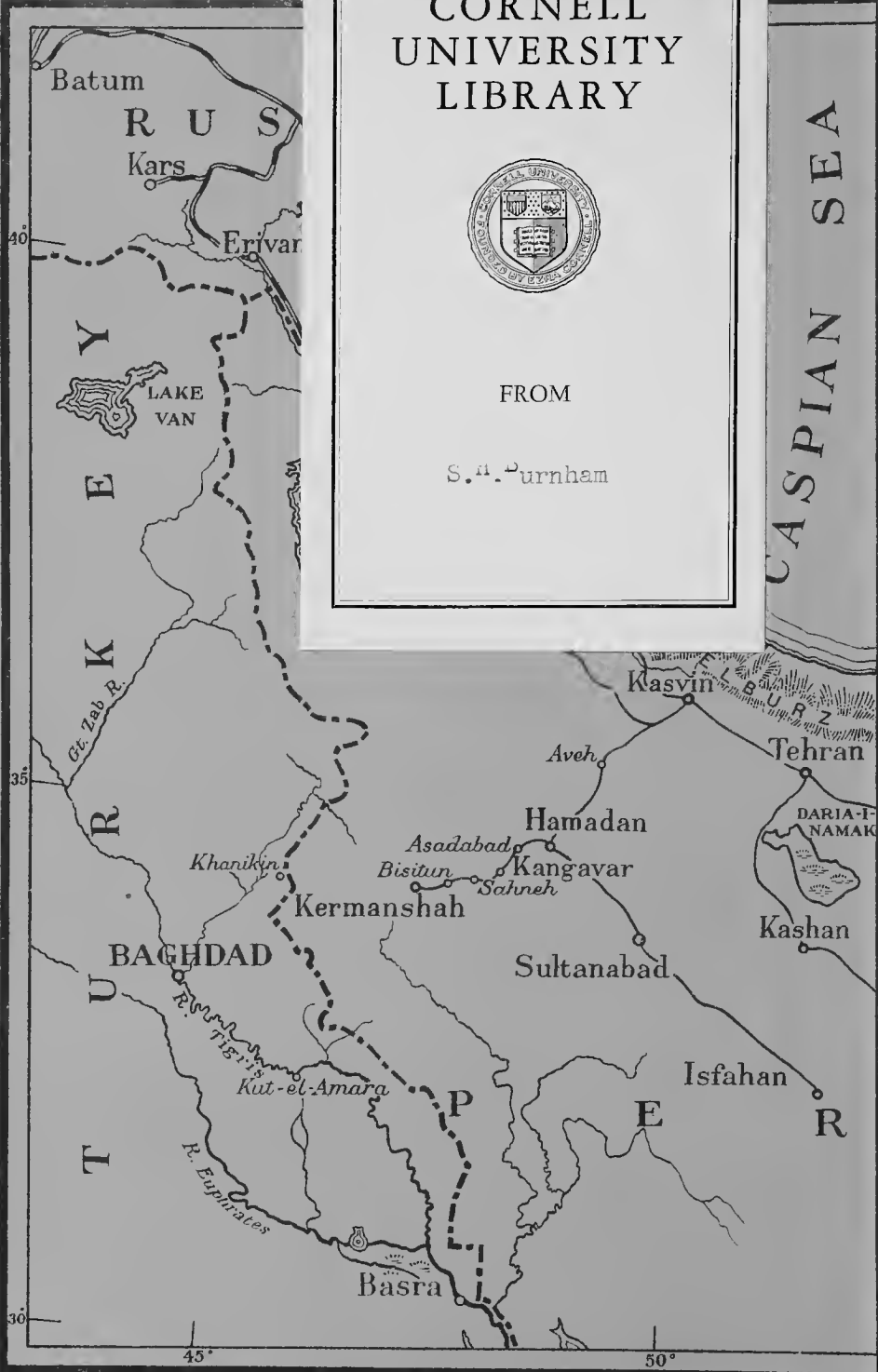
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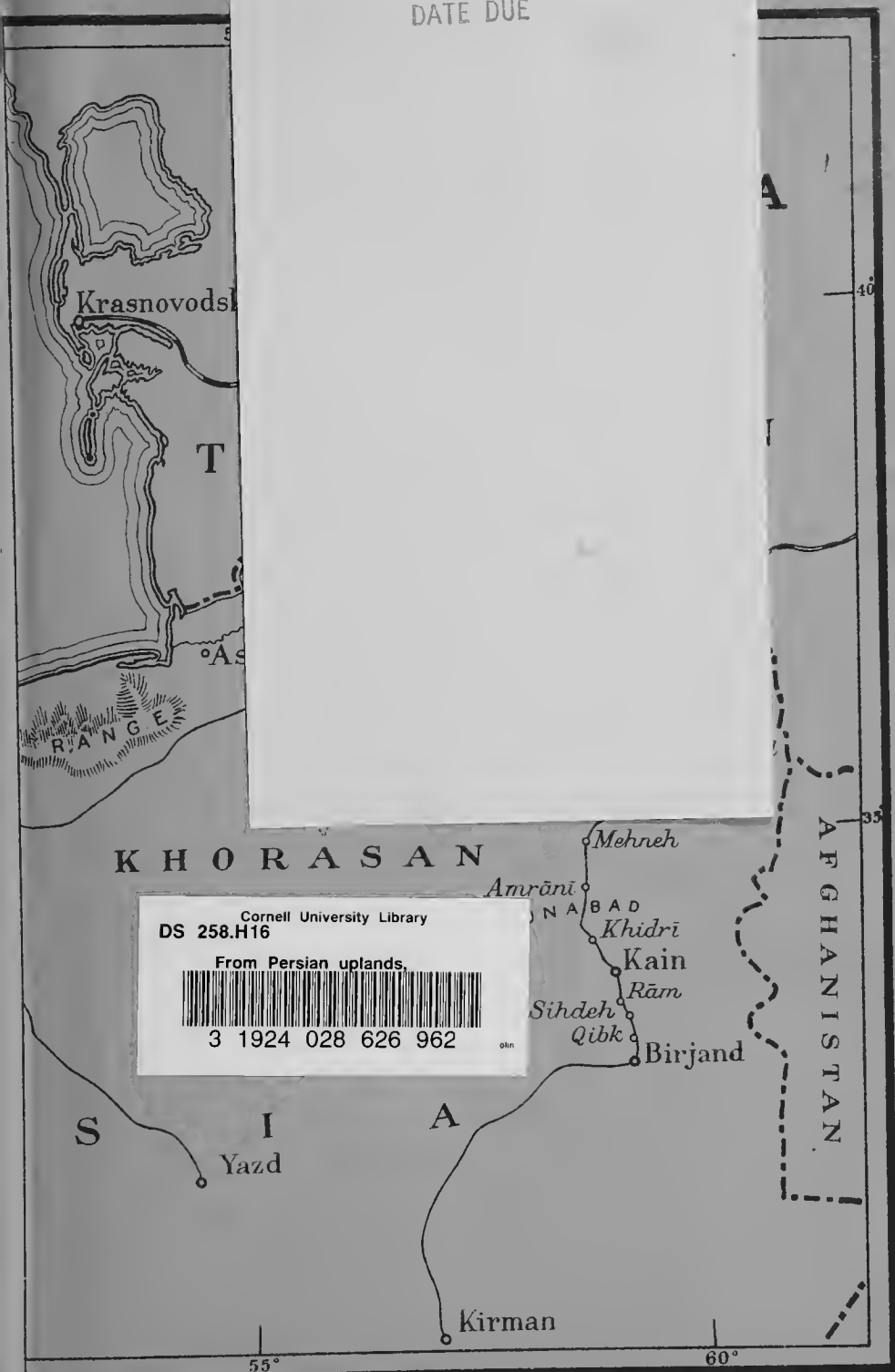
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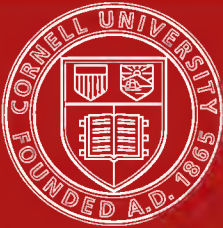
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FROM PERSIAN UPLANDS

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BY

F. HALE

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FROM PERSIAN UPLANDS

ASKABAD, 15th August 1918.

DEAR M.,—You are wondering, I suppose, what has happened to me since I left London on the 7th: whether I missed the train at Victoria, or took the wrong one at Flushing: whether I dallied in Berlin, or was held up in Warsaw: how, knowing no Russian, I contrived to get over the long journey through Southern Russia to Rostov, and so along the northern side of the Caucasus and down the western shore of the Caspian Sea to Baku, the port of outset for the Middle East.

That five days' orgy of locomotion, with the delightful twelve hours' crossing to Krasnovodsk in a clean well-equipped steamer, and the final twenty-one hours in a leisurely journey south-eastward by the Transcaspian Railway that brought me here to Askabad, come back in snatches like the brief inconsequent episodes that stand out from a night's dreaming. Isolated pictures rise up and glide past in memory: the glint of the sun on the chestnut backs of a ploughing team in Westphalia—the conversation in the dining-car as we dashed along through birch groves in Hanover—the cosmopolitan women of a

Berlin café, and the rotund, spectacled gendarmes of the Friedrichstrasse—little bowler-hatted ill-shaven men in the streets of the Polish capital, and the poor at the doors of the half-eastern churches there—in Russia, the heavy-booted and belted giants of railway officialdom, the close-cropped heads and great beards of the men, the blank rusticity of the pale-faced blue-eyed country girls at the countless little railway stations where the engines are watered and the passengers refreshed—and again, the lifeless immensity of the plains on a Sunday, with great stretches of wheat and oats and maize relieved by the golden stream of field on field of sunflowers with their heads bowed eastwards.

Impressions of personalities, too, detach themselves here and there from the confused memory of strange types and foreign tongues. Brief acquaintances formed on the basis of a common speech are recalled with grateful interest. On the way to Berlin I met an English schoolboy off to Vienna for his holidays, and his cheery talk made me home-sick, for I was not to hear the like of it for another five years. For two whole days of travelling in Russian trains I had the company of an American, whose terse reflections on things in general, and on Muscovite methods of agriculture in particular, did much to alleviate the discomfort of a sooty and ill-lighted sleeping-car. On the Caspian, too, I was lucky enough to meet

of one who has suddenly to drop them and take up other concerns. On the other hand, you may say that such things go to the building-up of a creed, and give a point of attack, as it were, for new life. There is not much in that, but you can have it for what it is worth, and we will turn to the sad case of the man on leave after five years in a country like this. He, poor fellow, is pulled both ways. He goes home to his friends, who, in spite of correspondence, have known nothing of him during that great slice of time. He takes up the old life, plays golf and goes to the theatre, and talks about politics and the stock exchange in a pathetic attempt to make up the interval and come in touch. But all the while his mind is working on lines his friends cannot follow. He feels that these people, with whom he once saw eye to eye, are looking down avenues of thought that no longer exist for him. He thinks, probably, that their intelligence is dissipated in the details of town life and daily newspapers. His conversation with them must be either anecdotal or general—forms which lead quickly to exhaustion and boredom, but seldom to intimacy. After a few months his international outlook begins to take local colour again, when, heigh-ho ! he must go back to the East. Of what use 'reviving old desires,' to be thus torn from their attainment ? He sighs and turns his mind for consolation to thoughts of guns and tennis rackets

willows, discussing the latest Paris news with a little old spectacled Frenchwoman, the pleasure of the hour is made piquant with regrets and speculations. To-morrow, before the sun sets, I shall be in Persia again.

When you asked me whether I was really glad to go back, I shrugged my shoulders or made some equally neutral reply. A man must make a living, and that, after all, is the main argument. The rest is a matter of pros and cons, and when you have summed them up the account pretty well balances. The home life pulls hard, especially at times of leave-taking. So much of tradition and environment have to be given up; so much of the sensible pleasures and perceptions that have made up your early life seems to be lost when you go among a race that has none of those things you take delight in. One cannot go to the opera in Persia, or hear a Beethoven symphony, or visit the Academy, or dance at a country ball, or take a punt on the river, or discuss the burning questions of the day over a snug fireside. Of what use, in the Middle East, is a liking for French poets or English county history? Of what service is the study of socialism, let us say? Side interests of this kind do not constitute a man's character? Well, perhaps not, but they are a big part of his personalty, to use a lawyer's word, and except in so far as they recur pleasantly in memory these things are so much loss to the life

of one who has suddenly to drop them and take up other concerns. On the other hand, you may say that such things go to the building-up of a creed, and give a point of attack, as it were, for new life. There is not much in that, but you can have it for what it is worth, and we will turn to the sad case of the man on leave after five years in a country like this. He, poor fellow, is pulled both ways. He goes home to his friends, who, in spite of correspondence, have known nothing of him during that great slice of time. He takes up the old life, plays golf and goes to the theatre, and talks about politics and the stock exchange in a pathetic attempt to make up the interval and come in touch. But all the while his mind is working on lines his friends cannot follow. He feels that these people, with whom he once saw eye to eye, are looking down avenues of thought that no longer exist for him. He thinks, probably, that their intelligence is dissipated in the details of town life and daily newspapers. His conversation with them must be either anecdotal or general—forms which lead quickly to exhaustion and boredom, but seldom to intimacy. After a few months his international outlook begins to take local colour again, when, heigh-ho ! he must go back to the East. Of what use 'reviving old desires,' to be thus torn from their attainment ? He sighs and turns his mind for consolation to thoughts of guns and tennis rackets

and of the comforting attentions of many native servants. The Stores and his tailor provide him with an outfit and supplies, and away he goes. His mental outfit is a patchy one, partly discarded and partly renewed, but not to be completed anywhere in Europe.

I fancy I see you, as you read this, throwing your head back, raising your eyebrows, smiling a tolerant smile with your eyes and a determined one with your lips, and asking again: 'Are you glad to go?' Why yes, of course I am. But I should like to have you with me.

ROBĀT I TURUKH, 1st September 1918.

DEAR M.,—I had a letter from R. yesterday, telling me that you were going north for a holiday on the moors, so I expect you to share my mood this evening—a joyous one, for I am at last on the road with my caravan, having left Meshed just a few hours ago. But first let me tell you how I got there.

The morning after I wrote you I left Askabad with my hand-luggage in an old phaeton with no tyres, drawn by three scraggy ponies. I had no servant, and the driver was a Russian who knew about ten words of Persian, so we hadn't much to say to each other, and I let him go as he liked. We rolled along a flat road for a couple of hours through a stream of dust set up by the horses' feet, and then rattled uphill to

the first wayside stopping-place, where we halted for an hour and a half to have lunch and feed the team. For the rest of the afternoon we continued up and through the mountains till the frontier was reached an hour before sunset. My passport was taken and returned for the sixth and last time in Russian territory, and we passed on up to the Russian frontier post and down to the Persian village of Bājīrān, where I put up for the night in a room in a caravanserai kept by a Russian. Next morning we were off at six o'clock, and so we rumbled south-eastwards for four days, through a continuous flow of white grimy dust, till we passed through one of the gates of Meshed, and rattled and joggled and jingled our way over rough-paved narrow streets, coming to rest finally near the town square, where I found a cheery welcome in a roomy bungalow with a shady garden.

Tea in a deck-chair under the trees on the lawn was very pleasant after an hour spent in removing road-dust. Later on some tennis players turned up, and I was introduced to a few members of the European colony. Five days later I received my luggage from Askabad, and commenced preparations for continuing my journey. Unfortunately we are in the month of Ramazan, when good Mohammedans sleep and pray most of the day, eat and drink at night only, and do as little work as possible, so that I was detained

another week before starting. The Russians have an infantry garrison at present in Meshed, and they run a military club where every one goes once a week to dance and make merry to the music of the regimental band. The officers themselves are the most hospitable fellows imaginable, and their conviviality knows no bounds in extent or duration. When they have danced their wonderful dances for an hour or so, they sit down to supper, and dishes are passed and glasses are emptied and songs are sung till it is time to return to the dancing. Later, when the ladies have gone home and the band has played itself out, they continue their jovial capers till it is time for morning drill. In the afternoon you will see them playing indifferent tennis with the same inexhaustible zest. One wonders when they sleep and whether they ever feel tired.

I entered Meshed somewhat in the travelling fashion of seventeenth-century England. To-night I am back in the Middle Ages. Not entirely so, for my little camp has in it many touches of modern Europe, instance the folding bed, table and chair fresh from London, which half-fill my Indian tent bought in the bazaars of Meshed. The candle-lamps are lit, and the servants are busy with cooking-pots round a wood fire. My horse, a few yards away, is crunching his barley with an appetite born of anticipation. Farther off, the mules are feeding

quietly, with every now and then a little reverberant note from the bells at their necks as the animals bury their muzzles deeper into their nosebags. A light breeze rustles in the willows by the watercourse. The heavens are luminous with stars.

Meshed, with its pilgrim population of dead and living, is lost in darkness across the plain, and remains but a vanishing memory. Lost, too, is its golden dome, that glittering crown of Persia's most holy shrine, whereto the pilgrims journey—many of them old and frail men, hastening, perhaps, to end their days like moths beneath its ball of fire.

You will be tramping the heather these days, breathing the air of the hills, and asking yourself why you ever live in towns. I too have found my hills again. They are not clothed with heather, but bare, for the most part, to the all-devouring sun. The plains, waterless but for a few happy valleys, have nothing to embellish them but a patchy growth of scrubby little desert plants, on some of which the camel browses. Here are no morning mists, no dewy twilights. The air is clear, translucent. The world is in outline. Everything is naked, simple, inevitable. Over all sits solitude among the hilltops, like a spirit brooding on eternity. . . .

After all, I envy you your moors. But then, perhaps, sometimes, you envy me my wilderness, do you not ?

AMRĀNĪ, *8th September 1913.*

DEAR M.,—I arrived here at six this morning, having been in the saddle since sunset last night. Food was almost unobtainable, thanks to the ravages of a band of Persian cavalry who had preceded us, so I had to breakfast on tea (without milk) and the remains of a large cake provided by my kind hostess in Meshed. Later on, by means of prayers, expostulations, anticipatory blessings, and payment in advance, we procured a meagre supply of bread, melons and fowls, and fodder for the animals. The deficiencies of the commissariat are aggravated by the fact that the plains are full of big black-breasted sand-grouse—nice fat birds that would make a delectable lunch if only there was a gun in the camp.

I have come so far gently and by easy stages, through the village of Sharīfābād, by Robāt i Safid, to the pleasant little town of Turbat, which lies buried in orchards between two fertile plains ; on to Zurnūkh and Mehneh—both of them crown lands. From the latter place to here is about thirty miles over a broad plain, with not a single habitation on the road beyond a few miserable houses half-way.

As we filed off southwards last night in little groups and units, I thought of past journeys in Persia—long weary marches in the Bakhtiari

mountains, with the partridge calling at sunrise—riverside camps in the heat of early autumn—the night ascent of the great passes from Kāzerān to Dasht i Arjen on the Bushire road—Persepolis in the dusk of evening, with the great carven bulls guarding the porch of Xerxes. . . .

We moved out slowly, with the long cool night before us. Westward across the great plain the sky was magical with sunset tints along the unbroken horizon—a long yellow flush on the level of the pale sun—above him rose-pink, and over that a little grey bank of feathery cloud. In the south the crystal half-moon^{*} was floating like an iceberg in a sea of turquoise blue. Eastward the blue turned to lapis lazuli, sinking deeper and deeper till it merged into shadowed tones of murky violet and purple along the darkening horizon.

The mules crept on with little deliberate steps, their noses to the track. Behind them the muleteers followed with long swinging strides. In the rear came my four mounted guards, with their old Werndl rifles balanced across their saddles. Anon the Milky Way appeared overhead, and the Great Bear came rising over the northern hills. The moon, lost for the moment in cloudy billows, left us in semi-darkness, out of which glowed little red spots of fire in the pipes of the muleteers.

Suddenly the leader of the horsemen at my

back burst into song, shouting in high-pitched long-drawn notes—a song of languorous amour, full of the ripples and gurgles and trills that characterise these people's music. When he stopped I bade him continue—and moved a little farther ahead of him. He had a good voice, but its edges, to the ears of a European, needed the softening of distance.

Midnight passed, and the men became less talkative. Heads nodded over saddles, and dozing figures sank into amorphous bundles on the packs of the ridden mules. The muleteers took turns on their one little donkey, stretching themselves face downwards across the sacks of fodder on his all-suffering back. The moon had long disappeared, and the track was barely visible. The hours drew on between waking and dreaming and watching the stars. Orion, limb by limb, had dragged himself clear of the horizon, and was now well on his way westward. By and by the morning star appeared, bringing with it the false dawn. The air grew chilly, and I dismounted and led my horse awhile. Gradually the east paled. Pale turned to white, and white became yellow. The stars disappeared, and the brown hills stood out clear. A great flight of crows passed high overhead. The horses, sighting the village of our destination, quickened their steps. At last, all awake and lively again, we jogged into Amrānī as the sun was rising.

KAIN, *11th September 1913.*

DEAR M.,—I left Amrānī at four on the morning of the ninth, going southwards across the plain into hills and among sand-dunes that gave way eventually to the broad plains of Gunābād, which I found to be plentifully blest with large villages and fruit gardens. At eight-thirty we reached Beidukht, finding quarters for the day in the house of a peasant whose wife and family promptly vacated the two living-rooms to make place for me. In one of these rooms the roof, for a yard or more from the outer wall and across the whole breadth of the room, was replaced by a wind-funnel arrangement of brick and plaster roughly partitioned into three great vents for the passage of air-currents. The householder, who paid about four shillings a month rent for his four rooms and kitchen and go-downs, was a solicitous fellow, and took me on to his roof to illustrate the great labour required for the conservation of water in the surrounding orchards and cotton and melon fields. The gardens were all deeply sunk, and the fields banked round with earth to retain the scanty rain-water. Well-water, he told me, was only obtainable at a depth of six hundred feet. Later, I was shown an underground reservoir, the water of which had recently been spoiled by the action of an Indian and several Russian Cossacks on their way southwards. These travellers, it

was said, had gone there to wash themselves, and had apparently made a free use of soap in the tank itself.

At Beidukht I had to change guards, and a messenger was accordingly sent to the deputy-governor at an adjacent village. Subsequently I sent a second messenger to hasten matters, and four men turned up late at night. As only three of them were provided with rifles, I told the fourth I had no use for a mounted man who was unarmed, and sent him away. In a few moments he returned flourishing an old revolver. He was quite disconsolate and not a little perplexed when I told him that a rifle of some sort was obligatory. Eventually I left with the other three at midnight by a low moon, and reached Khidrī at half-past eight next morning. The road was a fairly good one, climbing and winding for the last seven miles through a broad range of hills, from which we descended gently to the plain

At Khidrī I occupied a small house with one living room, open kitchen-space, and a compound about twelve feet square. In the evening, as I stood on the low mud roof watching the home-returning of goat-herds with their scanty flocks, a dervish came to my door in the street below, chanting raucously and with much loud professional groaning. His litany commenced in praise of the deity, and shortly became very topical and pointed in indirect address to myself as the

object of his attentions. The matter of his chant was that a certain sahib, whose name he mentioned and whom I was shortly to meet in Birjand, was a very generous sahib, possessed of many virtues, and, in short, that this munificent sahib gave him two krans (eightpence) every year. I was so struck with this unexpected testimonial to my future friend's widespread reputation that I promptly bestowed half that sum on the wily beggar-dervish. He went off chanting louder than ever, and the burden of his sing-song strain, announced tunefully to the whole village, was this: 'There are two sahibs in the world: — sahib and this sahib! These are the greatest of the Feranghis!'

An hour or two after sunset we got clear of Khidri. The mules were going slowly, with a fairly long stage before them, so I left them to their leisurely paces and pushed on with one guard and my servants. Our escort proved to be the poorest of guides, and as a consequence we lost the road twice in the course of the night. For two-thirds of the way we kept to the plain, then entered the hills, and by and by threaded our way out again by a winding river-course. The rising sun showed the town of Kain, the old capital of the district, lying under the southern hills across the plain. We had travelled nearly forty miles in the night, and I was glad to find comfortable quarters in the telegraph office.

This afternoon I had a visit from a Persian who holds an appointment in the town. He was a gentleman of the new school, and represented one of its least attractive types. After airing with ill-concealed vanity his meagre knowledge of French and English, he drifted into political platitudes, and for half an hour regaled me with second-hand ideas, culled, obviously, from the Teheran newspapers of the last five years. The purport of his oracular eloquence was twofold. 'We Persians are a poor people, unworthy of civilisation, and fit only for subjection.' And, on the other hand, 'England and Russia are here entirely for their own benefit; they will not let other races help us, and their trade interests are a mere pretext created as an excuse for political encroachment.' Persia's young men are very prone, nowadays, to lamenting their failings as a race. National self-abasement is the burden of their talk, and much fluent diction is wasted in destructive criticism of their leaders' methods, which criticism, of course, they never think of applying to themselves as individuals.

Kain is not a prosperous town, and I begin to wonder if the rest of the district is like it. My servants have a low opinion of the place, having found that mutton, fowls, and rice, for some temporary reason, were hard to procure. Their view of things is a precise one, and its practical justice oppresses me.

QĪBK, 13th September 1913.

DEAR M.,—Yesterday's journey was a pleasant one, and not too arduous. We left Kain at three in the morning, passing through a long stretch of gardens and along the plain till we reached the hills. A gentle winding ascent brought us to the chilly top of the pass at eight o'clock, and we then descended with a quickly rising temperature till our march ended in Rām, a squalid little village among the hills. On the road we passed half a dozen hamlets making the best of their scanty water supply with tiny fields of barley. Melons were plentiful along the hill-sides, and my muleteers helped themselves freely to the ripe fruit, which would not in any case fetch more than a penny each on the spot. Among the melons were a few castor-oil plants; the uncultivated slopes, dotted with boulders of dark rock, were relieved with a fair growth of camel-thorn. The villagers of Rām subsist on the produce of their meagre crops, and weave their clothing from the fleeces of their ill-fed flocks. Their houses are of mud and straw, with sunk floors and low doorways. They refused silver or nickel money from us, declaring that they possessed neither, and that copper only was current with them, the coins being less than a farthing in value. Presumably they preferred small change and thought it impolitic to display their wealth. They spoke highly of

the governor of the district, stating as ample reason for their loyalty that they had paid no taxes for two years.

I camped for the day on a walled-in piece of ground, and at two hours after midnight set out again through the hills, going along in switchback fashion with short ascents and long descents, till we finally drew clear of the mountains and descended to Sihdeh, a populous village of mud houses with domed roofs, lying in a billowy plain. Anon we climbed a gentle slope through fields of melons, beet, and late barley, and continued up and down through apparently interminable hills to Qibk. Here we are at another miserable village. My camp is pitched beneath it, and sheltered from the afternoon sun by mulberry and almond trees.

I have not explored this place with the unpronounceable name. Rather I have kept sulkily to my tent, outside which, at this moment, a woman is dangling an infant in a powerful appeal for alms.

My mood is not charitable. It is rather apprehensive. I am wondering what Birjand will be like when I see it to-morrow.

BĪRJAND, 11th November 1913.

DEAR M.,—When I wrote you last I was on the eve of my arrival here, two months ago. I shall never forget my impression as I rode into the

Birjand valley next morning and caught sight of a part of the town, looking exactly like another dingy stopping-place on a caravan road. My distaste was heightened by a nearer view of barren hills, below which, on a long hump sticking out of the valley, was dumped a pell-mell heap of little mud and plaster houses with domed roofs and mean walls. My feelings were partly relieved when I found a friendly reception and comfortable quarters awaiting me, and my first disappointment gradually gave way to something else.

You will think I have waited an unconscionable time before telling you anything about the place I have come to live in. But I have had little time to write until now, and I thought it better not to use bad language in a hurry.

The English people I found here have now all gone south, and I am practically alone for the time being. I have looked around a little, and made acquaintance with many of the local people, and I find that Birjand isn't such a terrible place as it seemed in the first week or two. In fact, I feel like a man who has found a dust-covered bottle of rare old wine hidden in what he thought was an empty cellar.

I had inklings of such a possibility even in Meshed. The governor, it was said there, was a man in his early prime, who played tennis and auction bridge, and was a good shot—a man who represented an old ruling family, and was beloved

by his people. Truly an exceptional combination of virtues and accomplishments, which in itself promised wonders for an out-of-the-way district of Persia. That the climate was excellent went without saying, but that the people were prosperous and had an extensive and thriving industry of their own seemed too good to be believed. I had many misgivings, but my doubts have nearly all been removed.

The governor is away just now on business at Teheran. His deputy is a cheery, open-eyed fellow, with a hearty laugh and a good-natured desire to please everybody, to which end he works hard from early morning till night. What does he do? He owns a lot of carpet factories, but besides that he administers a district with several hundred thousand people in it. How does he do it? Well, he goes about seeing people sometimes, but generally he sits in his office at one end of a big garden, and talks to priests and merchants, and landowners and officials, and village headmen and tribal leaders. Some of them have important grievances, others none at all, but they almost all want something from him, and they often get what they want. His office is a general courthouse, too. The man whose neighbour has damaged his wall or stolen his wife, the traveller who has been robbed or says he has, the late pedestrian arrested for being out in the streets after closing time without the password, the two

strangers who have quarrelled, the two friends who have fought, the baker suing for debt, the petty farmer claiming water rights, the man who has been called bad names in public, the man who has resisted the 'police,' and the 'policeman' who has overstepped his authority—all these come along and swear and forswear and counter-swear, each of them with a crowd of witnesses, real or imaginary, and all of them, by their own eloquent showing, harmless, innocent, and hapless ones who have been vilely wronged and seek the protection of a benign government against the most evil of men. Out of contradiction comes truth—not always, but surprisingly often. Occasionally a severe beating takes place in the high-walled garden in front of the court-house, and as my own quarters are just on the other side of the wall, I hear the howls of the victim of justice while I am having my poached eggs of a morning. My boy cocks his head to catch the groans, and grins appreciatively. If I ask him what the culprit is being bastinadoed for, he is sure to know all about it. I went on my roof the other day (somewhat shamefacedly) to watch the operation, as I had never seen a beating before. The wretch lay on his back with his feet tied to a cross-pole, and two men were laying on to his upturned soles in deliberate fashion with stout loose whips. When it was over he was carried to a stable and left there with his swollen feet in the litter. Sometimes

jagged branches of pomegranate are used, and blood flows quickly. Even death may result if the flogging is exceptionally severe. Horrible, you say; and what a barbarous country, you think. But is there as much barbarity in that as there was in Europe less than a hundred years ago?

There is a prison in Birjand, but the only occupant at present is a man committed for murder and awaiting sentence. The murder was cold-blooded, and the man has confessed his crime before three priests in turn, but if the son of the victim accepts blood-money he will be let off at that. The man's story is that he and his friend, fellow-travellers, were resting for the night in a room at a certain village. Suddenly the devil tempted him to kill his friend, who had about thirty shillings on his person. He could not of course resist the devil, so he took a large stone and beat the brains out of the sleeping man. When out riding I have often passed little cairns of stone by the wayside, and I am told that some of them mark the scene of former murders. What, I wonder, are the feelings of the murderer's relatives when they pass that little cairn? Do they add a stone to the pile, from pride or shame, or do they take one away, from fear? Probably they have no feelings at all.

The governor being a bridge player, there are naturally three other players here, so I make a

fourth, and we meet twice a week. The stakes are nominal, and the players are average hands. Their terminology is an amusing mixture of English, French, and Persian, picked up from Europeans or invented by themselves. We play from an hour after sunset till eight o'clock or later, when they know my dinner-hour is due. They themselves have their squatting meal at any time between nine and midnight, and retire to bed very shortly after it, to rise again with the sun. The talk, in the intervals of play, is vivacious and jocular, even when business or politics are mentioned. Perhaps the Persian newspaper from Calcutta is brought in, and questions are asked as to some point of our administration in Egypt, or the position of affairs in the Balkans is discussed with the quick intelligence, lively imagination, and impetuous reasoning for which the Persian is noted.

BIRJAND, *17th November 1913.*

DEAR M.,—I am making my new quarters comfortable by degrees, and have just ordered a carpet from the best factory in the district, which happens to adjoin my house. I inspected the factory a fortnight ago, and, after looking over the score of hand-looms, chose a 'creation' that was near completion. Later it appeared that the carpet of my choice was already sold, so I have commissioned the master-weaver to make me one of

a certain design which he showed me. It will measure about fourteen square yards, will take three months to make, and will cost about £25. It will be of wool with a cotton warp, will have about ninety loops or knots to the square inch, will include about sixteen colours of fast dye, and will last for twenty years with ordinary wear.

A Persian doesn't mind spending money on his carpets, for he sits on them, prays on them, and spreads his dinner-cloth on them, so that when his floors are well-covered his rooms are almost furnished. Hence the excellence of the craft. The Persian carpet is the finest in the world in point of workmanship, durability, and delicacy of design and colouring. Those made in this district average a fair quality and have, of course, a characteristic style of their own. They are nearly all brought to Birjand and then sent up to Meshed for sale and export. Directly or indirectly the industry supports most of the local population.

I have been reading a few old annual Consular Reports on the trade of the district. Possibly you have never heard of such things, but if so, you needn't let their existence disturb you. They are very dry documents, interesting only to the British Government and to business men and people who compile encyclopædias. In case you are still curious as to what they are like, I have paraphrased one for you in the roomy manner of

the ancients, leaving out the figures and statistical tables (which are beyond paraphrase), and adding a few facts which don't concern the government or their consuls. The facts are as true as I can make them, but by way of relief you will find some local colour in the phraseology. Here follows.

In the eastern part of Persia is a province which is called the Qāyināt, and the chief town of this province is Birjand. From Birjand if a man journey northwards he will reach the frontier of this province in three or four days, and if he travel towards the rising sun he will come in six days to the country of Afghanistan; likewise if he go by the south road he will arrive in six days within the bounds of Seistan, while if he follow the setting sun he will pass by the edge of the great desert of the south-west—a land which owns but little lordship.

Now, whereas the people of this province are not above two hundred thousand in number, there are in the chief town, which is Birjand, full fifteen thousand souls as men reckon. Some count themselves as having Arabs for their forefathers, and for the rest they are a goodly race, having neither the poor spirit of plain-dwellers nor the rude disposition of hillmen. In all the province around Birjand are places of small repute: in the valleys and plains are villages, and the largest of these have but five thousand souls: in the hills and on the mountain sides are many

hamlets, where water is hard to find in summer, and life is a difficult thing in winter by reason of the cold and the snow that falls. The people of the plains are tillers of the soil and keepers of flocks, and their women busy themselves with the making of cloth wherewith the people clothe themselves. Likewise they are famous weavers of carpets, both the village people and the outer tribes. They make their houses of earth and plaster, with walls of exceeding thickness, and the roof of each room is curved like to the top of an egg, for the land is a dry land and there is little timber in it save the poplar tree, and of that they make their doors and windows and pillars, and beams for those houses that have the flat roof. Of fruit trees in their gardens there is the almond tree and the walnut tree, and the quince and the pomegranate, and also the mulberry trees, both that of which the silkworm eats and the other. And in their gardens and fields they grow cotton both white and brown, and wheat and barley and melons and opium; and the poor people grow turnips, whereof they make their food in winter time. Of the wheat they make their brown unleavened bread, and within these ten years have they grown much of the potato, which is a serviceable bulb that a man may use with meat if haply he sicken of rice. Also, they grow much fine saffron, wherewith they dress their rice and their sweetmeats. And in their hills and valleys is

much rare growth whereof the seeds and gums yield matter for trade. For their meat they eat of the flesh of sheep and goats, and they plough their fields with oxen. Of mines they have slight art, lacking the means thereto of western races, but some hold that there is certain wealth of copper and iron and such like in their mountains. Their salt they take from the rock and from the desert. For their fires they burn the wood of the tamarisk and the jujube and other trees, having no coal. They have no railways, nor have they knowledge of steam power. Of carriages their wealthy men possess but three or four among them, and for the rest they ride from place to place on horses or mules or asses.

For their industry, we have spoken of it ; for their enterprise, it is put forth in trade ; for their pleasure, it is in the possession of lands, whereto they dispose the profits of their labour. But as to the trading of the townspeople, the highways can tell of it, for there the beasts of burden pass with their loads. From the north come camels and mules in plenty to Birjand, bringing oil and sugar from Russia, bringing rice from Sabzevar, and from Khurasan the silk that goes down to India. Also their eating and drinking vessels and their lamps they bring from Russia, and cloth of wool and cotton. And when the camels and mules have been eased of their burden and have taken rest, they return to Khurasan with rich

bales of carpets and much wool and cotton and saffron, and the merchandise of India, and the hair of goats and the skins of foxes.

But from the south the camels come slowly out of far-off Hindustan, journeying for many moons. And they bring much of the wealth of India and of Europe, even much fine cloth of wool and of cotton, and yarn for the making of carpets, and dyes for the colouring of their wool, and copper for the making of pots. Tea also they bring from India, and likewise coffee and sweet-smelling spices: also a thousand things whereof a man has need in these times, and of which the foreigners alone have the art. And they journey by way of Seistan, which is a country of winds and dust and great heat. And from the reed pastures of Seistan they bring fair tale of good cattle and sheep, and from their plains they bring sacks of wheat for the bread of the people. And anon the camels return by countless marches to India, bearing precious bales of silk, and also gums and almonds and other fruits of hill and plain.

Now of the government of this people we would speak, and of their manner of life. And, firstly, of their faith, for that they are all good Moham-medans of one sect or another, having among their number neither Jew nor Armenian, nor yet Parsee; and their priests are men of piety and wise circumspection, not such as incite the common people to fractiousness and dissension.

Of their governor they have just pride, for he is descended from many generations of rulers of men, and his justice and benevolence are matters of praise and thanksgiving; and he excels in manly sports as is becoming to princes. Of tribute they pay to the Treasury in Teheran yearly according to their land, but the hire of their men-at-arms is paid by the Treasury. Notwithstanding, they are slow of payment and have no liking for the collectors of revenue. Of their manners and ways, they are as those of other Persians, yet less changed from the traditions of their fathers, for they live still much apart from the outer world; and they speak on occasions amongst themselves in a barbarous dialect, and have strange customs. For their virtues, they exceed indeed their vices, but of corruption and evil they have such as all men have, being, before all, great smokers of burnt opium, so that if the truth be told they are in great number enslaved by it, even to the destruction of their bodies and souls. For the rest they breathe a pure air which breeds but little disease.

Truly they are a pleasant, peace-loving, and docile people, thrifty in their households and as honest in their dealings as a man may well expect.

BIRJAND, *24th November 1918.*

DEAR M.,—So you are back in town, and you are sorry for me for being out of civilisation.

Well, you know how London attracts me when I have escaped from it, fogs and wet streets and chilly Sundays and all. It is an attraction made up of many things. In many ways it is really an irrational allurements—a fine stimulant to the imagination and energy, if you like, but you know the danger of stimulants.

When a Persian thinks of England he thinks of London, and when he thinks of London he thinks of its bigness, its wonderful railways and motors, its free institutions, its hotels, its theatres and other places of entertainment, its thousand and one opportunities of public amusement, distraction, and dissipation. And he sighs for his own country, so poor in these respects. But why should he sigh? There are no cities in Persia, and likewise there are no slums; no steam-driven industries, and therefore none of the mechanical tyranny that deadens the brain, starves the heart, and wearies body and mind with its monotony: there are no railways and no factory chimneys, but there is fresh air for every one who wants it, though occasionally you do step across a dead dog in the street. There is no gas and no electricity, but is not the glow of oil-lamps pleasanter? There is less publicity and less co-operation, and therefore a freer individualism in some ways. I could go on like that, but my conscience cries halt. The Persian newspapers have been telling their readers for years that what

they lack is public spirit—the spirit of co-operation. Well-meaning foreigners have asked them why they do not organise trade guilds and merchant guilds as Europeans did in their Middle Ages. They reply that they are too fond of intrigue, that they suspect each other too much, that their standard of business morality is too uncertain, that their ideas are too volatile. The Persian likes advice, but has always a fairly sane reason for not accepting it.

I have given you the educated provincial's concrete idea of England, of Europe. His abstract conception is of course a nobler one. He thinks of us as people who are wisely and honestly governed, who are secure in their possessions, rational in their habits, broad-minded in their views, and reliable in their actions. Above all, he thinks of us as those to whom science and knowledge have brought a larger, fuller life. He sees the complex and innumerable products of our civilisation, and he envies us not only for the comforts they bring, but for the intellectual command of these things. Arguing somewhat from his own case, he imagines us as having and delighting in a just knowledge and comprehension of the history, constitution, and bearing relation of all the material paraphernalia of our lives. Just think for a moment what that means.

To return to my comparisons. What impresses me daily here by contrast is the ignorance of us

European town-dwellers in matters of daily practice. The Persian has little art and less science ; his technical knowledge is traditional, and is concerned with simple crafts and forms of labour. His work is done in open booths in the streets, or in the fields around his town or village ; his merchandise is borne on the open highways. So if a boy would learn the weaving of cloth, he has but to watch the weaver or take his place at the loom ; cotton-ginning, wool-spinning, and the dyeing of yarns are familiar sights to him. If he would become a hatter, behold ! there sits the maker of hats at his work, and you may stand in front of his shop and watch him till you are tired. When your servant goes to the baker for bread, or to the confectioner for sweetmeats, he sees how everything is made and what it is made of. He knows where the wheat comes from and how it is milled ; where the sugar comes from, and the tea ; where the nuts and fruits are grown, and when the potatoes he buys were dug. Also, if he is a wide-awake fellow, he knows the price of land in the neighbourhood, and the crop seasons and methods of agriculture, and he knows the big merchants and what they deal in and how they do it. He can tell you how your house was built—how the bricks were made and the plaster prepared, what sort of timber was used and where it was grown—what were the labourers' wages, how many hours a day they worked, and what they had for dinner.

He has some knowledge of the customary law and the ordinary forms and procedure of administration, taxation, and justice. He knows nothing, of course, of the making of foreign products, but he is a fair judge of the finished article. Of everything that is done in his own town he has an inkling. But who of us can say the same? Our commerce is so multifarious that only those engaged in it know anything about it; our arts and industries are founded on such an array of sciences that only those who have made them a special study can understand the processes involved. We organise exhibitions to teach the people how things are made, and we stock museums with everything under the sun; but the people resort to exhibitions for other reasons, and none of us ever admits having visited a museum. Is it not so? Are we not stupendously and boastfully ignorant?

We discussed all this, you remember, in the middle of an afternoon's golf four months ago, and continued the argument over a cup of tea in the club-house. You said that in the country people know more about these things, that they have more leisure and use their eyes and ears better and keep their memories fresher. But how many country residents have an intelligent understanding of their neighbours' occupations? The division of labour has put us all into cells, and the wall between our cell and the next one has no

windows. 'Ah, but,' you say, 'we climb a tower occasionally and look around us.' And what do we see? Nothing but roof-tops. So much for general observation and musing on things at large.

But I expect that, having read so far, you are very cross with me. So I will leave it at that, for you know you look charming when you are cross.

BIRJAND, *1st December 1913.*

DEAR M.,—You ask me what the women in Persia are like. But have I not told you that I know nothing about them? I have not exchanged ten words with a native of your sex in this country, except in one case. That was in Teheran, and the lady in question was wrinkled, stout and short of breath, and had a voice like the rattle of cart-wheels over a cobbled road. She was my washerwoman, and the gossip of the quarter. A kindly old soul indeed, but much given to scandal-mongering, like many another.

But the women of Persia! You have seen photographs of them: soft and flabby beings, with pallid complexions, round faces, and large, limpid eyes. In their houses they never appear when their men-folk have visitors. In the streets they go shrouded from head to foot in their ugly black-blue or white cotton overalls, and even the veriest hag will veil her face with her robe at the

approach of a foreigner. The young and pretty ones make play with their veils sometimes. They know their security, and make bold to challenge the foreigner's eyes with their own great laughing orbs.

But please don't imagine that they are all dolls, made for love and coquetry and idle vanity. I have seen (in Shiraz) a turbulent tribe numbering scores of thousands controlled during months of incessant fighting by the wife of its fugitive chief—a capable woman, by all accounts, with a head for affairs, and the power and authority to command respect. Others are like her in their degree, and probably most of them are just as hard-working and intelligent as their husbands in their own sphere. It is the tribal women who make the little woollen rugs that are bought and sold in thousands here every year, and it is the women of this district who weave the goats' hair cloth for the garments of their men.

Birjand has an unusual number of beggar-women, young and old, and every day I am assailed by their shrill entreaties. I am told that in most cases opium, directly or indirectly, has led to their undoing.

For the rest of womankind, I am now and then reminded of their existence. My cook, an active and clever young rogue who plays football and prepares a savoury equally well, petitioned me a fortnight ago for leave to marry. The request

was made through my boy one evening as I sat at dinner. Cookie had come with me from Meshed, and had left a wife there, so I told my boy to call him up, and he appeared before me as I was having my coffee. 'Ali Akbar,' said I, 'I am told that you want to marry.' 'Yes, sahib.' 'What has happened to the wife you left in Meshed?' 'I divorced her, sahib, before I came away.' 'You did not tell me that before?' 'The divorce was only in case she did not follow me here in a month's time.' 'You did not send her money to enable her to come?' 'Her father and mother are here, sahib, and they won't let her come. She is a bad woman.' 'She had been already divorced when you married her?' 'Yes, sahib. She is an evil character, but I didn't know that when I married her.' 'You did not make proper inquiries first?' 'I was young and lonely, sahib. I have no father or mother.' 'Have you a writing for the divorce?' 'No, sahib. The priest who made the document keeps it himself.' 'Well, you made a mistake in that marriage. You are still a stranger in Birjand. Are you going to make another mistake?' 'No, sahib. The father of this girl is a respectable man. She is fourteen years old and has already been married and divorced.' 'What! another divorced girl?' 'Yes, sahib. Her husband went to Yezd, and her father and mother wouldn't let her go with him, so she was divorced, and lives quietly in her father's house.

They are very respectable people, and she has twenty pounds' worth of household goods of her own.' 'I see you know all about it. But you are in a great hurry. You had better be careful this time. When do you want to marry?' 'To-night, sahib.' 'Oho! to-night, indeed?' 'Yes, sahib. The priest is waiting in the house.' 'Allah is great! And you come now to ask my permission?' 'If you do not allow it, sahib, I will send the priest away.' 'Quite so. Well, your guests will be waiting. Go and get married and be happy, bless you.' 'May your kindness be increased. I have a further petition, sahib.' 'What is it?' 'I beg that you will let me have the gramafoon for this evening.'

The artful wretch, you see, was careful to ask my permission to marry—in order that he might be able to entertain his wedding party with strange foreign music.

Next evening my boy, with due relish of the situation, informed me that the cook's former wife had just arrived from Meshed. It looked as if trouble was in store, and sure enough the divorced one's father came to me on the following day with a complaint against my cook, and, of course, a different version of the story. I sent the aggrieved parent away with a promise to hear both sides of the case together. More interviews followed, and some days later I learned that the parties had made friends and that the first wife—

the lady of dubious character—had found another husband. Truly, in one respect at least, Birjand is not Heaven.

BIRJAND, *6th December 1913.*

DEAR M.,—We are into the first days of Muharram, the Shieh month of mourning, and there is much beating of breasts in unison (a fine exhilarating exercise in this cold weather) and shouting of the names of the prophet's martyred grandsons. The shops are half shut, and the people flock to the courtyards where religious plays are being performed. The trumpet sounds, the costumed actors declaim in tragic verse, the white-robed women sob in loud and piteous chorus, and the passing foreigner even is affected by the apparent keenness and fervour of this annual emotional outburst. They are easily touched, these people; and in truth the scenes depicted at the culminating points of the great drama of martyrdom are heart-rending in their crude realism. The actors are dressed in the supposed Arab costumes and armour of the seventh century; they have no scenery, and for all music there is little but the fateful blare of the trumpet and the beat of drums. Even so, perhaps, did the mediæval Church impress the history of its great passion on followers of the Christian faith. Tragedy, of course, is relieved by lighter entertainments, and occasionally the comic element is introduced as it was by us in the Middle Ages.

These plays are the only theatre the Persians possess. But their country blossoms with poets of another quality, whose mystic and erotic verse is read and quoted everywhere. Their odes and songs of love and wine and pleasure are recited and sung at private entertainments in every large town by troupes of professional dancers and musicians. Birjand is not a large town, and Birjand has no professional musicians, but between ourselves it is none the worse for that. One of the local bigwigs produced a native zither when I called on him the other day, and entertained me with a few Persian pièces. He didn't sing, of course. Singing is not a polite accomplishment from the Persians' point of view, among men at least.

They are very fond of the gramophone—a depraved taste, you will say. The ordinary folks like the records of Persian music, which they understand. The enlightened young men of the better classes pretend sometimes to an educated preference for European songs, but one rather doubts their sincerity.

My own instrument—a borrowed one, by the way—is old-fashioned and musty and broken-voiced. The records, like the books in a circulating library, are a fair indication of the average man's taste. There is a little of everything, from Mozart to musical comedy, from Caruso to coon-songs. The Persians like one kind as much as

another, which is to say that they listen and enjoy in their own fashion without understanding. How could they understand, when the very idea of harmony, musical or mental, social or political, is somewhat new and strange to them ?

BIRJAND, 11th December 1918.

DEAR M.,—I have been out on a week-end shooting excursion—a dash into the hills and back. All little towns get grubby at times, and Birjand is no exception, so off we go with a rifle and a shikari for a breath of mountain air and a sight of fresh wild things. The wild things, of course, include goat-herds and woodcutters and charcoal-burners, and others of the pagan fraternity. As for game, the pretty little gazelle skips around on the open plains within reach of a day's ride. The fleet wild ass is farther away, and the leopard lurks uncertainly in the mountains where the giddy ibex tosses his head at the prowler. In the hills near the town there is the wild sheep that roams in the lower ranges and plays havoc with the melon-fields in late autumn.

Naturally the first thing to do is to get a good shikari. I have bagged quite a good one—a sturdy little slouching fellow of twenty-three or so, with rosy cheeks and a perpetual smile. His name is Sultan, and he is one of the Ismaili sect whose religious head is the Agha Khan of India, and whose local headquarters are at the village of

Sihdeh. I sent Sultan a message on Thursday, and on Saturday morning sent the cook ahead on a mule with the baggage to a village seven miles away. In the afternoon I rode out with my syce, arriving just before sunset. The hamlet was as squalid as we could ask for ; it was bitterly cold after sundown, and there wasn't a stable in the place, so we had to knock a lot of wall away from the doorways of two rooms to let the ponies in. I was housed in a room with no windows and with a door three feet high. There was a fireplace and chimney however, so we soon had the thorns crackling, and with a lamp and a volume of Gibbon I passed the time comfortably till early bed.

Next morning we were on the march before sunrise. An hour later we were scouting in the hills, and Sultan, who had climbed to the top of a range and was lying flat with his eyes on the prowl, turned his head to me. 'He has seen a few tame goats,' I thought, as I drew level and fumbled for my glass. He whispered the direction in his dialect, and I followed it as best I could, seeing many things which might have been sheep but turned out to be boulders. I grew hot with shame and called myself a blind fool to be out with a rifle. Eventually I picked them up—brown forms with white tail-spots—one, two, three, four, five. Ah ha ! And one of them had horns on his head. But a long distance off.

Away scuttled the shikari downhill, and I slithered after him, up and down by the way we had come, then round and along for half an hour till we came out on top of a rise and crawled up to eye-level. The sheep were there, a hundred yards nearer, but (I won't say whose fault it was) they were all standing still and gazing in our direction. So we lay there, moving nothing but our eyes, and waiting for the ram to show a broadside. It occurred to me that the shikari, crouching on the hilltop with his hat off and a headcloth bound across his forehead, looked finer than anything I had ever seen on canvas—which was natural enough, and a poor comparison at that. By and by the sheep appeared to get the order to stand easy, for they took to grazing again. I was cautiously preparing for a shot when the gentleman with the horns lay down and spoiled my chance. At that my gillie backed downhill again, and we made another detour to a knoll of bare ground that came out sixty yards from the sheep. An absurd distance, I thought, as I looked for some vantage-ground on top of the knoll. We crept like burglars to a piece of camel-thorn, making snakes of ourselves as we got near the top. Then I settled on my left elbow, brought my rifle forward, and raised my head. There he was facing me. As my head rose he leapt, and my hasty shot missed his tail as he disappeared round a corner, with all the harem after him. Alas! I knew it, and now he

was gone. Sultan turned his clear brown eyes on me, and I called myself names. A greenhorn, a deliberative blunderer, a gawky fool to come shooting!

An hour later we were on the top of the highest peak of this little range, and there in the valley below was a group of brown things, standing all together, undecided which way to move. They had heard or smelt danger. The distance was uncertain, and without using my glass I could just make out a ram in the middle. Sultan doesn't bother about heads and would have me bang off into the group. He thinks of his melon-crops and the pot, and he kept urging me. So I sighted for 250 yards, covered the ram just behind those half-invisible horns, and—bang! Result? Missed again, fathead! Off went the lot. But they hadn't gone twenty yards when Sultan shouted 'Qūch uftād!' and away he dashed down the perilous slope with a cartload of loosened stones rattling after him, and myself bumping along in his rear.

The ram had dropped with a little hole in his side and his chest ripped open. The females halted within easy distance, watching us as we stood over him. They simply wouldn't fly, and Sultan was all for reducing their number. But I had had enough, and sat down trembling while he rolled up his sleeves like a butcher and drew a hunting-knife from his sash. He looked

thoroughly happy now, and I was pleased, and listened with a smile to his repeated exclamations of satisfaction. He cleaned the animal deftly, skinned the hind legs and tied them together with the loose skin. Then he dragged it to a little pool and washed the gore from it and from his arms. The ram's eyes were glazed and he seemed to have shrunk. Only a three-year-old, but what matter? It was my first shot at anything bigger than a hare, and I would not return empty-handed. So we had lunch, and drank what we had with us, there being no sweet water near. And I smoked a cigarette and thought many thoughts, counting myself by turns a joyous savage, a contemptible slaughterer, a great shikari, and a conceited ass. I finished by giving Sultan a present and telling him to shoulder the game, and we set off down the valley at one o'clock, Sultan leading by easy tracks along the level, with the beast dangling its legs and flopping its head behind him, and I following in his wake—a pretty picture for the disconsolate ewes, which were still watching us from the distance, looking for their dead lord.

In an hour and a half we reached the horses at a place appointed for them to be in waiting. The game was strapped behind the saddle of my groom's pony, and so we rode for the town. When we got home, Cookie, who had returned in the morning, was waiting in the doorway.

He smiled his congratulations, eyed the corpse lovingly, and took it in. The sheep bobbed his head for the last time, and then lay still and cold in the compound.

BIRJAND, 23rd March 1914.

DEAR M.,—The Duke, the Amir, the great man, has arrived from the capital, with his men-at-arms and his train of followers. Which is to say that the Governor has returned from Teheran. There was a great stir and clamour at his coming, as you may imagine, for I have told you how popular he is, and you know that a provincial ruler is a powerful man in Persia. The town had a field-day for his entry, and did no work for three days, most of the chief people having ridden out thirty miles to welcome him and escort him in. X. and I sent him letters of salutation with mounted representatives who joined his escort. He must have been very tired, I'm afraid, though very happy, for was he not returning to the home of his fathers and the people his fathers had ruled for generations, and had he not been honoured by the Shah and given an addition to the territories under his administration? So the band played and the horses pranced and his carriage rolled past the town and across the plain to his house a couple of miles away. There he had a great reception, with mullas uttering benedictions and poets reciting odes. On the following afternoon

I called on him and drank tea and exchanged polite remarks. He is a tall, lean man of about thirty-three, with fine-cut, mobile, Arab features, a prominent nose, and a sallow complexion. His voice is soft, his speech clear and rapid. His bearing is unaffected, and his manners are full of restrained vivacity and natural courtesy and gentleness. He is evidently a man of keen perceptions, with an active mind and a marked individuality, for which the gods be praised. He was accompanied by three young officials—one of them our stout, ruddy-faced prince of the blood royal, the other two, just arrived with the Amir, being a vigorous and honest-looking officer of cavalry and a revenue collector. The last has an incipient beard, but the others, including the Amir, are cleanshaven but for their moustaches, which a Persian never on any account shaves. The revenue collector didn't seem at all pleased at the idea of living in such a hopeless little hole as Birjand, and he even said as much. The Amir, of course, showed no sign that he didn't like the remark, which somebody else countered by asking the tired one if he had not come here to have an occupation, and to be, in a sense, a guest.

My visit was returned a few days afterwards, when the Amir told me he was getting his tennis-court ready and hoped we would meet there once a week and be good friends.

BIRJAND, 22nd May 1914.

DEAR M.,—I have been out on a week-end visit to the south-east, seeking change, exercise, and adventure, just as you do at home. There is no change or adventure to be had in town, and no exercise but tennis, which we play about twice a week. So having heard of a wonderful cave which was of unknown extent and held many mysteries (including skeletons in open coffins), I gave the rein to my curiosity and rode off one afternoon like a knight of the Middle Ages. Towards sunset I arrived at Noufrist, a fair-sized garden-village at the foot of the hills about seventeen miles away. My cook, on a mule, had preceded me by some hours, and had walked in on an old merchant friend of his master's with the alarming news that I was coming on behind and would be his guest for the night.

The dear old man was quite composed when I turned up, and we had a cheery tea-talk together, after which we strolled about his orchard-garden. The almonds, alas, had just been nipped by frost, but Haji took a comforting pride in his peach, apricot, and cherry trees, and his patches of green barley and lucerne. We had our evening meal early, as I knew my host liked to go to bed betimes and get up for his prayers before sunrise. He told me all about his carpet factory, which was established in Noufrist and which he had come

out from Birjand to look after for a while. We discussed prices and materials and workers, and I realised that, apart from moneymaking, this modest capitalist of the old school was happy in the knowledge that the hand-loom owned by him provided bread for the mouths of over a hundred boys and men. We talked about the increase in the cost of living owing to higher standards, and he described to me the simple life of forty years ago when food was cheap and foreign luxuries were unknown. That brought us to the subject of longevity, and he assured me that he himself had seen two cases of men whose sight had improved a little after they had passed their hundredth year, and whose empty gums had at the same time produced some new teeth. As Haji is very honest and intelligent and never talks nonsense, I had to believe him. He has a title, given him by the Governor, which means Chief of the Merchants, and that is actually his position. He is a shrewd and quick-witted old man, frugal and regular in his habits and observances, and gifted with much cheery humour and common sense. In Birjand he rules his class, and any dispute between shopkeepers or traders is referred to him informally for arrangement. In serious trouble or on points of law, recourse is had to the religious leaders or to the civil government, with both of which powers his influence is considerable. Merchants in Persia generally have not the spirit

of co-operation necessary to form effective guilds, but they have always their leaders, and my old friend is a worthy representative.

Next morning we visited his workshop, a rectangular mud-brick building with a double line of looms on each side of a central passage, lighted by a doorway at each end and by holes in the roof. The little fellows were seated on planks in front of the upright looms, and their nimble fingers were busy with wool and yarn and scissors and tightening-forks. On our entrance they set up a shout of respectful prayer for their master which was pleasant to hear.

After a look round I rode off into the hills and followed an up-and-down track till I came at midday to Chinisht, the site of the magic cave, where I dismounted under a big plane tree and walked through the tortuous lanes of the village, coming to rest in a little room. There I found myself surrounded by a full dozen men and boys, soft-featured beings dressed in bright-hued tunics and with round caps ribbed and embroidered in gay colours like the headgear of a dervish. 'Why,' said I, 'you can't all be dervishes, surely?' Whereat they laughed merrily and said they were so. They looked very prosperous and cheery, so I asked the little red-bearded spokesman how a village could support itself with a population of idle dervishes who, by their looks, loved to sit i' the sun and do no work. My sur-

prise tickled him and the whole fraternity of jolly beggars immensely, but the question wasn't answered very satisfactorily. I learned afterwards that the women do the field work. On the way back to Noufrist I was told that one of the cunning practices of these holy men is to display the white mark of the prophet's hand on their brown sunburnt shoulders, which proof of sanctity and divine favour brings grist to their mill. The miracle is worked by pasting on the shoulder a piece of paper cut in the shape of a hand, which is removed when the surrounding skin has been well darkened by exposure to the sun.

I passed the evening at Noufrist with a young friend who owns a shady garden full of old mulberry trees, in the midst of which we dined and talked about land and crops. He is a bright lad with effeminate features and a sensuous lip and eye, but he keeps himself manly by the business of looking after a number of estates which he has inherited. He explained to me how the local people dealt in land, which they reckon not by the acre but by the quantity of grain seed sown on it or by its water-rights. Here, where all the water used for irrigation flows through privately-owned courses and is brought underground to its destination, a piece of cultivated land is described in a deed of sale as so many shares of water in such and such a situation. The water is not measured by quantity, but apportioned by time-allotments, a

share of twenty-four hours' flow of each course being subdivided into allowances of one hour or more. In this way each owner across whose land the water passes receives his regular time-allowance of the whole stream, which he directs over his property by little irrigation channels. Quaint and incomprehensible? Quite so, and to explain the whole business I should have to write a long account which you would certainly fall asleep over.

Meanwhile you are wondering what I saw in the mysterious cave at Chinisht. Well, I will confess I have a horror of prisoned spaces, and wouldn't climb through a chimney or crawl through a drain pipe even if I knew Dover was at the other end. So after sliding down and along a hole two feet in diameter for five yards, I scrambled up again, leaving the skeletons undisturbed. It was a shameful retreat, but after all there *are* people who can't look over a precipice. Alas for the knights of the Middle Ages!

BIRJAND, 30th June 1914.

DEAR M.,—We have all been to school, to the Madreseh Shoukatieh (the Shoukat's College), to hear the boys examined on the last day before their summer holidays. You know what the ordinary idea of a school is in the backwaters of Persia—a room where a few urchins have the three R's hammered into them by a fusty old pedagogue full of wise saws and pious cant. The

late Amir Shoukat ul Mulk, brother of the present governor of the same title, bequeathed part of his estates for educational purposes, and this trust was applied by his successor in founding and maintaining a school worthy of his name. The result of six years' work is something to be proud of, and the present Shoukat ul Mulk gets all the credit for it. Why? Because, instead of forgetting his obligations and allowing the bequest to be dissipated as bequests so often are in Persia, he has actually applied the trust for the good of the rising generation.

Education was in the air in those revolutionary days. Effete old Persia, fired by the examples of Japan and Turkey, was thinking repentantly of her sons, and borrowing, for their guidance, the light of European science. So the old town citadel was put to new uses, and the boys of Birjand were invited to come there and be taught as their fathers never had been. Instructors were brought from Teheran, and pupils of all classes were admitted free. Maps were put on the walls, and the boys learned for the first time that there was a science called geography, and that ancient history was something different from mythology. The little fellows entered a new world of fairy tale, and shocked their fathers and mothers with assertions about the Law of Gravity and how the sun and the moon were made and how ridiculously the earth behaved, all of which made the dear old

mullas shake their heads. The boys of the first year are now young men, and in another year they will complete their studies and go out with an elementary knowledge of such things as hygiene and the French language.

For the closing day we received and accepted written invitations from the headmaster, and at nine o'clock we went along to the school, shook hands with the teachers, sat down and drank tea. The Governor arrived in his carriage and drank tea likewise, and the boys were marshalled into the big hall, at the end of which they stood facing us till they were ordered to sit. In the front row were children of six or seven, with the big boys of eighteen to twenty-five behind, all with their legs tucked under them and their knees on the carpet, which is a more respectful but less comfortable posture than cross-legged squatting. The boys, even the youngest, were dressed in a variety of frock-coats, long trousers, and the native white slippers, and they all bore the school badge in silver on their black pill-box hats. They numbered about a hundred, and represented all grades of society, the deputy-governor's son rubbing shoulders with the son of his servant or of some small shopkeeper. The boys pay nothing for their education, and some of the poorest of them are even clothed and fed at the school's expense. The half-dozen teachers sat at one side of the hall and called the boys out before us in turn, com-

mencing with the youngest, who were made to write a few words on the blackboard, spelling aloud as they wrote. The second class read from a little book of moral anecdotes. Deep voice and shrill voice, pale face and rosy cheek, shy boy and bold boy alternated. The little fellows stumped away and the bigger ones stalked forward. The third class did a few quick examples in arithmetic on the blackboard, and answered questions in elementary geography. Then we had some ecclesiastical biography, which was followed by answers on questions of style in verse-writing, illustrated by copious quotations from the poetry of Sadi. These points of style related to metaphor and allusion and verbal conceits, and not at all to verse-forms or measure. Reading in Arabic followed, and then examination in history. As we were invited to ask questions, I asked the master if any one could tell us what was the use of studying history. A tall boy with a large head promptly returned the shock by replying that history made us acquainted with our ancestors, and enabled us to benefit in the present from the experience of the past, besides giving us models of conduct and action. A race that knew not its history, he said, was like a child that knew not its father. I was further surprised when another boy with a solemn face and a twinkling eye replied correctly to my direct question in elementary geology, that the Birjand valley was formed by

alluvial deposit, and that the surrounding hills were composed mainly of limestone.

The senior French class came last, and was put through its paces by the revenue collector. Persians are good linguists, but this particular batch was not a very bright one, though they probably read as well as the average boy in the average English school. Three of these young men were friends of mine, who come to my house twice a week for instruction in English. They are the cleverest boys in the school, and I find their society very refreshing. If they haven't learned much of our difficult language, they have certainly helped me a lot with their own tongue and with Arabic. We talk together, like the Walrus and the Carpenter, of things in general, including politics, and their unsophisticated reflections are always diverting and often illuminating. Native politeness and respect prevent them from being over-critical of our aims and our methods, but the face of the youngest usually tells me what they really think about such questions. They were frankly annoyed with me some time ago, as being a subject of King George, for a remark of the Foreign Secretary which they had seen reported in a Teheran newspaper. Sir Edward Grey, it appeared, had stated in Parliament that in his opinion the whole of Persia was not worth the blood of one British soldier. Was this, they asked, the utterance of a responsible

Minister of State? Was this expression of insufferable arrogance and contempt the fruit of England's greatness? I suggested that Sir Edward Grey had been mistranslated, or that his words merely meant that a policy of pure aggression anywhere was not worth a single life's-blood. But their pride (the fiery pride of youth) was badly hurt, and they boiled with indignation.

Certainly one likes to think that one's country is worth invading.

BIRJAND, 10th August 1914.

DEAR M.,—I hope you are sorry for me. I have never wanted to see a daily paper so much in my life, and the London papers take eighteen days or more to reach here. What is happening—what are people saying—what is the country doing—how did it all come about?

We shall learn in time, I suppose. I got a telegram on the 2nd which rather puzzled me, so I wired back for an explanation. The reply came on the 3rd. 'Situation in Europe very grave.' 'H'm! what a nuisance. Those naughty boys in the Balkans again, I suppose, throwing stones at each other.' Thinking these great thoughts, I walked across to see X. 'Hullo! any news from Seistan? I've just had a wire from Meshed saying that the situation in Europe is grave.' 'Have you?' said X.; 'I haven't heard anything. Stop and have tea.' So I stopped and had tea, and some tennis afterwards, and he beat

me 6—1, 6—2, and so on, as he always does. Next morning I had a note from him. ‘You were right yesterday. Read this.’ And then followed little bits of news that he had received on the wire. Next morning came other little bits of news, and thereafter Reuter danced a fiery squib-dance daily. Russia in—France in—Belgium in—England in—we began to see red. The little old Russian telegraphist, who drinks cocoa and buys fox-skins and feeds his great watch-dogs on dead donkeys, walked in on us with a quizzical smile. ‘Have you any news?’ he asked in his broken Persian, which is the only language we have in common. He always gets his news belated. ‘None whatever,’ said X., looking unconcerned. The old man smiled, and looked hard and long at us. ‘When I put my ear to the ground,’ said he, ‘I can hear the sound of Austrian guns.’ Then slowly, deliberately, a trifle anxiously, he put the question that had been troubling his mind. ‘Are you—with us—or—against us?’ Whereon we both shook his hand violently, and the alliance was confirmed.

The natives have had the news from us, and they begin to see trouble ahead. Some of them can’t understand that the British Empire should be actually at war. That great and strong power—what need can it have to fight, and who is this unheard-of enemy that must feel the weight of its blow? Most of them know nothing of Germany

but the name, which they use in describing synthetic indigo, known as *nīl i ālmānī*. They ask me why the Ingles are fighting, and I tell them that the Beast of Europe has lowered his horns, and that we and our friends are out to chain him up. They ask me how long it will last, and I tell them three months, or perhaps six. They don't like that, because their export trade has been stopped, and they say that if it lasts six months the carpet-makers will all be bankrupt. Well, judging by the articles I used to read in the heavy Reviews it will be a short affair—a succession of deadly blows and rapid rushes, chaos generally, and then a financial smash-up somewhere that will lead to peace. The odds are with us, which seems rather lucky. The heavy Reviews always discussed single combat. They used to point across to Kiel and invite us to fear the foe in shining armour and to get ready for biffing him. We didn't appear to bother about it, but perhaps the men at the wheel weren't asleep really. There are three of us together now, and although it's a strange alliance in one respect, I suppose it settles the upshot. So when a Persian asks if we are sure to win, I reply that the fate of countries at war is with God, but that I shall be considerably surprised if by any chance we should happen to lose.

I dare guess that you have taken to reading newspapers, and that you have had a continuous revel of excited discussion with all sorts of people

during the last ten days. I have had about two columns of news altogether since the end of July, and I pant for the Weeklies to talk it over with. You can't 'discuss' things with Reuter as you can with a leading article.

Above and before all I shall look for a long letter from you.

BIRJAND, 14th November 1914.

DEAR M.,—My three months' allowance for the war has expired, and apparently the fighting hasn't yet started properly. Meanwhile I am getting a wonderful knowledge of geography, as I refer to a big atlas almost daily—Eastern Belgium, Lorraine, Northern France, Eastern Prussia, Galicia, and now we're off to Turkey and the Black Sea.

Persia is very excited about Turkey, and doesn't know how to behave herself. She and the Turk follow the same prophet, though they curse each other's sects at times just as Protestant and Roman Catholic used to do. Persia's politicians are rather like spoilt children whom people meddle with too much, and they simply can't sit still. They must be spilling their tea, or smashing auntie's china, or begging for more cake. Just now they are all agog with ideas. They see that Britain and Russia are rather preoccupied with European affairs, and they discuss with each other the advantages to be drawn from this new situation. 'Our northern neighbour,' they say,

'has his hands very full, and will not be for some time quite so aggressive as he has been. We shall see what we shall see. Perhaps we can induce him to clear out of our province of Azerbaijan, or perhaps the Turks may come in and drive him out for us. At any rate, there is money to be made somehow, so we must be friends with everybody in the meantime, and play our cards cleverly.'

The Governor has gone off to Seistan with his troops—infantry, cavalry, artillery, and camel corps, about four hundred in all. They are a mixed lot, but they happen to have two or three good officers. The colonel in command of the cavalry is a young man of about thirty-two, alert and athletic and a hard worker, full of energy and enthusiasm. He has been learning to play tennis all summer, dashing about the court like a young antelope. The Amir has gone south to put the Baluch tribes in order, and he and his army won't be back till the spring. We shall miss them very much this winter.

We have made the painful discovery that the news we get isn't quite reliable. The official reports tell half-truths, and some of the newspaper correspondents report with a flourish any old yarn they get hold of, and the censors apparently help to mystify matters, so that we have to read between the lines. The papers are interesting, and we devour them eagerly. The mails come through very slowly. I have just had

a letter that I wrote home last July returned to me from Russia, for no apparent reason.

BIRJAND, 10th February 1915.

DEAR M.,—Your letter of 18th November turned up yesterday, and with the same mail came one from P. R., dated 1st January, and giving me the joyful news that he was in khaki. I have written him a long letter which will bore him terribly no doubt, and I am wondering where and when it will find him—the state of the mails is so exasperating. If P. R. comes through this all right he will congratulate himself for the rest of his life on having done the right thing. It seems to me that in this very uncertain world there is absolutely nothing so clear as a man's duty in this one respect. The thing is sublimely simple, too, for a young bachelor with no responsibilities. He takes one step—or he doesn't. If he doesn't he's either a fraud or a failure, and if his body is healthy he must have a diseased mind. It is the unfailing test of sanity and virtue.

I know you agree with me. I have always known it, but have you not just told me that you are flitting about in a Red Cross uniform? Those ambulance classes, and those ingenious bandages that you used to manipulate for my instruction—I little thought, two years ago, that they would serve so fine a purpose, or that you would ever see real blood flow from a soldier's wounds. I

suppose that you were 'secretly preparing' all the time, and that it's only another proof that the diabolical British were planning this war for years past. Well, I shall kiss the dust of your feet for ever.

Between us three, I am tired of ranters. I should like to see some enemy newspapers for a change. It would be nicer to smile at the pug-nacious cant of G. politicians than it is to read the heroics of our own tub-thumpers. I wonder how many platform speakers, in all the belligerent countries, have sworn that they will fight to the last man, the last drop of blood, and the last shilling, franc, rouble, mark, or krone, as the case may be? But I suppose things like that have to be said to warm the blood of the proletariat.

BIRJAND, *22nd May 1915.*

DEAR M.,—The Governor has returned. His adventures with his gallant army among the Baluch tribesmen of the south make rather a lame story, so we won't talk about them. He looks a little haggard and tired, and his health appears to have suffered from the climate down below. The members of his entourage who went with him into camp at Kuh Malek Siah (Black Chief Mountain) discovered while they were there what a fine place Birjand is. They hadn't realised that before, so the expedition has had some good results. For the rest, there was a very little blood-letting, and

a good deal of palaver, and no harm was done for the time being.

India, from all I hear, is behaving very well, Turkey and all notwithstanding. Which reminds me that the other day my Persian factotum entered my room with a very *intrigué* air, on top of which was an apologetic smile. We had a sitting behind closed doors for five minutes, and he told me that the chief priest had received a document signed by the religious leaders at Najaf, and directing the people of Persia to make holy war on the English and the Russians. The chief priest had shown the document to the Amir, who had advised him to suppress it for the present. 'Well,' said I, 'I suppose this has been sent to all towns in the country, and it is bound to get spread about. There may be some preaching in the mosques on the subject, and the common people may get excited. They may collect in crowds and work themselves into a fanatical fury. Some of them, the more ignorant, will then think it a pious deed to—er—to hasten our departure to the lower world. Is that correct?' 'Yes, sahib, it is possible.' 'That,' said I, 'would be rather an amusing turn of affairs.' 'But it will not happen,' said he, 'because to set up a *jehād* it is necessary that the Government should order it, and the invisible Imam should reappear to sanction and direct it.' 'In that case,' said I, 'we need not heed this document. The Turks are fighting

against brother Mohammedans of India, and their allies in this war are Christian people. Therefore the Government will not order a *jehād*, and the holy Imam will not reappear to sanction it. The mullas of Najaf have been misled, or their seals have been forged. It is interesting news, but we will think no more about it.'

There is a Persian newspaper printed in Calcutta which comes to me every week, and it has always some interesting and fairly impartial comments on the war. The chief news article used to be headed 'The War of the Seven Armies,' and grew to the 'War of the Nine Armies.' I really believe the old editor is eagerly looking forward to the entry of a few more belligerents in order to make his headline still more impressive. Nevertheless, he keeps on urging Persia to safeguard her neutrality and to fish these troubled waters for what she can catch without wetting her own feet—Machiavellian advice, which I suppose expresses the policy of the neutral Balkan states as well at present.

BIRJAND, 30th June 1915.

DEAR M.,—Many thanks for the copies of *Land and Water* you have been sending. They were very illuminating at first, but I'm afraid we're all getting sophisticated and sceptical. The prophets have made such bad guesses all round that we can't believe them any more. We used to

have a high and cheerful faith in their logic, but now we only look for results and don't care a bit for prognostications of crushing disasters here and sweeping victories there. The front-page articles of the *T.L.S.* seem to me disappointing. Is half the intellect and learning of England talking like that just now, and does the other half really listen to it? I suppose, while the men of action are busy with fate, the parsons of the Press must rightly be busy with sermons. But is it with such ethical meanderings and ruminations that they should 'be copy now to men of grosser blood, and teach them how to war'?

The Teheran newspapers are getting rather partial to the enemy, and just a trifle bellicose. The retreat of Russia in Europe has given them boldness, and no doubt the numerous German, Austrian, and Turkish emissaries and agents in the capital have bought as many friends as they can. So the editors read the reports of both sides, and study the maps of Belgium and Northern France and Poland, and compare achievements to date, and nod their wise heads and set their pens scraping in praise of the Kaiser and the Turk, and in pity for Russia who (they say) wants peace, and in scorn for England who won't let her make it but lends her money at interest instead. And the daring spirits dream of an Islamic alliance of Turkey and Persia and Afghanistan and Moham-medan India, with the Kaiser as fairy godfather.

But Persia at large distrusts the Turk and fears the savage Afghan, and the sober-minded men who keep things going realise that Russia is still a mighty power and perilously near at hand, while the fairy godfather lives a long way off. They also realise that Egypt is secure so far, while Constantinople may not be. They know that India is with us and is advancing up the Tigris towards Baghdad. So they say, 'Let us bear with the tutelage that we have suffered for a hundred years. We and our fathers have watched the rivalry and jealousy between Britain and Russia in Persia for a full century, and we have even taken advantage of it on many occasions by knocking their heads together. We have never been afraid of Britain, because Britain has always wanted us to be a buffer state and retain our independence like Afghanistan. Now that these two powerful rivals have made friendship, it is very unfortunate for us, and we must be careful. Let us wait a little longer, and in the meantime let us try to borrow some more money from them, for our trade is badly damaged, and our revenues have declined, and our forces are disunited as they always have been, and our army is but a poor thing at best and could not stand up for a moment against such terrible warfare as is going on in Europe.' And a sage old mulla mutters an Arabic quotation in his beard and winds up the argument in a deep voice full of authority and

conviction. 'Let the Christians eat each other,' he says; 'the Turk was a fool.'

The Germans have taken a sudden interest in the trade of several towns of Persia, and have sent representatives to Kermanshah and Hamadan and Isfahan. In the last-named town, which is right in the centre of Persia, they appear to be taking a particularly lively interest. Can it be that they are already preparing to monopolise Persia's foreign trade after they will have defeated us satisfactorily? It is even reported that they are engaging a greater number of servants than they require, and that one or two of them are travelling eastwards.

The Amir is himself again, or nearly so, though his tennis isn't quite so good as it used to be.

BIRJAND, 29th July 1915.

DEAR M.,—The plot thickens. The conspirators are coming on. The mischief-makers of Europe are popping up in Persia, of all places. The telegraph instruments in Birjand—think of it!—are ticking all day, and maps are being studied as they never were before. I told you last month that there were Germans in the west of Persia and in Isfahan. After that we heard of Germans in Yezd, and in Kerman, and in Tun, and in Tabas, and so gradually nearer till before we knew where we were a couple of them arrived in Kain with a band of Persian mercenaries, and demanded hos-

pitality from the wondering townspeople. Now the town of Kain is seventy miles north of Birjand, which is three days' journey, so the question is where they are going next. The Amir has telegraphed asking them their business, and they say they are peaceful travellers. Very good, very good indeed! But it is whispered that they have a lot of mules loaded with rifles and ammunition and mysterious boxes. It is pointed out to the Amir that they are the enemies of Britain, and that they should not be allowed to travel about neutral territory with such merchandise. The Amir says if they come to Birjand he will see about it. The reply is that if they are allowed to come and establish themselves here, they may make it unpleasant for him, and they will certainly make it unpleasant for us. So the Amir asks what he can do. 'Arrest them,' is the reply. 'Send them home again if you like.' 'Peaceful travellers?' says the governor of Kain and Seistan. 'Peaceful fiddlesticks,' say we. The Amir looks grave, and says he can't interfere with them without orders from the capital, as it would be a breach of neutrality. 'But they are an armed party of belligerents, and they have violated *your* neutrality!' The Amir suggests that it is a long, long way from Turkey to Birjand, and that we have told him that the G.'s have come right across Persia, and that there are more G.'s in the big towns between here and the west. 'Why didn't you have them stopped before?' 'Ask

us another,' say we. 'Well, if my government hasn't interfered before,' he asks, 'how can I interfere now without orders?' 'Then please get the orders,' we reply, 'and, meanwhile, before it is too late, we will do it ourselves, if you don't mind.' 'Very good,' says the Amir, 'I have no objection.' So there the matter stands.

We are in the middle of Ramazan, when the people fast from before sunrise till after sunset. How would you like to pass the long hot summer days without even a drink of water? And how would you like to be my cook, who prepares master's meals and goes hungry himself? I wonder if he really does. The opium-smokers have to break the fast, as they are the slaves of the pipe. The opium-smokers of Birjand make at least one-third of the population, male and female. Of the rest, many in ill-health are excused by the doctors from fasting, and many eat and drink in secret. The others have a meal after sunset and another before dawn, and so turn night into day.

BIRJAND, *14th August 1915.*

DEAR M.,—After a year of war it looks as if we may have some excitement even in Birjand. The great game of Puss-in-the-Corner has commenced. The first move was by the peaceful travellers who came along to Kain and squatted on people's floors and drank their tea, and smiled when they were asked their business. The second move was made by a company of Cossacks in khaki

and forage caps, and mounted on tough little Russian horses, and with rifles and bayonets and a plentiful supply of cartridges slung about them.

These cavaliers had come from Russia to Meshed, and from Meshed to Turbat and down to Gunabad; and hearing of strangers in the vicinity they had shown a laudable eagerness to meet them. So they rode along to Kain at two o'clock one morning and were received with a volley from the peaceful travellers, who had posted a night guard on the main gate of the town. As you can't storm the gate of a Persian town in the middle of the night with a company of tired men when the walls are guarded, the Cossacks eventually retired to a safe distance and established themselves in a village a few miles eastward over the plain, where they remained. The peaceful travellers, being in no mind for another exchange of greetings, left Kain in a hurry that day and went back the way they had come, leaving the greater part of their 'merchandise' behind them. Next morning our Russian friends walked in and found that the bird had flown. So they collected the rifles and ammunition and mysterious boxes, and after a day or two sent them off to Meshed, and they themselves left Kain and went off to catch Puss, and we haven't heard anything more of them. In Birjand we have now about fifty Cossacks, who arrived on the 31st July.

The Amir has sent up a new deputy-governor to

Kain, and as X. was going up on a flying visit, and I wanted a change of air, we all went together. We left on the 4th and got back here two days ago. In Kain I made two new acquaintances, both of whom were Seyyids, descendants of the prophet. The first was a burly merchant with a bushy beard, a gruff voice, and a bluff manner. His way of offering us cigarettes when we returned his call was rather unconventional. As there were five visitors he took five long cigarettes from a glass dish on his table, and putting them one by one in his mouth, set them alight and gave them all a good start in life. He then handed them round, and we smoked them dutifully. In Birjand I sometimes visit a cheery old man whose servant invariably does the same for me. It is the Kalyan method. The native water-pipe is prepared by a servant, who draws at it vigorously to set it going before he brings it in. The same mouthpiece is used by him and by all the guests in turn.

My other new acquaintance was the chief priest of Kain, an old man robed in black, with rolling orbs, a huge dark-blue turban, and a pulpit voice. We met him unexpectedly at the deputy-governor's house, where he was found sitting in wait for us, with a large following of blue-turbaned Seyyids squatted in the compound facing the little casemented room. The old mulla had a great deal to say, and had evidently prepared his

oration. He spoke for about ten minutes, his voice booming and resounding in the ears of the attentive crowd below. He sat with his slender hand on a thin walking-stick, the handle of which was a life-like figure of a saucy little cock in enamel and turquoise—so life-like that it looked as if it might crow its applause at the most dramatic moments. The old man sat erect, with his body motionless. His head rose and fell, and anon turned slowly to right and left like a camel's, while the whites of his eyes gleamed awesomely. When his address of welcome and appeal was over and had been suitably replied to, his voice subsided, his face assumed a smile, and his manner became social. When we left the house he rose and raised his hand to each of us as if in blessing. I am told that this old man rules the morals of the little town with a firm hand. When the tale of some particularly pungent peccadillo sets his ears tingling, he is wont to rise in wrath, and with a voice of thunder command his servant to fetch the great sword of his grandfather that he may sally forth and deal justice on the miscreant. I suppose he really keeps a sword in his house, though what he could or would do with it I can't imagine.

On the way back to Birjand we stopped at Sihdeh, a prosperous big village in a comparatively fertile plain. This village is the district headquarters of the Ismaili sect, the followers of His Highness the Agha Khan of India. Their

former local chief was our host, and we made the acquaintance of his son-in-law, the present head of the sect in the Kain district. The son-in-law is a man of thirty-five or thereabouts, and has the reputation of being a freethinker. His chief occupations appear to be the making of wine and the writing of verse. The wine he mostly drinks himself, and the poems he recites to any convivial guests who may happen along and who may be willing to sit up till midnight listening to them. When we called on him he produced a bottle of extra special vintage, broke the seal of flour paste, removed the paper stopper, and announced, with a sparkling eye, that this was very old wine—no less than two years old.

After Sihdeh we spent a night at Sāqī, a poor little village in the hills eighteen miles north of Birjand. Here, too, there was a poet, and we put up in his humble dwelling. He is a tallish old peasant with a bent back and red-dyed beard, and we first saw him in the late afternoon squatted in his compound with three village cronies, gathered round a copy of the Koran which he was reading aloud. The old man stumbled painfully through the Arabic, returning to correct his mistakes as he read. He was pulled up repeatedly for errors of diction by one of the cronies who appeared to have a better memory of the classic tongue. Arabic is to a Persian who doesn't understand it a much more vital thing than Latin is to a devout

and unlearned Roman Catholic. The education of the common people in Persia is still to a great extent taken up with learning to read the Islamic scripture in an unknown language. You will appreciate the advantage of this drilled ignorance to the cult of the priesthood.

Later in the day the old fellow came into our room to fetch a book, and I tackled him on the subject of his poems. He shook his head very slowly, and said that he wrote nothing nowadays. 'The market is not what it used to be. In the old days the governors and great people would reward me well for an ode. Now . . .' The times and manners have changed, and a poet's adulation is no longer acknowledged by filling his mouth with gold. In his turn he asked me some questions. 'What has been happening in Kain town? What is all this about Alvān? Who are these people, and what do they want? It is said that they are peaceful travellers, who pay well and don't vex any one. Why have the Russians fought with them? What is Alvān? Is it a powerful country?' Alvān is the peasant's version of Almān, which is the Persian for *Allemagne*, which is the French for—well, it's the French for a lot of things nowadays.

BIRJAND, 19th September 1915.

DEAR M.,—I have been away on a three weeks' dash to Seistan and back. Seistan is 250 miles

south-east of Birjand, and is one of the innumerable spots known to a certain kind of Britisher as 'The last place that God made.' I should probably never have visited it but for the fact that I found my sight rather damaged when I returned from Kain, and had to go all that distance to get it examined. The result was fairly satisfactory, so I shan't have to wear a placard and carry a tin box just yet. On the journey I travelled by night and passed the days in dark rooms with closed doors, but as the road is uninteresting I didn't miss much.

On the way down I met some of our Indian troops coming up to Birjand in search of adventure, and in Seistan I found a good many more. The officers are very keen on the new Puss-in-the-Corner game, though I think they would rather have gone to Flanders. Their Seistan mess is in the consulate bungalow, and every evening they cross over to the bank court for tennis. The Sandhurst type is varied by the addition of one or two Indian Army Reserve men, civilians with the universities behind them and their careers in the making. The troops are fine cheery fellows—a mixture of Sikhs and Mohammedans, cavalry and infantry, with a few machine guns. They have come all the 480 miles from Nushki to Seistan on camels, and the amount of supply and transport they go in for is extraordinary.

To get to Seistan I had to cross the Hāmūn, a

broad sheet of water which comes down from the Afghanistan highlands and spreads itself over the low country. The crossing is done in flat canoe-shaped rafts made of reeds and date palm, which are punted gently along through several feet of water by a bare-legged savage standing in the stern. I arrived at the water's edge shortly after sunset, and there was a great hullabaloo for over half an hour, at the end of which I got on my horse and rode for twenty yards through sloppy marsh to the raft. My kit had been placed on other rafts, and my ponies were stripped and taken in tow. We pushed off in line, and I lay back very comfortably with quilts and blankets and pillows under me cunningly arranged to soften the bones of the date stems and invite me to sleep. We glided along through a narrow clearing in a forest of reeds fifteen feet high, with the moon overhead and a light breeze rustling, and the cluck-cluck of sleepy waterfowl in the reeds alongside. I thought of gondolas in Venice and punts on the Thames, and anon I fancied myself once more on the Shatt el Arab, being borne in a belam from Basreh down to Muhammerah on a moonlit night in April with a couple of Arab belamchis crooning over their paddles in the bow. Heaven is in such memories and in the precious moments when they are awakened. I was supremely happy for ten minutes, when—bzzz! a little fellow sounded his bugle note in my ear. Reveille! My dreams

were dispelled, and I was back on the mosquito-plagued Hamun with my head under a fold of muslin netting and the little wretches reconnoitring around me. After the first panic, however, I ignored the evil and sat up and smoked. We glided on noiselessly, with just a faint steady splosh from my pony treading the water behind, and the sound of a boy singing softly in the rear of the line. My servant, who had supplied my wants and had no further use for me, curled himself up between master and the bare-legged savage. He was soon asleep and snoring a gentle lullaby, till I too slept.

When I woke again it was nearly midnight, and we had reached dry land. The baggage was taken off, and the horses were rubbed down and given their nosebags. I returned to my raft and slept again till it was light, when a two hours' canter across the plain brought me to Seistan.

While in Seistan I renewed acquaintance with the revenue collector, a hirsute little prince with a good education, an exceptionally enlightened mind, and a great admiration for Napoleon. Like many other Persians he has made a close study of the French Revolution, and like those others he mentally tries to adapt to Persia's needs the methods and ideals of French democracy. When I saw him he had been much perplexed, he told me, as to the right attitude to take up in face of the political situation created by the pres-

ence of British troops there in fighting order on Persian soil. He had nothing but praise for the behaviour of the Indians, and had spent, he said, an enjoyable evening as the guest of the officers.

On the way back to Birjand, while we were crossing a hill at night, I met a small party of Persian artillerymen tramping down to Seistan. They reported that on the previous night they had seen a balloon (no doubt a Zeppelin!) passing southwards. 'Balloons' have often been seen by star-gazers in this district in the last two months. Persians are nothing if not imaginative, and I have actually heard a description of a machine which alighted near Kain in July. It carried two men, who sat in an enclosure of the shape and size of a coffin. When they wanted to start again they jumped in and turned a wheel, and the machine ran along the ground for fifty yards and stopped. The pilot got out and operated a sort of wheel or handle, and the aeroplane then rose and disappeared.

At Neh I met the deputy-governor, a tall countryman with a keen eye. He has an inquiring mind, and wanted to know about all sorts of things, such as the possible area of operation of a submarine, the height of the earth's atmosphere, and the nature of clouds. There also I had a long talk, much on the same lines, with a lonely young prince who acts as telegraph operator and receives a salary of about forty-five pounds a year. The Shahs had many wives in the old

days, as you may have heard. As a consequence kings' sons are plentiful in Persia.

BIRJAND, 10th October 1915.

DEAR M.,—We have been out hawking with the Amir, so as it was my first experience, and as hawking is an old British sport, I must tell you all about it. The Amir had sent for his hawks a month ago, and had recently promised to arrange a day for us. The expected invitation came on Sunday, in his bold handwriting, which is full of character, but just a little difficult to read till you are accustomed to it. Here is a translation of the letter. The original is written with a reed pen from right to left, without punctuation, on a folded sheet of cheap European writing paper, and commences with the date, 22nd Zi Qa'deh, alongside which is the Arabic 'ya hu,' which is an invocation to the Deity :

'May I be thy sacrifice,

'It is hoped that the august constitution of your excellency is in the perfection of health and well-being. I shall be much obliged and thankful if the day after to-morrow, Tuesday the 24th Zi Qa'deh, at three hours after midday, you will bring honour to the bondsman's residence so that we may go in company for a little hawking. Also, if for the partaking of dinner with your sincere friend you will maintain honour so that the time for bridge play may be prolonged, it will be an increase of obligation. Beyond this there is no trouble.

'The Sincere Friend,

'MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM.'

To this I replied :

‘May I be thy sacrifice,

‘At the news of the well-being of the existence of the most noble high chief, I became exceedingly gladdened. In accordance with the command of the high chief, on Tuesday at the hour appointed, with the perfection of disposition and distinction, I shall attain to honour.

‘The Veritable Friend,

‘F. H.’

And I addressed the envelope :

‘(In) the blessed presence of the most glorious, most honourable, most bountiful, most praised, most high chief, Amir Shoukat ul Mulk, governor of the Qayinat and Seistan (may his glory endure) let it be honoured.’

At a quarter to three on Tuesday I started out, and arrived at three o'clock in the Amir's garden, where the autumn tints were beginning to show on the fruit trees. I found the Amir sitting with X. and the prince, and very shortly afterwards we all mounted and moved off up the gravelly track towards the foothills a mile or two south. Our servants rode behind, and as the Amir had about a dozen men in his following we made quite a cavalcade. A boy of sixteen walked by the Amir's bridle, and alongside tramped two old men bearing each a hawk on his right wrist.

On the way we discussed the latest news of the war, and after half an hour's ride we reached the foothills at the chosen spot and began a series of short climbs and descents. Within ten minutes

a covey of see-see, the little partridge that frequents these bare hills, rose with a whistle and disappeared round a bend. We dismounted and advanced, the falconers leading with the bright-eyed hawks held on their gloved hands by a slender thong attached to a leg-ring. The hawks had at no time been hooded: they were now straining for their release, which came shortly. The see-see rose again twenty yards ahead of us, the falconers raised their hands and let go, and the hawks simultaneously rose and pursued in different directions. One of them disappeared and pinned its quarry a hundred yards away. The other went straight ahead of us, lost or overshot its mark, and alighted on a jutting rock that overlooked the 'field.' The Amir's men came up and commenced to search the ground for the crouching partridge, while the hawk watched the proceedings from fifty yards' distance. After a minute or two a couple of birds were put up again, and a lightning chase followed, which ended a hundred yards off. The falconer ran up and took the quarry, bringing the hawk back. We again went forward, and in a short time put up another covey. This time the hawk pursued unerringly. Its victim skimmed along a few yards above the ground, seeking cover, till it was brought to earth. When I arrived on the scene the hawk was poised on its quarry with its claws gripping behind the neck, and had begun

to pluck the feathers from the back of the silent wide-eyed and motionless partridge. The falconer came up, took the neck and back of the still-living partridge in his left hand and its legs in his right, and with one pull dismembered the body. He then presented the legs, which had brought away the greater part of the bird's flesh, to the waiting hawk. When this gruesome business was over I felt little inclination to see the process repeated. The hawk had received his meal, however, and the royal and ancient sport was ended for the day. Thereafter we took guns and walked up a valley on the chance of some shooting. Fortune didn't favour us, and eventually we mounted our waiting horses and rode back to the governor's residence, where we arrived about sunset.

Tea was brought, and we had an animated conversation, with much joking and laughter, every one being in high feather with the success of the afternoon. When tea and cake was over we sipped tumblers of sweet fruit-sherbet, and the Amir retired for the evening prayer. He is very punctilious in such matters, and sets his people an admirable example of unobtrusive but steadfast observance, which atones in the eyes of the mullas for such venial errors as card-playing with foreigners. When he returned we settled down to a quiet game with nominal points, and the time went quickly till dinner was called

for, and we passed into the dining-room. There we stood at a little table and demolished a variety of hors d'œuvres—paté de foie gras and sardines and lobster, morsels of meat roasted on spits, and radishes and bread and butter. When we had 'whetted our appetites' we sat down to dinner at a rectangular table in the middle of the long room, which has no other furniture but the cane-bottomed chairs we sat on, and the great carpet on the floor, and the English lace curtains on the windows. Our host has two cooks, one of whom is skilled in European dishes, and the only Persian course we were offered was a big dish piled with cunningly-prepared rice flavoured with saffron, and accompanied by a dish of lumps of bony meat with tiny pickled limes and another dish of chopped meat stewed with lentils and spinach and such things. The wines of France were brought round, and there was little to remind us that we were not in Western Europe, unless it were the neat black pill-box hats which set off the clear-cut features and imaginative forehead of our host and the trim moustaches and rosy complexion of the well-groomed prince who faced him at the other end of the table.

I am reminded of the absence of women on these occasions by the appearance of the two brummagem china flower-stands of European manufacture, which are filled with flowers tightly packed in a mass of indiscriminate bloom that

would make your fingers twitch and your brows pucker. The utter lack of art shown by the Persian in such matters is the more astonishing when one considers the beauty of the rugs and carpets made by some of the Kerman weavers, beauty of form and colour which expresses the national grace and elegance to a degree unequalled in the world. The artists who can create the design and colour-scheme for such products are exceptionally gifted, but the ordinary output of Persian looms is not wanting in taste and originality. The worst specimens perhaps are exemplified by the little rugs woven in thousands by the women and children of the tent-dwelling tribes of this district. Most of these rugs are frankly crude and unlovely, though a few of them are a delight to the eye. The demand for such things in America and Europe is difficult to account for. The tribes are untaught, of course, and proper guidance would work wonders. The one idea that is instinctive with these people is that of symmetry. The larger rugs are woven in pairs exactly alike, and a pair of these always lies symmetrically at the far end of a reception room. It is very difficult to teach a house servant that chairs should not be placed in prim rows along the walls of a sitting-room, but perhaps that is due to native custom, which demands that guests should be mustered in such a fashion—the bigwigs at the top of the room and the small

fry nearest the door, the centre of the room being empty and the squatted guests forming two lines down the sides. By this arrangement twenty people can be conveniently seated in a room of ordinary size, which is certainly economical.

During dinner a gramophone was played in the passage outside, and in the intervals of British, American, Indian, and Persian records we talked. The Amir is not a ready conversationalist, and has not the gift of sustaining small talk. But when one can manage to raise a subject that interests him and admits of discussion, he will readily respond, and then he speaks freely, rationally, and with some eloquence. On one occasion when we were a party of eight, a new arrival, a young Persian with an earnest mind and a ponderous manner, was edifying us with a discourse on the immorality of war in general, and the necessity for its abolishment ethically considered, and the sure prospects of perpetual and world-wide peace that lay at most a matter of centuries ahead. Protests were made, heads were shaken in disagreement, and a mild argument followed. An Englishman evoked natural law and appealed to the past, challenging his protagonist to prophesy against the whole teaching of history and experience. The peace-lover, who had been educated in Europe, persisted in his views and kept the ball rolling till our host was referred to. The Amir smiled. 'What can I say?' he asked, bending

a little forward and fixing his dark eyes on a dish of grapes. 'It would be a fine thing certainly if war was to cease, but I can't dare to expect it. As So-and-so said just now, when you speak of war you mean blood-spilling on a battlefield, which is only one kind of war. There are innumerable other kinds, of which trade competition is one, and if we consider a state of humanity where all rivalry and jealousy and emulation are done away with, we must imagine a sort of living creature the like of which is not to be seen in the whole world of nature. Natural perfection as we see it in plants and the lower animals is only reached by the exercise of force. Self-expression is a manifestation of force, and is always directed against some form of resistance. Here are eight of us engaged in a discussion, for instance, and as there are two sides to the discussion we have a battle. We may say that any struggle or endeavour, down to the simplest motion, is an attempt to overcome some form of resistance, and is therefore a kind of war, however much it may differ in degree. The principle of pressure, whether it hurts or wounds or slaughters, is the same. So it comes to a question of degree, and how far it is necessary to go in a certain line. Yes? Well, if you clean away all evil and crime from the mind of man you will have no blood-spilling, and the more evil you eliminate, the less blood-spilling you will have, I suppose. Also, the more harmony

and co-operation against inorganic force, the less blood-spilling. But can you eliminate evil without eliminating the good also? Are they not relative ideas? You say that the progress of civilisation is improving matters, but if so, then the lesser evil of the future will not be judged less, because it will contrast with the higher good of the future. So, relatively speaking, evil and crime and vice will always exist. But you say evil can be controlled without bloodshed. I suppose it can, when the good controls it; but until you can eliminate the possibility of private murder by an individual man who is subject to law and restraint, how can you eliminate the possibility of war by one state on another? Let them submit to arbitration? Well, when two individuals disagree, they have an unlimited choice of arbitrators, and also the law and police of their government, and yet they often come to blows, either from excess of passion or from distrust of law and arbitration.' The Amir paused, and the earnest young man took another mouthful of rice. Our host continued with slackened speech and in a pensive tone. 'In spite of what I have just said, I have always had the idea that the greater and more civilised a race might be, the more peace it would enjoy. But what can we Persians think nowadays? When the mightiest, most wealthy and prosperous and intelligent powers of Europe, to whom we look for the teach-

ings of science and good government, are engaged in savage warfare on a scale that we can hardly form a conception of? Bah, bah! when we consider that already the casualties in Europe almost equal the whole population of Persia!’

I am afraid I have given you, in parts, the basis of his remarks rather than the exact translation of them. I remember that he ended with a deprecating little laugh, which was like an appeal to us to leave the matter at that and to make the conversation a little less stodgy.

BIRJAND, 29th October 1915.

DEAR M.,—I think you will have seen a good deal about Persia in the newspapers in the last two months. The square-heads are coming on, and seem to be making very fair headway. Our consul in Isfahan having been shot at and wounded, the British colony there were forced to withdraw in the second week of September, and marched across the Bakhtiari mountains to Ahwaz, a dreary little place on the banks of the Karun where the temperature reaches over 120° in the shade. Teheran is now in a state of political turmoil, and anything may happen there. The Germans, with Isfahan in their control, are sending their emissaries eastwards and southwards in increasing numbers. They dream of emulating the deeds of Alexander and repeating the history of 327 B.C. by an overland march to

India. As this is impracticable for a modern army in modern Persia, they are trying to raise Afghanistan and Persia itself against us. If they can't succeed in embroiling the Persian government they will create local hostility. Persia is a suitable country for such a policy, as its means of communication are hopelessly slow, and it is peopled by very diverse races and tribes, many of whom can't be properly controlled from the capital. As the agitators are well provided with money, they have managed to engage a good many mercenaries and to secure desirable adherents. 'Here am I on Tom Tiddler's ground,' says the bold Teuton, '*scattering* gold and silver. Gather round, brother Mohammedans, and I will fight your battles for you.' Whatever the results, they have had fair success already, as several hundred emissaries from Germany and Austria have necessitated the sending of some thousands of British and Russian troops to Persia for the protection of our interests, when these troops might have been profitably employed elsewhere.

Meanwhile the Indian troops stationed at Birjand have their spirits kept up by alarms and excursions which lead to nothing, but give them something to talk about. The officers spend a part of their spare time wandering about the bazaars or buying rugs. The rugs are brought to the mess and spread out for examination. The buyers are almost experts by now, and at

the sight of a crude article their underlips protrude and the broker is waved away. If a good pair is offered, the eye beams, an interpreter is summoned, public opinion is invited, and a long discussion follows, which passes the time pleasantly till lunch is ready. Carpets, in short, have taken the place that polo ponies occupy in the mind of a cavalry subaltern in India. You mustn't imagine, of course, that the officers do no work. They do a great deal, and most of it is uninteresting and not in the least exciting. Their local routine, however, is varied by patrol work on the north road up to Sihdeh, where, in the course of looking for German adventurers, they keep an eye open for the possibilities of shikar. Not having been blessed with a glimpse of an enemy so far, they are beginning to think that hunting for Germans in this part of the world is like fishing for salmon in the Thames at Windsor. Impatience, after all, is one of the soldier's noble vices. They remind themselves on these little expeditions of the children's rhyme—

‘The noble Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men;
He marched them down to London town,
And he marched them back again.’

or words to that effect.

Meanwhile, they have attracted the notice of certain newspaper editors in Teheran, who, with their pockets bulging and their heads in a perspira-

tion, have been concocting (after Poe) a few 'Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque' and 'Tales of Mystery and Imagination' based on the tyranny and misdeeds of the British and Russian troops in Eastern Persia. The Persians in Birjand, of course, estimate these fictions at their proper value, particularly as the Amir himself has also been a subject for abuse. The Birjandi is sensible enough to recognise that in wartime, when the troops of a neighbouring power are brought in to oust belligerents of hostile intent, they must expect the movements of wayfarers to be rather carefully watched and questioned. But they do not construe this into 'torture.'

As for the Amir, his position is quite clear. He tells us frankly, over a cup of tea or a rubber of bridge, that he is a loyal servant of his government, and that if his government were to declare war on us he would promptly and cheerfully fight us. If, on the other hand, his government declared against our enemies, he would equally promptly and cheerfully fight for us—in which case, he adds privately with a smiling outburst of national pride, our troops might return to India and he would do their work for them with much greater ease and effectiveness.

As to which we naturally offer no opinion.

BIRJAND, 30th November 1915.

DEAR M.,—Many things have happened since I wrote you a month ago, and much diplomatic history has been made in the Middle East. Poor Persia, who contracted an attack of Teutonitis in the summer, took to her bed in September with a severe headache and a rising temperature. The disease developed steadily and affected her vital organs, and specialists from the chief capitals of Europe were brought to her bedside. ‘A contagious disease,’ they said. ‘She has caught it from her neighbour the Turk, who should not have been allowed to visit her. We must keep it from reaching her other neighbours.’ So they put their heads together and discussed and agreed and disagreed and wrote little prescriptions and ordered a change of diet. And they went on writing prescriptions and giving advice, and the patient went on getting worse because her children thought they knew better than the doctors and gave her indigestible things to eat. The crisis came in the second week of November, when her temperature rose to danger point, and her children went off to prepare her funeral and to divide up her property in anticipation. The Russian doctor, however, had ordered some ice from the north, and luckily the ice arrived just in time and was applied to her burning brow. A few hours of anxiety followed, but at last her brain cooled

and the fever subsided. The specialists looked at each other and nodded, and one of them went softly to the door and opened it gently and whispered to the children waiting outside. 'It is all right. The Shah will not leave Teheran.' But no one heard him, for the children had all gone off to Qum and were busy playing with the rifles and guns and bombs and money-bags which their kind uncle, the Kaiser, had just sent them.

By the middle of November all fear for the capital was over. The Shah proclaimed his friendship for his neighbours, and a new cabinet was formed. The advocates of war, however, had already committed themselves, and in the provinces the sparks began to fly. Isfahan became a war centre, and the enemy advanced in force from Kermanshah in the west. On the 23rd I heard that the consul and other British subjects in Shiraz had been arrested. On the 25th I heard that all our people had left Hamadan for Kazvin, and on the 27th came the news that the bank in Sultanabad had been looted. A merry week indeed, and we are wondering what will come next.

And what about sleepy little Birjand all this time? Well, on a certain afternoon when the crisis was just nearing its worst, an express telegram came through from Teheran which put the situation in about ten words. We discussed it together, and our imaginations dwelt lovingly on

its ridiculous but stimulating possibilities. I reminded X. that we were due to dine that night with the Amir. 'You will go, of course?' 'Certainly,' said X. 'I wrote an acceptance this morning, and so did you, I suppose.' 'Do you think he knows what is in the air at Teheran?' 'Possible,' said X., 'but I really don't expect he does.' So we went. Riding out to the Amir's garden just before sunset I overtook Captain — humping along on a camel. 'Hullo,' he said, 'what do you think of the news?' 'Very interesting,' I replied, 'but don't take it too seriously or you may have another reaction. It's probably a false alarm, like the ones you've been so disgusted about lately.' There was a pause, and we continued at a walking pace. 'It would be rather funny,' said Captain —, 'if after dinner we were suddenly invited to stop the night.' 'It would,' said I; 'just what I was thinking myself.' In due course we arrived and found the young Persian colonel of cavalry with the Amir. The pleasure of shaking hands with our host was heightened by the piquant reflection that this might possibly be the last meeting at which we would all be in a state of freedom. We drank the usual round of tea with the usual small talk, and when shortly afterwards we settled to bridge, the sinister potentialities of the situation were forgotten. When dinner was over we had some boisterous demonstrations of skill and agility, in

which the Persian colonel took a distinguished part. The Amir himself showed the suppleness of his joints by jumping over a walking-stick held in both hands, and picking up pins from the carpet with his mouth while he held the stick below his knees. After a jolly half-hour of pure boyishness we sobered down to bridge again. At midnight we left. Not a word of politics, nor the least hint of electricity in the atmosphere.

A week or so later I met Captain — looking like a man who has missed his train at a wayside station and has to wait ten hours for the next one. ‘What did you do this morning?’ he asked. ‘What have you been doing this afternoon? What are you going to do this evening? Has anything ever happened in Birjand? I’m perfectly certain nothing ever will happen, pleasant or unpleasant. I can’t imagine why we came to this awful place. How do you manage to exist?’ I felt his pulse gravely, and prescribed. ‘Five grains of aspirin, or three sets of tennis with the odds heavily against you. And stop thinking about the Quetta Club.’

Meanwhile we are watching with great interest the doings of a certain little force that is pushing its way valiantly up the long Tigris river towards Baghdad. If Baghdad is taken, the G. buccaneers in Persia will have to run away home by a different road to the one they came by. But it seems rather a lot to expect.

BIRJAND, *3rd January 1916.*

DEAR M.,—Your letters of 3rd September and 14th November arrived together last mail. I haven't had one from P. R. for a long time, but I expect he is tired of getting fiery epistles from me when his battalion is still marking time in England. When I write him I always imagine him to be in France or in hospital, and I suppose that sort of letter hardly relieves the burden of parades and route marches at home. I had a letter ten days ago from Mrs. D., in which she congratulated me on being in a country like Persia, 'which is so far away from the war, and where no one is likely to be disturbed.' That was just as much as I could bear, so I hope you will give the old lady a harrowing picture of things as they are in the Wild East when next you meet her. The Russians occupy the north and are in touch with the enemy at Hamadan in the west and on the road to Isfahan in the centre. The British bank's branches have been going down like nine-pins, and the whole of the west, centre, and south of Persia seems to be under the control of Germans, Austrians, and Turks, with a following of rebel Persian gendarmerie under Swedish officers, and with a general riff-raff of mercenary menials and warrior hillmen at their backs. The British colony in Yezd was finally relieved of its responsibilities and its cash about three weeks ago, and left

to find its own way to safety. At the same time, the colony in Kerman, having seen enough of German aggressiveness and Persian indifference or weakness in the last few months, decided to evacuate and make for Bundar Abbas on the Gulf Coast. The next places on the map in this victorious eastward march of the enemy are, of course, Birjand and Seistan, so you can work on your imagination for the benefit of Mrs. D. You might tell her, for instance, that we sleep in our clothes every night with revolvers beside us and the doors barricaded,—that we never venture out—that our houses are surrounded by wire entanglements, and that those who hadn't a cellar on their premises before have now got the latest type of dug-out. As a matter of fact, however, we are living absolutely as usual.

We had a full house on New Year's Eve at the vice-consulate, which is also the mess quarters. There were fourteen of us at dinner, half the number being Persian officials. The governor sat on the right of Colonel —, and on his left was the newly-appointed revenue collector, a sensible and industrious little man of middle age, with a practical mind, a businesslike manner, and a sense of humour. One of the other officials was unable to be present, but his place was filled by a minor dignitary, who on discovering that he was not to receive an invitation had begged for one. The colonel, who has been learning Persian but

is much too English ever to be able to speak it properly, kept his end of the table going with anecdotes and stories for children, the most amusing part of which, as he well knew, was the Anglo-Indo-Persian idiom in which they were given. The colonel has acquired a reputation for this form of entertainment. In the middle of dinner he adjusted his glasses and addressed me with a smile of anticipation. 'I want to tell them the story of the Bees and the Snail. Now what is the Persian for a snail?' I was floored, of course, never having seen one in the country; so I appealed to the revenue collector and asked him what was an *escargot* in Persian. The conversation round the table stopped, and all eyes were directed on him while his reply was anxiously awaited. Satisfaction was not to be had, however, and he in turn referred the momentous question to the governor, describing the creature by circumlocutions. The colonel here called for paper and a pencil, and drew a careful sketch of a snail rampant, which he handed to the governor. The Amir suggested a name, and referred the question to one of the table servants, who suggested another name. The subject was taken up generally, and the sketch was criticised. The paper was passed round the table and covered with snails by various people, and was then returned to the colonel, who was still smiling sweetly. 'Once upon a time,' he began, 'there was a horned

dragon two inches long with its house on its back.' The initial difficulty being at last overcome, he got through the story with much success.

After dinner a bridge four was started, and Major — drew partners with an I.A.R. cavalry officer against the governor and the prince. The deal fell to the prince, who called two royal spades. 'Three hearts,' said the I.A.R.O. 'No,' said the Amir. 'Three no trumps,' said the major, calling over his partner. 'Dub-bel,' said the prince. 'Four hearts,' said the I.A.R.O., who is an old rugby forward. 'Dabel,' said the Amir. 'Four no trumps,' said Major —, who is an officer to command respect. 'Dub-bel,' said the prince in a bored voice. The I.A.R.O. having called three hearts and been twice overcalled by his own partner, considered his hand again and tightened his mouth. His eye gleamed fire, and he suddenly showed a double chin which hadn't been there before. 'Five hearts,' he said, holding eight minus the ace and king. The governor doubled joyfully. The major drew back his neck, which had a blush all over it. He made a little cough and puffed furiously at his cigar. His hand held three aces and the king of spades—all super-dreadnoughts, with a fleet of destroyer hearts in his partner's hand and the king third in his own. Certainly he must conduct this battle himself. These younger men—. 'Five no trumps.' The prince doubled and began to reckon up his

winnings. The others passed, and the major, committed to death or victory, redoubled. The I.A.R.O. gave up the struggle, put down the dummy hand with an air of aggrieved rectitude, and relit his pipe. The governor held the ace of hearts second, and the major lost one trick. I had better not repeat the interesting but rather long discussion that followed. Enough to say that we had a merry evening and saw the New Year in with the traditional honours.

BIRJAND, *17th March* 1916.

DEAR M.,—King Charles has lost his head, and the Roundhead sits in his place—by which you are to understand that the Amir Shoukat ul Mulk has been dismissed and ordered to Teheran, and that his nephew and rival, the Amir Hisam ud Douleh, is now governor in Birjand. It is a sad business and rather a long story, but as it may suggest to you a few ideas about Persian politics, I may as well give you the local history of the past two months. The case is of general interest for two reasons. The first is that the Amirs of Kain are among the few remaining hereditary governors in Persia, and they are perhaps the only instance of a family, without royal blood and with no tribal chieftainship, retaining through many generations, by wealth and local influence, their administrative powers over a considerable district. The second reason is that Birjand, their present seat

of government, being midway on the route from Russia through Khurasan to India, has in the past frequently been a scene of rivalry and covert contention for influence between the representatives of England and Russia : the town itself was allocated in 1907 by the two powers as being within the British sphere of influence, of which it marked the north-eastern limit. This rivalry, though hushed by the greater business of the war, continues even now on friendly lines as between Khurasan and Seistan, or between Petrograd and Simla.

To keep his position, in the altered state of Persia, the governor of Kain has to maintain his authority and popularity with the people, to act in concert with the views of England and Russia, and to placate the court at Teheran. As the Shoukat ul Mulk is by a long way the biggest landowner in the Kain district, it is easy for a man of his attractive personality to command obedience and popularity. The local people are as pacific and amenable as any in Persia, and hereditary loyalty is a strong factor of his power. The Hisam ud Douleh, who is of ruder blood on the distaff side, could rival him only in action and forcefulness, and has less personal distinction. To either of the family it was easy to satisfy the Shah and his ministers with the gifts that circumstances required from time to time. The only difficulty, therefore, for the Shoukat ul Mulk was

to hold the favour of the foreign representatives. Being, in addition to his other agreeable qualities, a master of finesse, he succeeded in preserving the friendliest relations with the British, whose good offices had already secured him in his appointment against the claims and intrigues of his elder brother, the present Hisam ud Douleh's father.

His relations with the Russians have always been less cordial. Apart from the question of personality, the policy of Russia in Persia is too aggressive for his liking. While it is in the British interest to keep Persia standing on her own legs, the Russians, by mere geographical contiguity to the richest provinces of a feeble and degenerate power, are almost in the nature of things drawn into a policy of encroachment. A local ruler with a sense of independence, jealous of his honour and dignity and loyal to his throne, will therefore prefer to shake hands with Britain rather than rub shoulders with Russia. Apprehension, in a man of character, breeds dislike, and dislike breeds hostility. The Shoukat ul Mulk disliked Russia, though his feelings went no further. As a consequence, his rival, the Hisam ud Douleh, became a Russian protégé, and looked mainly to Russia for diplomatic support. The Hisam ud Douleh was, moreover, in disfavour with the British, having been dismissed from Seistan, partly at their instance, on a charge of tacit encourage-

ment to the Baluch tribes who raided southern Kain four years ago.

Matters stood like that in 1914, when the rival interests of Britain and Russia were suddenly united for the war, much to the annoyance of those Persians who had enjoyed knocking their heads together. As the war dragged on and it was seen that our joint prognostications of early victory were not realised, and that Germany retained her conquests, the influence of this third power, aided by that of Turkey, became an increasingly important factor in the situation. During the last six months of 1915, the Shoukat ul Mulk watched the progress of German activities in central and southern Persia. The steady advance of their propagandists and armed forces towards his district impressed him, and he became doubtful of the issue. Unable to foresee with certainty the results of the war in Europe as affecting the local power in Persia of Britain and Russia, he adopted a policy of extreme circumspection and directed his efforts to the avoidance of offence to either side. He attached no importance to the German violation of Persian neutrality, which he considered had been already violated by the presence of Russian troops in the north-west. His satellites in Birjand, in love with the fair promises of Germany and full of feminine admiration of Germany's achievements, urged him to definite secret support of our enemies. He took

his stand, however, on implicit obedience to the orders of his own government in Teheran.

The orders ultimately received by him in December and January were to support us in all friendliness and to put down hostile agitation. Even these mild instructions he privately regarded as wrung from a cabinet overawed by the presence of large Russian troops. 'I cannot construe this sort of thing,' he said, 'as a definite order to oppose the progress of armed Germans. The cabinet are afraid to assume the responsibility of issuing such an order. How can they expect me, their servant, to assume the greater responsibility of hostile action without definite instructions?' The orders, however, clearly directed him to discountenance German activities among the people of the district, and this was never done.

The situation grew more tense, and the Shoukat ul Mulk was definitely warned that unless proof of his friendship was forthcoming he would lose his position. 'I can understand that,' he replied. 'It is difficult for the cabinet to authorise open hostility to German parties, but it is an easy matter for them to dismiss one governor and appoint another. They will oblige you in that respect with the greatest pleasure!' He fully realised that his nephew, the Hisam ud Douleh, who had been all this time in Teheran, was an eager candidate for his government, was being

actively supported by the Russians, and was no longer under a cloud with the British.

As a matter of fact, the Hisam ud Douleh left Teheran about this time and arrived in Meshed. In February the Shoukat ul Mulk received a telegram from Teheran instructing him to proceed to Meshed 'to discuss with the governor-general certain matters of revenue.' Shortly afterwards he received sanction to go direct to Teheran, and on the 27th of February he left Birjand, accompanied by the majority of his satellites and followers. A few days before his departure a telegram was received by the revenue collector and the agent for foreign affairs from the Hisam ud Douleh, directing them to assume control pending his arrival. These two officials commenced to act without waiting till the Shoukat ul Mulk had left the town, and amongst other things a retainer of the dismissed governor was engaged by them. The angry Amir sent for the revenue collector and gave him a severe rating, and the servant in question, who was a son of the former chief of police, was likewise sent for, and was given a sound whipping as a lesson in fealty and good manners.

On the day of the Amir's departure the soldiers were drawn up in line at a point of his route just outside the town, and there a crowd assembled. Across the roadway at this point a string was stretched, attached to an upheld pole on either side of the road. In the middle of the string a

copy of the Koran was suspended, and the Amir kissed the book as his carriage passed under it, many of his followers doing likewise. About the same time the Hisám ud Douleh left Meshed for Birjand, and the two Amirs, uncle and nephew, who had not seen each other for some years, passed on the road within a few miles of each other without meeting or exchanging messages.

On the 12th of this month the Amir Hisam ud Douleh arrived in Birjand, and was welcomed by a much larger crowd than had witnessed the Shoukat ul Mulk's departure. We called on him the following day, and he made many protestations of friendship, which were repeated when he returned the calls. He spoke to me of what he had heard as to the Shoukat ul Mulk's friendship. 'They much indication of kindness with the slave had,' I replied. 'No doubt your Excellency in the same way will make command.' We smiled gravely, and he remarked that the Shoukat ul Mulk (who is thirty-four and about the same age as himself) was 'a good lad'—an expression which amused me by its studied detachment.

Well, King Charles, with his Gallic grace and *esprit*, his *bel air* and princely manners, has left us, and here we are exchanging compliments with Cromwell, who is of average height, stout and round-headed, and has weak eyes and a soft voice and manner, and a facile flow of speech. X. has asked for leave, and I am trying to get away too.

I haven't much hope though, and neither has X., though he hasn't been home for seventeen years. As for the officers of our Indian troops, they have wanted to leave Persia from the day they arrived. But they like the new governor because he is amiable and talkative. 'The other fellow was a bit lordly,' and they didn't altogether trust him. 'Never quite knew where you were with the Shoukat!' Even they, however, regret King Charles and his tennis and bridge parties, and his 'jolly little dinners.'

As for the people of Birjand, their small arms don't count for much when the big guns are booming. We rather expected a hostile demonstration, but no such thing happened. Only the active partisans of the Shoukat ul Mulk are apprehensive, and many of their number went away in his train. The soldiers received a donative, and are pleased for the moment. The whole of the ex-governor's staff is now out of office, and the Hisam ud Douleh will have to find a new set of officials for the town and district. This wholesale change of personnel always takes place when a provincial governor is dismissed, and the result is delay and expense and incompetence and intrigue for some time afterwards—between the new set, who are ignorant of local affairs and routine, and the old set, who are out of employment and feel it their duty and pleasure to be obstructive.

Meanwhile, the political situation in western Persia has changed for the better. Our friends were back in Hamadan in the beginning of January, and in Sultanabad towards the end of February—thanks to the Russians, who have now gone further and driven the enemy out of Kermanshah. The Germans and Austrians and Turks in central Persia have thus had their line of supply and retreat cut off, and we may expect to hear of their scuttling out of Kerman and Yezd very shortly. In the altered state of things the Hisam ud Douleh will have no temptation to go against us or even to beat about the bush discreetly as his predecessor was accused of doing—all of which seems rather bad luck for King Charles.

BIRJAND, *2nd May 1916.*

DEAR M.,—The days are very dull at present, and my idle afternoons are very long, so to pass the time I have been delving into Persian romance, which my housemaid reads to me regularly after lunch. My housemaid is a gamin of fifteen, with a pale face, a bright eye, and a brighter intelligence. His father was ruined by opium-smoking, and his brothers are opium-smokers. He himself has taken to cigarettes, which he puffs surreptitiously. I remember the joy of those illicit puffs at the same age or a little earlier. I remember also the lectures that didn't impress me very much. So I lectured Hassan one evening

on the evils of smoking at his age, and in the middle of my remarks, when I paused to light a cheroot, the head flew off my match and singed the sleeve of my coat. 'There,' I said, 'you have an example of the evils of smoking.' But I'm afraid the example was lost on him, and I think that if I were to keep count of my cigarettes I should find two or three missing daily. Hassan is a good lad, and works well. It is pleasanter for me to develop his reading powers than to strengthen my own, and we get along faster that way, though he needs help over a strange word occasionally. Persian books have no punctuation whatever, which makes matters difficult: also the word 'but,' for instance, would be written simply 'bt' in Persian, which might mean 'bat' or 'bit.' With Hassan, however, the difficulty all depends on what book he is given to read. The only book he himself possessed was a *Lives of the Saints* or *Book of Martyrs*, the sort of thing our Puritan forefathers revelled in.

I tried him first of all with the *Lights of Canopus*, which is rather like *Æsop's Fables* on a big scale. It is a very wordy and long-winded book, full of wise saws expressed in ornate and artificial language, and the reader had to struggle so painfully over the verbal obstacles that the matter of the anecdotes barely reached his mind. So we gave that up, and he brought me a book called *Malek Arslan*, which is a novel of gay and wonderful

adventure. This he simply raced through as quickly as he could find breath. It was full of magicians and jinns and warriors and moon-faced princesses and astonishing deeds of derring-do performed by the matchless young hero. It had no difficulties for Hassan, who had already listened to its tale of marvels and would have liked to read it over again when we had come to the end. After that I gave him a copy of the *Iskandar Nameh*, and again we opened the doors of Romance for an hour daily. When I call for Hassan he washes his hands (a very necessary operation), puts his coat on, kicks off his shoes at the door of my room, and stands to attention with the big book on the table before him. At the word of command he begins where he left off the day before—sometimes in the middle of a sentence. He reads in a loud clear voice, and has learned to use natural emphasis and variation of tone, whereas the ordinary schoolboy reels off a book in mechanical fashion. As his voice is at the breaking stage, it wolfs every now and then like a badly played violin.

The *Iskandar Nameh* is the story of the achievements of Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who died nearly a thousand years before the birth of the Mohammedan religion. By a convenient anachronism this peerless prince, Lord of the East and of the West, is described as a true Mohammedan, who went about to give battle to heathen

rulers, putting them to the sword and killing or converting them. His doughty warriors and princelings engage in numberless single combats with giants and sorcerers on horses, elephants, or dragons. Many an idolatrous chief, waving a sword three tons in weight, mocks at the heroes who dare to match their puny powers with his. The fight sometimes lasts for days, in which case the combatants retire at sunset to refresh their horses and themselves. The drums of war beat in the rival camps, and at sunrise the contest is renewed. Throughout the book the clash of steel rarely ceases except to introduce as comic relief the escapades of vassal imps who visit the enemy king in disguise, drug him to sleep, release his captives, and clip his beard, or perform pranks of a less innocent nature, to his annoyance and hurt. The challenges and vauntings of the combatants, and the battle phrases of the narrative, have a profane suggestion of the blood-stirring old English of Malory, but the book, when all is said and done, is too full of lies and licence for the idle heads of boys. So after a while I confiscated the *Iskandar Nameh*, and Hassan brought me a copy of the *Shahnameh* in very fair print, which I bought for sixteen shillings, promising to present it to him when he could read it properly.

The *Shahnameh* is the Epic of Kings, the finest book in the whole of Persian literature. Like the *Iliad*, it has preserved for us the fabulous and

splendid youth of the race, whose kings and heroes it enshrines in martial verse. The difference between Homer and Firdousi is mainly the difference between Pagan and Zoroastrian. The *Shahnameh* was written at the end of the tenth century. It begins with the mythological past, and carries the epic history of Persia down to the Islamic conquest. Its language is pure, noble, and of knightly simplicity. Its marching couplets are themselves like an endless army of mail-clad knights with banners waving in the sun. They are like Handel's music. The sacred fire burns throughout. The praise of famous men revives the pristine generous virtue of a god-like age, when heroes were of a different stature to ours in mind and body—when strength of arm and faith, chivalry, courage, and gentleness united in the supreme revelation of manhood, in the galvanic force and fury of well-found battle.

You would think that this national epic would be read in Persia by all who can read, but it is not so. The pious Mohammedan fears to warm his heart at the Zoroastrian fire, and the present-day Persian prefers erotic verse, with which his unstable and degenerate mind is more in sympathy. The *Shahnameh* is relegated to tribesmen and dervishes. The former read it aloud amongst themselves in their encampments. The latter learn its episodes by heart and recite them in the coffee-shops of towns, striding up and down in the

midst of the company as their hearts warm to the work.

The language of the *Shahnameh* contains many obsolete words which make it difficult to read till one has learned them. The master-baker who sold me my copy volunteered to read me a few pages, so I sent for him one evening and seated him with the book in the presence of two prim young Persians, neither of whom could read it at all correctly, though one of them was a junior schoolmaster. The honest baker was abashed in their presence, though he had little reason to be. Eventually I got him started. He chose the most famous episode of the book, the death of Zohrab in single combat with his unknown father, Rustam—the sublime tragedy which you have read of in Matthew Arnold's verse. My honest baker didn't speak the story, he chanted it as the dervish does, on a mournful rhythm that was like a sea-swell after shipwreck.

Afterwards I got Hassan to the task, and we consulted the glossary together till the lines began to flow easily. Poor Hassan! He is a very ordinary kiddy, and the bardic spirit is not his. But the heroic youth of Persia often seems to linger in the blood of her young, and the ghost of the golden age flits before us, sometimes, as he reads.

BIRJAND, 30th June 1916.

DEAR M.,—In the last three weeks our little community has dwindled down to Captain —, in command of a squadron of Indian cavalry, and myself. The colonel of infantry went off to Baluchistan a month or two ago amid general regrets, and lately two other officers have followed him. X., whose presence I never ceased to be grateful for in the last two and a half years, has left us in the prime of life after a struggle with fever. He applied for holiday leave some months ago, and was refused on account of the war. His death was hard to realise at first, though a sense of his absence was forced on us at every turn. He was a man who would have found it impossible to make an enemy.

I am cross with the fates for many reasons, and my greatest desire is to do like the others, and quit Birjand as soon as possible. The place has been stripped of its attractiveness, and everything grows staler and more uninteresting as time passes. When a man begins to lose his illusions about Persia it seems better for him to leave the country if he can, for when Persia loses its charm there is in truth not much left. At present I can see little in the place but an arid sun-baked wilderness,—a country which is rapidly reaching the last stage in the independent history of backward states—a spiritless, vain, ignorant, uncivilised, and foolish

people with no cohesion and no ambition for anything but momentary personal gain. Perhaps, you will say, that mood is in itself only another illusion and will pass. And you may perhaps add that we should keep our eyes on the bright side of things these days. Well, let's be merry, or if we can't be merry let us at least be cynical, which I suppose is better than grumbling. I will tell you what happened last night at the governor's dinner on the anniversary of the Shah's coronation—the grandest and most solemn function of the Persian year.

The Hisam ud Douleh, unlike his predecessors, lives in town. His residence is built on the usual lines of house construction here, consisting of a square brick-paved compound with rooms on every side and a small shallow tank in the middle. On one side is a paved verandah, behind which is what is intended for the main reception room. Our invitations were for an hour after sunset, to partake of 'sherbet and sweetmeats and dinner.' At half-past eight, therefore, Captain — and I arrived on foot attended by half a dozen men. The local military band was stationed inside the entrance-court, and struck up the British National Anthem as we came in. The bandmaster is struggling under difficulties at present, as all his best instruments belonged to the Shoukat ul Mulk, and were taken from him and locked up by the latter before his departure. From the entrance-

court we went along a passage lined with soldiers, who presented arms vigorously. Inside we found the compound full of servants. We were ushered into a sitting-room opposite the big verandah, and there we shook hands at the door with the agent for foreign affairs, and in the middle of the room with the governor himself. The room was well set out with European drawing-room furniture, and in the centre was a brilliant acetylene lamp which fizzed and glared and added considerably to the already oppressive heat. The other guests were already there for the most part. The telegraph-master, an old grey-haired man with glasses, had a cross-band over his breast signifying his rank as a colonel. The postmaster had a gilt badge on his hat. The Russian military doctor was there in uniform, with two Russian telegraphists in serge frock-coats, one of these telegraphists being a sturdy old greybeard with several service medals. The Persian commanders of cavalry and artillery were also in uniform. The governor was dressed in a dark-blue uniform of sorts, with a jewelled belt and a cross-band, and with several Persian orders on his breast. The karguzar (the agent for foreign affairs) was dressed in a black frock-coat and wore a Turkish silver medal. This medal attracted notice at a similar function last year, when the British consul for Seistan and Kaim was in Birjand for the summer. The karguzar was laughingly quizzed for

wearing a Turkish medal in the presence of the representatives of powers at war with Turkey. He replied promptly : ' It is very easy to remedy the matter. The consul has only to get me a British order to place alongside it.'

We were offered whisky-sodas, rather to our surprise, as Birjand is at present suffering from one of its periodical famines in this classic British drink. We learned afterwards that the governor had with great difficulty succeeded in finding one bottle. Where he got it or what it cost him I have not heard. Shortly afterwards our host, who is stout and thick-set and was suffering from the heat more than any of us, suggested a move to the open air, and we all went into the compound.

The scene there was as brilliant as the resources of the town could make it. The whole area was floored with carpets, and the four walls, twenty feet high all round, were covered with carpets totalling thousands of pounds in value. In the centre of the draped verandah facing us was a galaxy of about a hundred oil lamps arranged in tiers. This illumination was flanked on the raised verandah by two gramophones, while the band had taken up its position in a corner of the compound. Persian cavalymen, with drawn swords, stood at attention in an outer ring round the compound, forming a guard of honour. In the middle, some distance from the tank, was a long table prepared for dinner, with bent-wood chairs placed

around. Near this were three small tables with various kinds of hors d'œuvres, to be eaten standing before dinner, in the Russian fashion. On the edge of the flat roof overhead was an all-round line of figures in dim light—mostly white-robed women, spectators of the scene below. We walked, and stood, and talked, like people at a garden-party. One of the gramophones set up an English musical comedy song, and immediately afterwards the other, not to be outdone, commenced a Persian air. The two went at it gaily, and I remarked to the governor that England and Persia appeared to be at war. 'Such a thing,' he replied piously, 'will never happen, insha'llah.' I asked Captain — what he thought of it all.

'It reminds me,' said he, 'of those places at home where you pay tuppence to get in and tuppence more for every side-show.'

The gramophones stopped, and the band at once commenced. The agent for foreign affairs sidled up with the air of a conspirator and drew one of us aside to discuss the order of toasts. Shortly afterwards we found ourselves consuming pâté de foie gras, lax, and other things at the little tables, and when this was over we sat down sixteen to dinner, in the places assigned to us by name-cards written in Persian. On my left I found the Indian sub-assistant surgeon who has run our consulate dispensary here for many years. Next him was the local Persian doctor, and the

two at once commenced a lively discussion about disease. The Persian was promptly warned. 'Si vous parlez de malades il faut vous séparer.' 'Whom are they arranging to kill next?' asked the governor. Course followed course, till the Shah's health was proposed by the British and drunk with cheers *à l'anglaise*, the band playing the Persian National Anthem. A few minutes later the agent for foreign affairs, who sat opposite the governor, rose and proposed our King-Emperor. The band played our National Anthem, and while we remained standing the governor turned to his neighbour and gravely repeated the toast. I was a little surprised, but when we sat down he explained. 'The karguzar,' he said, in a voice that no one else could hear, 'was rather hasty. It was *my* business to propose the health of the King of England. He had no right to do it. He ought to be fined.' After an interval the Russian vice-consul's interpreter rose and proposed the health of the Shah again, on behalf of his chief, who unfortunately had been prevented from coming. This time the band, under a misapprehension, played the Russian National Anthem instead of the Persian—a bad omen for Persia! The bandmaster apparently discovered his mistake, for he sent me a message asking what he was to play for the next toast. I told him he had given us the wrong tune, but as the Russian National Anthem would be the correct one next he had better

repeat it. The governor overheard the reply, and remarked, *sotto voce*: 'I know what it is. He has been drinking wine. He will have to be fined.' I tried to assuage his wrath, and I sincerely hope that the bandmaster was not made to contribute to the cost of the dinner, as his pay doesn't leave much margin for fining. The agent for foreign affairs now rose and responded again by proposing the health of the Czar. About this stage Captain —— noticed one of our servants, who had been requisitioned to wait at table, mixing some gin into a bottle of champagne he had just opened. The rogue then filled up the glasses of the more convivial guests with the mixture, no doubt with a desire to enliven the entertainment. He prudently avoided ourselves, and the victims of his mischief didn't appear to notice anything unusual in their glasses.

Dinner was now over, and the band was playing a merry dance tune. The old Russian telegraphist with the medals, who is a Caucasian and has several sons in the war, began to hum and beat the air to the music, which reminded him of his native dances. We induced him to take the floor, and up he got and off he went at a brisk jig, while we all left the table and gathered round. We hadn't watched him long before some others started. The band was brought alongside and struggled manfully with the situation. When they were tired the Russian Cossack escort of

about ten men were brought forward, formed a ring, and sang their lusty songs and danced their inimitable gymnastic dances. The only Persian who dared to rise to the occasion and to forsake convention and formality so far as to dance, was the dear, sedate, and circumspect old karguzar, who is normally the acme of dignity and decorum. He whirled and twisted with the best, and the applause increased when he was given a couple of lighted candlesticks, with which he performed graceful and intricate evolutions in the best traditional style. At this point some one drew the attention of our host to the fact that the telegraph-master was missing. Inquiries were made, and it was discovered that the old man had discreetly fled to his home. 'He has done wrong,' said the governor in an aside, 'he must be fined.' Another victim! It reminded me of the terrible queen in *Alice in Wonderland*.

We finished up the evening with a Persian hymn sung in the European manner by the members of the band, many of whom were boys of fourteen and upwards. The poor fellows were pale and tired-looking, and it would have been pleasanter to see them having a hearty meal. They got their reward eventually no doubt, but it was past one o'clock when we left, after shaking hands with our smiling host, and with the karguzar, who was by this time once more a figure of unimpeachable officialdom.

BIRJAND, 15th July 1916.

DEAR M.,—I spent last week-end at Aliabad, a deserted village of the plains, fifteen miles away to the east. The immediate object of my visit was exercise and a change of surroundings, and the pretext was provided by the gazelle that frequent the district. The plain is about twelve miles long and five miles broad, and is bare except for a few hamlets, a ruined fort or two, and some flocks of goats and sheep that pasture on its scanty growth. On Sunday morning I picked up a couple of gazelle over a mile distant, but they were too wary to wait for me. On Monday morning, as I was riding home, we sighted seven of them a mile and a half ahead, so I left the horses to continue slowly along the road, and went off with a deer-driver to make a circuit. The sight of the horses, however, put the herd on their guard, and they capered off while we were still a mile away. The deer-driver went off in a hopeless attempt to head them round, and for an hour and a half I watched them from behind low scrub while he endeavoured to get behind them. Eventually they all disappeared, and I didn't much regret their escape, as I had had my glass most of the time on a couple of kids playing round their mother at the tail end of the herd. The temperature at midday was only about 92° in the shade, but the whole plain was covered with dancing heat waves which reminded me of the South African karoo.

The village of Aliabad is an exaggerated example of the drying up of Persia. In former times it was a residence of the governor, and Mir Alam Khan, the father of the present Amir Shoukat ul Mulk, kept his state there in days when the Kainat was an almost unknown district inhabited by very simple folk. Now the village supports only a dozen peasants. The big orchard-garden still contains a number of parched trees and a carpeting of starved vegetation. The great octagonal building which overlooks it is sadly in need of repair, but is still habitable, though the padlock on its solid door is only withdrawn for a very rare visitor. The broad lattice windows of the upper rooms (which have never known glass) are broken by the wind, and the ceiling boards are gaping in places. In one room is a trap-door, beneath which were laid the bags of silver and gold that formed the Amir's treasure. Leading from another is the Amir's private place of prayer, a tiny mosque or chapel for daily devotions. The outhouses that skirt the garden contain a jumble of antique furnishings, among which lie the costumes and armour used in the passion-plays that were performed there in the month of Muharram.

The custodian of these ruins is an old retainer with a harsh voice and an air of greed and cunning. On the night of my arrival he promised to send for two shikaris who lived alone six miles away.

Next morning before dawn, when I asked if the shikaris had come, the boy who was supposed to have gone for them appeared and said that neither of them had been at home. 'He lies,' said I, 'he has not been to their home at all.' The old man went off protesting, and told my servant a story which he considered to the point. 'When I was here in the service of Mir Alam Khan,' he said, 'he sent me one day to the surrounding villages to buy twenty fowls, and he gave me forty krans. At the end of the day I returned with only three fowls, and said: "I have been everywhere, but could find only these three." The Amir became very angry, and said: "He lies; he has not left the village. Let him have ten (strokes of a whip) on the face." I was beaten, and some days afterwards he again gave me forty krans and sent me to buy twenty fowls. At the end of the day I returned to him with forty fowls which I had bought for twenty krans. He was satisfied with me then, and gave me five krans as a present.'

The little village continued to thrive until a few years ago, when the water-supply became gradually less. Among the numerous bequests of Mir Alam Khan a part of the property had been set aside for the expense of religious festivals for the benefit of the villagers of the immediate district. These festivals and prayer meetings were discontinued latterly by the late Amir Hisam ud Douleh, who replaced them by similar

assemblies in Birjand. Other charitable charges, it is said, were neglected as time went on. The simple story of the Aliabad villagers is that one day a dervish demanded the customary alms and was refused. 'By the soul of the dead Amir,' he cried, 'the prosperity of this place is at an end. If the water of Aliabad be not dry in three years from now, I have no faith in Ali!' The curse took effect, and within the stated time the one underground channel which supplied Aliabad with its former abundance of irrigation water had dried up.

I mentioned this story last night to a well-informed Persian. He told me that the main water-supply of Aliabad had formerly been as plentiful as the present supply of Birjand. He ascribed the failure to the comparative drought of recent years, and gave the opinion that the same supply might still be got by digging lower at the top well, which would mean making a new channel altogether. As a matter of fact, the rains this year were extraordinarily good, so the drying up remains a mystery.

The plain around most towns of Persia is pock-marked in long diverging lines with the well-heads of underground watercourses. It would be interesting to know the history of their use, which has probably continued on much the same lines for thousands of years. The system appears to be used in very few countries, so you may like to hear some details about it as it is practised in this dis-

tract. The work is very simple, as no metal or machinery is used owing to the difficulty of transport and the lack of engineering facilities. The labour is consequently greater, and the trouble and expense of providing the average small town in a dry district with its water-supply should impress the European who curls his lip at the apathy and incompetence of the lazy feckless Persian.

The instruments used are few and inexpensive. The most complicated is the water-finder, of which only a few Persians have the secret. This water-finder, which I am told has a diamond and a magnet as parts of its construction, is kept in the hands of the master-builders of watercourses. It is said to show the presence and depth of water at anything down to several hundred yards below the surface, and to indicate the quantity available. Experience tells its owner where to search the valley, and observation with the mysterious instrument does the rest. The greatest depth at the source, in the longest channels in use in the Kain district, is 250 yards. The least depth is fifteen feet, in the shortest channels built in the hills. When the master-builder has found a supply and estimated its depth, he next calculates to what distance in the required direction he must lead it till it comes to the surface. For this he uses an ordinary spirit-level of six to fourteen inches in length, with a measuring-pole held upright a hundred yards away. The readings

are recorded and worked out on paper, with the depth of the water at the source and the incline or gradient of two to six inches in every hundred yards, as factors in an arithmetical calculation. The length of the channel will thus depend on the depth at which water is tapped and the downward slope of the plain or valley through which it has to be carried. The longest course in Kain runs to as much as fifteen miles, the shortest is about a hundred yards, and the average is four to eight miles in length.

The master-builder makes his report and gives his employer an idea of the probable cost. If the landowner who has engaged him decides favourably, an advance of money is given and the work is commenced. The direction above and below surface is obtained by an ordinary pocket compass, which is marked with a cross-thread, pointing as required, for use in tunnelling. The only tools used are picks and shovels and buckets, with a simple windlass at the well-heads. The top well is sunk first, and thereafter the line is followed by simultaneous tunnelling and well-sinking so contrived that the well-sinker and the tunneller meet at the bottom and can hear each other as they approach a junction. From the top well, also, two or three short courses may be taken higher up at oblique angles as feeders. The distance from well to well is normally equal to the depth of the wells themselves. The

diameter of a deep well should be twenty-five inches, and of a shallow one twenty inches. The circumference at top and bottom is equal. In the case of the top wells a piece of piping projects from the well-head to assist ventilation during construction below. Near the well-head the 'wall' is strengthened if necessary by stones. The well-heads are generally covered up on completion, about one in ten being left open to allow the escape of moist air and prevent damage. The tunnelled course should be twenty to twenty-five inches broad and forty to forty-five inches high, from start to finish. Generally speaking, an upflow is impracticable as the lower levels preceding it would fill with water and could not be entered for repairs : but in passing a depression such as a ravine the water is borne below through a course lined with burnt half-bricks and lime, which carries it along and up again to its normal channel beyond. This brickwork is soaked with standing water for ten days after construction, and then lasts 'for ever,' whereas iron would require renewal.

The labourers employed work from two hours after sunrise till an hour or an hour and a half before sunset, with an interval of half an hour for their midday meal. Their wages are eightpence a day. In other places such as Teheran the work is continued night and day when necessary. Danger to life depends largely on the skill and care of the foreman. I understand that no lives

have been lost in this district in the last few years.

The time required to complete a hundred yards in ordinary soil, including both well and channel, is from three to five months. The time for a whole *qanat* depends on the number of windlasses used. Gravelly soil is better for tunnelling, as soft soil requires a certain amount of strengthening with brick. A *qanat* of eight miles in length will ordinarily require about twenty pounds annually for repairs.

Clay soil, it is said, gives warm water, and gravel gives cool water. The wastage in very gravelly soil is said to be one-third of the flow over a course of four miles. This can be reduced to one-fourth by layering the floor of the channel with earth. The slower the flow in a *qanat* the more brackish the water will be. A gravel course gives water of a better quality, and even reduces original brackishness. In gravel soil the radius of water drainage or attraction at the top wells is reckoned as about eighteen hundred yards. No one else has a right to build within this catchment area. A *qanat* may be carried below another man's land, and if the owner of the land allows a well to be sunk on it, then the owner of the *qanat* becomes the owner of the well-head surface to the extent of four yards radius in the country, or two and a half yards in town.

BIRJAND, 23rd August 1916.

DEAR M.,—Captain — went up to Sihdeh a fortnight ago with a hundred Baluch mounted levies, and after a few days we got the pleasing news that he had captured a real live German. The prisoner was brought here in due course, and after some days in Birjand, was sent down to Seistan *en route* for India. He is one of the bold adventurers who found their way across Persia to Herat and down to Kabul last autumn. These breeders of enmity haven't had a very successful time in Afghanistan, and are now trying to make their way home again. The captured man was dressed as an Afghan even to his boots, which must have weighed about ten pounds. He was lodged at the vice-consulate, and his treatment surprised and amused some of the simple Birjandis, who apparently expected him to be flung in a cell and tortured, or led round the town in triumph. 'How is your honoured guest?' they asked ironically. 'Has he been to call on any one yet?' The man of the moment (otherwise known as Ewe Lamb No. 2) smoked innumerable cigarettes, and asked if he might have some French books in place of the gelignite and other playthings which had been taken from him. Major — called on me to supply the literature, and I sent him what I could find, after getting the books dusted. There were five of them, as follows:—

La Langue de l'Avesta.

L'Esprit des Lois.

Balladen und Romanzen.

Deutsche Lyrik.

Handbuch der Regionalen Geologie (Persien).

One of them I had never even looked at. Poor German prisoner! The servant who brought me Major ——'s verbal request didn't like the look of the books, and his roving eye lighted up with approval at the sight of a few London pictorial weeklies on a side-table in my sitting-room. 'It is well that you send those, sahib,' said he; 'they are full of amusing pictures.' 'Abdul Husein,' said I, 'you are lacking in discernment. There are certain flippancies in those periodicals which might not appeal to the good taste of a German prisoner in war-time.' 'It is true,' he assented, with a knowing smile. I recalled (and no doubt so did he) an incident of a week before when I had given him an old copy of the *Sketch*. It was open at a full-page caricature of two grotesque British Tommies, with cigarettes and concertina trousers. Abdul Husein, who cannot read, jumped to the obvious conclusion as he studied the picture. 'Bah, bah!' said he, 'look at these Germans! From what a man hears about them they might be something. But when once you see their *photographs*! . . .'

This afternoon at lunch I asked my man what

news he had. He answered that he had heard that there were large numbers of Germans at Yezd and Kerman, and that a Turkish army had entered Teheran. The truth as regards all three towns is very much the reverse, but he wasn't to be blamed for not knowing it. We ourselves have had very conflicting reports in the last week as to the situation at the capital. Nearly two months ago the Turks commenced an advance into Persia on a serious scale. The little old Russian telegraphist told me one day that the great Mackensen was advancing on the Kermanshah road with two army corps of Germans. The second evacuation of Kermanshah by the Russians was reported officially, and for some time the troops faced each other at Bisitun on the way to Hamadan. About the 8th of this month our friends left Hamadan, and from the reports we had during the next week it looked as if the Turks were advancing by rapid marches on the capital. On the 17th it was telegraphed that the European women and children were leaving Teheran. On the 20th we heard that the colony, including the British and Russian legations, were about to make a hasty exit. On the 21st we were semi-officially informed that the Turks were nowhere near the capital, that the Russians had no intention of letting them get there, and that the legations had not the least intention of taking up quarters elsewhere. The least interesting report

was, of course, the last one, which for the moment put an unkindly stop to our engrossing speculations on the immediate future. We have seen so many news-bombs turn into bubbles in the past year! Our morbid minds, however, are still inspired with profane hopes of sensation. 'I wonder,' says A., 'if there are really 20,000 Germans advancing on that line? If they take Teheran they'll force this wretched country into war, and the governor here will get a nice long telegram telling him to act accordingly. It's a situation that's worth considering. Say when.' 'The Turks,' says B., 'will be cut off and forced to surrender after losing half their effectives. Simultaneously our troops will advance from Kut and take Baghdad. In another two months I shall be on my way back to India. Here's luck.'

The kite-flying season is in full swing, and the little boys of Birjand are out every evening. Their kites are rectangular in shape and have a framework of split reeds, covered with painted paper, and with a convex surface facing the wind. Across the concave back they attach strips of paper cut into teeth-like lines of streamers, and the wind, rustling through these, makes a fair imitation of the whirring of an aeroplane.

BIRJAND, 18th October 1916.

DEAR M.,—You will be interested to learn that the Birjand football season commenced six weeks

ago, and is now in full swing. We can just manage to raise two elevens at present, as there are barely a dozen Indian troopers left in town, the rest of the squadron being out on patrol duty. Of these sowars about six men are available, and Captain — makes up his eleven with the help of the sub-assistant surgeon, the S. and T. clerk, the local washerman, and Major —'s cook, not to mention the hope of his side, who is the gallant major himself. My side includes a young Sikh trader, a comb-maker, and a tailor, with three of my own servants and a number of other people's. My cook broke his leg badly at the game last spring and is still a cripple, which accounts for the shyness of certain former players who excuse themselves this year. It is hard work teaching the Persians to keep their proper places on the field and to co-operate loyally, especially as in the ordinary affairs of their lives they haven't quite learned those two points of importance. They make rapid progress, however, and show more intelligence and activity than the long-legged Indians, whose brains are seldom in their boots when they are required there. The comparison applies racially, as is agreed by many who know both countries well. Given the same good government and the same material opportunities, there seems little doubt of the Persian proving the better man all round.

We are having the teams photographed by a

young Persian who is quite an expert with the camera. Persians are very fond of seeing themselves in print, and the religious objection is waived nowadays. Mirza Reza, the photographer in question, told me some time ago of an encounter he had when he first took up the hobby. The chief priest heard of it and sent for him. 'You know,' said the old man, 'that reproductions of the human form are against the holy law. You must discontinue this irregular practice, or I will denounce you as an offender.' Mirza Reza stood his ground and showed the old man some photographs of noted religious leaders taken in Teheran and elsewhere. He apparently demonstrated the harmlessness of his work, for after some discussion the worthy sheikh gave way and withdrew his ban. 'When we had reached that point,' said Mirza Reza to me, 'I thanked him and told him that I had a request to make. "What is it?" he asked. I said: "You have seen my camera, and you have kindly allowed me to go on taking photographs of respectable people. I wish now to take yours." He consented, and I took two good photographs. Here is a copy of one of them, which I beg you to accept.'

The Russian and Turkish forces still face each other somewhere about Hamadan in the west. That district seems to have become an established front, which has apparently settled down to comparative immobility just as Mesopotamia did

after the siege of Kut. We get very little news of the provinces now, and so far as we know they are all quiet. The last year has produced a momentous development in Persia in the direction of joint supervision by Britain and Russia—a gradual insinuation of forces set in motion by political necessity and carried on by their own natural impetus. The influence of the two powers is now practically paramount, but its exercise is wisely confined to meeting our immediate needs and consolidating our interests in the light of the war in Europe. The result at the moment, as seen in Birjand, is unfortunate for the internal affairs of this country. The traditional bribery, extortion, and misappropriation indulged in by the official classes (largely because of their insecurity of tenure) continue in a worse degree than formerly. The central authority of the Persian government, which exercised some sort of intermittent check on corrupt administration, is now enfeebled and listless, while public opinion is in a corresponding state. Later on, let us hope, the requisite control will be established on modern lines.

The Birjand merchants, true to their class in Persia, have shown extraordinary staying-power throughout the difficulties and hardships of the last two years. The valuable carpet industry has collapsed utterly, and the import trade with India has been at a standstill owing to insecurity of

traffic and lack of transport on the long road through British Baluchistan. In spite of heavy losses, however, these good people carry on with the hope of better days and with the exercise of mutual forbearance and kindly common sense. Their recuperative powers will not fail them when the time comes. The humbler classes of men—the artisans, the labourers, the village peasantry—are waiting and watching, as always, with infinite patience and good humour, for that brighter prospect which has been so often promised and so long veiled. One wishes much for the uncertain future of these people, and one wonders what the road will be like ahead—they have stumbled over such rough ways! ‘To travel hopefully . . .’? Yes, but hope must be renewed by achievement. One prays that their rulers may be wise—that their leaders and administrators may be well chosen, combining ability with rectitude, and energy with caution; for to walk circumspectly is better than to outrun, as the country’s recent history shows. The Persian Problem cannot perhaps be solved, because it is a living thing and has many features which change with the times. Doubtless, however, ‘the true success is to labour.’

\ BIRJAND, 4th December 1916.

DEAR M.,—To-day we have had our first rain since late spring—a gentle shower from clouds that couldn’t quite make up their minds what to

do even after days of loitering over our heads. We have longed for rain and the smell of damp earth as General Townshend's men at Kut must have longed for the whiff of tobacco when their pipes had been empty for months. So I went out in the afternoon, climbed a little hill, and walked joyously under grey skies along the whaleback ridge east of the town. Bare earth everywhere, hardly moistened on the surface by a few hours' rainfall—about as satisfying to the nostrils as a dry old bone to a hungry dog. The dog, I suppose, gets his pleasure from the association of ideas, and feasts in imagination while his tongue is busy with a desiccated relic: so I, tramping the gravelly heights, conjured up sight and smell of dark, fresh-turned furrows and steaming, odorous thickets. Presently, however, a glance back at the crazy little town, caught in a new light and from an unusual vantage-point, recalled to my mind vague pictures of the East seen in early days at home. The veil of sophistication was removed for a moment, and I had a bright vision of that romantic wondrous East which is known only to children and strangers. So might a domestic person, solemnly eating a cutlet for the thousand and first time with his wife at the other end of the table, suddenly look up at the poise of the lady's arm or the curve of her shoulder, and fall to thinking of fairy princesses.

Later, as I looked down from the rolling up-

lands across the southern plain, I had the same sensation of recaptured dreams, though in this case not for the first time. The flat plain, sloping imperceptibly up to the dark mountain range which loomed along the whole misty background, was relieved in the nudity of its dull expanse by the presence of half a dozen hamlets and homesteads dotted at wide distances apart over its surface. Chief among these, the Amir's residence and garden marked the centre of the plain—high mud walls, bare trees, abrupt structural outlines, clean-cut in the midst of nothing. To it (and herein lay the magic) a white roadway was tracked straight across the plain from the town, like a guiding finger. Seen from where I stood, that white, unbroken, undeviating track could be nothing but the royal road of nursery travel, and the palace to which it led must surely be the home of romance and the goal of adventure. Such, you may say, are the virtues of two qualities—simplicity and distance, the secrets of nature's cunning in Persia: relieving the picture of all inessential detail, she gives point and conviction to the fancy, and then leaves it undistracted to its play, like a child well set with his toys. Hence, partly, the fact that Persia has given us such fine stories for children.

While we are talking of children, I may as well give you the distressing news about my *sherbetdar* ('bearer of sherbet'—house-boy). Hassan has

taken to the society of ghouls, who visit him every other night. When he is in bed with the lamp out and his head under the quilt, he hears a pattering and scraping on the roof. ('A night-bird or a street dog on the prowl?' 'Certainly not. Quite a different noise.') Then he hears a scratching at the door. ('That accursed grey cat on its way to the kitchen?' 'No, no! Quite a different noise, and at the door of my own room.') A-a-ah! Then the ghoul enters, and feels his way about stealthily, trying to find Hassan. Fi fo fum! Hassan lies in a cold sweat, with his head under the quilt and a great weight on top of him so that he is unable to move. 'And what does the ghoul look like?' 'He comes in the dark, sahib, and I have never seen him.' 'Then how do you know he is there?' 'Because of the noises. I can hear him moving about, and feel him sitting on my chest. And if it isn't a ghoul, why should I be unable to stir head or foot?' 'Belly-slave boy, you eat too much *roughan* at nights, it seems!' 'Not at all, sahib. It's a real ghoul, and I know what he's like, because I have heard all about ghouls. Every one knows about them. He goes away after a while, and I put my head out and find no sign of him. But one night I'll catch him and get the *sad-dinar* coin which they say he always has lying on his tongue. Whoever gets that coin becomes rich, because whenever he spends it it always returns

to his pocket.' 'Hassan,' said I, 'to-morrow you will go to the doctor, who will give you some pills to take every night. Those pills are *talism*, and their power is such that when you swallow one no ghoul can come near you. It is Feranghi magic.' Hassan smiled knowingly, and promised to obey. But he kept his own convictions on the subject.

When I was in Ahwaz in south-western Persia, I was sitting alone by the fire one night after dinner. (We burned fires for a few weeks in the winter at Ahwaz.) My head-servant had gone home, and the sherbetdar, who slept on the premises, came in as usual about half-past nine to mend the fire. When he had done this he withdrew to the doorway and stood there waiting. He was an active little man with a snuffle—aged about twenty and addicted to opium. I looked round. 'Yes?' 'Sahib, I'm afraid to be alone. There's no one near me outside, and it's a dark night, and the syce has been frightening me.' My stableman was a fellow with an enormous head, a fierce rolling eye, a deep rumbling voice, and a sense of humour. 'What has the syce done?' 'He told me that last night when you were out he saw three jinns sitting where you are sitting now.' 'Yes?' '*They were playing with their heads.*' Can you picture a trio of decapitated jinns tossing their heads to each other, or playing skittles with them? It's difficult, but

very fascinating. I considered the idea for some time, and then scouted the possibility. 'The syce has been fooling you,' I said. 'Tell him that I myself have discoursed with those same jinns, and have arranged that they will visit him to-morrow at midnight. Let him beware.' The little man grinned happily. I then lectured him on the necessity of overcoming the superstitious terrors of his childhood, and tried to convince him that jinns were the invention of disordered minds. He went away comforted, for the time being at any rate.

The ghoul appears to be a harmless creature, a mere nightmare who sits on a man's chest, but is not to be feared otherwise. The jinn is more formidable and may proceed from annoyance to actual torture. Thus an outraged jinn has been known to put a man head downwards flat against a high wall and halfway up it, keep him there by invisible means, and beat him mercilessly. Therefore it is wise and prudent to take precautions on a thousand occasions. For instance, when you throw dirty water in your compound or your garden, be careful to say *bismillah* first, so that a possible jinn lurking behind a bush may avoid a splashing, and you yourself may not incur his wrath.

But we are a long way from Christmas, and when this letter reaches you Christmas will be gone and forgotten, so enough of the supernatural.

BIRJAND, *5th January* 1917.

DEAR M.,—I am very sorry about your accident—it isn't cheering to think of your being hung up in comparative inactivity for a whole month or more, with all your faculties about you, nursing a wounded arm when you want to be nursing other people's. You seem quite happy about it—almost aggressively happy, so perhaps it is only your friends who are distressed. Knowing they will be, you really ought not to be so merry. At any rate, I insist on thinking of you as fretting and fuming, with your mind like a water-beetle gyrating on a pond, or like a ship's propeller racing above the waves in a storm. A serious illness, now, would be another matter. A man might lose a lot of blood and grow weak: his fluid energy might become diluted, his sensibilities be softened and refined, and he might lie, part of the time, in a state of divine contentment bordering on Nirvana, till the fates saw fit to break his inglorious peace by ordering his recovery and return to harness.

Anyway, I hope you are better, and as your last letter is dated 3rd November and you may read this any time between the end of February and the middle of April, it seems probable that my pious wish will have been granted before you see it expressed—which illustrates the drawbacks of conversational correspondence in war-time when

letters have to suffer the vagaries of foreign travel and the contempt of mere time peculiar to over-worked censors. Imagine the absurdity of asking Mrs. Smith over the telephone if her cold is better, and running excitedly to the instrument four months later to get her reply!

In your last letter, on the other hand, you appeared to recognise the futility of being topical under such conditions, and you plunged me forthwith into a vortex of great ideas, the fruits, I suppose, of your enforced leisure. You think the war is lasting too long, and defeating its own ends. But you think, too, that we shall all be good boys when it is over, and that life will be more beautiful, with the beauty of the earth after a spring storm. And you have just read a book which is much talked of, wherein you find your ideas confirmed. Do you know you make me feel very old? I have resolved that I shall read no more history. . . . I don't know anything about the war. It's too big a thing to follow it through and speculate on its results. I can only think of it in terms of a schoolboy fight or a faction brawl which one watches from a distance unless one is taking a hand in it. While it is at its height, who can say what the upshot will be, or how the domestic relations and social philosophy of the individual parties will be affected thereby in the future?

Nevertheless, I found your reflections very arresting. They shewed, for one thing, the

present effect of the war on the outlook of one individual. I wanted at once to sit down by a fire with you and talk it over and out, this great matter. I am simply incapable of rising to your grand conceptions on paper. You say war is a horrible thing while it lasts, but excellent in its after-effects. I supposed that war was a splendid thing while it lasted, but might be very depressing in its after-effects. Bullying, of course, is not in the question, though even the boy who beats the bully must be a little depressed when he realises that his own face is disfigured and his trousers are torn. I suggest that war and peace, at their height, are both times of splendour, but that the reactions from either are depressing. I hasten to add that I think you are quite right.

The Persian army, as represented in this little country town, is a thing of sheer delight, a perfect Home of Varieties. I sometimes think that an absolute government breeds individualism in a race more than any other. Under despotic power the people, relieved of the cramping necessity of ruling themselves, develop idiosyncrasies which you will not find in the members of a corporate institution or the subjects of a democratic government. In these Persian infantrymen, at least, there is much to please the eye and feed the fancy. Their ages, I find, vary between twelve and forty-five or more, the boy of twelve shouldering a rifle like the rest. Their uniforms exhibit all

degrees of age and completeness, from that of the newly-equipped recruit to that of the dejected-looking person who has nothing uniform about him except his tunic and his belt. Their manner of saluting is full of character. There is the enthusiast with an ideal, who fixes his eyes ahead of him as he sees you coming, then suddenly draws up as he meets you, jerks his head towards your flank with a breakneck movement, glares at you fiercely, and brings his hand up smartly. There is the ingratiating one, who makes his head and his hand meet halfway, and smiles on you amiably. There is the contemplative spirit, who puts his hand to his brow as if he were thinking of something. There is the conscientious one, who takes the side of the road on your approach, adopts his position by numbers—one, two, three—and performs the serious business in methodical fashion. There is the anti-militarist, who merely salutes you verbally as if he were a civilian; and there is the man of sturdy independence, who doesn't salute you at all.

There is also the aforesaid lad of twelve, who is oppressed with the burden of manhood, and salutes you with indescribable dignity and solemnity, raising and lowering his arm in a full, slow, majestic sweep. With imperturbable concentration on the job in hand, he ignores the jibes of a little fellow in civilian dress, his erstwhile chum, who mimics him from a safe distance.

Poor little soldier! If you saw him I am sure you would want to pat him on the cheek and give him a penny; and I shudder at the thought.

The soldiers here receive their pay from the local revenue office, the recent chief of which was hostile to the governor and said he had no money. His statement was probably true, but the soldiers, after waiting in vain for the promised settlement of arrears, demanded satisfaction on his person and tracked him down to the house of a friend of his. The friend intervened and was made a substitute, while the treasury agent escaped by the roof and shortly afterwards fled the town. A few weeks ago a dispute arose between two army officers of high rank. They met in the street and fell to dignified abuse which ended in one of them drawing his sword at the other. Telegrams flew to the capital as usual, and as a result another ruffled official has just left Birjand.

BIRJAND, *20th February 1917.*

DEAR M.,—The Amir Hisam ud Douleh has been dismissed from the governorship, and the Amir Shoukat ul Mulk has been reappointed and will be here in a month or so. The people are rather apathetic about it. What they would most like is to see the rivals made friends. They are tired of this ding-dong business with governors and officials, which encourages maladministration and hastens the impoverishment of the country. No

one has serious fault to find with either of the two amirs, both of whom are excellent governors when judged by Persian standards, though, if the truth be said, neither of them has shown much public spirit or interest in the progressive development of the district. The present state of Persian politics hardly conduces to the fostering of national vitality. The tribal chiefs and political hotheads who butted in to the support of our enemies have mostly dropped out of the losing game, and the British and Russian representatives, threatened, you remember, with a stab in the back at a critical time, have since been in no mood to repeat their handsome proposals for a friendly understanding which would have been creditable to all concerned. While the war continues, the military interests of the Allies are paramount in their thoughts. The native virtues of the Persian placemen who gain their approval are necessarily of less immediate importance than their subservience to our interests, and the under-current of corruption flows on with but little check or restraint.

Here is a simple case of what happens in Birjand. A young man, after leaving school, entered the service of the revenue department. He worked well, and within a short time he was sent on duty to a district a few leagues away. After a while he was recalled, and his chief, alleging various shortcomings, fined him a sum equal to his salary for three months. He was a poor lad

and could not afford to lose his position and his reputation, so, doing as others did, he borrowed the amount and paid the 'fine,' which was simply private blackmail. He was then allowed to return to his post, where he reimbursed himself as quickly as possible by methods he had formerly scrupled to adopt.

The opium monopoly is administered here by a branch of the revenue office, with results which you may divine. The juice of the poppy is bought by the revenue people, part of it being exported by dealers. For local use in the common form of *shīreh*, the opium is put into cauldrons over a fire and burnt till it is as black and hard as charcoal. The remains of smoked *shīreh* collected from the bowls of the opium pipes in the local 'dens' are then mixed with this in the proportion of two parts burnt opium and one part burnt *shīreh*. The mixture is put into other cauldrons, water is added, and it is boiled for some hours. The liquid is strained off several times, and on the final boiling becomes yellow and sticky like soft toffee. This result of the simple process is the *shīreh*, which is sold for consumption at the present price of two miscals for one *kran* (equivalent to about one rupee for an ounce), conditional on the return of the burnt *shīreh*. If 'returned empties' are not arranged for, the price is doubled. The extract has not the obnoxious smell of the ordinary drug when smoked, and it

is much more powerful in its effects. Another form of shīreh is prepared in much the same manner, but without the addition of burnt shīreh. This pure extract is the most potent form of the drug.

BIRJAND, 2nd April 1917.

DEAR M.,—The Amir Shoukat ul Mulk has come back and the rivals have promised to be friends, so it is no longer ‘ a plague o’ both your houses.’ Our erstwhile King Charles appears to be turning into a cynic, a little *blasé* and indifferent, discouraged perhaps, and more consentant, but with his sense of humour undulled. He has had ample leisure in Teheran to observe the workings of government, and the result, I suppose, is not to be wondered at.

The railway from India is at last creeping on. The Baluchistan line, which runs from Quetta to Nushkī, was extended during the winter for a further seven stages to Dālbandīn, which is about a third of the way from Nushkī to Persia. Presumably we may expect to see it brought still nearer the Persian frontier, to the benefit of trade and intercourse with India. In the north-east the Russians have made surveys for a branch line from their Transcaspian railway to Meshed, a distance of under a hundred miles. Some day, perhaps, when railways are becoming an antiquated form of locomotion, these two lines may meet

at Birjand. Meanwhile, such tentative advances as these, with the Julfa-Tabriz line and the Mohammerah-Khurramabad project, are to be preferred to grandiose schemes for Transpersian railways which fail to materialise.

This morning, as I was out walking before breakfast, I passed our football ground, where I saw the consular levy sowars at foot-drill. It was interesting to find that they had not the field to themselves as they usually have, but were sharing it with the local artillery company. It was a curious juxtaposition—on one side an artillery unit of the Persian army under their own officers, marching and manœuvring smartly enough: on the other side a troop of Baluchis and Seistanis in the pay of the British government, armed with our service rifle and performing evolutions at the command of an Indian N.C.O. The Persian gunners are much superior in appearance and efficiency to their humble brothers of the regular Persian infantry, being better equipped and better paid than the mere *sarbāz*. Their commissioned officers, like those of the infantry and the cavalry, are trained in Teheran. The men themselves are a mixed draft from the local population, some of them petty shopkeepers torn by force from a thriving business. Their term of service is nominally three years.

The consular levies are recruited from the tribesmen, stock-raisers, and cultivators of the Seistan

and frontier districts. They have not been assigned full uniform as yet, but being well paid and well officered they have already imbibed the company spirit, and have contrived a certain uniformity in their native dress, assisted by the indispensable puttee. Some of them are handsome fellows, soft-featured, dark-hued, curly-haired, supple of limb. They are a promising, workmanlike lot, with a pride of arms and a responsive manner very different from that of the Persian regular. Their scraggy, sinewy little ponies are provided by themselves, and are well broken to work. The force numbers a hundred men, and is principally engaged on patrol and outpost duty towards the Afghan frontier.

The British officer commanding these mounted levies (he was fighting in Flanders a year ago) wasn't enthusiastic over his material when he first handled it. He compared these southerners dolefully with the men of the Hazara foot levies also to be seen in this district. These Hazaras were recruited by our consulate in Meshed, where they are known as Berberis. Many of them were old soldiers of the Indian army, and they had all been in training for some time. They are Central Asian in type and origin, exiled from Afghanistan; but to say they resemble Chinese would be inadequate and unfair, for some of them resemble nothing on earth, and no two men are alike. A chosen squad of them, displayed to the audience

at a London music-hall, would have little to do but smile for their salaries. The officer commanding the Seistani levies eyed these Hazaras, and wondered at their sturdy thick-set figures, the enormous skulls of some, the narrow glistening eyes and wrinkled faces of all: he noted their smartness on parade despite their lack of uniform, and he smiled appreciatively at little touches of swagger and gaiety in their bearing and dress when off duty. Then he turned regretfully to his own men, the soft sensuous untutored men of the hot plains and the naked hills. He was soon content however, for he found them take shape under the moulding of the Indian N.C.O.'s, and discovered that they had an eye for a target, a caressing affection for a rifle, and the tribal sense of loyalty to good leadership. The C.O. is doing creative work, and rather likes it.

The Hazara levies in Birjand are only a small guard party. Their headquarters are a few stages to the south at Neh, where a part of the levy force is recruited from yet another tribe—the Bahlui. The Bahluis are tent-dwellers of pure Persian descent, breeders of sheep, stout fellows who think nothing of fifty miles for a day's march.

Apart from these levies we still have about fifty men of an Indian cavalry regiment stationed at Birjand and a stage or two north. The Russian vice-consul has an escort of a few Cossacks, and

the Russian dispensary has a guard of five men of a Siberian regiment. You will observe that in spite of our pacific manner of life the military element is not lacking.

What does the Persian regular soldier think of all this? He didn't like it at first, and minor complications arose. But that was a long time ago—a year and a half ago. Nowadays perfect peace is observed. I expect he wonders what he keeps on drilling for—what everybody keeps on drilling for: and he probably concludes that he, a *sarbāz*, is a mere appanage of royalty, a constituent of pomp and circumstance, as the humble infantryman was throughout Persia before the days of the Swedish gendarmerie. I recall the comment of a Bakhtiari horseman who accompanied me for some days on a journey to the coast from Isfahan. He was describing a successful little warring expedition of three hundred Bakhtiari cavalry and a thousand regular infantry sent out from Teheran some years ago. I noticed that in his narrative of exploits he said nothing about the thousand infantry, so I asked him how they fared. 'Oh, they did very well,' he replied airily; 'in fact they were rather useful, as they always fetched food and fuel for us in camp, and took our horses to water. They didn't fight, of course,' he added.

BIRJAND, 30th April 1917.

DEAR M.,—I am for the road again at last—Meshed, Askabad, Baku, Resht, Teheran, and, if the fates are kind, Hamadan and Kermanshah, the last being my destination. I sent you a telegram with the joyful news, and if you got it—which I doubt—you will have realised (1) that I am coming nearer Europe, from the eastern border of Persia to the western; (2) that I am to see new country and a highway famous in Persia's history for some three thousand years; (3) that I am to have the privilege of visiting a recent front of war and of settling down in a place which the Turk has held for the greater part of a year. It is barely two months now since the Russians occupied Hamadan, and less than that since they entered Kermanshah on the way to meet our troops who were busy about Baghdad. People tell me Kermanshah is a pleasant spot, blessed with a good water-supply, gardens, and vineyards. They say it has a population of 40,000, as to which my gazetteer says 60,000 and my encyclopædia says 30,000, while another authority puts it at 80,000; but they all speak of pre-war conditions, which by no means apply now.

After over three years and a half it is pleasant to see the doors open again, and to prepare to quit what was becoming a house of detention. Change, movement,—the most desirable things to

a man confined—new scenes, new types, new adventurings within this sea of islands which is Persia. Look you, I was getting grey-haired in Birjand, and now the process is arrested. I find myself accordingly in sympathy with the Russians of our little colony, who have had a new world opened to them in the last six weeks, and who live from day to day in a turmoil of excitement. I have been learning a little of the Russian language lately, and I now adventure through the forests of words in the latest newspapers from Petrograd. What speeches, declarations, manifestos, warnings, appeals! The press is full of the clamours of this awesome revolution. Releases and arrests, dismissals and appointments—the general post goes on daily, and there seems no end to the holding of meetings and the passing of resolutions. Poor Russian bear! He has found wings, and would become a Pegasus, but he doesn't yet know how to use them, and is in terrible travail, trying them this way and that. And, meanwhile, the hunters are ever on his track, and the newspapers report daily from the scenes of war, thus: 'Artillery activity, raids and aerial reconnaissances'—which is just what seems to be happening in their political world, with, in both cases, the threat of a possible worse to come, and yet, shining through it all, the hope of a glorious better.

The Russian vice-consul has removed from his

sitting-room his portrait of the Tsar, and its place is now blank, with a horrible great nail left sticking in the wall. The Persian military band has dropped the Russian national hymn like a hot potato, and now practises assiduously—as a temporary substitute, for ceremonial occasions—the Marseillaise. The vice-consul, the doctor, and the telegraphist, with their respective wives, meet in each other's houses and indulge in the new freedom of speech, talking omnivorously, like famished people at a pastry-cook's who eat all that comes their way. Meetings! Meetings! The word has a magic sound to these representatives of Free Russia.

I listened to them recently for half an hour, and could make little of it. They all spoke at once, no one heeding his neighbour. 'What are you talking about?' I asked my host. 'Politics,' he replied with a hearty laugh. 'But what sort of politics?' 'All sorts. A. is a Social-Revolutionary, B. is a Democrat, C. is a Monarchist, D. is a Republican.' 'And what are you?' I asked, as he finished his third tumbler of tea sweetened with sugar and jam. 'I? I am a Cadet!' And he plunged into the discussion again.

I visited my old friend the Chief of the Merchants the other day, and he politely expressed his regrets that I should be going away 'just when we have got to know each other.' Apparently the idea of parting led the old man to

thoughts of after-life, and reminded him of the invisible wall between us, for he set out by indirect attack to make a Mohammedan of me, referring significantly to the fact that many Englishmen, as he was told, had recognised the superiority of Islam and become converts. I told him I had not met any, and indicated an absence of any great sympathy or admiration for converts to either faith, suggesting that a man could not change his skin, and that such matters were more than skin-deep. 'Blood and race are all very well,' said he, 'but this is above them. A man must examine for himself and accept the truth where he finds it.' The dogmatic old man, I knew, could never be persuaded that so far as the truth was concerned that invisible wall was a mere fabric of men's minds and had no existence at all. So we left it at that. And perhaps he was right, and no doubt he had a comforting sense that he was doing a pious thing in breaking, for once in a way, the general convention of silence on such matters.

BIRJAND, *30th May 1917.*

DEAR M.,—There has been a round of revelry lately at the house of one townsman after another, concerned with an event which takes place in the life of Mohammedan boys between the ages of six and thirteen. The occasion, as observed here, is one of hospitality even more than a wedding is.

It has this point of similarity with our weddings, that the guests give presents ; but with the difference that the presents—which are mostly in money—precede the invitations, instead of reluctantly following them. The after-dinner public entertainment, which is a feature of the celebrations, is rather a poor affair in Birjand. The father of the family, or the nearest male relative, instals a pair of sorry musicians with fife and drum in his compound ; the humbler townfolk gather to the sound, the buffoon diverts them with rustic fooling, and those who have a mind to it join in the dancing, while the women watch the show from the flat roof. At about three hours after sunset they disperse to their homes. This ‘ show,’ as they simply name it, is repeated for three to eight days according to the social position of the host, who throughout the period, or thereafter, dispenses more material hospitality to a large or small number of guests. The season for the ceremony, you will notice, is the late spring.

I have not witnessed these shows, but I have lately seen some fine free dancing of a more organised nature rare to this town—the ring dances of the Seistani levies whom I referred to recently. On the first occasion the British officers here and myself were invited by the levies to a tattoo in their barracks. On the second occasion the performance was repeated, with

variations, in front of the Indian cavalry lines, the native officers of the cavalry being our hosts. The third occasion took place last night in the compound of a private house, and my senses are still echoing the hum and bustle of it. The cooks were busy all day with great cauldrons of rice and slabs and chunks of mutton : the guests came in and dined in the compound between seven and eight o'clock : the dancing commenced at nine. We ourselves appeared on the scene at about half-past nine and were given seats on the verandah facing the brick-paved courtyard, where the barefooted Seistanis were already circling in the stick-dance. The players stood in the centre, and the dancers, each with a baton in his right hand, whirled round them in rhythmic order with a succession of *volte-face* movements, each man with a series of rapid and graceful steps facing round in turn to his neighbour in front and his neighbour behind and crossing sticks. You will realise that the staccato click of thirty sticks in perfect time with each other had a fascination of its own, apart from which the dance was one of leg movement only, with a surprising symmetry and agility in the double progression. The pace and vigour increased, and we watched to see some one get a hearty crack on the head from his neighbour's baton ; but the shots never missed.

The second item was a solo dance by a young Indian who performed a sort of jig with a dagger

in each hand. After that two Russian Cossacks came on and set to each other, while a third played a merry lilting tune on their beloved concertina. They span around with a great deal of precise posturing, and the neatest of foot-work in their black light-soled riding-boots. Occasionally one would squat on his haunches and carry on the dance in that position for a few steps, and once he surprised us by approaching his partner in a rapid somersault. These Cossacks never tire of dancing, nor we of watching them.

The next item was a dance by two Persian boys of about six years of age, who flitted about for a quarter of an hour in a space of twelve feet by eight. These little fellows were respectable amateurs, very different from the professional wriggler known to larger towns. Their bare feet, 'like little mice, ran in and out' through a marvellous maze of seemingly impromptu figures : they fluttered and hung and darted and turned after and about each other, their heads always erect, their dark eyes shining and their rosy cheeks glowing through the dim light of the lamps. Their dancing seemed too spontaneous to have been studied, and yet was much too intricate and artistic to be unrehearsed. It was like two elves disporting themselves—but very skilful and intelligent elves. Here was all the poetry of motion, innocent of passionate or sentimental suggestion, the grace of young things joyously

alive. Mozart in his childhood (his lighter music suggests it) might have danced like that, but his curvettings would have been more formal and less rich in cunning and variety; the *élan*, the *verve*, the *entrainement* of these Persian children was more than Gallic.

Through it all the satyr in the background played upon his reed pipe. His face was pitted deep with smallpox and yellow with opium-smoking, his eyes glazed, void of expression. When the dance was over the Seistanis rose and began to form a ring round the compound again. The player put aside the little pipe which made a sound like an oboe, and recommenced with his usual instrument, which sounds very like a chanter—a bagpipe without the bag. He puffed his cheeks and made a bag of them, breathing through his nose while he blew. The sound was continuous, and he never seemed to stop blowing. The Seistanis began to circle again—a motley circle of turbaned heads, bare feet, baggy trousers, and tight waistcoats below which the free tails of their white shirts flapped and flew. They had no sticks or other accessories this time, and the dance was one of free gesture, ample movement, and supple flexions. They set to the man in front with Schottische steps, spun round, set to the man behind, advanced towards the middle, retired, whirled fantastically, and began over again, progressing always round the ring. By this time

half the lights had been blown out by the night breeze : the pace quickened and the scene took on a wild and demoniacal aspect : the onlookers caught the infection ; some of them entered the giddy vortex, and the dance became a medley of dim whirling figures with flashes of white shirt-tails and loose turban-cloths.

Finale, presto. The guests departed, and the dancers, the players, and the crowd vanished into the outer moonlight. Anon came the cry of the night - police challenging homegoers, and then deep silence, broken later by the howling of cats on the roof where the white-robed women had watched.

MIHNEH, 7th June 1917.

DEAR M.,—I left Birjand on the 2nd, probably never to return. My chief feeling was one of mild relief after a round of good-byes. The Persian is often a sentimental creature with the gift of abundant speech for suitable occasions. If you have known each other well for some years, he will realise, as you meet for the last time, that here is indeed a minor form of death, and he may think it his obligation to say things to you which in your own country would only be said at your funeral. If he grows pathetic, however, you have but to switch him off with a twist of levity, and he laughingly runs down the proffered siding, taking the hint that neither of you is very deep

in the affections of the other, or could ever be in the nature of the case.

One sometimes lives these last days of sojourn in a rarefied atmosphere, with heightened vision. The ordinary sights and sounds of daily life are noted with quickened perception, and assume a new significance when the veil of familiarity is about to be withdrawn : a halo of farewell makes the commonest things arresting, as the colours of sunset work magic in a dull sky. But the pitch of sensation was not raised for me at the time of leave-taking. I could see nothing but the same old egg-top roofs, the same narrow, evil-smelling lanes of traffic, the same opium-sodden beggars. The song of the Indian troopers taking their horses to water, the chant of the bricklayer, the evening call to prayer recited by the old man with the cracked voice and the little boy with the brazen one (each within fifty yards of me and paying no attention to each other's periods), the nightly bugle-call four hours after sundown, the braying of donkeys, the bleating of kids, the gurgling of camels, the town-crier announcing in loud long-drawn tones that somebody's calf is lost, the cry of a neighbour's infant, the laughter of veiled women, the evensong of the Cossacks lounging across the way, the voice of the toll-keeper hailing peasants as they would pass his hut, the marching-tunes of the native band, the tramp of infantrymen and the staccato sten-

torian 'one, two, one—one, two, one' of the perspiring Persian officer, whip in hand, as they passed my door in the morning—all these come back in an untimely jumble already as indifferent and undistinguished as is the faint droning of flies in the big room where I am now sitting in a village half-way to Meshed.

I am travelling this time in an open carriage with four good horses abreast, guaranteed to take me to Meshed in eight days. The driver is a Turk from Tabriz in the north-west, and says his prayers facing in the wrong direction. He has a groom who sits or stands at the back of the carriage. The groom's chief characteristic is his ugliness, and his chief accomplishment is falling off his perch in a deep sleep, waking up later in the roadway, and walking in our tracks for the rest of the stage. My servant sits beside the driver, and I dispose myself among rugs and pillows with my feet across the luggage which is packed in the body of the carriage. Whiles I reclines and sleeps. Whiles I just reclines. So the time passes, with seven to eight hours a day driving and the rest of the twenty-four in strange lodgings which provide much of the hazard and interest of the journey. We have had our due of mishap already at a place where a dozen gypsies were encamped in goats'-hair tents on the outskirts of a village. As we passed their encampment on our way out after a halt the carriage tilted on a

slope, hung for a second, and fell on its side. We picked ourselves up from the road and proceeded to right matters. The swarthy soft-featured gypsy women watched us over a low wall and smiled. One of them told us the reason for the accident. She had begged alms, it appeared (though I had no knowledge of it), and my servant had turned her a deaf ear. He thought nothing of it, or perhaps considered that the dark people had had all the revenge they wanted, for he continued to turn the deaf ear. 'I suppose,' I said to the driver, 'you don't do this sort of thing very often?' 'Be assured,' he replied with a chuckle; 'never more than once on a journey. We will now get to Meshed safely.' He flicked his whip and we started off once more at a trot. Before we had gone thirty yards in the narrow, uneven roadway the same thing happened again, and again we rose from the dust and looked at each other and examined the overturned carriage. The hood was broken slightly in three places. My helmet was bruised into pulp. I was cross with the driver, and he with his luck. 'She has put the evil eye on us,' said the groom as he rubbed his bones. I looked back and saw the woman still smiling. . . .? No, it would be too absurd to go back and give her something. She laughed lightly and turned away. We got off again, and have had no trouble since, so perhaps our account is settled. But I am not quite sure,

and if ever again a gypsy asks me for money—well, I hope I shall refuse her.

At Beidukht I stopped for a few minutes to go over a new mosque which is being built to enshrine the remains of Mulla Sultan, the late local chief of the Sūfī sect—the brotherhood of dervishes whose district headquarters are here as those of the Ismailis are at Sihdeh. The tomb is in the centre of the unfinished buildings, and I was about to enter the chamber when I saw a woman in black crouching beside it, so I came away and scrambled onto my rugs and pillows again. Beidukht is a poor, ill-favoured place, unworthy of such a memorial.

At Sihdeh I was greeted by a picket of Indian cavalry, whose native officer sent me a Punjabi curry for lunch. The men regretted that we should have no more football together in Birjand, and complained of having too little to do with the war, so I tried to buoy them up with hopes of an early return to India. At the next post we had passed the British line and entered the Russian 'sphere of influence.' As my carriage stopped I was consummately stared at by a few Cossacks, one of whom (a solitary Siberian of uncouth bulk, with little half-buried eyes) peered at me with his hands in his breeches pockets and spat heartily the while to show his sense of the new emancipation. So far as I have come, there are a dozen or more men posted at every stage—big blonde

fellows most of them, the picture of rude health. They get little news of the war, and that very belated, so the few I spoke with were eager for the latest I could give them.

CHINĀRĀN, *14th June 1917.*

DEAR M.,—Behold me speeding for the Russian frontier at the rate of thirty-six miles a day, in the same carriage, with the same driver, the Tabrizi Turk, who now proclaims himself a Russian subject or ‘protected person.’ This morning I left Meshed, where I had spent the last three and a half days renewing old acquaintances and making new ones,—English, Russian, Belgian, American, Persian, Indian, and Armenian—a score of people who form a cosmopolitan colony centring round the British and Russian consulates. Our consulate is a roomy two-storied brick building, in the middle of a delightful garden where you can play tennis or badminton or croquet in surroundings that might do justice to a country house in the south of England. You may take your tea there on the lawns within a rose-arbour or beneath a weeping-willow: the broad verandah where you sit in the cool of the evening is marked off with a deep border of potted geraniums, and your table is decked with dahlias. The tethered gazelles grazing beside the lambs in a miniature park, the irrigation channels that fringe each patch of green, the big almond tree and the great

oriental planes in whose tops the crows have nested, are barely enough to remind you that you are in the East : if they do remind you, it is only to awaken in you a comfortable appreciation of the fruitful care of those who found and foster such oases.

Meshed has changed much since I last saw it. There are new gardens, new houses, new shops,—a whole street of them—and a fine new building for the post and telegraph offices which would not shame any European town. The town square, where the band plays and the Persian troops drill of a morning, is lined with shady trees and set about with flower-beds. Most marvellous to see, there is actually a public park where the townspeople walk and take the air in the evenings. The effect on the town of a garrison of several hundred Russian cavalry is manifest in other ways. Many of the shops display Russian signs, and the Russian language has been rapidly learnt and is freely spoken by a large number of all classes when they have occasion to use it in their dealings with the troops. Politically, these influences have recently become dormant. The potent expenditure of the rouble continues, and the display of force is still there, but the revolution in Russia has temporarily paralysed their power of action, and the thoughts of officers and men alike are concerned for the moment with the single question of their own future. The Persians in Meshed are

very curious about Russia's prospects, and their lack of reliable news leads them to spread absurd rumours from time to time. They are sympathetic enough, and hopeful of future relations between the two powers and peoples more flattering to themselves, but with their own recent experience of the results of abrupt conversion from despotism to ultra-democratic ideas they are naturally somewhat cynical and sceptical as to the upshot in Russia.

The Persian democrats, foiled in their efforts of 1915-16 to rouse this country in the cause of our enemies, have suddenly adopted the desperate methods of assassins. In Teheran a band of terrorists has been formed who have issued notices warning prominent individuals against active support of the British and Russian diplomatic representatives. Two such supporters of our legations have been murdered in the last fortnight, and others have since been threatened for the alleged taking of bribes.

BAKU, 22nd June 1917.

DEAR M.,—I have reached the fringe of Europe once more, and am taking breath for a space after a welter of strange faces and unfamiliar speech. I wrote you on the 14th from Chinārān. On the 15th I passed the night among the poplars and willows of Kūchān, a new town built to replace the old one some miles away which was

ruined by an earthquake a generation ago and still suffers from shocks. On the 16th I reached Imām Qulī, a green spot which is the home of Turki-speaking Kurds, and on the 17th we crossed the frontier.

At the Persian frontier-post our troubles began. My passport, with my photograph gummed to it, bore the *visé* of the Russian consul-general in Meshed, and was supported by a general letter of recommendation from him. My servant had a Persian passport also endorsed by the Russians and with his photograph attached. The carriage-driver had been misinformed and had failed to provide himself with a pass of any sort, with the result that we were held up for a couple of hours while he procured a permit from the agent for foreign affairs. This settled, we drove uphill to the frontier and downhill to the Russian customs post, passing on the way the barracks of the Russian frontier guard, where a sentry with fixed bayonet stood by the roadside. The carriage was unloaded at the customs-house and a cursory examination of our belongings was made by a sour-faced menial whose severity was tempered by the amiable admonitions of a mild-mannered clerk. Our passports were checked by this latter, who found some difficulty over the carriage-horses and had to summon his chief, a blonde rugged giant of bluff manner and short speech. While awaiting this officer the clerk entertained

me with conversation on the war, which he knew little about, and the state of Russia, as to which he was plaintive. He spoke with a sing-song cadence in his voice, a burlesque intonation which I find used by many Russians. He seemed to blame the revolution for the simple state of his office and furniture, which appeared to me exactly the same as when I saw the place four years ago.

We parted the best of friends, and I drove on to a little village where we passed the night. As the carriage stopped, three or four soldiers came forward and again demanded my passport and requested me to have my luggage opened for examination. The non-commissioned officer in charge of the post (I took him to be such, though I only saw him in shirt and trousers, with his braces hanging loose) read my papers, decreed that an examination of the luggage was unnecessary, led me to a good room and stood in the doorway talking till my tea was ready, when he said good-bye and disappeared. He had a fair skin and fair hair, declared himself a Pole, and told me he had been in the fighting at Warsaw. Like the customs clerk, he asked me when I thought there would be peace, as to which I claimed no inside knowledge. At dinner-time my servant, Ismail, produced a half-bottle of Burgundy which had crossed the frontier with me, and which I disposed of with particular

relish because the sale of wine is forbidden in Russia.

Next morning we started at 5 o'clock in the hope of catching a train which left Askabad at 11 a.m. according to the customs clerk, and at 9.30 according to him of the hanging braces. At 8.30 we pulled up at the station after passing a common where squads of young soldiers were drilling. I now learnt that the morning train carried only third-class passengers and that the evening train would be at 5.25, so we drove off again along tree-lined avenues to the Orient Hotel. There I engaged a room and, going downstairs to pay off my driver the Tabrizi Turk, met Ismail coming along the corridor looking as if he had seen a ghost, whereas all he had seen was the mere suggestion of European city life. After that first sight of a very ordinary hotel, with maid-servants, unsecluded, serving a male public, not even the railway nor the steamer could open his eyes so wide in shy wonder.

At Askabad I went first to a barber, and afterwards to a Persian bath as there was no bathroom in the hotel. The *friseur* was a lad of seventeen or so, who told me he drilled with the soldiers twice a week. Later, I breakfasted in my room with tea and sugar, eggs and bread. As there was no dining-room I decided in an unlucky moment to lunch outside, and went

accordingly to a restaurant of indifferent quality, where I got fish and bread and mineral water, tea with sugar being unobtainable, as also alcoholic drinks of any kind. While I was there a man left the place with very uncertain gait, obviously well primed with liquor, the nature of which I didn't learn.

At a little after five I drove to the station and found long queues at the booking-offices. I was now told that the train, due to arrive at 5.25, would leave at 6.30, which it did punctually. I commissioned a porter to buy tickets—one first and one fourth class. There was no third class, and he found that there were no places available in first or second. Repeated chases after the stationmaster, who, run to earth at last, was all smiles and apologies, but could do nothing. The porter eventually got me a fourth-class ticket and asked the attendant in the dining-car to let me sit there for the journey. Ismail was duly given his place in the fourth class, in a compartment with six sleeping-berths in tiers of three, with my luggage piled opposite him on the other side of the corridor, where also were two berths placed lengthways to the train. His travelling companions were all soldiers, who took to him at once and began to teach him Russian by asking him all sorts of questions which he couldn't answer. I left him in a circle of popularity, and went to the dining-car, where people were drinking beer or tea.

Later I made the acquaintance of two school-boys, aged about sixteen, who were going some distance west on holiday from a *gymnase* at Charsu. A real live Britisher was a priceless curiosity to these lads, who bombarded me with questions on all sorts of matters, including the details of our military uniform from a field-marshal's to a sub-lieutenant's. I asked them if they spoke French, and the more voluble of the two replied that he had been two years at it and couldn't speak a word, but that they knew some German. He complained about education in Russia, which he said was of no value, and when a passenger brushed past his comrade on the passage at the end of the car he complained of Russian manners. I told him that many an English boy could not speak a word of French after two years' study, and that many a passenger on English trains was lacking in good manners. He said that he hoped to become an engineer, and would go to America for that end if the war was over before his military service was due, scientific instruction being hopeless in Russia. 'I hope you will go,' said I, 'and come back and put matters right in your own country. The future depends on you and others like you.' He told me he had heard that if Russia made a separate peace, England would at once seize Turkestan with the help of the Afghans. He imagined that Afghanistan swarmed with Englishmen, whereas

they have always been prohibited from entering that country. The train stopped, and the boys rushed me off to see a museum of relics and souvenirs of the war with the Turkomans—a collection of ordnance, arms and ammunition, equipment, battle pictures, and photographs of officers. Among the passengers on the train who hastened out to view these exhibits was a number of Turkoman officers themselves, now subjects of Russia—big men of powerful physique, with striped red robes, enormous sheep-skin hats over their embroidered skull-caps, and daggers stuck in their belts.

The next man I spoke to was a mechanic, an employee on the railway, who finding I was a foreigner promptly concluded that I must be an Austrian prisoner under convoy, but was none the less obliging. My third acquaintance was a little fair-haired Jew who spoke Persian. He had been a buyer of lambskins in Persia for some years, but had lost so much money in bad debts that he swore never to return to that distressful country. After dinner those officers and women who had berths in the first or second class retired gradually, and there remained three senior officers who I found were in the same position as myself—passengers with fourth-class tickets who proposed to spend the night in the dining-car. With one of them, a much-decorated colonel of a Turkestanian regiment, I had a long conversation principally

on the war and the state of Russia. He was plaintive, like the schoolboys. ' Before the revolution my soldiers were like my own children. Look at them now ! Discipline has gone and there is no sign of its returning. One must ask them to do this, and suggest to them to do that, and gently request them not to do the other. Punishment has been abolished, and of course orders are not listened to. The country is in a hopeless condition. They say that if matters don't improve, Japan will step in and take control. What do the English say about us ? ' I could only reply that the English knew what losses the Russians had suffered in the first year of the war and did not expect them to make an offensive movement till the revolution had boiled down a bit, but would be content to see them hold their line. This pleased the colonel, who was afraid the British, the Japanese, and the Germans between them were going to swallow up Russia. His apprehensions appeared to be shared by others to whom he afterwards quoted his question and my reply, much to their relief and my astonishment.

At midnight the train stopped at a station where we hoped to find places available. There proved to be none, and when we returned to the dining-car we found it locked against us. The colonel found a seat somehow, and I stood in the corridors for an hour or two and then sought

Ismail in the fourth-class boxes, where I stretched myself on an upper berth with a rug and a pillow. The smell of humanity was overpowering, and with that and the pig-like snoring of a man in the berth alongside, my sleep was rather uneasy. I rose again at four o'clock, and shortly afterwards I was found lurking in the second-class corridor by an inspector who immediately assumed a manner and threatened me with a fine. The attendant explained my case, and at the next station he succeeded in getting me a ticket for a second-class berth, where I snatched some more sleep. We arrived at Krasnovodsk at about nine o'clock, and I got a second-class passage for Baku, the first being full. We could not go on board till three in the afternoon, and as there is no good hotel at Krasnovodsk we spent the whole of the intervening time in the dreary big room at the station, where I had a satisfactory lunch, but could get no newspapers. I was relieved of fifteen roubles in all for the simple business of taking my luggage from the station, putting it on board, and purchasing my tickets, all which certainly took a considerable time to accomplish.

The boat (a converted cargo-boat twenty-nine years old, oil-driven with Bolinder engines) arrived while we were waiting at the shore end of the pier, and some thirty soldiers came off burdened with kit, some of them bandaged and one or two limping. The courteous colonel,

whose very agreeable company I had as far as Baku, explained that these latter were sick or diseased. 'We have had practically no wounded,' said he, 'for many months now.' After the soldiers came the civilians—a motley lot of Jews, Turks, Persians, Tatars, Russians, Armenians, and what not. The embarking passengers were then allowed through the pier gate, soldiers first again.

We were given a good evening meal between five and six, when the amiable colonel was kept busy persuading three women that the sea was calm (which was perfectly true), that they would not be sea-sick (which was probable), and that on the Black Sea whither they were bound they would not be torpedoed (which was at least possible). At nine o'clock I had a glass of tea with brown bread provided by the company, with sugar provided by myself, and jam contributed by a fellow-passenger—a government clerk wearing gold shoulder-straps and standing about six feet five in his shoes. With him and the colonel I had an interesting confabulation for an hour or more before we retired for the night. They were both very deprecatory when speaking about their country, astonishingly like Persians in that respect, and to a point of illogical childishness. 'Have some more tea,' said the clerk. 'No more, thank you. I don't usually drink tea at night, and might not sleep after it.' 'Ah! there

now! Look at the system of the English,' said the colonel. 'We Russians drink tea at any hour and to any extent, and then we go to bed with troubled heads. We do everything like that. You others know what is good for you and keep to it.' I thought of my cabin companion, a mild young Russian civilian with glasses and a straw helmet, who told me at dinner that he never ate meat or smoked tobacco, on principle.

We arrived next morning at Baku, where three hydroplanes were circling in the bay. I found my way to the Hotel d'Europe, which is frequented by the Americans and the British in the town—the British colony numbering about fifty. Baku is not a pretty port, and I was anxious to leave it as soon as possible, so I was not cheered by the announcement that owing to new regulations I should probably have to remain for three weeks, particularly as I found that bare living in the hotel (where there was abundance of food) cost thirty roubles a day, and that there was nothing to be seen or done. This morning, however, being the third day of my stay, I went to the prefect armed with papers, and obtained from him after some demur the necessary permission for myself and my servant. We are to leave Baku this evening by a paddle steamer for the Persian port of Enzeli.

Baku is perfectly quiet, but on every hand I hear the same story of disorganisation and

paralysis. I find, for instance, that telegrams to England are delayed for any time up to a month, and mails take at least six weeks; that the local papers have very little news and the Moscow and Petrograd papers arrive a fortnight old; that it is almost impossible for me to send money to London; that the soldiers are idle and the hospitals empty of all but sick; that the sale of wine is absolutely prohibited, but is carried on by devious methods. The newspapers are still full of speeches and appeals, and every one seems extremely vocal and extremely inactive. Some of the few English people I have met are frankly intolerant, and when the situation is referred to they dispose of it in one or two trenchant expressions in the typical manner, and wish themselves elsewhere.

RESHT, 24th June 1917.

DEAR M.,—I wrote you two days ago from Baku, since when I have escaped from Europe and all its works and reached Persia again—a haven of comparative quiet. We boarded the steamer at seven in the evening, left an hour later, and dined at 9.30, by which time I had made the acquaintance of a young Russian consular official travelling to Resht, and a Persian of about thirty-two who was returning from London after six years abroad, spent mostly in Switzerland, where he had been studying law at the Geneva university.

The boat was full of soldiers who swarmed onto the decks fore and aft and amidships, crowded and jostled themselves into some sort of companionable comfort, lay down, and went to sleep. The more wakeful of them sat littering their surroundings with the shells of pistachio nuts, and a few mounted to the promenade deck above, where they passed a breezy rainy night. The men carried no arms: they were all bound for the Kermanshah front, and they all looked thoroughly fit. They behaved in the quietest possible manner, without any stir or bustle, talking to each other in subdued tones and with their rugged faces rarely lit by a smile or a sign of animation. The officers on board, so far as I saw, paid not the least attention to their men, nor did the men trouble their officers.

The Persian returning from London told me there were a score of Persians to his knowledge now there, and the same number in Switzerland, which before the war harboured some hundreds. The Persians in Europe, he said, had mostly gone back to Persia since 1914, and the majority of them were democrats. 'Which means that they are hostile to England and Russia?' 'Yes,' he assented. 'Where is So-and-so?' I asked, naming a former friend of mine who had been very pro-British. 'He is now in Berlin,' was the reply: 'I had a letter from him not long ago.' I wondered what might be the implication of that

letter, but I said nothing. It is a state of affairs that doesn't encourage conversation.

We arrived at Enzeli eighteen hours after leaving Baku. As the steamer drew alongside I saw the wharf lined with several hundred Russian soldiers without arms or equipment. 'Where are they going?' I asked. 'Nowhere. They are simply passing the time.' Our passports were checked and returned to us, and I left the boat, having already commissioned a man to engage me a carriage. On the way to the customs-house, my things being carried by sailors, I attracted two other well-wishers. My passport became once more and for the last time an object of interest, after which my luggage was partly examined by a petty officer of the Russian navy. The three men who had attached themselves to me engaged three others to carry my luggage thirty yards, and the six of them, with much loud-voiced discussion, bestowed it in and behind the cab. I had to tip eight men for doing the work of three, but I made little objection, being glad to find myself on Persian soil again. The two-horse rubber-tyred carriage drove off, and for three hours we bowled along through what was to my eyes, parched with the arid landscapes of the Persian plateau, the most delightful scenery—sub-tropical jungle and woodland alternating with stretches of bright green paddy-fields where the transplanted rice grew under water in sym-

metrical rows within minutely divided areas, while at intervals we passed stretches of succulent pasture where foals wandered and cattle grazed in large numbers. The altitude throughout was very little above the level of the Caspian Sea, and the mild air was heavy with moisture which was balm to my nostrils.

The way was marked with signposts in Russian, and the motor-wagons and cars and one-horse carts which passed us frequently were a sufficient reminder that this was Russia's military highway leading to Hamadan, Kermanshah, and the Turkish frontier. We stopped half-way to rest the horses, and my servant, Ismail, fetched me a glass of tea from the 'coffee'-shop. Ismail had recovered his normal self by now, and his face was lit up with a happy smile of relief and satisfaction as if he had just returned from a prolonged and painful exile. 'There wasn't enough sugar in Russia, but here they give you too much,' said he, as if to put the matter in a nutshell. 'Well,' I said, 'you needn't have let them half fill my glass with sugar. In Russia I was your servant at times, but now the position has reverted.' 'Sarkar,' said he, 'I was ashamed beyond words before my master in Russia, being so helpless and useless in a strange land. I thank God that is finished. And if that is really Russia that we have been through in the last week—well, I am the slave of Persia for ever.' 'I have already told

you,' I said, 'that Eastern Russia is not Russia proper, and that Eastern Russia in war-time and during a period of revolution is a very different thing from Europe in times of peace.' 'Did you see that tradesman in Krasnovodsk,' he asked, 'who cuffed that poor porter till his nose bled? When I was on the boat,' he went on with only apparent irrelevance, 'a soldier beside me had some trouble with his neighbour, a man of humble position. He beat him unmercifully till the poor fellow cried, and no one made any objection. The soldiers as a rule, though, were very quiet and didn't trouble any one, and the Russians in the streets of Baku were just the same, and went about their own business. But whenever I left the hotel at Baku I was repeatedly accosted by impertinent Caucasian Turks, who wanted me to answer all sorts of questions about myself. They worried me to death, giving me no peace, so that I gave up walking in the streets. When a man is in a foreign land he should be going about and seeing the sights, but I could only sit on the floor in the room, like a deaf and dumb fool, absolutely miserable.'

Ismail, you see, had suffered the loss of some illusions about European civilisation, of which he had just skirted the borders. He had always been told that Europe was a long way ahead of Asia in everything, and like any ignorant countryman he drew the wrong conclusions. He ex-

pected more spaciousness, more ease and comfort, and he found jostling crowds and unceasing noise. He conceived vaguely of a higher form of humanity, with more refinement of conduct, more courtesy of intercourse, more nobility and grace of aspect in matter and in man. Reckoning his impressions by such a standard of value, he found, of course, but little to admire or emulate, particularly when I warned him against casual rogues and exorbitant shopkeepers in the streets of Baku. I am confident, therefore, that he will remain a true son of Iran, reassured of the superior merits and attractiveness of his own country, while admitting, for the sake of argument, the advantages of swift locomotion, and the initial pleasure of such minor facilities as obtaining an unlimited supply of good and clean water by simply turning a mysterious tap.

TEHERAN, 30th June 1917.

DEAR M.,—I left Resht on the morning of the 25th, in a tyreless landau with four post-horses abreast. The following afternoon we arrived at Kazvin, where I stopped for the night, leaving again the next day after lunch. At two o'clock on the 28th I finally drew up in Teheran, where my journeying is over for the time being. As usual, I find that my heavy luggage, which had been sent on by the direct route from Meshed three or four weeks ago, has neither arrived nor been heard of.

From Resht to Teheran the road is a good one, metalled where necessary, and without the bumps and hazards to which I have grown accustomed in other parts of the country. The horses are changed every three hours or so, and the traveller may occasionally be delayed an hour or two waiting for fresh relays, but he is otherwise free to continue his journey night and day if he likes, at an average pace of five and a half miles an hour. The rich alluvial land of the flat coast-belt, with dense forest-growth broken at intervals by rice fields, continues for seven or eight hours from Resht, gradually giving way to less luxuriant country as the road rises to the uplands. The air becomes cooler, drier, and more invigorating, and one suddenly finds oneself back among the naked hills, the scanty pastures, and the sterile stretches which characterise the whole plateau of Persia.

On the way to Kazvīn I met many military transport carts, and some three hundred Russian soldiers (among them a few junior officers) returning on foot and in motor-lorries to the front of war. They had no arms or equipment beyond in some cases a small haversack, and when at one point half a dozen of them gathered round my cigarette case, one of them, in answer to my question, asked me how I could expect them to have cigarettes when they had insufficient bread even. They all bore themselves with the same subdued,

almost stolid air that I had remarked in the soldiers on the railway and on the Caspian Sea—the air of normally strong men browbeaten by fate and looking to suffer still. At Kazvin, where the highway to Hamadan and Kermanshah branches off, I lost sight of these men, and thereafter the level road, which skirts the Elburz range of mountains till it finally crosses the now hot and dusty plain to Teheran, was deserted of all but post-wagons and a few road-carriages and mule caravans of merchandise.

I had been warned of many changes in the capital since I left it eight years ago, but the old types and the old landmarks drew my attention much more than the fresh veneer of advancing civilisation which has been streaked over the town. The club maintained by the European colony is more prosperous than of old, and there is a new Imperial Club for Persians and Europeans, founded principally for sports but now more noted for card-playing. There are two or three hotels which deserve the name rather more than some of their predecessors did. New buildings and new shops have improved a few of the main streets, which are now better cared for: the central square, where the same old muzzle-loader cannon repose, is lit at night with arc lights. The traditional thirst-quenching British hospitality comes over one with the same flow and variety as in former days of peace, which is surprising in view

of the state of traffic with Europe and India. There are minor alleviations, such as the possibility of visiting a barber's shop instead of sending, as we used to do, for a black-frocked person who, with blunt scissors (and a blunter machine, of which he was very proud), made strange cryptic patterns on one's head if his artistic instinct was not carefully controlled. The brightest feature of the street to the newcomer is unquestionably the Persian gendarme, the chaste elegance of whose uniform, in striking contrast to the sombre and floppy dress of the people, arrests the eye repeatedly on every line of traffic.

The various legations desert the town for the summer, and are now established in their usual country quarters six or seven miles to the north towards the mountains, where are also most of the British bank and telegraph staffs and other European residents. There are several Swedish officers in charge of the gendarmerie and the police. The latter force appears to be under good control: the chief of police is at the moment engaged in tracking down members of the ever-increasing society of terrorists whose avowed object is the assassination of Anglophile, Russophile, and reactionary Persians. Their latest victim is the treasurer-general of Persia, who by all accounts was little deserving of murder. Whether these assassins will be fitly dealt with by the Persian authorities is at present a matter of

doubt, the men being regarded by many Persians as patriots, misguided at worst.

HAMADAN, 22nd July 1917.

DEAR M.,—Your letters of 18th March and 25th April reached me in Teheran, and you may imagine how welcome they were as it was a full month since I had had any home news. It is good to know that everything is unchanged, or was three months ago, and that P. R.'s *talism* (which is the Persian for a mascot) still serves him well. I notice that you have stopped speculating and ruminating about the war, which seems to have become almost a natural state of existence with you all. I suppose that during demobilisation and thereafter you will lose the new habits as gradually as they have been acquired. You get little news from this part of the world, it seems: Persia is certainly a backwater at present, and has dropped quite out of importance since the capture of Baghdad. I found, for instance, that there were practically no press correspondents at the capital, and that Reuter's news agency was being run by some one in his spare time. I see, by the way, from your last letter that my telegram from Birjand took a fortnight to reach you.

I left Teheran on the 5th after a stay of a week, returning on my tracks as far as Kazvin. My Birjandi servant, Ismail, left the day before to return to his family, much to my regret, as the boy

had given me loyal service for four years. From experience, however, I knew that he would not be happy out of his own province, so I had perforce to find another man. I have engaged for the rest of my journey a boy of twenty-three or so who enlisted some years ago in the gendarmerie and disliked it so much that he shot himself in the hand to obtain his discharge. The only other recommendation he had was from some one who took him on as cook and dismissed him for exorbitant accounts of expenditure after a fortnight. He is a capable fellow and hasn't broken out with me so far, so perhaps his wild oats have been sown.

From Teheran to Kazvin I had an energetic travelling companion who made the short journey anything but tedious. We were delayed repeatedly by jaded horses, and at one point where the driver halted to refresh himself and the animals within an hour of our next stage, my friend lost his patience, mounted to the driver's seat, used the whip and the reins till his hands were blistered, shouted and swore till his voice was hoarse, and brought us in triumph to our stage in the small hours of night, while the wretched little driver was left to follow on foot with his post-boy's saddle over his arm. At another point where we halted at lunch time a Russian orderly took us to a good room, gave us tumblers of tea and fresh white bread, and entertained us with stories of the

taking of Erzerum, at which he had been present. The lad had received four or five shrapnel wounds in the course of his campaigning, and had something to tell of hardships, but he was very cheerful and active in spite of it all.

At Kazvin I engaged a fresh post-carriage for Hamadan, and started off again on the afternoon of the 8th, arriving here on the 10th after forty-four hours' travelling. The road is a good metalled one throughout, though its surface has been loosened by traffic and drought. I was provided with papers of introduction from our attaché at Teheran and from the Russian consul at Kazvin, but found no use for them, as the only Russians I spoke with were some soldiers at the hot springs beyond the third stage, who were waiting their turn, like myself, for a bathe in the little covered tank in the rock through which the hot water comes bubbling up. The people at the posting-stations, as we approached the Hamadan district, spoke Turkī amongst themselves and had very little knowledge of Persian. At the second stage out we reached the north-western corner of the great plain on the edge of which lie Kazvin and Teheran, and thereafter we rose into cooler hill-country. As we drew near Hamadan the valleys and villages had an increasing air of fertility and prosperity, and for the last three stages I rested my eyes at more frequent intervals on smiling fields and gardens.

Some fifteen miles from town my carriage passed a zigzag line of trenches intersecting the roadway. They marked the limit of the Turkish advance in August 1916, after which time Hamadan remained in Turkish hands until the fall of Kut el Amara and our advance on Baghdad in early March 1917. (The advance towards Teheran by the Persian gendarmerie and Kurdish and other irregulars in March 1915 got as far as Āveh, four stages west of Kazvin on this same road, where they were met by the main Russian forces.) On my way from Kazvin to Hamadan I passed a certain amount of ambulance and supply transport, and a few parties of troops, but not till I saw those trenches near the town did I realise that I was on the verge of an actual and recent scene of war. There was in that realisation something of the elation of the archæologist, uplifted by the communicative virtues of the visible symbols of past greatness : there was more of the pilgrim's wondering pride, the sense of privilege ; for here, indeed, was holy ground, in direct kinship, however humble, with the glorious fields of France, and alike consecrated to a cause that is older than man. Yet as I entered Hamadan I reflected that this was no mere scene of half-forgotten martyrdom, where the pilgrim, in the joy of arrival and shadowy attainment, kisses the tomb and goes his way again : rather I had reached but the portico of the theatre, and within, behind those

doors ahead of me, the play was still upon the stage.

The town of Hamadan stands on the edge of a comparatively well-watered plain over 6000 feet above sea-level, which I may remind you is much higher than the highest mountain in Britain. Behind it to the west the ground rises without a break to a great range of mountains across which runs the road to Kermanshah. The peaks of Alvand, over 12,000 feet high, are only three or four miles distant from the narrow and tortuous ways of the Hamadan bazaars, where Persian, Turk and Kurd, Jew and Armenian pit themselves and their varieties of cunning against each other in the business of buying and selling. The lower slopes, and the plain itself, are dotted with villages buried in groves and gardens of poplar and willow and fruit trees. Most of the summer crops have already been harvested, but here and there the yellow wheat is still standing, and the grape in the walled vineyards is not yet ripe.

The house where I am hospitably lodged during my sojourn in Hamadan was occupied throughout last autumn and winter by Ali Ihsan Bey, the Turkish commander. My present host left it at three o'clock in the morning of the 9th of August 1916, after removing what valuables he could, and thirteen hours later the Turks were in possession of the town, which the Russians re-entered on the 2nd of March of this year. When the Russians

and the British residents evacuated Hamadan in August they left behind them a few members of the American Presbyterian Mission, who remained here as neutral subjects throughout the period of Turkish occupation. These missionaries, and the townspeople themselves, have retained, on the whole, a favourable impression of the behaviour of the Turkish troops, who destroyed or took away with them of European civilian property only what military necessities dictated: the cutting-down of much valuable timber, for instance, is excused by the severity of the winter at this altitude. The baneful German influence was more or less absent, as it appears that with the exception of a score of subordinate officers there were no Germans with the Turkish troops, who openly declared their dislike of Teutonic domination.

A few days ago we took tea at the Russian headquarters, where the commander-in-chief sat at one end of the long mess table, with a priest at the other end and a number of officers on either side. General B. is a Cossack officer of middle height, with an air of impregnable health and inexhaustible energy which report confirms. The only wrinkles on his handsome face are at the corners of his eyes, where he smiles. He is noted for felicitous speech-making and for inspiring vigour and confidence in his men. The Cossacks, by the way, appear to have preserved their

military spirit and their loyalty to their officers undamped by the revolution, and they provide an invaluable stiffening to the forces which are now north and west of this base.

The inhabitants of this town of neutral Persia seem to have suffered little from their experience of warfare and successive occupation by opposing armies. When the Turks entered, their commander spoke in person from the pulpit of the principal mosque, and announced that as Hamadan was now Turkish territory the people must respect and even follow the Sunni ritual and observances of their brother Mohammedans. The order was obeyed in public, and the people welcomed the conquerors with presents. As time passed the Turks became less friendly. The local capitalists were eased of part of their wealth by tactful methods, and Turkish notes were forced on the bazaar at a fictitiously high rate of exchange for Persian money. The Turks introduced Persian coin minted by our enemies, and it is said that they were on the point of redeeming with local currency the Turkish gold disbursed by them, when they were forced to fly. The astute local traders, nevertheless, have contrived in many cases to amass fortunes, particularly since the return of the Russians, though the continued depreciation of Russian paper money means heavy loss to holders of this doubtful form of wealth. The rouble note, now at a fifth of its value in

peace time, is exchanged for coin by the British bank and by Jewish and Persian petty financiers, not to mention the branch of the Russian bank itself.

At present the townspeople are suffering from nocturnal robberies more than from anything else. Every night since my arrival I have heard shots fired in the town or in our own neighbourhood, and always in the morning one is regaled with widely-varying stories of the adventure which befell some unfortunate householder or belated pedestrian. Little or no attempt is made to catch and punish these armed robbers, and the sport, in consequence, is becoming increasingly popular with malcontents and bad characters, whose only stock-in-trade is a revolver and a grievance.

I hope to move on in a week or two, so I have been doing the sights of Hamadan. One of them is a mound overlooking the town, on which are remains of an ancient citadel. Another is a lion *couchant*, of colossal size, which guards an eminence on the outskirts to the south-east. The figure has been well chiselled, but snow and rain have played for so long on its soft sandstone that the detail has been worn away and the poor animal is pitted with big rain-holes along his back. The face is worn almost smooth, but the lion's present claim to distinction lies thereon, for while the rest of its body and the surrounding earth may be absolutely dry, its face is always wet and oleaginous.

The affection is no mere chronic catarrh, but rather a perpetual perspiration which commences as high as the forehead. The cause of it I might leave to geologists and mystics to settle between them, but, as a matter of fact, it appears to concern neither. The lion's face is said to be rubbed with oil by women of the neighbourhood whose married life has not borne fruit.

Another of the sights is the reputed tombs of Esther and Mordecai, enshrined in the centre of the town within a domed building of economical proportions, the entrance to which is by a small and very heavy stone door of the type used in many an old fort. The guardian of this place of pilgrimage is an aged Jew, who will show you the carved and inscribed walnut cenotaphs of Xerxes' Jewish queen and her scheming uncle, and will point out to you the place overhead where hung the crown of Esther till it was stolen a little while ago—some say by the custodian himself. The old man lifts a circular stone in the floor between the two cenotaphs, and you see below a wick light which is kept ever burning, like the Zoroastrian fire. You may peer through this man-hole, or even go down it if you like, and speculate on what lies there in the dim light.

Elsewhere, by the river's edge in a mean quarter of the town, is the tomb of Abu Ali, known to Renaissance Europe and to ourselves as Avicenna, the great philosopher and doctor of

medicine who lived and wrote in Bukhara and in Persia proper nine hundred years ago, under the patronage of successive and rival princes who gave him no peace till, like many an honest fellow of those days, he died of good living. His tomb is fitly guarded by an unkempt and ragged dervish, and is a haunt of that fraternity. The stone cenotaph of Avicenna lies by that of his beloved master, within a railed-off area in a little room which the Turks (be it said in their favour) re-floored with tiles during their occupation of Hamadan last winter. The little garden in front of the simple building is planted with trees and flowers.

KERMANSHAH, 16th August 1917.

DEAR M.,—I left Hamadan on the morning of the 9th, and got here on the afternoon of the 11th. There is no post service of horses, so I hired a droshky with three horses for the price of twenty pounds, to take myself and my servant and as much baggage as it would hold. We started at eight o'clock, and rattled over the cobbles through the town and by a stony road along the edge of the plain, making for the Asadabad pass, which we reached about midday. A short halt refreshed the animals and ourselves, and then up we went by a zigzag course, and down the other side, stopping for tea at a pleasant stream above Asadabad, where the smell of opium from the coffee-shop alongside added itself to the flavour

of my biscuits. Asadabad we reached at six o'clock, and at half-past seven we drew up for the night in the same plain at a small village called Nusratabad, beyond which the horses could not go. There I was lodged on the broad roof of a serai, where I dined and slept. Off again at four-thirty, with a pause for a glass of tea at six, and a stop at Kangavar for breakfast between eight and ten o'clock : on by a second long pass to Sahneh, with a line of trenches at one spot on the east side of the pass and the great rock mass of Bisitun confronting us in the distance as we made the descent.

The limestone range which runs right away to the Kermanshah plain starts abruptly from the earth at Bisitun. As seen from above Sahneh the mountain, with a nearer peak thrown against it, assumes the contours of a recumbent human figure, with the face upwards and the knees raised. At its feet is a stretch of level land through which a river runs. From the knees to the feet of the figure is a steep drop of some thousands of feet, and on the ankles, as it were, are the bas-reliefs and engraved records of Darius the Great. It is a fit but daring spot for the memorial tablets of Persia's greatest king, and the sublime aspect of nature's work, with its startlingly human suggestion as seen from above Sahneh, affects the imagination, as I found, more than the famous figures of the king and his king-captives, and the

recital of his achievements, that were laboriously scratched within a cleft above the mountain's base a matter of two thousand five hundred years ago. Yet it was the thought of those inscriptions, and the hope of a pleasant camping-ground, that impelled me on from the village of Sahneh, where normally we should have spent the night.

We drove on accordingly at six o'clock, and at eight o'clock we were rolling in the gathering darkness along the sandy, dusty track with the mountain mass looming ahead of us apparently within half an hour's distance. Half-past eight, nine o'clock, and half-past nine found us still following a straight line for our goal, which seemed no nearer. The horses were tired, the going was heavy, and the driver lost the main track and found himself more than once at a loose end in the scrub. We passed two or three hamlets, from which came not a sign or sound of life, the inhabitants having fled within the past year from the ravages of warring troops. Eventually we skirted a hill, threaded our way among boulders, jolted over a cobble-paved bridge guarded by Russian sentries, made towards the sound of barking dogs that indicated the village, and woke the sleeping population at the hour of ten-thirty to demand a night's lodging.

My hopes of a pleasant camping-ground by a clear spring were rudely dashed, and I had perforce to accept what offered in a caravanserai

full of wagons and mules and loads and sleeping muleteers. 'Put me on a roof,' I said to the keeper of the serai, 'where I shall be freer of sandflies and other insects.' 'The sahib would escape the noise and the crowding,' said my servant. 'The sahib wants to wake up in the morning and see the mountain in front of him,' said my intelligent droshkychi. 'Wullah,' said the keeper of the serai, 'you can see for yourself that the rooms are uninhabitable. The roof is damaged and there is no proper approach to it. The soldiers have left no timbers anywhere.' 'Then,' said I, 'remove that old opium-smoker with the crutches, and bring a broom and clean the floor of this platform by the doorway, and we will make shift.' My bed was put out, and I dined on patties and cold joint and native bread, and went promptly to sleep in my clothes with a towel over my face and hands, and with mules munching and muleteers snoring a couple of yards off. The Russians were in occupation of a good big serai a stone-throw away, but I had had no mind to disturb them at that hour, and the horses were better where they were.

I slept comfortably, and woke after dawn to find the caravan gone and the place deserted and silent. My morning cup of tea was soon ready, and after a wash I went with a villager to view the records of the Great King who ruled from Thrace to Central Asia, from Egypt to the Indus.

They are wonderful in truth, these records, but little enough to gaze upon in sober everyday sense, and unsuited in most respects for comparison with the astounding architectural and sculptural glories of Persepolis, where Darius and his heirs kept state in the days of Persia's greatness. My disappointment was keen, but no keener, perhaps, than what I felt on my return to the village when my servant told me he could get no eggs for breakfast. Could the irreverent importunity of mere appetite go further? Yet I have seen good folks at home eating buns in a cathedral they had come far to visit.

I now discovered that the 'old opium-smoker with the crutches,' who had painfully made way for me overnight, was a young villager who had been bitten in the foot a month before by a snake. The poor fellow's foot was in a bad way, but he bore his trouble well, and I was glad to make some practical amends for having disturbed him and mistaken his character in the dark. It is distressing to the traveller in a country like this, to be appealed to by victims of accident or disease and to be unable to help them with skilled treatment or advice. I was relieved therefore to learn that this man was being treated by a Russian army surgeon temporarily stationed on the spot.

We left Bisitun at eight o'clock, paused an hour later at Hajiabad (where half a dozen donkey-men were seated round a spring breakfasting on stale

barley bread steeped in water), and pulled up about ten-thirty at a spacious coffee-shop where breakfast was obtainable on rather more sumptuous lines. The serving-lad took me on to the roof and showed me the town of Kermanshah, eight miles away, running in a long line from the plain up to the hills. The upper end was all gardens and tall trees. 'That is Dil-Gushā at the top,' he explained: 'the British consul and the British bank manager live between there and the town.' 'Bah bah!' said I, 'it is well named Heart-Expanding. And what a fine fertile plain you have!' 'Yes, and along that southern hill-side there are a few more little villages hidden.' 'But where are the flocks?' 'There are some,' he answered, pointing to several hundred sheep and goats grazing towards the northern range. 'There are fewer now than there used to be. The Russians eat them all.' 'And is there game in the hills?' 'Yes, yes, there are wild sheep and ibex. You can see them sometimes from here even. The men say they have seen them. But there are many robbers in the mountains.'

I continued my journey after midday over the flat and dusty road, across the bridge of the Karasū river, and up past the town and into the garden quarter. Kermanshah, my journey's end, lay clustered on and around a hill that rose from the opening of the valley. The town mass on the little hill reminded me of Birjand. The fertile

plain below and beyond it reminded me of Isfahan. The valley of which we were climbing the eastern slope looked fair and promising.

My dusty carriage rumbled past a pair of broken-down gate pillars, along an avenue of young poplars with a stubble-field on the left and some acres of melons and lucerne on the right, through an attractive gateway with the Union Jack over it and a few Persian soldiers on guard, and up a sloping, curving drive to a solid-looking bungalow of white brick, where it deposited my dusty self on a gravel front among beds of sun-flowers and marigolds and asters and cosmos.

KERMANSHAH, 21st October 1917.

DEAR M.,—Your letters are still coming through Russia—very irregularly, of course, and much belated, as the state of that country grows more and more disturbed. I have had only two or three mails since I wrote you a couple of months ago. The consul has arranged for his mail bag to be sent up from Basra across country through Pushtikuh by foot messenger or on mule-back about every ten days, so if you address your letters care of the political officer at Ali Gharbi, Mesopotamia, they will come up with his—perhaps.

Kermanshah is a pleasant spot, three or four times as big as Birjand, and much more interesting in many ways, though I miss the congenial

friendliness of the simple folk in that quiet back-water. The townspeople here are mainly of the blood of the Kurds, a race of tribes quite foreign to the Aryan types of Central Persia. The Kurd is a fine fellow in his native hills, but his town cousin is an unhealthy-looking person suggestive of licence and impurity. The sharp-featured women are too sallow to be beautiful : the broad skulls, high cheek-bones, and olive eyes of the men are finished off in too soft-mouthed and womanish a fashion to be handsome. They dress in dark colours and are partial to loose garments and baggy trousers. The men's black felt headgear would make a sensation at a Covent Garden or Chelsea ball : it is flat and circular on top, concave all round the sides, and very, very large. There are about a thousand Sunnis in the town, the rest of its sixty thousand inhabitants being Shi'eh Mohammedans, with the exception of some fifteen hundred Jews. There are half a dozen families of Chaldeans and one or two Armenians. The present acting-governor is a Jew converted to Islam. The chief customs officer is a Belgian : the chief revenue officer is a member of a local family of princelings—a man who is no more conspicuous for honesty than is the average member of the official classes.

The town has been of military interest and importance to us since Turkey entered the war. From the first it was the point of entry for

German emissaries to Persia and Afghanistan. The enemy opened his eastward movement by a few bars of friendly intercourse with the Kurdish chiefs on the frontier. The chiefs discovered a new means of getting money easily and quickly, and the German emissaries sowed the seeds of hostility to us and the Russians while our political representatives were asleep round the corner. The first-fruits of this policy were seen in mid-April 1915, when the British bank was closed and the staff left for Hamadan. In August 1915 the European colony, escorted by forty-five Russian and Persian Cossacks, attempted to return, but their road was barred half-way by one Schunemann with a bobbery pack of four hundred men and two machine-guns, and the attempt was not pressed. On 23rd February 1916 the Turks and their Persian supporters were defeated by the Russians at Bid-i-Surkh, and Kermanshah was entered immediately afterwards. The bank was opened again on 6th March, only to be closed for the second time on 28th June, the Russian troops retiring before a superior force of Turks who entered the town on 1st July. The Turks remained in occupation till 11th March 1917, and on the day that the British entered Baghdad the Russians entered Kermanshah, hot (but not *so* hot) on the heels of the flying enemy.

Throughout these two years the local representatives of the American Presbyterian Mission

(Mr. and Mrs. Stead) remained at their post, acting the difficult but appropriate part of benevolent neutrals. They were barely quit of the Turk for good and all when America entered the war, and our friends gave up their rôle of benevolent neutrality for that of active co-operation within the spirit of their calling.

There is now a considerable force of Russian infantry and Cossacks holding Kermanshah. Many of them are camped outside, but the majority occupy houses from which the Persian owners or tenants have been ejected. These troops are less feared than they were, and much less respected, their daily and nightly relations with the townspeople being the occasion of much friction and some disorder. Soldiers' and Workmen's delegates have sown their seeds of anarchy amongst the men, and committees are busy with revolutionary and subversive propaganda. The heart of the army, here as elsewhere, is gone: it is merely a thing of legs and arms and hungry mouths, and can hardly be called a fighting force. The one bright spot in this dull disarray is the Partisans' Detachment—a small mixed legion of men who have volunteered to support the Alliance and to continue the fight by the side and with the aid of the British. Their leader, Colonel Bicherakof, is an attractive character to an Englishman—a fighting Cossack of magnetic personality. His band of desperadoes gave us

recently a display of trick-riding, in which the Cossack, who is born and bred to the saddle, excels.

Needless to say, the question of supplies is a difficult one with our Russian friends, whose army service corps has no great reputation for honesty. Drought and the war have raised the price of bread here to three times its normal value in local currency, fodder and other necessaries are equally costly and scarce, and the native is driven to outcry when he sees his available foodstuffs being eaten or bought up by alien soldiers with large appetites. In addition to this the Russian has hitherto persisted in financing his requirements in northern Persia by flooding the country with rouble notes which nobody wants and which have lost more and more of their exchange value. In future, however, the British bank will provide silver for these requirements and receive the equivalent in sterling in London at a rate of exchange more favourable to Russia. Meanwhile, the Russians, with all their troops, have repeatedly been compelled to purchase grain from the Persians with the assistance of the British, who have no troops here at all.

We have no troops here, certainly, but the Persian likes us all the better for that; and he knows, moreover, that we are round the corner at Baghdad, which knowledge is quite enough for him to go on with. We have, however, two Imperial units attached to the Russian head-

quarters here—an Anzac wireless station and a British-Indian survey party. The former numbers a score of men with two officers, and it is thanks to them that we get Reuter's news daily hot from Basra. Both parties arrived from Mesopotamia in June 1917. The surveyors are busy map-making, and their work appears to be a great improvement on any maps possessed by the Russians. Our noble Allies, however, with minds made morbid by failure, privately suspect the survey party of representing not the considerate generosity, but the ulterior designs, of the British.

The Russian Red Cross has now closed its local hospital, but the Russian Land Association has two hospitals manned by women doctors and nurses, male orderlies, and one or two surgeons. They have no wounded, but the numbers of sick are astonishing, and there is a large proportion of malaria and typhus cases side by side in the same congested wards. The hospitals are not over-well run, and the beds contain a few malingerers; but the ladies in charge deserve great praise for their consistent pluck and energy and cheerfulness. Two or three of them have sacrificed much social position and welfare to their enterprise, and all of them are in distressing doubt as to the fate of their families and their possessions; yet they maintain, under these depressing conditions, a practical and robust outlook which is in strange

contrast to the mental attitude of officers and men of the army. The hospitals have organised occasional theatrical performances as an entertainment for the soldiers, and to one of these we went the other evening. I came away from the crowded garden with my senses echoing much stage singing and dancing and drunkenness and murder, and with a general impression of good and spirited acting.

Also I have been to a Persian play—a product of modernity brought out by the democrats in aid of some educational scheme. One or two of the actors had come from Teheran, but the rest were locally-produced amateurs, including a couple of Chaldeans. The play commenced about nine o'clock and went on till after midnight. It was a representation of life in a provincial town some years back, centring round a pleasure-loving, stupid, ignorant, idle and thoughtlessly tyrannical governor and his rapacious and hypocritical satellites, with a sidelight on the superstitious credulity of a family of oppressed villagers, the greed of the tax-collector, and the ruthlessness of an unfeeling village headman. The whole thing was a satire on the old types and manners and the old system, which persist largely in the present day: it was exaggerated and overdone, perhaps, but it contained many telling points, and was remarkably well acted.

KERMANSHAH, 20th December 1917.

DEAR M.,—I have had another interesting jaunt since I wrote you last, and have seen some more new country. On the 2nd of November I had an urgent call to Sultanabad, which is a small town of recent growth in the centre of Persia between Hamadan and Isfahan. I had been warned of such a contingency and had just arranged with the lady doctor in charge of one of the Russian hospitals for a passage by car to Hamadan, so on the following afternoon I left with a suit-case in a touring Ford with two other passengers. The good lady, blinking benediction through her glasses, whispered to me as she saw me off to make friends with the officer in charge of the car, who might send it on with me from Hamadan to my journey's end — another eighty miles or so.

We spent the night at Sahneh sleeping four in a small room, and reached Hamadan the following afternoon. I left again next morning at eleven with the same car, and found myself at six o'clock, after three punctures, belated with differential trouble at a village within an hour and a half's run of my destination. The headlights were working badly and the road was unknown to us, so I passed the night in a room at the house of the village headman, where we thawed our frozen limbs at a big wood fire and in due course thawed

and comforted our interiors with an excellent and varied meal.

Next morning the frozen car needed a couple of hours' coaxing before it would start, but eventually we arrived before midday at Sultanabad, where I was welcomed by an old friend who made me his guest during the five weeks of my stay. The town lies at the mouth of a valley, on the flat edge of a huge level plain which stands 6000 feet above sea-level. The climate is cool and pleasant, though the natives give it a doubtful reputation on account of a marsh some miles away. The houses are new, and the streets are straight and comparatively broad. The familiar poplar is well in evidence, and the outskirts are laid out with flourishing vineyards, Sultanabad grapes and raisins being of particularly good quality. The district is an agricultural one, and supplies wheat and barley to the capital. It is also an important centre for the weaving of carpets, most of which are exported to Europe and America. The natives are of the central Persian type, and most resemble those of Isfahan. The governorship is held by a Bakhtiari chief, who keeps some two hundred mounted men of his tribe battenning on the townsfolk. There are a hundred Russian Cossacks representing (or formerly representing) Allied interests. These men were recently ordered to centralise at Isfahan, but they are said to have replied that they had taken wives in Sultanabad,

and were very comfortable where they were ! I found attempts were being made by the authorities at the capital to establish a fixed price for wheat and barley in Sultanabad in view of the general crop failure, and much chicanery was going on in consequence. The familiar game of private money-making was likewise being played with great zest at the revenue office.

The Sultanabad colony boasts a nine-hole golf course which provides better sport than any we ever played on at home. It is laid over a gravelly slope with a few artificial bunkers and two or three nasty dry and deep rivulet beds. The fairway of the course is swept free of stones and scrub. Turf being impossible, the greens are ' browns ' made of a plaster of mud and straw as our tennis courts are made. Several of them are tilted with a considerable gradient, which, on the smooth surface, gives limitless putting possibilities. A gentle tap at the upper edge of the green, for instance, may send the ball rolling past the hole with gathering impetus as far as the opposite edge, while a ball putted from the lower end may miss the hole and roll back to the striker half a dozen times in succession : or you may be preparing a cautious hole-out at three or four feet when a great gust of wind comes and rolls your ball away to the rough. My biggest number of putts, I remember, was thirteen for one green. That was a bad day, however. The record for the course

(held, needless to say, by a Scotsman) is somewhere about forty-five.

My host's garden is unique in its way, as it produces what I believe are the best-grown apples and pears in Persia. His predecessor was a student of botany, and he gave his particular care to matters like grafting and pruning and liberal spacing, which are neglected by most Persian gardeners. I found that the members of the little European colony were making their own red and white wines, and that they could produce by very simple methods a good clear wine at a trifling cost.

I left Sultanabad on my return journey a week ago, travelling as far as Hamadan in a light three-horse Victoria which I had hired to take me there for twenty pounds. The horses were a scratch lot that the driver had bought two days before for eleven pounds. They had been straw-fed for months, and as a consequence the journey took us three full days in a biting wind. I spent the third night in Hamadan and came on the following morning in another conveyance of exactly the same quality, which landed me here yesterday. The roads were almost bare of merchandise, but I passed a number of military convoys—or rather a straggling stream of odds and ends—ammunition, stores, ambulance wagons, and men on horseback, on mules, or on foot, all anyhow—the Russians leaving Kermanshah and on their melancholy way home to taste the fruits of a

disastrous peace in a topsy-turvy country. I was glad, for many reasons, to see them go—as one is glad to see a sick man give up the ineffectual struggle and take his trembling limbs to bed for a while. Not that their bed is anything but a bed of thorns. . . . God bless them, and *give* them peace !

KERMANSHAH, 6th January 1918.

DEAR M.,—Since I wrote you last I have had a little run of festivities and farewells, ending in solitude. The Russians have continued their withdrawal till only the nucleus of their garrison is left. Among the last to go were the sisters at the one remaining hospital, who have played the game splendidly to the end : they had no tears for us—only sparkling eyes and laughing lips as they said good-bye, and waving hands as they sped off through a light fall of snow. Later, on New Year's Day, the Anzac wireless and the British-Indian survey party went away in the opposite direction, bound for Baghdad. The consul and his wife left on the same day for a short absence. The American missionary is away on duty, leaving his wife alone. The Russian consul remains with his wife, and there is also the Belgian director of customs, whom one seldom sees.

The town is much disturbed by lawlessness—the work of ne'er-do-wells and political agitators. The Persian agent for foreign affairs was shot in

the street on the 2nd. The new governor, who arrived here on 4th November, is a man of straw. The Russian general and his die-hards are apprehensive without reason, uneasy in their minds, anxious for the return of the Partisans who went to Mesopotamia in the autumn to fight on the British right flank and are now on their way back. The newspapers, having seen most of the Turks and the Russians depart from Persia, are agitating for the withdrawal of the British troops likewise, from the south and elsewhere. 'Away with the South Persia Rifles,' they say, 'and let this harassed neutral country settle its internal affairs in peace!' They have been saying the same thing ever since Sir Percy Sykes began his levy-raising in 1916, but the campaign for ousting the British has become more vigorous of late. The Persians incline to think that England is on the downgrade and will soon share the fate of Russia, so in the meantime their minor publicists are the less averse to a little well-paid propagandism on behalf of Germany.

In spite of the departure of the Russian troops the price of bread stands at seven times its normal figure. Famine relief has been started in all the large towns, where deaths from starvation are increasing in number. The trade of this town has sunk to a low level as the Baghdad route has been closed since November 1914, and the Shiraz road is closed also, and some of the other routes

are infested with robbers. A way, however, has been open for some months from Basra through the hitherto close territory of the Vali of Pusht-ikuh, and caravans of tea and sugar are coming up by slow degrees. These commodities fetch a hundred per cent. profit, and are sold at prices far beyond the reach of the poor. The enterprising Jew, risking his capital handsomely, makes the bulk of the profit, but doesn't brag about it.

KERMANSHAH, *29th January 1918.*

DEAR M.,—Great doings these last three weeks, and more to follow. Great, that is, for a little place like this. If you had told me a couple of months ago that we should have British aeroplanes landing at Kermanshah and British armoured cars passing through the town, I should have laughed regretfully and suggested in addition a review of the Guards by the King, or something equally impossible and incongruous. But the aeroplanes come and go, and already I have had a joy-ride in a Lamb car, and our poor little tables are graced, at last, with a variety of good company, and life has taken on a new colour.

The main party of Russian Partisans arrived from Mesopotamia five hundred strong on the 11th, bringing with them many cases of Japanese beer and English cigarettes and Indian rupee

notes, and much honour for their effective little fight on the Diala River. With them came an English liaison officer and an Australian wireless party—the latter to replace the Russian wireless who dismantled their installation and went off home three days before. The Partisans were welcomed at lunch by General Mistulof and his few remaining officers, and we had two and a half hours of solid food and strong drink, and fiery speeches shouted out in quick and long succession. Through it all the Partisans' leader, Colonel Bicherakof, sat like a rock in the surge. His face was lit with happiness, and he beamed good-naturedly on the noisy conviviality of his turbulent countrymen: he spoke little, but his eye sparkled as he referred to the generous hospitality and the wonderful organisation of the British, who had fed his men like fighting-cocks.

At five o'clock we all went home, and the English officer buried himself in despatch-writing. The wireless operators got busy under difficulties, and Baghdad, growing impatient, ordered the preparation of a rough landing-ground for aeroplanes to bring up and take back despatches. On the 16th a couple of R.E. 8's arrived. The pilots were a delightful pair of 'bootiful young men,' and I spent a very happy evening in their company. They flew back to Bakuba next morning, taking with them a supply of potatoes for their mess. These pioneer aeroplanes created

a great sensation in the town, and there was much speculation among the Persians as to what their coming foretold.

On the 26th one of the aeroplanes returned accompanied by a third and bearing as a passenger Colonel S—, whose name you will have seen in Morgan Shuster's book. S— is a man of convictions, and as keen as ever on Persian questions. He stayed two nights and flew on yesterday to Teheran. The first armoured car arrived with its satellite Fords on the 27th, and passed on to Hamadan on the 28th. On the same day Colonel Bicherakof and the English officer with him went off to Hamadan to feel the pulse of the Russians there.

‘What are we out for?’ you ask. Well, we're out to help the Armenians if possible, but in any case to support the Caucasus in holding out against a Bolshevik peace, which means that we must get to Baku and strengthen the hands of the people there. It seems that I am to have the privilege of watching a real British military side-show of the traditional sort, and it's going to be great fun.

Kermanshah is an attractive station, and might be made a place for the gods. The town is built on and around a hill, at the mouth of a valley which debouches on to a broad fertile plain where the winter wheat is already showing. Through the plain, from north-west to south-east, runs a

goodly river with willow groves at intervals on its banks. On the other side, six miles away, the northern mountains rise abruptly to a height of 11,000 feet above sea-level, the town itself being already at an altitude of 5000 feet. The flat plain is almost bare of trees, and is given up to agriculture, with a few little villages dotted here and there. The view from the south above and across the town is a magnificent one, and the eye roves from west to east and from east to west about an uninterrupted panorama, dwelling ever and again on the countless contours of these fascinating mountains, which stand out at every hour in some new aspect of light and shade. The peaks and the upper slopes are covered with snow, and the setting sun, couching in the uplands to westward, spreads for us daily an evening banquet of colour—soft, varied, and indescribably delicate in the ethereal expanse of this pure atmosphere.

KERMANSHAH, *24th February* 1918.

DEAR M.,—The show is getting well under way, and we have had a month of expanding activities, in which there is now a momentary lull so far as Kermanshah is concerned. On the 30th came Captain G—, an energetic young political officer of brilliant quality, who has been doing admirable work since his arrival. His office is usually haunted by (in addition to more worthy people)

native toadies, intriguers, agitators, blackmailers, cadgers, would-be contractors, and other gentlemen of the jackal variety, relations with whom do not encourage roseate ideas of the Persian character. On the 31st another airman arrived, and he and his brother pilot, who had been stranded here for several days owing to snow and bad weather, returned to Bakuba on the first of this month. On the 2nd, Bicherakof and Colonel C— returned from Hamadan with depressing views of the Russian situation there. On the 3rd came General D— with a party of officers in about thirty Ford cars on their way to Hamadan. General D— is *rr*, straight from the War Office and bound for the Caucasus. The curtain is rung up on the first act, and the star actor-manager has appeared—a fine big Englishman who ‘takes the stage’ well. The officers are his staff and a first consignment of his Force.

On the 4th, Major P— arrived with another Lamb car, and was hung up by bad weather. On the 5th an inch of snow fell, and on the 8th four inches—unfortunately for the armoured car. On the 10th the airman who had taken Colonel S— to Teheran returned, looking somewhat the worse for wear after a week’s lionising at the capital. He showed me some Persian newspapers with descriptions of his landing, and with many indignant comments on this violation of the neutral air of Persia. The natives were markedly

unfriendly, he said, and German and Austrian officers were much in evidence in the streets—these officers being prisoners of war who had been sent east by the Russians and who had escaped or been released and come south into Persia to further German aims. Next morning he flew on to Mesopotamia, taking with him Colonel Bicherakof, who was in one of his sulky and impatient moods and wanted to visit our General Headquarters.

On the 17th, General Shore arrived from Hamadan on his way home from Tiflis via Baku and Baghdad. He was breathing fire and brimstone on the Bolshevik, and had many convincing tales to tell of anarchy and blood and murder in the Caucasus. On the 20th, Colonel Bicherakof returned from Baghdad on horseback, and on the 23rd, Colonel C—— went off to Hamadan again.

The road to Baghdad is definitely open at last, and the traders are asking when they will be allowed to import goods that way, as the Pushtikuh route is not at all satisfactory. But the time is not yet. Meanwhile, the Jews pray for the coming of the British, of which the native hears rumours, and of which he thinks he sees signs. The price of bread, which had dropped somewhat, is going up again, and the famine continues to develop. The political agitation against the presence of British troops in Persia grows. It has found a leader in the person of

Mirza Kuchik Khan, a middle-class gentleman who controls some hundreds of warlike followers on the Caspian coast, near Resht. The name of the Jangali (the forest-dweller) tribe has become notorious, and their leader has addressed appeals to the mullas and the tribes of these parts to help in the cause of Persian independence, for which, he declares, the Court party in Teheran care not a scrap. He is a sincere Nationalist, by all accounts, and to some extent disinterested, though how far so is not known. He and the Bolsheviki between them may be responsible for the fact that General D—, finding the state of affairs unfavourable for the present, has returned to Hamadan, where some of his officers are now engaged on famine relief work.

KERMANSHAH, 20th March 1918.

DEAR M.,—To-day is the Persian New Year's Eve, and to-morrow the native will commence his annual holiday, which lasts from two days to a fortnight. My thoughts are busy with spring, and my gardener has been working hard for the last ten days, with the aid of half a dozen casual labourers, digging and dressing the soil and sowing seed. The sowing smacks of war-time economy, as the seeds I ordered from India last autumn haven't arrived, and he must perforce carry on with the few flower-seeds he has—asters, chrysanthemums, petunias, iris, snapdragons, cosmos, and

marigolds—and give up most of the plentiful open spaces to vegetables. He put in some peach and apple saplings recently in place of the big walnut trees cut down by the Turks for firewood when they used this house as a convalescent hospital. He is now planting potatoes, carrots, turnips, onions, tomatoes, peas, beetroot, lettuce, parsley, spinach, cabbages, and cauliflower. Also he is cleaning the strawberry bed and trimming the vines, which, like the fruit trees, I cannot induce him to prune sufficiently. The lucerne field is showing a fresh green, and the beans at one end of it are well above ground. My gardener likes to spend an idle winter and do all the knife and saw and spade work with a rush at this time of the year. He says it is madness to prune trees before the new sap rises.

Apart from the vegetable patches, the garden is a dear, delightful jungle of things. At the foot of it, by the gateway, are the stables, and behind them, along a part of one wall, is the tennis-court—useless till the rains are over in May, because the rains would ruin its top-dressing of mud-and-straw plaster. Between the gateway and the house the way is bordered on both sides with poplars. On the one hand is a medley of walnut, pear, apple, and almond trees; on the other a swimming-tank, thirty feet by twelve, lies in the middle of the garden surrounded by a guard of stout willows. Below it is a screen of jungle :

above it is a thick tangle of morelloes and sour plums half-strangled with vines. On either side of the house, and climbing the slope behind it, is more promiscuous orchard—apples and pears and figs and almonds and apricots and quinces and mulberries and pomegranates, with long grass and weeds growing underfoot, and hollyhocks and chicory and larkspur rising haphazard out of the grass, and roses and blackberries bordering the ample watercourse. And when you would prowl there in the fruit-time, or take tea beneath the spreading branches in the leafy summer, you pick your way at large in a maze of wildflowers and woodland, for here are no walks to discipline your feet, nor any rows or angles to arrest your eye and cry halt to your fancy. This is the part of my garden that I like best. The gardener is paid to let it alone, and being but a philosophic hireling he is well content to do so.

General Baratof, the divisional commander who held this front against the Turk, has been here making long speeches at late dinners. He and Colonel Bicherakof and Colonel Leslie (a Russian of remote Scottish origin) have all gone off in the last week for good and all, and the whole of the Partisans' Detachment with them, so that the only Russians now here are the consul and his wife and his assistant and the assistant's wife—the latter lady being, incidentally, a dentist with a flourishing practice. The future of the Russians

who have just gone is uncertain, as the Bolsheviki are said to be out for their blood for having kept faith with Russia's late allies and ignored the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

The British have at last committed themselves openly to sending troops into north-west Persia. The whole major question of our presence anywhere in the country has apparently been opened up, and the alternatives of reinforcement or absolute withdrawal seem to have hung in the balance while the matter was honestly faced and debated. The decision was made about twelve days ago, and on the 12th of March the British minister in Teheran presented a note to the Persian government accordingly, in which it was intimated that British troops would be introduced into north-west Persia, and advanced farther if need be for the protection, during the war only, of our military interests against enemy action, political or military.

So that's that. But now that the responsible people have made up their minds, let them act quickly for the sake of our dignity. The town, by the way, is none too peaceful, and lawlessness is still prevalent. Only two days ago an employee of the bank was accidentally wounded in three places in a sort of Texas encounter with pistols between two swashbuckling blackguards, not twenty yards from the bank door.

KERMANSHAH, 15th April 1918.

DEAR M.,—The show goes on merrily, and our activities continue to expand. Several more parties of officers and N.C.O.'s have passed through for General Dunsterville's Force, which is asking for all sorts of things and getting a few of them. More L.A.M. cars have arrived, also an administrative commandant and a local purchase officer, likewise a company of 1/4th Hants and a detachment of 14th Hussars—the latter hard-bitten men of the old school, with a masterpiece of a sergeant straight from the pages of *Punch*. The roads are hopelessly soft and muddy, and cause much heartbreaking, making the armoured cars useless. To-day it is raining heavily—the fifth fall since the 20th of March. The weather is ideal for the crops, and a good wheat harvest is expected in June and July, but unfortunately only a third of the possible area has been sown, as a result mainly of the devastation wrought by the Turkish and Russian armies and the general insecurity hitherto prevailing. The peasants are largely destitute, and the villages on the line of march from the Turkish frontier are mostly in a state of utter ruin and desertion. Wheat has risen to eight times its normal price, and the British have been carrying out extensive road construction here and down the line and in Hamadan to relieve the very poor, who are dying

by scores daily. Thousands of them, mostly women and children, are mere half-demented skeletons, incapable of labour till they have been fed for some time. The American missionaries are taking a most active part in the work of relief and maintenance. The situation is worse in Hamadan, where cannibalism has occurred. . . .

We ourselves suffer no shortage, though we have to pay ten shillings a pound for tea, and four shillings and sixpence a pound for sugar. We get beef occasionally, and good mutton always. The river produces very fair fish of several kinds, including carp and one like the Indian mahseer. Eggs are always to be had, and in any case my cook keeps his own fowls. My cow provides me with four quarts of milk daily, which is the maximum hereabouts, and out of this I get a sufficient supply of table butter. Crushed wheat, soaked overnight, makes an excellent porridge. The Persian won't keep pigs, so we get no breakfast bacon unless we import it in tins, which it is almost impossible to do at present. Jam is another difficulty : honey is to be had in season, and there is a sticky sweet-stuff made out of grape juice which comes from the interior and which makes a very good substitute. The bill for food alone for an ordinary household is about a sovereign a day, and in most parts of the country it is more.

My cook is a local product, an open-mouthed

young man who can bake a cake or cover a pie or prepare a *vol-au-vent* or a chicken in aspic with the best. His peculiarities are a partiality for minced meat and a horror of onions. My head-servant is a prize specimen—a young Afghan brought up in Kermanshah and married to a Persian, with two pretty little dark-eyed daughters. He runs the house to perfection and allows me to mind my own business while he minds his—never needing to be told that a room should be cleaned or a door mended or the linen changed or a button sewn on or a visitor regaled. He knows all about our army rank and never consults me about precedence, and his quick eye is amusingly accurate on that point. Moreover, he is deft, active, and noiseless, and his respectful, solicitous smile is alone worth half his wages to a tired bachelor. His 'mate' is a round-faced, smooth-cheeked, dapper, and deliberate little man who cleans the lamps and dusts the furniture and washes the dishes, and keeps his clothes spotless through it all. He is a local Persian and supports a wife and family. The 'sweeper' is a wide-eyed, heavy-handed fellow, who fetches the water and prepares the baths and cleans the carpets and makes the fires. He is addicted to opium, but is trustworthy and fairly industrious. His wages are largely spent in propitiating the drug fiend. The gardener is also a local man—a placid, steady-going, simple-minded worker, who appropriates

the produce of the garden over and above his perquisites when he gets the chance. He sends his little son to school, but has no ambitions for the son's emancipation from manual labour. The gardener's apprentice looks after the cow and her calf, helps his master on the irrigation days, and sings, on sunny afternoons, little snatches of song. Fortunately most afternoons are sunny.

KERMANSHAH, 28th June 1918.

DEAR M.,—I have had a very busy two months, and now, behold! we are in midsummer, and life is a pleasant and goodly thing—at night, when the tiny black dog stops barking, and the water gurgles under the trees and the nightingale drops little showers of pearls into the moonlight—or at dawn, when I sip my tea and get out of bed and take a look at the mountains, and go down to the middle of the garden and stand barefooted on the grass by the deep tank and look out across the sleeping town through the delicate mists of morning to the wonderful vista away to the north-west, and then plunge into the fresh cool water and startle the fat old frogs and the goldfish, and come out again with the cobwebs of sleep and the sting of the sandfly all gone—or in the afternoon, when the heat of the day is passing and I slough my work-weariness and summer slackness in the magic waters by the willows, and come back to subside into a big easy-chair—or in the evenings,

when the lamps are lit among a kindly company, and the pieces are pushed about the board of war and its local aspects and problems in the criss-cross of easy conversation.

Do you frown as you read this, and turn again to your meatless days and your nursing of shattered bodies and your newspapers' tales of coming German offensives ?

The war drags on as unfruitfully here as at home, but with a confidence as big-hearted. We are still developing—not for fighting at Kermanshah, but for passing on fighters and material over the long highway from railhead at Ruz to the Caspian Sea and beyond. There are so few fighters, and they need so much material over this terribly long line ! In the beginning of May we had typhus in camp—over a score of men of the 1/4th Hants down at one time, with only one M.O. and no orderlies to look after them. The 14th Hussars provided volunteer orderlies, and the M.O. provided skill and care and untiring attention, and the typhus cases were all saved. During the epidemic some Turkish deserters were released, for the reason that there was no accommodation for them and there were not enough troops to guard them. They were told to come back on a certain date, and they went away crestfallen. On the day indicated they returned, and it was found that their numbers had grown from twenty-five to thirty-six. More deserters pre-

sented themselves later, and for some weeks they kept trickling into the town with their pockets empty and their clothes desperately in rags, accosting officers in the streets and begging to be arrested and sent to Baghdad.

Troops dribble up, and the town hums with motor transport. The last rains fell in May, and the cars and lorries no longer stick in the mud, but cover themselves with dust instead. Mesopotamia has fixed its tired eyes, somewhat wonderingly, on the Persian Line of Communications and the doings of the Dunster Force at the other end of it. Baghdad, baulked by our needs of its advance on Mosul in the spring, turns in the hot summer of the plains to thoughts of the cooler altitude of Kermanshah, where the maximum temperature never exceeds 106° . The Higher Commands, taking advantage of the lull in their own operations, have come up to get a better idea of what is happening on their right flank, and to scrutinise the longest L. of C. in history, or to inspect and advise the forces under their control. They have stayed a couple of days, cursed our sandflies, and dashed back to the land of electric fans, iced drinks, and 118° in the shade.

The Baghdad road is open to trade, and caravans of merchandise are streaming along it. The Jew has scuttled in to make his fortune, the Persian merchant following more sedately in his wake.

KERMANSHAH, 31st July 1918.

DEAR M.,—The grain has been harvested, and the famine is over at last, though very little of the wheat has been brought in owing to lack of transport, all the available donkeys being engaged by the troops on road-making. Prices are high and likely to remain so, as the British requirements are heavy. The force has thrown an arm northwards into Kurdistan in support of the Christian tribes south of Urmia who were stoutly opposing the Turk with the very small means at their disposal. A detachment of 14th Hussars and Hampshires left here for Senneh some weeks ago. The Gurkhas have been using their kukris most effectively in Resht, and have cleared the atmosphere of that town itself, while the Jangalis outside the town have been brought to terms by a little bombing from aeroplanes—a form of warfare against which they are powerless. The bigwigs from Mesopotamia continue to keep us up to the scratch with hurried visits, and Kermanshah, despite the sandflies, looks like becoming a minor hill-station for Baghdad. General D— has been down to G.H.Q., and passed through again on the 20th on his way back to Kazvin. The British Navy is about to hoist its flag on the Caspian Sea for the first time in history. My servant, Rasul, telephoned to my office yesterday to announce the arrival of a strange *sahibmansab* at the house.

'He is not an ordinary major or colonel or captain or general, sahib. I don't know what he is!' The mysterious officer proved to be the expected commodore—a sight for the gods in these parts. When I got home in the afternoon I found him rolling like a giddy porpoise in the tank. I took to the water after him, and we finished off the operation with a dish of black mulberries and cream, followed by tea and a cheery pipe at the end of it.

So you are off to Madrid in the autumn. Well, I hope you won't marry a Spaniard. Perhaps the place may give you some light on my remarks about Persia, as by all accounts the two countries have some points of resemblance—in geography and climate, and to some extent in character and national conditions and outlook. There must be a good deal of Arab blood in the south, too. I notice, however, that while Spain is only a third of the size of Persia, its population is double that of this country.

KERMANSHAH, *29th September 1918.*

DEAR M.,—Much has happened since I wrote you two months ago. Our half-heartedly heroic efforts north of Persian Kurdistan miscarried somewhat, and the Christian tribes of the Urmia Lake district decided in consequence to make a bolt for it, save what was left of their souls, and throw themselves on the hospitality of the British.

So, while our department of local resources was straining its utmost to procure sufficient grain, meat, and so forth to feed the sappers and hospitals and posts and travelling troops in its area, their distracting reflections on things in general were enlivened by the receipt of a wire from Hamadan announcing the imminent arrival of 60,000 hungry refugees. Sixty thousand—a number equal to the whole population of Kermanshah! In due course they began to arrive—Syrians in little Robinson Crusoe hats, sturdy Jhelus, scowling Armenians with their wives and families and their fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers, and their ponies and buffaloes and big lumbering oxen—some of the men riding, some of the women walking, lots of them in British motor-lorries, all of them hungry and dirty, most of them penniless (though the Armenians have rich uncles who are waiters in New York and Chicago), and many of them steeped in malaria or worse disease. They were pushed on to Mesopotamia by all means possible, and they have been arriving and being pushed on ever since. It is a wonderful migration—a second Exodus, with the Turk for Pharaoh and the British for Moses. But what a splendidly tactful, sympathetic, and tireless leader Moses must have been!

The bid for Baku was too much for us, as the newspapers will have told you. The Turks bid

much higher, and got it in the end. They had an army for the capture of the town, whereas General D—— had a mere nine hundred men for its retention. The Baku Armenians were expected to help, but they broke and ran from the attack, and were massacred for their pains after our troops had sailed back to Persian soil. Echoes of the fight still reach us in the form of occasional wounded men going down to the base. The whole of this little campaign has been one big bluff—a stouthearted, madcap adventure, with Bicherakof in the van, and behind him our big Elizabethan Englishman, riding magnificently for a fall. It might have been a glorious success, but as the luck went, it has been a very gallant failure. Meanwhile, we have wondered much why the Turk has not attempted to come round south and cut us off somewhere between Kerman-shah and Resht—a long line and an absurdly thin one. Probably the Turk is played out, and in any case he would find the question of supply even more difficult than it has been for our men.

We are in the thick of Spanish influenza, and the troops have suffered heavily. Pneumonia and malaria on top of it have caused many deaths, particularly amongst the Indians, and the hospitals here and in Hamadan are full of sick. The epidemic has spread through the towns, and half the population seems to have suffered more or

less. My own turn came on the 21st, and all my servants went down with it at the same time.

The British minister in Teheran has gone home, and his place has been taken by Sir Percy Cox, who was civil commissioner in Baghdad and has now gone to the Persian capital in the capacity of special commissioner and *chargé d'affaires*. The move is an interesting one, and suggests that the Foreign Office is now taking affairs in this country seriously.

KERMANSHAH, 25th October 1918.

DEAR M.,—The news of the surrender of Bulgaria was the best we had had for a long time, and in a continuous stream of good news, too. It indicated the cutting-off of Turkey from her allies, and, in combination with the shattering of Turkey's forces in Palestine in the first week of October, it suggests the early elimination of another enemy, which would leave us at peace on this front. Meanwhile, Mesopotamia is putting in an opportune blow, and our troops are active on the road to Mosul.

Since I wrote you last month I have paid a short visit to Baghdad, where I spent a few very pleasant days. The journey by car takes two days or more. The road on this side of the frontier has been metalled to a great extent, and sappers and steam rollers are still busy on it, and

will be so for some time to come. The villages that formed the old caravan stages are still in utter ruin.

I got back here on the 19th and spent the following day snipe-shooting at a spot eighteen miles away. We motored out at eight-thirty and arrived at the Lake of Lilies before ten o'clock. From there the snipe marshes run north, more or less in line, to another small sheet of water with reed banks. We shot till one, and then settled down on a convenient knoll to explore the contents of the tiffin-basket. After lunch we thought it over comfortably for a while, and then decided unanimously not to spoil a perfect day, but rather to leave the rest of the birds for a future occasion. So we drove back in cheery mood and arrived home at four o'clock, in good time for a change and tea and a few rubbers of bridge to complete the programme. The bag for the four guns was 21 snipe, 4 mallard, 3 teal, and 5 plover—a good average day.

In Baghdad I heard two of the four biggest men there asked when they thought the war would be over. One of them said we might expect it to last till 1921. The other said he thought it might end by Christmas, but he didn't anticipate a separate armistice with Turkey in the meantime, as our terms would be too heavy to tempt the Turks. So now you know.

KERMANSHAH, 29th December 1918.

DEAR M.,—I am sorry for you in Madrid. A neutral country must be the last place to be in these cheery days. I am in a neutral country myself, of course, but really I forget the fact often enough, as the life we lead is so unlike that of the old peace-time. The hours pass pleasantly in congenial work, and the invaluable boon of good company is never lacking. Kermanshah, by the way, has a finer set of fellows in its officers' messes than any other place on the line. Good relations never fail, and the leaven of humour lightens the telephone talk and semi-official correspondence and antepandial assemblies all the time.

The hospitals are no longer congested, and the work of the doctors (and padres) is less onerous than it was. We have a Red Cross depot, and plenty of small pianos—and gramophones that never seem to get played. The men have a Soldiers' Club where dances and lectures while away the long evenings, particularly for those who are kicking their heels in the well-filled rest-house waiting for transport. The Mechanical Transport (in whose ranks art always seems to flourish) have regaled the station with two or three first-rate variety performances. Arrangements were made for a varied programme of sports on Christmas and Boxing Day, but snow

and rain prevented most of the meetings. Snipe-shooting is popular with Headquarters on off-days, and I have spent a few delightful afternoons in the gardens around, and in the very English 'bottoms' up the valley, after woodcock—though I confess I haven't shot any woodcock.

The belated canteen is at last well stocked, and Tommy gets an ample supply of cigarettes and tinned things. It has been forcibly impressed on us here from the first that our fighting man is a conservative creature. He wants his Woodbine, and turns up his nose at the Persian cigarette which the mere officer smokes: even when the troops at Resht were given fresh caviare as a ration they expressed strong disapproval of what they called 'fish-jam.'

And what about demobilisation now that everything has been got going nicely at last? All the men and most of the officers are impatient for it. The Turks have vanished, Germany is a burst balloon, and Russia has thrown herself out of the window. What remains but to go home? Mesopotamia is going home—one division has already started on its way down to Basra. The troops up this line now move, when they move at all, towards Baghdad only, and from Kermanshah itself a few officers in the teachers' and students' category are going home. But the sappers and pioneers remain, and the road-making goes on. Will they

complete the work, I wonder, or will they leave the road in parts a rough unfinished monument, to draw, for a decade, the smiles and imprecations of muleteers and camelmen and motorists, instead of their blessings for a generation ?

On the 17th of November we entered Baku again, under different conditions and with different prospects. The Black Sea is open, and we are establishing a base at Batoum, the western port of the Caucasus. We have made our bow to the Georgians, walked into Tiflis, and settled down there. So, as the war ends, a new campaign develops east of Constantinople, and a more convenient occidentation is given to our operations in distant Transcaspia. India is not yet safe. The Turco-German threat is past, and Imperial Russia is no more ; but a fresh source of apprehension has discovered itself to our watchful political representatives during the last twelve months : the ghost of Bolshevism troubles their sleep. And Persia ? Persia is the long dark passage down which the horrid ghost may come to our precious India. So we place an unimaginative sentry in the passage, and we talk of putting electric light there, and then we go to bed and draw the blankets round us. And India, all the time, becomes, by our decrees, less and less a Field for our Younger Sons—becomes less and less of a white man's country : so that our finer youth will shortly have none of it, and the

process of enfranchisement will accordingly be hastened.

All of which unfolds to my satisfaction (and I hope to yours) the perfect and ideal quality of our national Imperialism. For are we not at this moment engaged in jealously protecting with the one hand what we are giving up with the other ?

KERMANSHAH, *6th February 1919.*

DEAR M.,—I am for home, and leave to-morrow via Baku and Constantinople. I shall be a sort of Rip Van Winkle, I suppose, after these six years. But I suspect that the great changes produced by the war may not have been so very radical as was foretold. We had strikes and the possibility of civil war in Ireland in 1914, and we seem to have both still. The general election campaign has apparently been like previous ones, with the same catchword frothiness, the same pandering to vulgar impulse and short-sighted selfishness, the same rash promises. The anti-climax to war, viewed from a distance, is disappointing. Yet the public mind seems inclined to a spiritual awakening, though the talk of the publicists is still class talk. Is not the world ripe for the coming of a new prophet ?

There has been little movement here since I wrote you last. The Mechanical Transport is being largely withdrawn, as it has been found that

it isn't worth its upkeep in petrol now that pack transport is less difficult to provide for our reduced requirements. Trade with Baghdad and the interior continues to flourish on an unprecedented scale. The Jews are coining money, and being of Baghdad origin are putting forward claims for British protection on the ground of our occupancy of Mesopotamia. The governor, a Persian prince of famous parentage, who was educated at Harrow and Sandhurst and passed a term with the French Army, is mildly interested in industrial development. I have suggested to him the possibilities of sugar beet, and of a glass factory under European supervision to begin with, and also the favourable conditions for extending the local manufacture of carpets, which could best be done by bringing a score of craftsmen from Kerman for a beginning. He has not enough security of tenure, however, to foster such enterprises.

The future of Persia is still uncertain. Various ideas have been mooted for its military policing and governance ; but perhaps the Peace Conference will eventually decide the fate of this country in the general settlement for which we are all waiting. Meanwhile, I alarmed a local leading official the other day by drawing a lurid picture of what might happen if and when the British withdrew. The Shah is none too popular, and his throne might conceivably topple. Monarchist and republican

nationalists would disagree, and there would be fighting. Several of the bigger tribes would make a bid for supreme power, and there would be raids and slaughter and general disorder. The boiling pot of the Caucasus, with the controlling hand of Imperial Russia removed, would bubble over into north-west Persia, while on the eastern side the Turkoman and other tribes would overrun the fair province of Khorasan, laying it waste on historical lines. Local and foreign trade would cease, as the roads would be infested with bandits. The Persian government has had a chance to set its house in order while British troops were strengthening its hand, but nothing has been done to take advantage of a golden opportunity, and the average official, when he is not robbing the public, is still wrapt in plaintive apathy. My friend agreed with all this (the Persian is nothing if not polite) and added, with enthusiasm, that every member of the official and ruling classes was corrupt and dishonest, except himself.

LONDON, 15th March 1919.

DEAR M.,—I left Kermanshah by car on the 7th of February, stayed over the 9th at Hamadan, and arrived at Kazvin on the 10th, Resht on the 12th, and Baku on the 14th. At Kazvin and Resht I found our political and military representatives energetically negotiating between rival elements of local politics. At Baku I observe

with admiration that our military chiefs, who were more remarkable for quality than for strength of numbers, had settled down in some of the choicest premises available and were calmly, comfortably, and effectively fathering the affairs of four small, very excitable, and brand-new republics. I left Baku on the evening of the 15th by a troop-train carrying Austrian prisoners of war under an escort of Staffords—miners on their way home. We halted a few hours at Tiflis and at frequent intervals *en route*, and arrived at Batoum on the morning of the 19th. On the 22nd I left Batoum on a big troopship, and arrived at Constantinople in a thick fog on the 24th. The shores of the Bosphorus were delightfully picturesque. Constantinople, seen through the fog, offered a strange contrast, with the slender minarets and ample domes of the great Stamboul mosques unfolding beauty and enchantment on the one side of the Golden Horn, and on the other the businesslike, many-storied modern buildings of Galata and Pera suggesting a modest replica of some American port. We coaled in primitive fashion at Constantinople and left on the 27th, arriving at Salonica on the 1st of March. Salonica, 'the Pearl of the Ægean,' is a very doubtful gem. Half of it has been destroyed by fire. The town sea-front is mainly remarkable for a depressing succession of low-class cinemas and *cafés chantants*. The British troops in camp above

the town are in poor health, and are waiting, as never men waited, for demobilisation. The flow of uniformed humanity in the streets is perhaps the most varied that one could watch anywhere, for it includes Greeks and Serbians, and Bulgarian prisoners, British naval and military, French, Americans male and female, Italians, Russians, and natives of northern Africa and India and Cochin-China.

I had a stay of five days at Salonica, and considered myself lucky to get off with that. I left on the 6th in a glorified battleship which had 200 troops on board and 600 horses on the lower deck. We had a pleasant voyage with a cheery ship's company, and arrived at Marseilles on the 11th. I left by the *rapide* the same evening, and reached Paris in eighteen hours. Four hours in Paris, and then home by Havre and Southampton. On the morning of the 13th I was travelling up to London, watching out of the window for signs of that welter of munition factories and chimneys which the papers had led me to imagine was Modern England. But what I saw in the south was mostly the old meadows and ploughed fields and woodlands, the placid villages and quiet farms and meandering streams—only the mellow beauty of Old England. As we reached the heart of London I remarked on the dim-lit haze overspreading the town, and was reminded that that was the normal atmosphere—a fact which I had

almost forgotten. And I remembered arriving at Victoria from the Cape many years ago, in the thick of a viscid, yellow, impenetrable November fog of the worst degree—and sniffing it up like the breath of heaven.



