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THE SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE.

A RIDE THROUGH PERSIA.

BY LIEUT. D. S. BUIST,
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(Read at Meetings of the Society, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, December 1892.)

PERSIA, as every schoolboy knows, consists for the most part of a lofty tableland, lying from 3000 to 4000 feet above the level of the sea, and shut off from the coast-line by high mountain chains. To reach the interior, wild and mountainous districts have to be crossed; and the passes leading over the hills traverse some of the grandest mountain scenery in the world.

From Bushire, where the great highway of Southern Persia starts, to Shiraz, the first of the great cities, the distance is about 120 miles, and the track winds almost entirely amidst the solitudes of the mountains. Here and there, however, are verdant oases, remarkable alike for their beauty and fertility, where grain and fruit-trees of all kinds flourish in profusion.

The usual method of travelling from the Gulf to Shiraz is by caravan; but caravaning in Persia is not quite what we should imply by the use of that term in this country. There it consists, not in the use of a wheeled carriage of any sort, but of a string of transport animals. Men, with heavy saddle-bags behind them, bestride mules, whilst women sit in what seems anything but a comfortable position, jammed into square wooden boxes, from which rise light frameworks covered over with tightly stretched canvas. On each side of the mule is hung one of these queer-looking arrangements, and in each box reclines a woman, sometimes with one infant, sometimes with more, whilst in others three or four children are huddled together. It says much for the hardihood of the Persian mule, that, loaded as he is, and traversing such roads, he is able to accomplish the usual daily stage of from ten to twelve miles.

All travellers are armed, and it is very unusual to meet with solitary wayfarers. The Persians fully believe in our maxim that "there's safety

in numbers," and when they wish to pass from one part of the country to another they usually join a caravan, or party of travellers.

My own caravan from Bushire to Shiraz consisted of three mules, and the only little adventure I had in my ride of 1000 miles took place at the summit of one of the wildest and loneliest rocky ladders that lead to the interior. Here I was accosted by five men, clothed in picturesque rags, each carrying a long knife in his waist-belt, and a long thin muzzle-loading gun slung over his shoulder. They kept following me for about five minutes, demanding backsheesh for performing the duties, as they said, of road-guards. It was still light, and a more villainous-looking set of fellows I have never yet seen. I told them to clear out of my way, but this they did not at all feel disposed to do. On one of them at last laying hold of my bridle, I gave him a smart crack over the knuckles with a riding-crop I happened to have in my hand. This caused him to relinquish his grasp, but all immediately closed upon me, and as a last resort I drew my revolver from my wallet. This produced the desired effect, for they now fell to the rear, and remained together as if in consultation as to their future movements. I pushed on, and was not again disturbed by the unpleasant attention of such dangerous-looking vagabonds.

Next day, whilst crossing the highest of the mountain passes, we found ourselves in a region of snow-crowned hills, and thenceforward to the confines of the Caspian we were never out of sight of white-crested peaks. One is never far from the hills, for Persia is a land of mountains and plains. One vast plain succeeds another, hemmed in on all sides by the everlasting hills, which bound the distant horizon, where mountain rises upon mountain.

Two days later we were gladdened by the sight of many wayfarers and numerous caravans, betokening our approach to a large city. We passed through a long but somewhat narrow plain shut in by hills on all sides. The soil was rich, and the supply of water being abundant, green corn-fields stretched as far as the eye could reach, and clung to the lower slopes of the mountains. Orange and pomegranate trees too flourished in profusion, and the creeping vine was everywhere conspicuous. Soon, in the distance, the domes and minarets of far-famed Shiraz arose before us from among many groves of trees. But how grievously were we disappointed with the city when, in due time, we reached it! Within its walls the sights are few and unimportant; and for interest the city has only the beauty of its surroundings and its classic associations to fall back upon. These still linger around it, for even to this day a vestige of its early reputation for letters is preserved, in that the dialect of its inhabitants is generally looked upon as superior to that of any other provincial city, if not of the capital itself; and the same measure of praise applies also to the calligraphy of the Shirazis, for in Persia handwriting is much studied—indeed, it is considered quite a fine art.

But, however shrunken from its former estate the city may be, the vast plain on which it stands has lost nothing of its pristine loveliness.

"But beauty still is here,
States fall, arts fade, but nature doth not die."

Though no broad river sweeps throughout its length, numerous small water-courses convert it into one of the most fertile oases in Persia. The numerous buildings of the wealthier inhabitants in the environs of the city, the many gardens dotted over it, and the fine clumps of trees growing everywhere in profusion, tend, with its luxuriant fertility, to make of this plain a landscape of smiling plenty, not to be equalled in all Persia.

In one of the gardens sleeps the shade of Hafis, in another rest the remains of Saadi. Both repose in the shadow of the hills, both slumber beneath the murmur of whispering leaves: one lies in a verdant garden by which the road winds to the capital; the other, far removed from the hum of the old city, sleeps amidst groves of weeping cypresses. Both are held in high esteem by the Persians of to-day, and to both shrines pilgrims repair from far-distant provinces. To me their graves remained unseen; it is only the gardens that enshrine them that I know. My host asked me not to enter these famous garden tombs, for on the last occasion they had been visited by a European an unfortunate *fracas* had taken place. Since then the ill-feeling towards the Feringhi had been aggravated by the unfortunate tobacco concession, and my host deemed it advisable that I should not enter the hallowed enclosures.

Almost the only industry for which Shiraz is now famous is its manufacture of wine. Although the use of alcohol is forbidden by the Koran, the inhabitants of this somewhat fanatical city have earned the reputation of being some of the best wine-makers in Persia. This manufacture is carried on chiefly by Armenians and Jews, from grapes grown in the immediate vicinity of the city; and the wine, besides having a considerable local sale, is exported in large quantities to the capital, where it is in high favour with Persian connoisseurs.

In Shiraz I learned from experience two facts about the customs of the country: one is, that numerous days are observed as saints' days, which entails on the inhabitants an entire cessation from business; the other, that there is a weekly post to Teheran, which clears the post-houses of all their horses. The day I arrived I sent my saddle-bags to the bazaar to have them bound with leather; next day, being a saint's day, I was unable to recover them; and, to add to my discomfiture, it was also a mail-day, and there was not an animal of any kind in the post-house. The post-master, however, promised me horses in the afternoon, but it was not till 6 P.M. that they turned up at my door.

From time immemorial there has existed along the great lines of communication in Persia a system of postal stages. Stretching from Shiraz to the confines of the Caspian are *chapar-khanehs*, or post-houses, from twenty to twenty-five miles apart. At each stage from six to eight horses are kept; and if not required by the post, a traveller can engage these for conveying himself, his servants and baggage, to the following stage, at a charge of one *keran* for each horse per *farsakh*, i.e. four miles. A *shagird*, or post-boy, accompanies the traveller to take the horses back; he is also of use in acting as guide, for without such assistance I should have found it utterly impossible to reach the capital. In many places tracks converge, while in others they entirely disappear.

Having overcome my little difficulties, I once more set out on my journey northwards. I rode one horse myself, my servant a second, and the postboy was mounted on a third. My kit, packed in two pairs of saddle-bags, hung down across the flanks of my attendants' horses. Though heavy and somewhat awkwardly placed over their quarters, the load did not appear to interfere at all with their action. But on the first stage our rate of progression was slow, for the road still lay entirely among the mountains. The night too was dark, and it took us from six to eleven o'clock to cover a distance of twenty-one miles. Next morning, as we pushed onward over the wide plain of Merv-dasht, we were able to make out rows of tall stately pillars to our right front, standing out against the dark background of the Kuh-i-Rahmet hills. Gradually they became more distinct, but until we got quite close to them they seemed to stand alone against the brown hillside. It was only when we arrived beneath the artificial terrace from which the mighty ruins of Persepolis rise that we were able to appreciate their magnitude.

"Besides the colossal winged human-headed bulls which flank the propylæ of Xerxes there are," remarks a recent writer in the *Times*, "remains of no less than six buildings upon the platform. The edifices and the stairways leading to them were richly decorated with sculptured reliefs, carved from a rich blue limestone; and herein lies the feature that distinguishes Persepolis from Susa. Whereas at the latter city the decoration seems to have consisted mainly in enamelled brickwork, at Persepolis we have, in a material which, for beauty and variety of surface and durability of character, almost vies with the finest marble, the principal relics of the Achæmenid arts of sculpture and architecture."

In ancient Persia the office of king had a semi-sacerdotal character, and the ruins that still remain all stand on the artificial terrace, and must have comprised the royal stronghold, palace, and temple only; of the city itself not a vestige is to be seen. The platform is faced with gigantic blocks of stone, and stands out at right angles to the steep hillside. A broad flight of shallow steps leads up to it, and on it stand rows of pillars, from the bull-crowned capitals of which the double heads of the once sacred animals look forth in opposite directions. Standing around are mighty ruins, that one would imagine only machinery could have piled up. The staircases embellished with bas-reliefs, that rival those of Grecian art, the bull-flanked portals of the mighty temples, and the massive remains of the hundred-pillared audience-chamber of the great king, are fragments which I shall never be able to forget. High up on the hillsides, looking down upon the plain, are visible the rock-cut temples, or tombs of the kings. These are large chambers, hollowed out of the solid rock, which has been scarped back deep into the hillside, to form a level platform in front of the portals of the sepulchral temples.

Amongst the ruins of Persepolis I came upon an Englishman, who had been sent thither by the authorities of the British Museum to take mouldings of the more important sculptures. He had already filled some five or six cases, and was still hard at work when I met him. But he kindly offered to go over the ruins with me, and show me some underground passages in which he took an especial interest. We

followed up one or two of those subterranean alleys, which all ended abruptly in the solid rock ; but they did not interest me sufficiently to induce me to continue my explorations, more especially as my time was limited.

Just as we were about to descend the broad staircase leading to the plain, preparatory to taking our departure, an excited Persian accosted us, and besought us to enter his house and cure some relative who lay nigh unto death. It was with the greatest difficulty we got him to believe that we possessed no medical skill ; he still hung on our footsteps, and it was only when we had actually departed that he went away sorrowing. My acquaintance told me it was often thus. The natives, hearing that there is a European at Persepolis, conclude he is a physician, and bring to him from great distances the halt, the lame, and the blind, in the vain hope that, touching the hem of his garment, they may be healed.

After leaving Persepolis, our road lay through a typical Persian country—a flat plain surrounded by bleak and treeless hills—till we reached Kawamabad, where there is a fine new caravansera. Although it had been but recently built, it required a few minor repairs, which in all probability it will never get. This apathy of the Government in keeping up buildings which private philanthropy has founded for the benefit of the community is much to be regretted. Bridges are undermined by rivers, roads are swept away by floods, and causeways subside below the level of the marsh, while the local governor exacts the uttermost farthing in revenue from an oppressed but withal contented people.

Next day these thoughts passed through my mind, as, plodding along a miry track at a slow pace, I had plenty of time for reflection. At last we got on to firmer ground, and a good gallop dispelled our gloomy meditations. We pulled up on the banks of a small stream which wound its way through the hills in a pretty defile. On emerging, we were again able to quicken our pace. By the roadside rose an old ruin, said to be the tomb of Cyrus ; farther off to the right a slender pillar stood out conspicuously, but we had not time to explore the ruins that surround it. On reaching Murghab we changed horses and set out on a rough and rocky path leading over low hills. A slight shower of rain began to fall, and the rumbling of distant thunder seemed to portend a storm. Just then three men met us, armed with the usual long thin muzzle-loading gun, and offered themselves as escort over the wild hilly country. We politely declined their offer, but they still followed us, telling us of the dangers of the road, and their own deeds of daring. They forced their unpleasant company on us for the next half-hour, but at last fell to the rear, and we soon lost sight of them on the winding road.

We were now nearing Dehbid, a village situated on a bleak wild plain to the west of the central tableland of Persia. A keen biting wind sweeping across the plain chilled me to the bone. Darkness, too, was fast approaching, and the tired horses could not be forced out of a walk. It was long ere we could descry the telegraph-office, almost hidden in a clump of reedy-looking trees, and still longer ere we reached

it, for our rate of progression became slower and slower. It is curious to note, when travelling over the barren plains of Persia, how objects in reality far away appear quite close. Again and again have I found it so, but never did I wish the long way shorter with greater fervour than I did that day.

When we at last drew up in front of the telegraph-office, the official in charge afforded us a most hearty welcome. He was a Scotsman who had lived long in Persia, and knew much of the country and its people. He told me the new Governor of Shiraz was expected to pass through the village in a day or two on his way to the provincial capital, and pointed out to me a company of about 100 soldiers, who had come from the city to form his escort. On hearing of their approach, he said, most of the villagers had fled, concealing the greater part of their household possessions, but leaving the most valuable of them in his custody. Whatever the soldiers could lay hands on in the village they seized, and the few peasants who remained had come to him in a body, telling him of their grievances, and imploring the mysterious protection of the telegraph wire.

Hoids of wandering Iliats, or Gypsies, had already begun to arrive in the district. These wanderers are said to number no less than a fifth of the population of the country, and, dotted over the bare landscape, their black tents stood prominently out. With the advance of summer they arrive in increasing numbers, causing almost as great consternation to the villagers as does the approach of the soldiers. With the advent of winter these nomads betake themselves to the low-lying plains, for the elevation of Dehbid is about 8000 feet above the sea, and the wind sweeps across the snow-covered plateau with such fury as to render an out-door existence quite impossible. Even in the month of April I found the cold so severe that I had to get a fire lit in my room, and next morning, on the road, a cold biting blast blowing across the moorland so numbed my hands that I could hardly hold my bridle reins. Descending through a deep and narrow defile, we got a little shelter, and, the sun getting up, we began to feel warmer. We now entered upon a vast plain, dominated almost throughout its length by a lofty snow-covered mountain. The views of its white peak obtained from different points, and in different lights, modifies to a small extent the monotony of the desert.

Towards evening signs of considerable cultivation began to appear, and later, amidst a green oasis, we saw the dry mud walls of Abadeh rise before us.

To a European the exterior of Persian towns is disappointing. Bleak dismal-looking mud walls succeed each other, and one passes from street to street in the vain hope that at the next corner some pleasing prospect may open out to view, but only to find the long black line of wall continued round the next bend. Let us, however, enter one of the numerous small gateways that open from the monotonous street, and mark the wonderful transformation. Before us, clothed in fresh green, lies a beautiful garden, studded with clumps of trees, where, through breaks in the foliage, we are just able to make out the pleasing

façade of the house of our host. In the centre of the garden glimmers a small rectangular tank, with sides so perfectly levelled that a gentle splash of water overtops the curb-stone, and, overflowing on all sides, seems to lend an air of coolness to the hottest day. A little jet of water shoots upwards from the centre of the miniature lake, and the spray falling gracefully downwards is blown hither and thither by puffs of wind. Fish of many kinds disport themselves in the clear water, and birds of various species congregate round this pool of water in a thirsty land. Inside, the rustling of the leaves, the falling of the water, the chirrup of the birds, and the verdure of the garden, contrast forcibly with the arid bareness of the bleak exterior.

I had been invited by the telegraph official at Abadeh to put up with him. Circumstances had forced on him a knowledge of medicine, and what he knew he had learned practically, though he had acquired a little from books. During the short time I stayed with him he performed one or two minor operations, dispensed a few medicines, and visited one or two sick persons. Though in this country he might be called a quack, in Persia such knowledge as he possesses is of the greatest benefit to the people, and such services as his, given freely and without price, tend to establish a lasting bond of fellowship between Feringhi and Moslem.

Next morning, he asked me if I should like to see his pets, and after closing all the doors of his courtyard he entered a side passage, and immediately after out sprang two large female panthers. He told me he had bought them as cubs some five years ago from a native huntsman, and since then they had been familiar friends to him. In great bounds they leaped about the yard, chasing each other, and anon returning to be caressed and fed by their owner, who stroked and brushed their glossy coats, and finally led them back to their den, an operation they submitted to most cheerfully. The pleasure of watching their gambols was not, it struck me, without a considerable spice of danger.

Horses were not procurable till next evening, when three dejected-looking brutes were brought round to the door. It was already six o'clock, and, making up our minds for a dreary, dismal ride, we set out. Darkness soon set in, and with it arose an icy wind that blew straight off the snowy ridges surrounding the plain. The horses could only move at a walk. An attempt at a faster pace had already deprived the beast on which my servant was mounted of much of the skin that ought to have covered his knees. But the longest lane has a turning, and the dreariest Persian stage an end, and moving slowly onward we at length reached the post-house of Shulgistan. Here we slept, and next day at dawn resumed our march. The same plain stretched before us, the same desert extended on every side, and situated in the midst of it lay our destination, Yezd-i-Khast, one of the most curious and picturesquely dirty villages in Persia. As we approached, we saw it standing out in muddy blackness on the treeless waste, but not until we were close upon it did we make out the peculiarity of its position. It was only when coming upon a sunken river-bed, and descending into its channel, that we found a second valley which opened to our right. Perched high on the banks,

at the acute angle formed by the meeting of the waters, loomed in front of us this fortress-looking pile. At its base the natural rock was alone visible, and then upward and upward was wall upon wall, which finally culminated in the village. Here and there were holes in the walls, meant to serve as combined chimneys, windows, and rubbish-bins, for from the external appearance of the place it was evident that the conservancy arrangements were extremely primitive, and that anything wanted to be got rid of was thrown out of these openings, where it was left either to the force of gravity to carry it downwards, or to the power of the wind to drive it into any of the numerous crevices and irregularities with which the hill was covered. Jutting out from the walls, and scattered over their whole surface, were numerous wooden verandahs, so rickety and shaky in appearance that they seemed to threaten every moment to fall down. Towering over the acute angle formed by the junction of the steep valleys, this curious-looking mud heap commanded the valley lying almost 300 feet below.

The main valley is narrow but extremely fertile, and, at the time I passed by, it was green with corn-fields. The steep banks protect the crops from the fierce winds that devastate the plains, but they also tend to conceal its verdant freshness, which only becomes apparent when one has arrived right on the cañon-like banks of the river.

Leaving this quaint old place, we continued our march over the desolate country which surrounds it. At the next stage, however, we were fortunate enough to procure good horses, and, galloping across the plain, we reached Kum-i-Shah that evening. The postmaster of this place had the Western idea of punctuality, for at six o'clock next morning we were able to mount and proceed on our journey. The city was already astir, troops of horsemen were riding out of it, a crowd on foot was flocking out of the Ispahan gate, where beggars had already taken possession of the portals, and were loud in their application for alms. Pushing our way through this motley assembly, after considerable delay we reached the open road. Already the vanguard of some large caravan had arrived, for tents had been pitched and horses picketed just outside the city walls. As we advanced, the stream grew in volume; horses, ponies, mules, and asses continued to meet us. Now comes a victoria, now a brougham, then appears a phaeton; now it is a string of horses, each carrying only the smoking apparatus of its owner. As the caravan grows denser we hear in the distance the braying of trumpets and the beat of drums; soon we discern an opening in the crowd, along which moves at a slow pace a brougham drawn by six handsome little horses. On the box sits the coachman, and at the heads of each pair of horses marches their attendant, resplendent in official attire. In front of, and alongside, the carriage ride a few horsemen who perform the duties of escort, and allow no one to approach near H.H. the new Governor of Shiraz,—for it is he who is proceeding in state to that ancient city, to take up the duties to which he has been recently appointed. A mob of about one hundred persons, mostly mounted, bring up the rear, but behind them a long line of transport still continues to drag its weary length along the road.

As I passed by, the Governor noticed me, and sent a mounted retainer

to inquire who I was, and whither I was going, and also to express H. H.'s hope that I had had all my wants supplied, and that my journey onward might be a prosperous one. I thanked the Prince for his solicitude, and informed him that I had had a very pleasant time of it in his province.

The Governor, a younger brother of the Shah, had experienced his full share of the vicissitudes of fortune. Until lately he had been an exile at Bagdad, but the king, having relented towards him, had summoned him to his capital, had loaded him with honours, and now appointed him his satrap in far-famed Shiraz.

A long and rough road led up the sides of the great hill of Kuh-i-Suffa, but, on reaching the crest of the ridge, we were rewarded with a glorious view of the ancient capital, which lay embosomed in trees at our feet. The old city presented a fair sight lit up by the misty rays of a setting sun. Its score of domes, with their beautiful tiles, seemed to flash a right royal welcome to us, and the fair winding stream at our feet lay in the tender embrace of a valley that smilingly invited us to come and pitch our tents therein. Gladly we descended, and were soon wending our way through a perfect maze of tree-shaded alleys in the Armenian suburb of Julfa. The consul had kindly invited me to put up with him during my stay, and, with tennis, dinners, and a picnic, I spent some pleasant days in Ispahan. There were at that time some fifteen Europeans in the place, and life in the old city, as at Bushire and Shiraz, was cast very much on Indian lines.

Like most Persian cities, the greater part of the town is 'made up of ruins, some grand in their decay, others vestiges only of what they have been—symbols, indeed, of a tottering empire. Times are changed, and, as the seat of a merely local governor, Ispahan has sunk to the level of an ordinary provincial city. The Shah's eldest son, the Zil-i-Sultan, still maintains a tawdry state in the dilapidated palace of the Forty Pillars; the great dome of the Madresseh, or college, still stands, bereft of many of its exquisite tiles; the vast cupola of the king's mosque still looks down upon the royal square; the splendid thirty-three-arched bridge still spans the Zende Rud; and the smaller bridge still struggles bravely against neglect; but the palace on the banks, where the great Shah Abbas died, is succumbing more readily to nature. Ichabod, how the glory is departed!—a city that was then proud of its 650,000 inhabitants can to-day boast of but 80,000.

The Armenian suburb owes its origin to the great Shah Abbas, of glorious memory, who, in 1603, desirous that his capital should become a large trading centre, arbitrarily removed the entire population of an Armenian township from the banks of the Araxes, some 800 miles away, and settled them down at the entrance to his own capital, in a new city which he called Julfa, after their old home.

Here they began to increase and flourish, till a king came who knew them not. From a city of 40,000 people Julfa has decayed to a village of 3000. Now-a-days, however, it shows signs of resuscitation, and Dr. Bruce, who has lived and worked here for twenty years, told me that, though its sons go forth to the uttermost parts of the earth, they seldom

forget their country or their people, and many of them return, like ourselves after our life's work is done, to die at home.

Besides the C.M.S. schools, there is one supported and managed entirely by Armenians. I paid it a visit, and talked in English to more than one of its scholars. This school, like the churches, is supported to a large extent by contributions received from those of the ancient race who are residing abroad, and who in this way evince their desire for the advancement of their oppressed nation.

After a stay of three very pleasant days, we left Ispahan one cool afternoon, meaning to ride only some twenty miles before evening. The weather was delightful, and the ride to Murcheh Khurt, along a good and level road, proved most enjoyable. We reached our destination earlier than we expected; but as the next stage was one of the longest on the route, we did not alter our original intention, but stopped there the night. Throughout our day's march long lines of shafts, a particularly striking feature in Persian landscape, had ever been visible. These shafts mark the courses of *kanats*, or artificial underground streams, and it is upon this system that the little irrigation practised in Persia is conducted. The spring is found on a hill slope, where the first well is sunk; from forty to fifty yards distant other wells are dug, and these are connected with each other by a tunnel, the excavated earth being drawn up and placed round the openings in circular mounds. In this way water is, by degrees, led to the surface, and then distributed to the cultivators by numerous channels above ground.

From Murcheh Khurt to Kashan there are two routes: the more direct traverses the Kulrud pass, where it rises to an elevation of 7000 feet; the other, more circuitous, has now become the post-road, as it possesses the advantage of remaining open for traffic throughout the year, while the former is constantly blocked by snow during the winter months.

It was along the post-road, of course, that my march lay, and for the next two days we traversed long dreary plains with small patches of cultivation scattered over them at long intervals; but notwithstanding the general barren appearance of the land, it is apparent that cultivated soil, wherever it is supplied with water, is extremely fertile. Although in so large a country as Persia the deficiency of rivers is remarkable, what strikes the traveller is not so much the absence of water itself as the absence of the means of storing and distributing it. Streams are allowed to lose themselves in marshes; the dissolving snow gives birth to hundreds of rivulets, the waters of which might be diverted by canals to many villages. But the inhabitants are too poor to bear the cost of doing this themselves, and the Government remains apathetic. One is never far from hills in this strange land, and it requires but a dam to be thrown across a valley, to convert many a bleak desert into a verdant garden. But little is done. The country is in a state of expectancy; it awaits either England or Russia to usher in the great awakening.

Undisturbed desert sweeps right up to the gates of Kashan, and then gives place only to the more dreary sight of acres of mud ruins. But we eventually reached the post-house, where we dismounted under a handsome stone-faced entrance. Whilst the tired horses were being un-

loaded, I went to have a look at the old city. As usual, I found it devoid of interest, but, I was told, it is still famous for its silks and brass-work. There is an entire absence of trees around the village, and indeed the same may be said of the whole country lying between Shiraz and Teheran, if the valley of the Zendeh Rud be excepted. The houses are almost entirely built of hard-baked mud, and their roofs are generally dome-shaped, so as to avoid the necessity of cross-beams of timber, for in Central Persia wood is scarce.

On the further side of the city there is a good deal of cultivation, but it disappears long before we come to the village of Sin-Sin, which is situated at the extremity of a small salt-marsh. The ground round about is so impregnated with salt that it presents a whitish appearance, and is, of course, absolutely unproductive.

At Sin-Sin we stopped the night, and next morning we started by making a long ascent. Our road thereafter threaded its way amongst hills, and later emerged on to the usual long and dreary plain. As we were scampering over the level ground, we were surprised to come upon a café, placed in an old mud ruin, almost in the centre of the plain, and far removed from any village. The proprietor came forward, and asked if we should like a cup of tea. I declined, but this was more than my servants could do, for, to a Persian, tea is much more than even whisky is supposed to be to a Scotsman. Few Persians travel without the utensils necessary to prepare their national beverage, and a *samovar* is to be found in every post-house. The tea is drunk from small glasses, holding perhaps a little more than our sherry glasses. It is highly flavoured with sugar, as many as two lumps being put into one glass, and is drunk without milk. The leaf is that of China, and throughout the northern and central provinces sugar has practically become a Russian monopoly.

Pushing onward over the plain, we soon came in sight of the gilded dome of the tomb of Fatima, flashing in the rays of a brilliant sun. Once again was I impressed with the deceptiveness of distance, for a full hour elapsed before we reached it. The rarefied atmosphere, the sharp outlines of the high hills, and the flatness of the plains, combine to deceive one in this respect. A plain that looks five miles broad may prove to be ten, while it is at all times hard to gauge its length, for as one advances new prospects keep constantly presenting themselves, the hills seem to shut in the ground over which one has just passed, and points that were conspicuous a short time ago can no longer be discerned.

As we near Kum we notice that there is much more cultivation round about it than there usually is near Persian towns, and the holy city strikes us as being of considerable mercantile importance, apart from its sacred associations. Such indeed is the case, for, as in other countries, religion and trade go hand in hand, holy-days become holidays, and religious feasts become commercial gatherings.

As we enter the city scores of storks watch our progress from the more elevated among many ruins, and, although we pass right under their quaint homes, they continue to stare at us quite unmoved. It is evident that they are regarded as sacred by the inhabitants, and are viewed with a

certain amount of awe even by the children. But the glory of Kum is the tomb of Fatima, the dome of which, covered with plates of beaten gold, is visible on all sides from great distances. Hither repair many caravans of corpses; for to be interred near the canonised Fatima is to ensure an entrance into Paradise. The method of conveying the dead hither is usually by caravans, which may consist of from five to ten mules. As we passed through the city, crossed the bridge, and got on to the new road which connects this place with Teheran, we passed one of these caravans. Evidently a few relatives of the deceased were accompanying him to his last resting-place; but such, I was assured, is not always the case, for demand creates supply, and for some time, in the larger cities, there have been contractors, who for a consideration engage to personally conduct, without the aid of relatives, the bodies of true believers to this famous *campo santo*.

Leaving Kum, we followed the new highway, which proved to be well engineered, and embanked more or less after the model of Indian roads; but driving along it one would have been terribly jolted, for in many places the metal had not been rolled, and in others there was none at all, though it was much needed. For the first twenty miles the road is fairly level, but a little later it rises to high ground, overlooking a large salt lake. Here we left the main track, and made a short descent to the water's edge. The sun had just set, and the arid banks of the lake were desolate and monotonous in the extreme. A few croaking birds informed us that all trace of life had not entirely disappeared, for they were evidently able to eke out a miserable existence on its banks. So, too, did myriads of small insects, which kept getting into our eyes, mouths, and nostrils to such an extent that at times we had to cover up our faces altogether, and trust to the intelligence of our horses to take us safely over some very uneven ground. We were not sorry when, leaving this dreary scene, we struck again into the hills, amongst which was situated the *mehman-khaneh*, or guest-house, of Aliabad. Here we put up for the night.

I was now nearing the capital, and the road thither passed through the famous "Valley of the Angel of Death," of which I had heard so much. I had seen many desolate stretches of flat plain, but nothing so absolutely unproductive and sterile as the long deserts I passed through that day.

At length we emerged from the valley, and mounting to the crest of an intervening chain of hills, caught sight of the hazy city in the distance. In front of it glittered the golden dome of the shrine of Shah Abdul Azim, and the level road winding its way through the plain could be traced almost up to the city gates. But it was a long journey to reach them, for rain soon began to fall in torrents, and our dejected steeds could with difficulty be induced to quicken their pace. Passing the mosque tomb at last, we entered a long avenue of double rows of trees, which transforms the approach to the city into a picturesque and leafy glade, through which glimpses of the not far distant town are occasionally caught. Not far off runs the only railway in Persia, which unites the mosque of Shah Abdul Azim with a station just inside the city

wall. It is a miniature railway indeed, for its length is only $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and the three small cars which usually compose the train could not for a moment be compared to our large and roomy railway carriages.

Marching under the tiled arch of the city gateway, we were soon wending our way through miles of covered bazaars. As usual, the articles displayed in front of the shops were mostly of European manufacture, but Persian products were more numerous than I had noticed them elsewhere. On emerging from this labyrinth of bazaars we came upon a street along which was laid a double line of rails, and soon a well-filled tram-car passed us. Following up the lines, we entered the artillery square, a large, open space, surrounded by buildings which are called barracks. Few soldiers, however, live in them, for both men and horses find lodgings where they can in any part of the town. In the centre is a garden, around which are placed some hundred old and rusty cannons. Leaving the square by a high gateway, a long straight street, lined with trees, opened up to our view. This road is quite Western in appearance; throughout its length are rows of lamp-posts, whilst at both sides are paths for the convenience of pedestrians, and here are located most of the European legations, including that of Great Britain.

Not far off was the house of the Assistant-Director of the Indian Government Telegraph Department, with whom it was my good fortune to put up. A round of amusement was just at its height, and dances, theatricals, and picnics were the order of the day. I had time, however, to see something of the city, and to hear much of the politics of the place. The British tobacco monopoly had been cancelled, Russian capitalists were to take over and extend the rail and tramway system, and had obtained a guarantee that no further concessions for railways were to be granted by the Shah for the next five years. Things were indeed looking bright for the Muscovite, if one could believe all that one heard; but in the society of this polyglot city politics take the place of scandal, and even the babes and sucklings lisp forth their valuable opinions as to the present relative strength of England and Russia. The city is in a state of transition. The "classes" have put on all the outward forms of our Western civilisation, and the "masses" are fast following in their wake. The change is, of course, inevitable, but none the less to be regretted. European vices are more easily learned than European virtues, and the Eastern mind, in its apathy, takes more readily to the downward path. But time will show in what it will end, for however much those in authority at Teheran may outwardly ape our Western mode of life, the internal administration of the country remains Eastern, and consequently rotten to the core, and must inevitably bring about the absorption of the country by one or two great European powers.

The city of Teheran lacks the interesting associations which hover around old age. It is modern, without many of the advantages which our modern cities possess. It was built for the convenience of a king, and clusters round the palace to which it owes its origin. Its population and trade, indeed, have become great, but as the centre of Persian political life, and as the point to which the wealth of the country is drawn, its importance is to some extent artificial. Situated in what was once a

desolate waste, the indolent Persian has found himself compelled to drive back the desert from the city walls. Long lines of *kanats* bring in water from great distances, and distribute an abundant supply throughout the city. To the north-west the everlasting snows of the Shemran range form a magnificent natural reservoir, and their culminating point, the great peak of Demavend, though forty miles away, is the crowning glory of the city.

From an architectural point of view, the modern capital is much behind the ancient. I have never seen so large a city so bare of architectural adornment. The modern Persian seems to have deteriorated, and at the present time to be incapable of making the faintest effort for the revival of literature, science, or art. The army is a perfect caricature of what European armies are. Soldiers dressed in a costume designed on the model of that worn by European forces are very frequently seen in every quarter of the city. To every European establishment three or four are attached; but should the householder wish them to remain, he must give them a small weekly wage. A more slovenly, dirty, and disreputable body of men than the regular army of H.M. the Shah of Persia I have never come across. I was informed that it numbers 34,000 men on a peace footing, and that in time of war it could be increased to more than double that number; but from the slight insight I got into Persian administration, the vaunted thousands would, I think, in time of need, dwindle down to hundreds.

Amongst the people I met in the capital was the Russian commander of one of the Persian Cossack regiments. He told me the Shah had in turn secured the military tuition of Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, and Austrians, but all of them had successively failed to work the Persian material into shape. He has now obtained the services of Russian officers as instructors to his troops; but, as far as I could judge, they do not seem to have met with any larger measure of success than their predecessors. To a great extent the fault lies with the Government, for they expect their army to be transformed into an efficient fighting-machine, and yet are unwilling to pay the money so elaborate an instrument costs now-a-days. Radical changes, too, are necessary, and these the Government fear to make.

With regret I bade adieu to my kind host, and with an official of the telegraph department set out for an eighty-mile drive to Kasvin in a *tarantass*. This description of carriage is a large clumsy box, resting on wheels, but without springs of any kind. It is of Russian origin, and is drawn by three horses yoked in Muscovite fashion, with the circular arch, so well known from pictures, high over the withers of the one in the centre. Our road throughout lay along a fairly level plain, but there had been much rain lately, and the track being a State one, and always out of repair, was furrowed and cut up to an extent almost incredible. But the great coach went thundering along, now jolting up an ascent, now hammering down an incline. We travelled from seven in the morning till nine at night, and even then our journey was not done, but we were forced to stop, as no fresh relays of horses were procurable. Early next morning, however, we drove the final stage into Kasvin, where we drew

up in front of an imposing guest-house, built originally as a halting-place for the Shah on his first journey to Europe. Here we had to take to the saddle again in order to cross the great Elburz range, which shuts Persia off from the shores of its great northern sea. Scarcely had we started when rain began to fall, and our horses proved miserable animals, who were not able to move out of a walk without considerable exertion on our part. Near the post-house of Megrah the ground began to block up, for we had now got to the base of the great range. Here we were imprisoned by the weather for the next hour and a half, when the sky began to clear. A monotonous ride lay before us, over a country that had been deluged with water for the past week. But to delay our march was impossible, for we had barely allowed ourselves time to catch the Russian steamer at Enzeli. So onward we pushed. As we were nearing the highest point of the Kharzan pass, and were marching along a wild chasm in the mountains, we noticed indications of a renewal of the storm on the hills beyond. Soon clouds came sweeping down the hillsides, and we were enveloped in a thick mist that almost turned the light of day into gloomy darkness. Thunder began to re-echo through the hills, and before long the storm in all its fury broke over our heads; torrents of rain descended, and vast sheets of hail, driven along the narrow defile by a wind which had increased to a hurricane, beat against our hands and faces, and numbed every limb. It was useless to attempt to push on: our horses would not face the elements, nor were we able to compel their obedience. Cascades of water leapt from every hillside; the noise of many waters, the biting blast, and the hills reverberating with peals of thunder drowned human speech. Silent on the hilltops we stood, mute spectators of a grand but awful scene.

At last the fury of the storm began to abate, and we were able to make an onward move. We had not proceeded far, when, rounding a bend in the mountain path, we came upon the caravansara of Kharzan. Our chagrin can be imagined, for, had the post-boy but told us of the nearness of the village, we should have pushed on before the storm broke, and taken shelter under the roof of the caravansara till the fury of the tempest had abated.

In this shelter we remained for an hour, and a drizzling rain was still falling when we recommenced our march. A long and difficult descent lay before us, for the Kharzan pass is 7000 feet above the level of the Caspian Sea. We were now in a region of mountains and rivers. Every valley gives birth to a rivulet, and every hillside contributes a rill to swell its volume. Trees begin to make their welcome re-appearance, and the slopes of the hills are clothed with verdure. On one side of the range is the high Persian tableland we know so well, on the other is a new, and totally different country—a land of forest and of flood, a land of emerald greenness and luxuriant vegetation.

The change is sudden, but easily accounted for; for the high hills over which we had just passed intercept the rain-bearing clouds from the Caspian, and cause them to precipitate their moisture before they pass over to the bleak Persian plains.

Gradually we descended to the main valley, and as darkness was

closing around us we forded the stream, and entered the post-house of Vauchénar, which stands upon its further banks.

The great valley by which the Sufid Rud has cleft a passage to the sea is one of the grandest of Nature's works I have ever seen. The turbulent stream, swollen by recent rains, hurled itself headlong through the valley, foaming as if in anger at the great hills which confine it to so narrow a bed. At one point, where a tiny tributary entered the great river, the road had entirely disappeared. The rivulet, dammed back by the impetuosity of the main current, had caused the banks of the road to subside, and with the greatest difficulty we were able to find the muddy inlet thus formed. Our horses floundered about, up to their bodies in slime, trying at point after point to effect a crossing; but for a long time all efforts were in vain. At last success crowned our attempts, and cautiously, in Indian file, we waded through the mud and reached the further bank. But our troubles were not yet over, for about a couple of miles lower down, where the valley broadened out, and where the road to Resht leaves the cañon-like channel of the Sufid river, no trace of our path could be discovered. All was one great sea of mud, from which a primeval forest excluded the rays of a setting sun. Trees torn up by their roots were scattered around, and great logs of timber lay half-buried in the slimy mud. We soon lost our way, and the darkness of night threatened to envelop us before we got clear of this labyrinth. The post-boy seemed to wander aimlessly through the maze, letting his horse plant his feet wherever he could discover hard ground. At last we were able to make out an opening in the trees, and on reaching this glade found that a good level road stretched along it. That night we had not to court balmy sleep, for he almost overtook us in our saddles.

Next day we had the luxury of a two-hours' drive in a victoria, along a good road from Resht to Pir-i-Bazaar. Here we embarked in a small boat, and were towed down a narrow, ditch-like stream by some half-dozen men. We passed many small craft *en route*, and an hour after starting entered the large lagoon, where, spreading our sail to the breeze, we sped across the intervening waters. At last we reached the goal towards which we had been working for the past month, and lowered our sail in the haven of Enzeli, on the shores of the mighty Caspian. Our journey across Persia was accomplished.
