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South Persia and the Great War

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tamarisks, and acacias in the gardens, but no animals or birds except ravens, hoopoes, and the abu fasada of Egypt, like a water-wagtail.

From Sidi Mohammed el Madeni, whose brother was Sheikh el Zawia at Taiserbo, we learned that the latter oasis is a day's journey in length, presumably some 50 kms. ; that it lies north-east to south-west with its greatest breadth, where a line of villages runs from Ain Jelahad and Ain Talib on the north to Mabus Gaballa on the south. The most northerly point of the oasis is due south of Jalo. In the centre lies "el Wadi," the most populated part, where also is the Qasr Jrangedi, an ancient Tebu castle. There are other Tebu ruins at Dahwa, Ain Jelahad, and Gezira. The vegetation is not continuous. There are clusters of palms round all the villages, with patches of "halfa" (half moss, half grass) in between. A band of "hattab," small mounds with some brushwood and fodder, surrounds the oasis. There are eleven villages, the largest, Gezira, where is the Zawia, containing ten houses ; some of the smaller ones only two or three. The total population was estimated at 200 or 300.

Sidi el Madeni was the most intelligent Arab we met in Kufara. He took much trouble to give us exact information concerning Taiserbo, and even drew maps of the oasis for our benefit, but his distances do not agree with Rohlf's. For instance, he insisted that Kusebiya and Gezira were but four hours' journey apart, some 16 to 20 kms. From Buseima to Taiserbo was unanimously described to us as a three days' journey, the first day through bad dunes. Our camels were altogether too weak to attempt such an addition to our route.

The soldiers' stores had run out. The imaginative Mohammed, who was usually our staunchest ally, was still oppressed by his prolonged thirst. Every one distrusted Abdulla. Rumours of probable attack came from all sides, and when a spy arrived from Ribiana to inquire if the rumour spread by the Bazama family (that the country had been sold to Christians, of whom we were the advance guard) were true, the panic of the retinue was complete.

*(To be continued.)*

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## SOUTH PERSIA AND THE GREAT WAR

Brig.-General Sir Percy Sykes, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.M.G.

*Read at the Meeting of the Society, 18 April 1921.*

**B**EFORE 1914 it seemed unlikely that remote Persia would become a war theatre, and any one who had foretold that British troops would march across her provinces time and again would have been considered to be mentally afflicted. To-night my theme is mainly South Persia, but a brief account of events in other parts of the country seems to be desirable.

I would first invite your attention to the province of Azarbaijan, in north-west Persia. In October 1914, the very month that hostilities broke out between Russia and Turkey, the Perso-Turkish boundary, which had been laid down by a mixed commission, was completed. In its northern section the frontier consists of a series of watersheds, crossed by passes. The possession of these by Turkey or Russia—for Persia had no adequate force of her own with which to protect her neutrality—were of considerable importance. If the neutrality of Persia were respected, the two belligerents could attack one another only across the very high range which runs from the Black Sea to Mount Ararat, whereas an advance through Persian territory gave to either side the advantages of outflanking the enemy, and of more open country for operations.

At the outbreak of hostilities the Russians advanced through Azarbaijan, and crossing the passes drove the Turks back on Van. But further south the Kurds rallied to the Turks from both sides of the frontier, and entered Tabriz early in January 1915, only to be driven out by the Russians, who had received reinforcements. Shortly afterwards the Russians, owing to the threatening position of affairs in Transcaucasia, were obliged to draw in their outlying detachments and retired for the time being from Persian soil.

We must now turn our attention to south-west Persia. Before war was actually declared by Turkey, the Government of India had despatched a brigade to the Bahrein Islands which, at the outbreak of hostilities, pushed up the Shatt-al-Arab to protect the important oil refineries of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company on Abadan Island. Subsequently a brigade was sent to Ahwaz to protect the vulnerable pipe-line which runs from the wells at Meidan-i-Naftun *viâ* Ahwaz to Abadan. The Turks made great efforts to destroy the pipe-line, but it was effectually protected by an advance of the Twelfth Division under Major-General Sir George Gorringe, which drove the enemy from Persian soil.

The policy of the Central Powers was to embarrass Great Britain and Russia by creating disturbances in Persia, in Afghanistan, and on the frontiers of India, and to jockey Persia into the war on their side as they had successfully done in the case of Turkey. Their plan of action as regards Persia was twofold. Agents furnished with ample funds and supplies of arms and ammunition were to enlist levies and create anarchy throughout the country. They were to murder British and Russian representatives, drive out British and Russian colonies, and seize their money and property. These groups were to act as supports to other parties intended to form missions for Afghanistan and Baluchistan. The German agents gave out that both the German nation and their monarch were converts to Islam, and spoke of the latter as Haji Wilhelm! Many of the Swedish officers of the Persian gendarmerie joined the Germans with their men, and rendered them services of the utmost value.

During 1915 these German bands swept through central and southern

Persia. At Isfahan they murdered the Russian Vice-Consul, wounded the British Consul-General and drove out the two colonies. A letter from a German official, Seiler, boasting of the attack on the Consul-General, was subsequently intercepted. At Shiraz they murdered the Vice-Consul and made prisoners of the British community, who were kept for seven months in custody. They also expelled Kawam-ul-Mulk, who was acting Governor-General. At Yezd they drove out the British



and seized the treasury of the Imperial Bank of Persia; and at Kirman they expelled the British and Russian colonies and murdered a leading British subject. At the end of 1915 seven branches of the Imperial Bank of Persia were in enemy hands, viz. Kirmanshah, Hamadan, Sultanabad, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yezd, and Kirman. Indeed, the British had been driven out of central and southern Persia, and only remained at the ports owing to the protection afforded by troops and gunboats.

In the north the position was less unsatisfactory. Owing to the danger

to which the allied legations were exposed from the levies and escaped prisoners of the enemy powers collected at Tehran, Russia had sent a force of troops to Kazvin, whence, as the situation became more menacing, they advanced to the Karij river, some 25 miles from the capital. The German and Austrian ministers left Tehran and made every effort to induce the young Shah to follow them, but they just failed. The Russians were strong enough to defeat the campaign of raiding instituted by the disappointed ministers, and before the end of the year occupied Kum and Kashan and were threatening Isfahan.

Up and down the historical route which leads from Baghdad to the heart of Persia the ebb and flow of battle were very marked in 1916. At first the Turks, shortly after the retreat of the British from Ctesiphon, crossed the Persian border and pushed forward to the neighbourhood of Hamadan. Then the Russians, with their *moral* at its highest after the wonderful feat of arms at Erzerum, advanced in their turn and drove the Turks back to Kerind. The fall of Kut, however, changed the military situation, and a powerful Turkish force consisting of 12,000 infantry, 4000 cavalry and 54 guns drove back the Russians, whose numbers were barely one-half. Kirmanshah was evacuated and then Hamadan, and the retreat was continued in August as far north as the Sultan Bulak range, which covered Kazvin and threatened a force marching on Tehran.

We must now return to southern Persia. After the expulsion of the British and Russian colonies, which proved the inability of even one of the local governors to withstand the German filibusters, arrangements were made with the Persian Government to raise a force of Persian troops under British officers in the south and to increase the Persian Cossack brigade in the north, the figure aimed at being 11,000 in both cases. I was appointed head of a mission to raise the South Persia Rifles, as they were ultimately termed. Upon landing at Bandar Abbas in March 1916 I was greeted by many old friends, and, thanks to their help, the energy of my officers was amply rewarded by the enlistment of as many recruits as could be managed, although at Delhi my chances of success were considered to be slight. Twelve days after landing the Persian flag was hoisted over the camp of the South Persia Rifles. The force never looked back, and in a comparatively short time was able to guard Bandar Abbas and an important section of the caravan route.

The general position in the Persian Gulf was not, however, satisfactory. At the neighbouring port of Lingeh, the British Agent, his brother, and an Indian escort of seven Sepoys were treacherously attacked by the guard of the Deputy-Governor. The assassins, who were acting at German instigation, murdered the two old men and two sepoy and wounded four others. Again, in British Makran two young officers were assassinated by a Rind—also at the instigation of German agents.

Finally, at the end of April came the fall of Kut-al-Amara, which was perhaps the gravest disaster suffered by British arms in Asia. The combined effect of these events was almost overwhelming, but yet nowhere was there despondency; our national phlegm undoubtedly served us well. Before long the tide began to turn in South Persia. Kawam-ul-Mulk, who had visited Sir Percy Cox at Bushire, was given three or four guns captured from the Turks, and the services of a few Indian gunners were placed at his disposal. I also handed over to his representative some rifles and ammunition. Nowhere in the world can the power of propaganda be greater than in Persia. The few guns were magnified into batteries, the rifles and ammunition ran into incredibly large figures, and the enemies of Kawam humbly craved for permission to kiss his feet. His return to Shiraz was a triumphal march, although unfortunately his horse fell with him, and he did not live to enjoy the fruits of victory. But his son was able to succeed to his offices and to punish the ring-leaders in the rebellion.

Before I had been very long at Bandar Abbas, my Persian friends in the Kerman province had written to welcome me back and to express the hope that I should soon march to Kirman and put an end to the intolerable state of anarchy from which they were suffering. Deputations even reached me at Bandar Abbas, and supplies were collected on the road. I informed the authorities that I was confident that I could march to Kirman if given an escort of 500 rifles, a squadron of cavalry, and a section of mountain guns, and my proposal having been accepted this force was sent to Bandar Abbas. During the next three years it marched over 5000 miles in Persia, and may perhaps claim a "record" for distance covered during the Great War. Before we left Bandar Abbas the Germans fled from Kirman. They made westwards for Shiraz and were finally all seized by Kawam, who kept them in custody at Shiraz until our arrival there seven months later.

In May the column marched to Kirman, a distance of 280 miles. The heat was very trying for the first few stages, but the arrangements made for supplies worked out well, and everywhere we were well received by all classes. At Kirman we were welcomed by the officials, the landowners, the merchants, and the people, and after an absence of eleven years it was pleasant to revisit a town where I had lived for so long. The anarchists had fled before our arrival, and peace was then restored. One landowner said that he had thirty of his tenants guarding him on the night before our arrival, but that they had now all gone home to reap the harvest. The manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia and the telegraph staff had accompanied the column, and in a few days' time the normal state of things was re-established.

The arrival of British troops at Kirman and the warm welcome they received were an event of some importance. It marked the determination of the British to help the Persian Government to restore order, and the

effect was considerable throughout Persia. More important perhaps was the result in Afghanistan and Baluchistan, where events in Persia react on the political point of view more than is generally realized.

The column halted at Kirman for six weeks, during which period recruiting was opened for a brigade of the South Persia Rifles. I was only able to leave three British officers to organize this body, but gradually they received additional officers and N.C.O.'s; the Kirman brigade grew rapidly, and within fifteen months engaged in successful operations against robber tribes.

From Kirman the column marched 220 miles to Yezd, up a wide valley which was very well known to me. Near Yezd we received the serious news of the Russian retreat referred to above and the evacuation of Hamadan. The Russian commandant at Isfahan informed me that a strong enemy force was marching on the city, and he begged me to come to his assistance. The original plan had been for us to march direct to Shiraz from Yezd, but the column was now diverted to Isfahan and instructed to march there as quickly as possible. The distance was 190 miles, and as the terrain was open we were able to move rapidly. But we were not destined to cross swords with the Turks, as the force, which had reached Dumbineh some 80 miles to the north-west of Isfahan, retreated, probably owing to hearing exaggerated accounts of the size of the column.

At Isfahan we met some 800 Russian Cossacks, and celebrated the meeting by banquets, a review, and much fraternization. The clothing of the troops was worn out, and we replaced it locally to some extent. We also sent out a force to open up the Ahwaz route. It was held by a noted brigand, whom we drove off with some casualties, and thanks to this no less than 16,000 loads of British goods, which had been dumped on the road for nearly a year, were brought into Isfahan. In October the Russian position had been strengthened, and it was clear that the Turks would not advance farther into Persia. The column therefore marched south to Shiraz, a distance of 326 miles. When we crossed the Fars boundary we were met by an officer and some men of the Swedish gendarmerie, and all along the route to Shiraz we inspected posts held by this force. It was significant that the road was deserted both by caravans and travellers. When I had last ridden along it, in 1898, it had been crowded, but anarchy had stopped all traffic. Northern Fars lies very high, and we crossed the Kaoli Kush pass at an altitude of over 9000 feet. We then descended to the valley of the Polvar and camped near the famous ruins of Pasargadæ. I examined the tomb of Cyrus the Great carefully and saw that the roof was leaking. A chance-sown seed, grown into a small tree, was the cause of the mischief, its roots having forced the great limestone slabs apart. Fortunately I was able to save the celebrated structure for the time being, by cutting out the roots and filling the cavity with cement.

I had often wondered how the Pasargadæ plain had been irrigated, as the Polvar at this point is hardly more than a brook. Later, when traveling by a route to the east of the valley, which we finally made the caravan route, we found the ruins of a very ancient dam at the head of the Tang-i-Karain. In Achæmenian times this dam had held up a considerable body of water, which was led down to the lands round Pasargadæ by a large canal, locally termed Jub-i-Dukhtar, or "the canal of the Virgin," which was about 100 feet wide at the top and 20 feet deep. This caravan route, which we made passable for wheels, left the old route near Dehbid and ran *viâ* Didagun, Kadirabad, the Tang-i-Kamin, and Sadatabad to Sivand. The route that we followed down the Polvar through the Tang-i-Bulak was impassable for wheeled traffic and difficult for pack-animals, a narrow track being cut out of the rock at one point. Indeed, this section of Fars was extremely hilly, and had it been held against us would have been difficult to force. However, Farman Farma had installed himself as Governor-General, and the tribesmen were moving to the low country near the coast, so we had no trouble.

We halted for a day at Persepolis and visited the wonderful ruins of the Achæmenian and Sasanian periods. I was able to arrange for ladders, by the aid of which we ascended to the rock-hewn sepulchre of Darius, which we examined with deep reverence. Externally the tombs represent the façade of a palace with four semi-detached columns, between which is the entrance. The interior of the tomb was arranged to hold nine corpses, and a few of the stone lids which covered the deep cavities cut in the rock for the reception of the remains of Darius and his family were still in position, albeit in a broken condition. From Persepolis we visited the famous dam known as the Band-i-Amir, which is the Bendemeer of Moore. The column was received with much ceremony at Shiraz, the notables, many of whom were old friends, meeting it some miles out and riding in with us in the friendly Persian manner, and we were very glad to reach our new headquarters, after completing a march of 1000 miles through the heart of Persia.

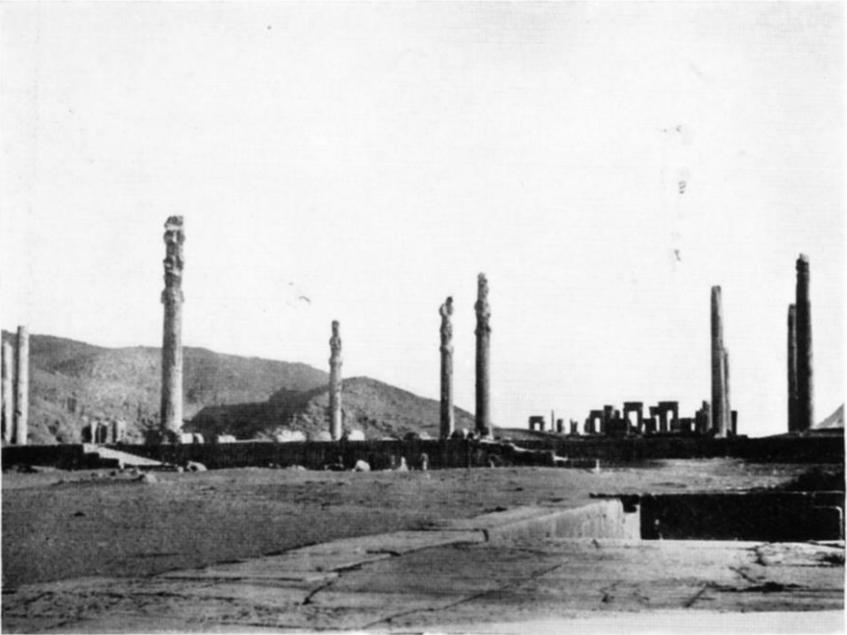
In 1911 the Persian Government had engaged a body of Swedish officers to organize a gendarmerie, but for various reasons none were serving with the force in Fars at the end of 1916. The Swedes had produced good results in the north, working in an open country, but to us their fundamental error in Fars was the construction of a large number of posts along the route. Almost the entire force was thereby immobilized, and the men rapidly lost their sense of discipline and levied blackmail on the caravans, when any passed; moreover, the smaller posts holding eight men were easily rushed. It cannot be too clearly understood that the only method of keeping a route safe in Persia, and in countries in a similar condition to Persia, is to surprise the guilty tribes with well-trained mobile columns. Attempts to catch raiding parties or to pursue them are generally futile, whereas, as soon as the tribesmen,

and more especially their chiefs, realized that raiding sooner or later resulted in a sudden attack, the game became less attractive.

Upon reaching Shiraz I had to decide what course to pursue as regards the gendarmerie. To take them over was very difficult, for I had practically no staff, having been starved in that respect. On the other hand, unless I took them over and paid them, the force would break up, desert with their arms, and many of them would become robbers. I consequently assembled the officers and explained that I was taking them into the South Persia Rifles, a Persian force that was being raised under British officers at the request of the Persian Government to restore the authority of the Shah. The number taken over was about three thousand.

At first our efforts were concentrated on paying, rationing and clothing the men, who were in rags and half starved. It was very difficult to re-organize them, as the route could not be left unguarded, and I could not break up my little force. After a while it became possible to send out some trained men and to call in men from these posts, where the majority had been stationed for three years without any change. As time passed the small posts, generally situated some 4 miles apart, were destroyed one by one, and their occupants were brought into Shiraz or Abadeh.

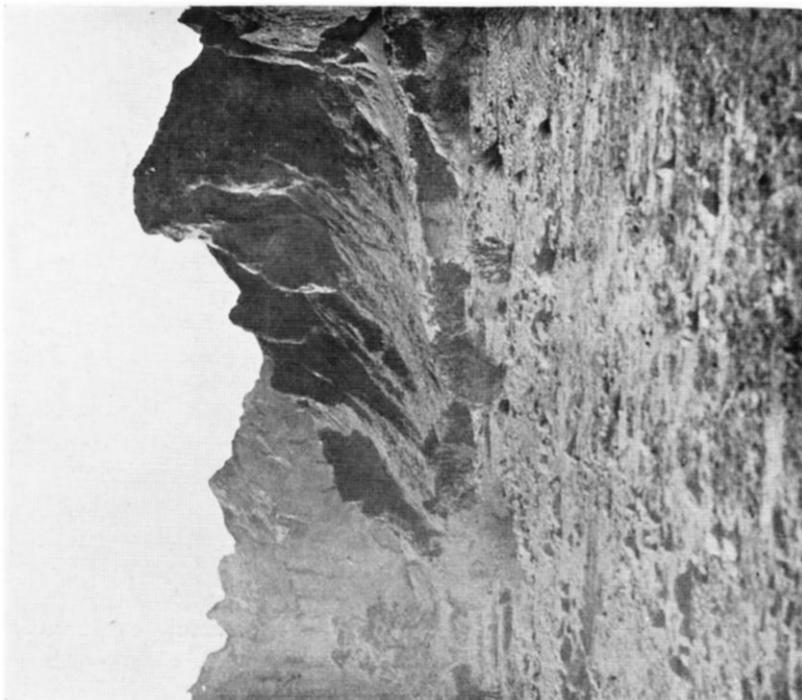
Among the most important questions which we had to handle were our relations with the Kashgais, the Khamseh Arabs, and other nomad tribes. The Kashgais are of Turkoman origin, being descended from the Khalaj tribe and retaining the Turkish language. When Tamerlane moved the Khalaj from Asia Minor to eastern Persia, the ancestors of the Kashgai broke away and settled in Fars. They are nowadays about 135,000 strong. They move farther in their annual migration than any other tribe, their winter haunts being near the coast of the Persian Gulf, while their summer quarters are some 200 miles distant and run as far north as Kumishah, where they touch the Bakhtiari country; on the east they march with the Arab tribes. Several of the districts into which Fars is divided are in the hands of the Kashgais. They thereby control 100,000 villagers, who are entirely at their mercy. In theory each family of the Kashgais provides a fighting man, but actually, owing mainly to supply difficulties, not more than 5000 Kashgais have ever been kept in the field. They possessed some 25,000 small-bore rifles, with a large quantity of ammunition. The Kashgais are divided up into a number of tribes headed by the Darashuris, Kashkulis, Farsimidans, Shishbulukis, Safi Khanis, and Ghallazan Oghris, who are considered to be the fighting tribesmen. Generally speaking, they are well to do, and own large flocks of sheep and goats; they also indulge in looting. They are physically splendid specimens of manhood, with the vulpine look of the nomad on their faces. Solat-u-Dola, their chief, was literally the "uncrowned king of Fars," for if a Governor-General tried to oppose him, he merely sent out raiding bands to block all the main routes, and very soon there was scarcity and dearth at Shiraz, followed by riots and by the departure of the Governor-General.



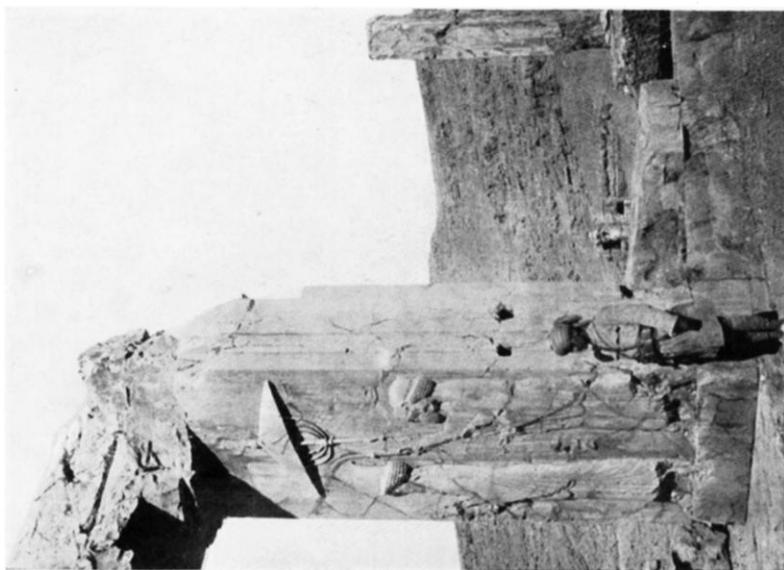
THE PALACE OF XERXES AT PERSEPOLIS, WITH PALACE OF DARIUS  
BEHIND



NAKSHI-RUSTAM NEAR PERSEPOLIS: THE SASANIAN MONARCH SHAPUR  
AND THE CAPTIVE EMPEROR VALERIAN



SOUTHERN ENTRANCE TO THE TANG I-ZAGH, THE CHIEF OBSTACLE ON ROAD BETWEEN KIRMAN AND BANDAR ABBAS



THE HALL OF A HUNDRED COLUMNS, PERSEPOLIS, AND SOWAR OF THE 15th LANCERS, OCT. 1916

whose tenure of office was usually brief. Solat would obviously resent the restoration of law and order in southern Persia, as he was amassing a huge fortune by the prevailing anarchy; and his tribesmen, who believed strongly in maintaining their immemorial right to rob, would certainly support him to a man. Our policy was to open up friendly relations with Solat, to humour him, to make concessions, and, above all, to avoid hostilities with the Kashgais, who were the most powerful tribe in southern or central Persia. To provoke a contest during the Great War would have been folly. In the spring of 1917 the capture of Baghdad reacted favourably for the time being on the situation in Fars, and Solat became less unreasonable. We visited him in his camp near Khaneh Zinian, his *amaleh* or bodyguard lining the road and giving us a good opportunity of observing their fine physique and their wiry ponies, which are wonderful over rough ground. Solat was suspicious and arrogant, but after several meetings he became friendly to outward appearances. In any case he restrained his tribesmen from raiding on the main roads, and did not attack us that summer, when we were weak.

Second only in importance to the Kashgais are the Khamseh or "Five" tribes, who occupy an area of country to the east of the Kashgais. From their winter quarters in the vicinity of Tarum and Lar they move to the neighbourhood of Niriz and Dehbid for the summer grazing. The five tribes are termed Arabs, Ainálu, Báhárlu, Báseri, and Nafar. Only the first named are Arabs, divided into the Sheibani and Jabbareh branches, who emigrated originally from Najd and Oman, but their numbers are more than one-half of the total; the other four divisions are Turks by descent. They all speak Arabic with a strong mixture of Persian, Turkish, and Luri. The tribe is 70,000 strong and can muster 3000 men in the field, but it is not as well armed as are the rival Kashgais. The Khamseh generally, and especially the Báhárlus, are noted freebooters, and raided the routes behind Bandar Abbas, as well as those running from Kirman to Yezd. Kawam-ul-Mulk is their hereditary chief, and from living at Shiraz is much better educated and far more civilized than Solat. He is bound to move very slowly in his handling of the tribes, but, generally speaking, his policy aims at stopping raiding and at developing the resources of the large area he controls, for he is governor of most of the districts in which his tribe has grazing rights. Our personal relations with Kawam, whose father and grandfather I had known, were good. We liked him and found him reasonable. He was also a pleasant shooting companion.

In the spring of 1917 sorely needed help arrived. My headquarters staff of one officer was increased to ten, headed by Colonel E. F. Orton and Lieut.-Colonel G. P. Grant. The 16th Rajputs and three squadrons of Burma Mounted Rifles also trebled the numbers of my tiny column; the latter regiment was composed of Punjabis mounted on small but sturdy Burmese ponies.

A reference must now be made to the important question of com-

munications. In South Persia there was not a yard of made road; there were very few bridges, and those there were urgently required repairs. From my base at Bandar Abbas there are two routes running inland—that by the Tang-i-Zindan, which we followed in 1916, and a second route lying farther west *viâ* the Tang-i-Zagh and Gakum to Sirjan. This latter defile was the safer and easier of the two. It also suited us better, as at Sirjan we established a “Clapham Junction,” serving Shiraz and Kirman alike. It was most important to open up this route for wheeled traffic, but there was a long delay while Major Rich, R.E., was surveying the rival routes and one still farther east *viâ* Jiruft. Finally the Tang-i-Zagh route was selected, and a beginning was made in opening it up. The crux of the work was a cutting 400 feet in length in the vicinity of the *tang*. Unfortunately, it took nearly two years to settle upon the route and to arrange for labour corps to be despatched, and when the armistice was signed only some 50 miles from Bandar Abbas had been prepared, whereas the Tang-i-Zagh lay some 80 miles inland. The “steps” leading up to the Iranian plateau presented considerable difficulties in the construction of routes, but in the interior the country was ideally suitable for the purpose. From Kirman we were able to run cars to Bam and even to the British frontier: westwards to Yezd, and south-westwards to Sirjan, the latter route involving a good deal of work over a high pass. From our headquarters at Shiraz we ran *viâ* Niriz to Sirjan, about 220 miles, there being one very difficult pass to the east of Niriz, and then southwards from Sirjan to within 120 miles of Bandar Abbas. Westwards from Shiraz we opened up the route for 30 miles, to a point a little beyond Khaneh Zinian, and this was finally constructed through by Major-General Douglas working from Bushire. Northwards again, with much trouble, we opened up the route to Isfahan, crossing three difficult passes. The route made by General Douglas from Bushire to Shiraz was by far the most difficult piece of work to be done. The pity of it all is, that these routes and others that were opened during the Great War will not, I fear, be kept in repair by the Persian Government. It is as well to explain that we constructed no metalled road, except for a few miles across the sand behind Bandar Abbas. The cost would have been enormous, in view of the long distances, the absence of water for binding, and the scarcity of labour and supplies; but we did open to light motor traffic 1000 miles of route, over which we travelled at the rate of 100 miles a day. The saving in time was great. It was 450 miles from Bandar Abbas to Shiraz. By caravan this usually meant forty days on the road, whereas a car could reach within 120 miles of the coast in three or four days from Shiraz, and a few lightly laden mules traversed the remaining distance in four days. In other words, the journey took one week as against seven.

Our important post between Bandar Abbas and Sirjan was Gakum, the chief centre in the district of Sabah. Tarum, which appears on the maps, has been deserted. From Gakum it appeared to be desirable to open up

a direct route to Katru and Niriz, and thereby effect a large saving in distance by following one side of a triangle instead of two. When returning from India in February 1918 I travelled along this route for part of the distance, and sent a party through to Katru.

Our first stage ran through Tizarj, with a large acreage of date palms, and thence up a very stony valley to Khana Murz. On the second day we followed up the same valley to a gently graded and open watershed. We then descended to the hamlet of Siriran. The Kuhistan range with its robber villages lay covered with snow to the west, the highest peak, Kuh-i-Muftu, rising to over 9000 feet. From this hamlet to Katru the route was hard and open, and cars could run the whole distance with very little work, while supplies were available in fair quantities.

From Siriran we marched eastwards through the Tang-i-Dehistan, opening on to a very large palm grove, which produces remarkably good dates. We camped at Bainu, a large village with 2000 inhabitants, the residence of Aga Haji, hereditary governor of Duraga. This old Lur is such a capable governor that all possible land is carefully cultivated, and no water is allowed to run to waste. He is so highly esteemed that oaths are sworn by his name. Unfortunately, his sons appear to be worthless from opium-smoking, which is such a curse in Persia. From Bainu we struck known country and the main road to Sirjana at Aliabad.

I would here give it as my deliberate opinion that motor transport will not pay in Persia, except perhaps for carrying the posts and rich passengers. The routes are too bad, the distances too great, the population too scanty, and all petrol has to be carried from the coast to the interior. We only used cars for touring, for bringing up officers, and for evacuating the sick and wounded. A touring car requires about a pound weight of petrol per mile. For 200 miles going and returning 400 lbs. of petrol would have to be arranged for, without allowing for any reserve. If the petrol is carried up separately the cost is heavy. The provision and upkeep of repair shops, apart from the question of the engagement of good drivers and mechanics, would be very difficult. Persians do not train well as mechanics, and are reckless drivers.

As soon as the reinforcements reached Shiraz we decided to open up the trade route to Isfahan, and with that object stationed the Burma Mounted Rifles and other troops at Dehbid, which, as mentioned above, is the centre of the summer quarters of the Arab tribesmen. We had made most careful inquiries about the raids, and found that the nomads fell into the classes of "professional" and "amateur" robbers. We determined to concentrate our efforts on the former class, hoping, and as it proved rightly hoping, that the amateurs would take warning. Highway robbery was so ingrained in the customs of the nomads that we realized that we should excite the intense hostility of these crusty old Tories, but we felt that unless it did stop, and that speedily, the village population would continue to disappear rapidly.

At Dehbid the Indian troops were soon challenged by the chief of the Kurshulis, a powerful offshoot of the Kashgais. This brigand raided a flock of sheep close to Dehbid, and while acknowledging the fact refused to restore them to their owners. The challenge was taken up by Lieut.-Colonel V. P. B. Williams, who made a march of 30 miles and found the Kurshulis posted in a fort, reinforced by neighbouring nomads and expecting an attack. The tired and hungry Indian troops advanced over the open plain under fire, and the Kurshulis stood firm until the order was given to fix bayonets before the assault. This dismayed them and they deserted the fort and fled to the hills, suffering a loss of twenty-three killed and many wounded. Negotiations were opened up and the sheep were restored. The result of this action was extraordinary, as it proved to all concerned that robbery would not be tolerated; the main route was soon alive with caravans, whose owners at any rate appreciated the new order.

In the autumn extensive combined operations were undertaken in the almost unknown area lying between Rafsinjan and Anar on the north and the Niriz Lake, Niriz, and Katru on the south, districts about which we gained much information. The Lashanis, of Kashgai descent, living to the north of Lake Niriz, who were the leading professional robbers, were first dealt with by destroying their forts and grazing their crops. Later, under Orton, the Lab Mohammedi Arabs to the south of Herat-i-Khurra were warned, and sections of the Chahar Rahis were severely punished. Farran also dealt with a nest of robbers behind Anar and took an almost impregnable stronghold near Shahr-i-Babek. The result of these and other operations was to restore order in southern Persia, such as had not existed since the death of Nasir-u-Din in 1896. Had the process been continued for two years, the robber tribes would have turned their swords into ploughshares and have gradually become dwellers in villages, and the country would have become prosperous. But the gods thought otherwise.

In March 1918 the great final attack of the Germans in France reacted on distant Persia. The government was unfriendly, and intense propaganda was carried on to excite the South Persia Rifles to mutiny or desert. The Persian Government, in their reply to a British note, characterized it as a foreign force and as constituting a threat to Persian independence and integrity. When this reply was placarded all over Shiraz, I realized that we should have desertions and probably mutinies in the South Persia Rifles, and unfortunately I was right. Before a week passed, ten *sowars*, headed by a junior officer, deserted from Abadeh, leaving behind them a letter which indicated that the desertion was political. Before very long we realized that we should be attacked by a powerful confederacy consisting of the Kashgais, Kazerunis, Dashtis, Dashtistanis, and other smaller tribes, who considered that the chance had arrived of destroying the British, who dared to interfere with their right to rob. Our intelligence department was well organized, and we



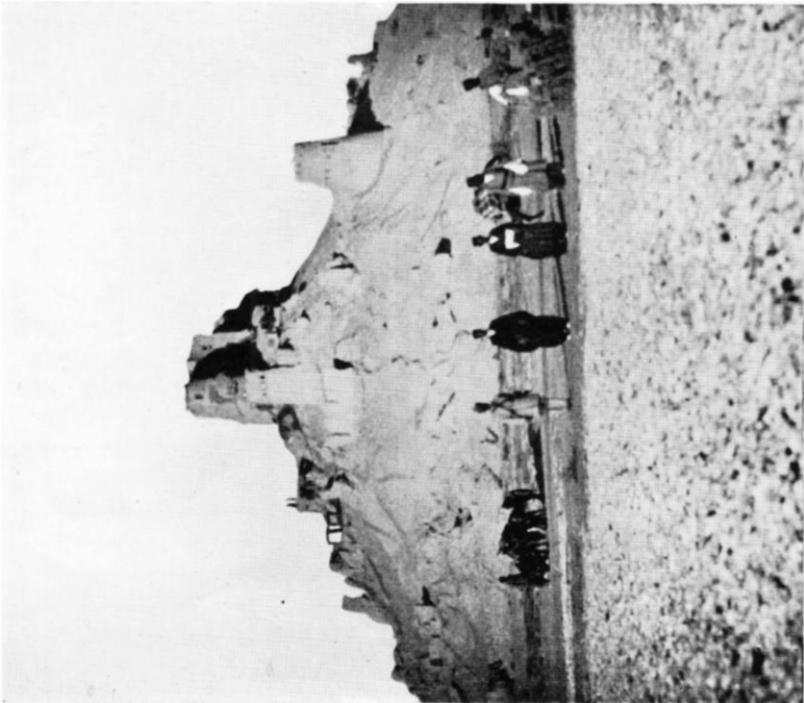
THE BAND-I-AMIR, NEAR PERSEPOLIS : THE BENDEMEER OF MOORE



SHIRAZ, 1917



CLIFFS SOUTH OF FIN, NEAR ISFAHAN



THE OLD FORT OF FIN, HELD BY ROBBERS IN 1918

knew that the storm would not break before the third week in May, before which date there is no grazing around Shiraz. We determined to utilize the few remaining weeks to good advantage. We hoped that Kawam would be able to keep the Arab tribes neutral, but we had proof that the Lab Mohammedis and other tribes near Niriz, of whose complicity in recent robberies we also had proofs, were likely to join the confederacy and attack the small force at that centre; so Lieut.-Colonel Grant was sent with a column to attack the Lab Mohammedis, the Chahhakis, and sections of the Chahar Rahis who inhabited the southern valleys of Baonat. This operation was brilliantly executed by a series of forced marches, a sharp lesson was given, and neither these tribes nor their neighbours threatened Niriz or joined the Kashgais. Incidentally the merchants of Yezd expressed their deep gratitude for the punishment of these robber tribes.

On 22 May 1918 Solat threw down the gauntlet and issued a proclamation in which he stated that by the orders of the Persian Government he was taking action in defence of Islam against the South Persia Rifles. His forces consisted at the outset of 4500 Kashgais, the picked fighting men of the tribe, and 1500 Kazerunis, a formidable body which was increased by contingents from other smaller tribes and finally totalled 7000 to 8000 men. They were all armed with small-bore rifles, and surprised us disagreeably by the abundance of ammunition at their disposal. We were stronger than at any previous time, with 2200 Indian troops at Shiraz, one-third of whom were however recruits. The South Persia Rifles slightly outnumbered the Indian troops, and, owing to propaganda, finally became a source of danger to us. Kawam had collected 2000 Arabs in and about Shiraz. They hated the Kashgais, disliked the British, and were ready to attack the beaten side, if they did not take a hand in the game before the winner was known. The inhabitants of Shiraz were hostile to us, partly owing to their connection with the Kashgais and partly owing to the *Mullas*, some of whom preached a *Fihād* or Holy War. We occupied a belt of walled gardens to the north-west of Shiraz, which gave us protection from rifle fire, and had strengthened the position by building towers and opening up internal communications. We had dug wells which made us safe, so far as drinking-water for the troops was concerned, but there was not enough for the horses. The lines of the South Persia Rifles lay half a mile to the south, close to the city.

A force which was at Bushire, under Major-General J. A. Douglas, was increased during the summer with a view to operations in the autumn, but we were informed that, owing to the heat and the very difficult nature of the country, we could expect no help from that quarter until October at the earliest. Major-General Dunsterville was also too far off to render us any assistance.

The position on May 24 was that the Kazerunis were investing Khaneh Zinian, held by a strong detachment of South Persia Rifles, and that Solat's

force was camped a few miles to the south of the route leading from Shiraz *viâ* Deh Sheikh to that post. Apparently his plan was to induce the British to march to the relief of Khaneh Zinian, and to envelop the column on its return by co-operating with the Kazerunis. The day after the return of the column from its operations, it marched out under Orton 1600 strong to attack the Kashgais. Camping for the night at Chinar Rahdar at the western end of the Shiraz valley, it moved forward rapidly at dawn, and upon approaching Deh Sheikh, 12 miles from Shiraz, encountered severe opposition. Orton saw through Solat's plan, and to defeat it swung gradually southwards towards the Kashgai camp. The enemy, we subsequently heard, anticipated an easy victory and had divided up the spoils in anticipation, even quarrelling as to who should have the splendid gun-mules. They made repeated ugly rushes, but the fire of the mountain and Lewis guns saved the situation by keeping them at a distance.

Throughout the day the column advanced very slowly, the troops suffering severely from thirst. In the afternoon the enemy showed signs of discouragement, and finally, when Solat's camp was within shelling distance, they broke and fled in a cloud of dust after suffering very heavy casualties. While the column was fighting the Kashgais, treachery was at work at Khaneh Zinian. The Persian officers were in the plot and surrendered the post to the Kazerunis after shooting Captain Will and Sergeant Comber.

We had hoped that the defeat of Solat, whose losses were infinitely heavier than any sustained in tribal warfare, was decisive. Unfortunately the capture of Khaneh Zinian was held to counterbalance his defeat, and as strong reinforcements joined him and fanaticism had undoubtedly been aroused, Solat soon returned to Khaneh Khabis. The enemy party at Shiraz had nearly screwed up its courage to attack the almost undefended cantonment during the absence of the column at Deh Sheikh. It was therefore decided not to move out so far again. Moreover, had the Kazerunis taken part in the action of Deh Sheikh, it might have gone badly for us. These riflemen now occupied the garden quarter of Shiraz to the north-west of the cantonment, and before long cut off the water-supply on which the city partly depended for drinking purposes and also for working its flour mills. The Kashgais, on their part, occupied the low hills on the south side of the Shiraz valley. Cholera was raging in the country, and although, thanks to inoculation, our losses were not heavy, they were appreciable.

In early June we learned that it was intended that the Kashgais should attack us on June 17, simultaneously with the Shirazis. We determined to upset this plan by sallying out to the south-west as far as Ahmadabad, a village some 4 miles from the cantonment, and then retreating slowly in the expectation that the Kashgais would follow us up in large numbers. Everything worked according to plan. The Kazerunis

retired from the gardens losing heavily, and the caravanserai at Chinar Rahdar was shelled with good results. When the retirement began, the Kashgais came galloping down into the valley in large bodies and offered good targets. They presented a really fine spectacle, but lost heavily in men and horses. On the following day the rising in Shiraz took place according to programme. The bazaars were shut, attacks were made on Indians and members of the South Persia Rifles; the *Mullas* issued orders that it was lawful to kill any one who had dealings with the British; and bands of men paraded the streets with fanatical cries. Our reply to that was the midnight seizure of three commanding buildings in the city. The result was excellent. The Shirazis, who were bitterly disappointed at receiving no support from Solat, began to realize that the British were actually beating the Kashgais; so they reopened their shops and returned to their various occupations. The tide had turned, and we secured the results of our success by inducing Farman Farma to dismiss Solat from the post of *Ilkhani* in favour of his elder half-brother Sardar Ehtesham. Kawam thereupon definitely joined us, and very soon afterwards Ali Khan, half-brother of Solat, left him for his full brother, the new *Ilkhani*. The Kazerunis, who had been promised the loot of Shiraz and had had little but some hundreds of casualties to show, broke away and returned home. The rot had set in.

It was now necessary to strike a third blow against Solat in conjunction with the new *Ilkhani*, the time-honoured custom being for the deposed man's followers to desert him and for the new holder of the post to loot his estates. In pursuance of this custom, it was agreed that we should attack Solat, and that our new allies should cut off his retreat by crossing a pass to the south of the city. The programme was punctually carried out as far as we were concerned. Our allies indeed failed to cut off the main body of the fugitive Kashgais, but inflicted a few casualties on stragglers. Kawam and the new *Ilkhani* pursued Solat to Firuzabad, his headquarters, and drove him away with but a dozen followers. Three months later Solat again raised his head, but again he was defeated by Orton, who marched rapidly to Firuzabad. Solat fled, finally beaten and weeping. To this expedition I owe the interesting illustrations of the Sasanian remains of Jur, as Firuzabad was termed until the tenth century.

To complete the subject some account must be given of the activities of the Bushire force. During the summer the base was organized, the force was increased to 20,000 fighting men and followers, and a light railway was constructed for 37 miles to Borazjun across the level plain. Thence over slightly broken ground carts worked as far as Daliki at the foot of the tangled mass of mountains. Towards the end of October the troops at Daliki started on the trying work of road-making, as it was deemed necessary to construct a route passable for camels before advancing on Kazerun. There was no serious opposition, but the

Kamarij pass was held by 100 to 150 riflemen, and there were occasional attacks on patrols and pickets. When the force approached Kazerun, the Shiraz column crossed the very difficult passes of the "Old Woman" and the "Daughter" in mid-winter and occupied Mian Kotal the same day that Brig.-General Elsmie and his troops were welcomed at Kazerun by the Deputy-Governor, who had recently arrived from Shiraz, and the notables. These operations successfully completed the restoration of law and order in southern Persia. The British continued their beneficent activities, and before the troops were withdrawn in the spring of 1919, a well-graded camel track, over which a car could travel, had been constructed to Shiraz across one of the most difficult tracts of country in Asia.

The time at my disposal has been short and I have not been able to give an account of the fine defence of Abadeh by a detachment of the 16th Rajputs, nor of the relief march of 180 miles in 169 hours made by the troops who had only returned on the previous day from the third action with Solat. But perhaps enough has been said to show that British officers and Indian troops upheld their ancient reputation. As the Shirazis put it, "Before the fight we thought that 100 Kashgais would chase 1000 Indians, but we now realize that 100 Indians can chase 1000 Kashgais."

In conclusion, it is pleasant to feel that our operations benefited Persia, and that they were constructive rather than destructive. The nomad tribes, whom she was impotent to restrain, were made obedient to the Persian Government, order was restored, trade revived, and many thousands of pounds were spent on communications which should prove of the greatest value if kept in repair. We may also claim to have helped the peasant to keep his place on his native soil; and perhaps my most pleasing recollection of Persia is a memory of peasants ploughing the land in a village deserted a generation ago, and of hearing from a fine old greybeard the words "This is thy work."

Before the paper the PRESIDENT said: Sir Percy Sykes is so well known that it is unnecessary for me to introduce him to you. I ask him therefore kindly to read us his paper.

*Sir Percy Sykes then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.*

General Sir EDMUND BARROW: I am glad to be able to make a few remarks regarding this lecture, because I think that the Persian theatre of war is one that has been very little recognized in England. There have been such great events elsewhere during the last six or seven years that Persia has rather receded into the background, and we have not fully grasped the really wonderful work that has been done by British officers in the various theatres of war in that country. From the map before us you will have noticed that the lecturer's wonderful march covered only a small portion of Persia. One of the most remarkable things during the war is that British troops have been traversing nearly all the great historical roads of Persia. Here on the south