

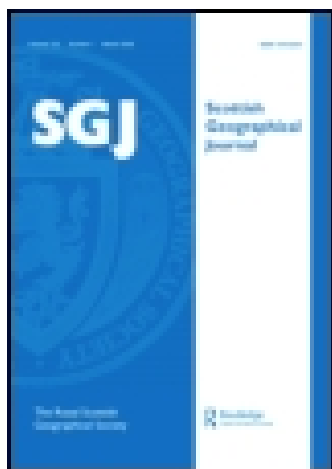
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### Anniversary address: The upper Karun region and the Bakhtiari lurs.

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# THE SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE.

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## ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS.

### THE UPPER KARUN REGION AND THE BAKHTIARI LURS.<sup>1</sup>

(Read at Meetings of the Society, Edinburgh and Glasgow, Nov. 1891.)

BY MRS. BISHOP, F.R.S.G.S.

(With a Map and Illustration.)

I WILL not spend any of the time allotted to me in apologising for my very slender claim to the honour of having been asked by the Council of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society to address you to-night, or in an explanation of how I came to visit a part of unexplored Luristan, or of the circumstances of my journey, but will merely remark that the traveller may consider himself fortunate who finds any portion of Western Asia in which the track has not been previously beaten by geographical research or commercial enterprise.

The subject, however, requires, if not an apology, at least an explanation on the lines which Sir Robert Smith<sup>2</sup> has just indicated. Without one it would scarcely seem fitting that a mountainous region devoid of permanent inhabitants, a river whose abundant upper waters can neither be utilised for irrigation nor navigation, and nomadic and semi-savage tribes, without the instinct of progress, should occupy the attention of this Society at the opening meeting of the session.

The interest attaching to the Bakhtiari country and its people is, in the first place, one of pure commercial selfishness, or, as it may be

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<sup>1</sup> The Editors are indebted to Mr. John Murray, of Albemarle Street, London, for the use of the accompanying sketch-map of the Bakhtiari country and engraving of the reputed source of the Karun River, taken from Mrs. Bishop's recently published work, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Robert M. Smith presided over the Anniversary Meeting.—ED.

stated, of lofty commercial ambition, and, in the second, is connected with certain political contingencies.

The concession made by the Shah of Persia in 1888 of the free navigation of the Karun as far as Ahwaz, and the subsequent permission to run steamers between Ahwaz and Shuster have hitherto been nearly barren of practical results, and, in the meantime, Russia, our great commercial rival in Persia, has been making use of her advantages of proximity to extend her commerce in every direction, to such an extent that on my Persian journey of about 2000 miles, there was seldom a hamlet or camp, however remote from the great caravan routes, in which her wares were not to be seen.

It is easy to circumvent the rapids at Ahwaz, but not so easy to surmount the huge barrier of the Bakhtiari Mountains, an obstacle which cannot be turned, and to ensure the safety of caravans from the attacks of the predatory hordes of the Feili Lurs. Several Indian officers, General Schindler of the Persian service, Mr. Baring, Mr. Blosse Lynch, and Mr. MacKenzie, have traversed and described some of the great passes by which the Iranian plateau can be reached from Shuster; but in spite of hopeful reports and the proffered co-operation of a predecessor of the present *Ilkhani* of the Bakhtiaris, it was obvious to the practical commercial mind that passes varying in altitude from 7000 to 11,500 feet, and blocked by snow for three or four months of the year, could never form a highway for British goods.

These elevated routes have lately lost their importance in consequence of a concession granted to an English company to construct a cart-road from Ahwaz to Burugird through the Gap of Khuramabad, the highest altitude on which will not be much above 5000 feet. This road is to be completed in two years, and, if the Persian Government shows itself capable of keeping the predatory tribes in order, a new era for British commerce in Persia may be confidently expected, and British goods, no longer handicapped in the race with Russia by the horrible rock ladders of Shiraz and the exactions and obstructions of Turkish officialism on the Baghdad and Trebizond routes, will reach the great distributing-centres of the interior by easy land and water carriage, through Persian territory solely. May this peaceful rivalry with Russia be the only one in which Britain will ever be engaged!

The second point of interest is that more than one careful writer has expressed the view that, in the event of certain contingencies, ten or twelve thousand Bakhtiari horsemen might prove valuable auxiliaries to a British force, and such contingencies are to the Indian official mind quite within the region of "practical politics." The Bakhtiari chiefs profess great friendliness for England, but, without trespassing on the domain of *les hautes politiques*, I may say, from what I have seen of them, my own opinion is that, if a collision were to occur in South-West Persia between two powers which shall be nameless, the Bakhtiari light horsemen would be sold to the highest bidder.

Three British officers, General Schindler, and two pioneers of commercial enterprise, were my predecessors over some of the earlier portions of the route; Mr. Stack, of the Indian Civil Service, previously reached

the reputed source of the Karun by a shorter cut from Ispahan, and Sir H. Layard and Sir H. Rawlinson, although they touched the route now to be described only at Khuramabad, turned the light of modern research upon the Bakhtiari in their winter homes in Khuzistan. The greater part of the route taken by the small party which I joined was previously, so far as is known, untraversed by Europeans.

We left Julfa at the end of April of last year, my section of the caravan consisting of my own saddle-horse, four mules, carrying besides my Persian cook, Indian interpreter, and ordinary baggage, three tents and provisions for forty days. I carried letters from the *Amin-es-Sultan*, the Persian Prime Minister, to the *Ilkhani* of the Bakhtiari and others, which were to secure a safe-conduct and escorts through the country, but the prophecies of the reception to be met with were of the most doleful description.

The route taken lay through the fertile valley of the Zainderud, with its 300 villages, each village an oasis, and each oasis a paradise as seen in the first flush of spring, and over the Kahva Rukh Pass into the Chahar-Mahals, a district sprinkled with Armenian and Persian villages, under Bakhtiari rule, but geographically Persian.

There, while camped close to the village of Kahva Rukh, on a bright moonlight night, I had a specimen of the dexterity of Persian thieves, followed by an illustration of the celerity of Bakhtiari justice, for I was robbed of the money for a four months' journey, being left literally penniless, but in one week the money was restored by the *Ilkhani*, the feudal head of the Bakhtiari, having been levied, according to their custom, on the village where the robbery occurred. The thief, when caught, was liable to have either his right or left hand cut off, the choice as to the dismemberment being referred to me.

Crossing the Kuh-i-Sukta range by the Zirreh Pass, at an altitude of 8300 feet, in deep snow, the Bakhtiari country proper was entered: *i.e.* that region of mountainous Luristan in which the powerful nomadic Bakhtiari Lurs have their summer pasturages—a region of lofty ranges, of deep valleys and gorges through which abundant waters take their impetuous course, of dark forests and grassy uplands, of blood-feuds and tribal wars, and of pastoral clans moving with great flocks and herds.

Journeys of forty-six days over wastes of snow, and of eighteen over wastes of gravel, enhanced the charm of the wild nomad land as seen from the crest of Zirreh. Far below lay the deep valley of Seligun, where long grass and ranunculuses rippled in waves of steel and gold, and a million corollas in the glory of their brief but passionate life drank in the sunshine. Emerald lawns starred with white tulips sloped upwards till they met the snows; twin lakes brought the blue of heaven down to earth; the *Fritillaria imperialis* stained the hill-sides terra-cotta and crimson, and the enchanting picture was set in a frame of mountain ranges glorious in unsullied snow.

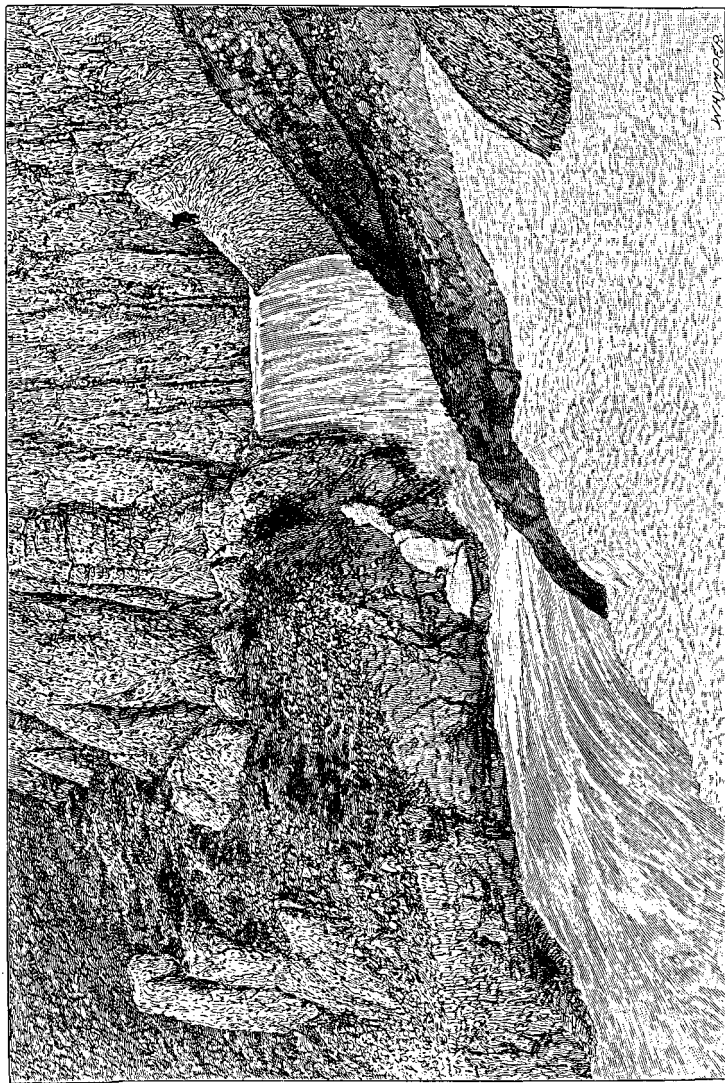
Crossing the Naghun range, we descended on the great Ardal plateau, on which the *Ilkhani* has a spring residence, half fort, half caravansary, and after spending a week in making the acquaintance of the leading

Bakhtiari chiefs, arranging for supplies, etc., some time was spent in tracing the course of the Karun from its departure by a huge chasm from the Ardal plateau to its arrival at Dupulan, below which point its singular windings have been repeatedly investigated. Several of its larger affluents, notably the Sabzu, were followed up to their sources, and the great ranges of the Kaller-Kuh and the Sabz-Kuh were traced to their joint termination in the gigantic headland of Sultan Ibrahim, which, from an altitude of 12,000 feet, looks down upon the great plain of Khana Mirza, on which are 100 villages of the Janniki tribe, a rare instance of the nomads betaking themselves to a settled life.

Descending upon the plain of Gandaman in the Chahar-Mahals by the pass of Wastagun, and re-entering the Bakhtiari country, we spent ten days on the elevated plain of Chigakhor, the summer camping-ground of the *Ilkhani* and of the *Ilbegi*, the second in command, and the summer centre of Bakhtiari life. About that time the *Ilkhani* plotted the destruction of the *Ilbegi*, and their rival retainers were on the verge of war. In no other way than by the difficulty which both felt in dispensing with the services of any of their horsemen under such critical circumstances can the fact be accounted for that the orders of the *Amin-es-Sultan*, which represented those of the Shah, were disregarded, and that we were left to make our way from Chighakhor to Khuramabad without any escort at all, though such a proceeding had been pronounced absolutely impossible, both at Tihiran and Ispahan. The *Ilkhani* is reported as having said on another occasion that "an Englishman under the cloak of a merchant was apt to conceal the uniform of a soldier." Later we were joined by Haidar Khan, a petty chief, who was useful in obtaining guides and supplies. Owing to this crooked dealing on the subject of escorts, we were considerably robbed, and were exposed to many risks, such as being fired on by bodies of tribesmen; and I brought little besides my life out of the Bakhtiari country. Starting a second time from Ardal for a journey chiefly in the region of the Upper Karun and its affluents, the Karun was traced, wherever the nature of its bed admitted of it, from Ardal up to the Sar Cheshmeh-i-Kurang, its reputed source, a noble fountain spring at an altitude of 8000 feet on the side of the magnificent Zard-Kuh range, and afterwards to what was proved to be its actual source, considerably higher, in the Kuh-i-Rang mountain.

The Karun was found, even from its birth, to be a formidable river, from 50 to 100 yards in width, fordable only close to its source, and that only in dry seasons; its full, deep, peacock-green waters flowing majestically between banks oftentimes nearly perpendicular, from 1000 to 3000 feet in height, and cleaving mountain ranges whose snowy summits attain altitudes of 12,000 and 13,000 feet.

At one point, the Karun, after pursuing "the even tenor of its way" with a width of fully 100 yards, is contracted between high conglomerate cliffs to a narrowness of 9 ft. 6 in., where it is bridged by the Pul-i-Alikuh, a cradle of boughs full of stones. Elsewhere on its upper course pointed stone arches are occasionally thrown across it. Its passage through the mountains is marked by prodigious sinuosities. It takes 250 miles to run from its source in the Kuh-i-Rang to Shuster, a direct distance of



THE REPUTED SOURCE OF THE KARUN.

only 75 miles. The well-known branches of its principal affluent, the Ab-i-Diz (the Kamandab and the Ab-i-Burugird), were found to yield in importance to two previously unexplored branches, the Gokun and Guwa; one of which drains the Persian district of Faraïdan. The Abi-i-Diz is a very important river, both as to the size of its tributaries and the area which it drains before it unites with the Karun at Bandikir. One of its head-waters rises in the Kuh-i-Rang, and there also is found the source of the Zainderud, or River of Ispahan, which was formerly placed in the Zard-Kuh range.

The conjectural altitudes of a region previously untraversed by Europeans were brought down by some thousands of feet, a summary process which involved the disappearance of the eternal snows with which rumour had crested them, and fabulous heights were compelled to descend to modest elevations probably nowhere much exceeding 13,000 feet.

The great ranges of the Kuh-i-Sukhta, the Kuh-i-Girreh, the Sabz-Kuh, and the Kuh-i-Rang were crossed and recrossed by passes from 8,000 to 11,000 feet in altitude, by sheep and goat tracks often so ledgy and rugged as to justify the muleteers in declaring that "since the world was made laden mules had never been taken over them." Many of the mountains were ascended, and the deep valleys between them, with their full-watered peacock-green or peacock-blue streams, were followed up wherever it was possible to do so. A lake of marvellously coloured water, something under three miles in length and a mile in width, of prodigious depth, and with a persistent level, was found to occupy a hollow at the inner foot of the Shuturun-Kuh, and, being without a native name, was marked on the map as Lake Irene.

The accompanying sketch-map (for the materials for which I am indebted to the Indian authorities) represents an area of 15,000 square miles, lying, roughly speaking, between  $31^{\circ}$  and  $34^{\circ}$  of north latitude, and between  $48^{\circ}$  and  $51^{\circ}$  of east longitude. The distance between Khana Mirza in the SE. to Khuramabad in the NW. is about 300 miles. The distance actually travelled was about 700 miles.

I will now ask you to give your attention to the Kuh-i-Rang or "Variegated Mountain," which is in many respects the most important point on the map. It is not only the greatest group of peaks in the Bakhtiari country, and the parent of three of Persia's most important rivers, but it stands there as a huge knot, demarcating two distinct systems of drainage, "and coincidently forming the boundary of two ethnographical areas," that to the SE. having been termed by a competent authority, the "Bakhtiari Country," and that to the NW. "Upper Elam." By the same authority, for the purpose of convenient reference, the range which descends upon the Iranian plateau, and which is pierced by two *tangs* or rifts, one for the exit of the Zainderud towards Ispahan, and the other for the ingress of the Darkash Warkash, which brings the drainage of an area of 2500 square miles in the Chahar-Mahols to join the Karun, was termed the "Outer Range;" and the range which eventually descends upon the plains of Khuzistan, and is pierced for the exit of the Karun at Dupulan, was termed the "Inner Range."



From the map it will be seen that the Bakhtiari Mountains are mostly parallel ranges, running SE. and NW., the streams which carry off their waters flowing through valleys which have the same direction. It is a land of walls and clefts, but the formation is orderly and intelligible.

At the Kuh-i-Rang, however, a change takes place, and the rivers, instead of running parallel to the main ranges, cut them across at short intervals. By this means Nature arbitrarily alters the characteristics of travel. Up to this point the tracks, such as they are, follow the valleys by easy gradients; beyond it the traveller is confronted by innumerable and horrible ascents and descents of three, four, and even five thousand feet, and by deep and rocky fords.

It is only possible to pass from the Bakhtiari Country to Upper Elam by two passes, both over 10,000 feet in altitude, one to the north, the other to the south of the Kuh-i-Rang; but the tribesmen seldom, and then only in armed companies, run the risk of crossing either of them. This mountain also divides the drainage-areas of the Karun and the Ab-i-Diz. I may add that, up to that point, the nomads had been, on the whole, friendly—beyond it they were suspicious and occasionally hostile.

The parallel ranges, specially the Zard-Kuh, have a continuity and steep-sidedness beyond all conception. They are rarely broken up into peaks, the Kuh-i-Rang, the Kuh-Shahan, and the Shuturun-Kuh being separate mountains. Fair, flowery alpine plateaux occur at great heights, and the wider valleys are both pastoral and arable. Much of the region, including the whole of the outer slopes of the "Outer Range," is absolutely treeless, producing nothing fit for fuel except two species of *astragalus*, which under the wastefulness and destructiveness of savage life are growing scarcer every year. But in many places, from the long crest of the Outer Range to the outer slopes of the Inner Range, there are extensive forests of small trees, consisting mainly of a wizened oak, the *Quercus ballota*, which produces acorns three inches long, largely used for food, and the pear, cherry, walnut, jujube, and willow.

The flowers of the country are innumerable, and include many medicinal herbs. Among the economic plants are the *Centaurea alata* and *Eryngium cœruleum*, invaluable as fodder, a gigantic species of celery, which furnishes food for man and beast, the *Ferula asafetida*, the blue flax, and liquorice root. Among 300 plants which were collected, many are said to possess great botanical interest.

The country appeared poor in minerals. In one place a substance which burned freely in the camp fires—but whether coal or bituminous shale is for the geologists to decide—was found in abundance; there were suggestions of iron; bituminous limestone occurred frequently; and close to the Ab-i-Diz, at the lowest altitude touched on the journey, there were some insignificant bitumen springs. Gypsum is abundant, and salt streams as well as salt springs occur. I heard of deposits of sulphur used by the natives in making gunpowder, but did not see them.

The climate is superlatively healthy. There are no malarious swamps, and the water is usually pure. The heat begins in early June, and lasts till the end of August, during which period the mercury frequently

touched 100° in the shade, even at altitudes of 7000 feet; but the nights are cool, and greenery and abounding waters are a refreshing contrast to the verdureless hills and arid plains of Persia proper. I should think that the rainfall is scarcely measurable. The snowfall is apparently excessive, and the winter temperatures are presumably low, but I refrain from hazarding any conjectures on either.

The *fauna* appears very limited, and game of all kinds very scarce.

There are few indications of ancient history, and the tribal legends are too hazy and scanty to be of any value, but in "Upper Elam" there are remains of well-built bridges of hewn stone, and of at least one ancient road, which must have been trodden by the soldiers of Alexander the Great and Valerian, and it is not improbable that the rude forts which occur here and there, and which the natives attribute to mythical heroes of their own race, may have been built to guard Greek and Roman communications.

I need scarcely apologise to the members of a Geographical Society for the length to which my geographical notes, brief and scanty as they are, have run. They are intended to convey an idea of a rugged and uplifted region, of lofty ranges, peaks, and precipices; of watered valleys and alpine pastures; of torrents thundering through sunless rifts, and of untenanted forests on vast hill-slopes—the summer country of the Bakhtiari Lurs, the grand stage on which these nomad players fret out their little lives, leaving scarcely a trace behind.

In early May the traveller, passing through what at that time is an absolutely lonely land, is astonished to find villages and hill-slopes covered with grain crops and intersected with irrigation ditches, not here and there, but wherever water is procurable, and he naturally asks, "Where are the sowers and the reapers?"

The answer comes in the middle of May, when every track leading up from the warm plains, which are the winter camping-grounds of the tribes, is a thronged highway, up which, in endless procession by day and night, stream sheep, goats, cattle, big dogs, mares with foals, fowls tied by one leg on donkeys' backs, men with long guns, women, and children, small oxen and asses laden with household goods, tents of goats'-hair cloth, and all the paraphernalia of nomadic life in copper, wood, and leather, the only materials which bear the strain of such an existence. By the first of June the valleys and hill-pastures are peopled; every plateau and ravine has its village of tents, and at night the camp-fires gleam like the lights of cities. Estimates of the population vary very widely, but taking my own, made with much care from data furnished to me by the khans, I should say that by the middle of June nearly 200,000 people have spread themselves over the country, to migrate southwards in October, sowing the grain before they depart, and reaping it in the following summer. The land, "which is as the garden of Eden before them, is behind them a desolate wilderness;" every stalk of herbage has disappeared, and were it not that on their upward march they cut and stack the *Centaurea alata* and the great celery leaves, their flocks and herds would perish on the return journey.

The Bakhtiari Lurs have made these two annual migrations from time

immemorial, and the only roads are the tracks which have been worn by the passage of their flocks and herds. Their camping-grounds are strictly defined by tribal custom, and each camp comes up with its *ketchuda* or headman and social organisation complete, taking up its position like a division of an army.

It had been said in Tihran and Julfa, by the only people who were supposed to know anything about the Bakhtiari, that it would be absolutely impossible for a lady to travel among them without meeting with insult, and that, my presence would produce complications and difficulties. It was owing chiefly to the goodwill and approval of the British Minister in Tihran that I was permitted to undertake the journey, and that only on the understanding that, if any of the troubles occurred which were predicted, I should return to Ispahan at once.

I may here say that not one of these prophecies was fulfilled. I was robbed, it is true, but never met with any rudeness or insult; and great as must have been the curiosity to see the first European woman who had penetrated these mountain fastnesses, not a Bakhtiari man or even boy ever raised the curtain of my tent.

The chief interest of the country to me was its people. On the journey nearly every tribe was visited in its own encampments, and my evenings were usually spent in learning from the people their customs, beliefs, and habits. It is with humble apologies to the members of the medical profession who are present for an intrusion on their province, that I confess that, in virtue of a medicine-chest presented to me by Messrs. Burroughs and Wellcome, a few surgical appliances, and a little elementary experience, which, aided by considerable faith on the part of my victims, had wrought some cures, the servants had bestowed on me the title of *Hakim*, and the fame of the Feringhi *hakim* soon spread among the tribes, bringing crowds of "patients" to my tent during all the hours of daylight. The "leather box" became famous; rumour, indeed, invested it with a gold key, and it was believed to contain not only specifics for all ailments, but love-philters, and potions for rendering favourite wives ugly and odious. I mention it, chiefly because it not only brought me much goodwill, but into friendly and familiar contact with the people—so friendly, indeed, that I was frequently urged to stay among them to teach them "the wisdom of the Feringhis," and cure their mares and mules as well as themselves.

On the whole they took the medicines with much docility, except in one or two cases where they said that they wanted "Feringhi ointment," but "nothing that went down the throat," some saying that I should poison them, others that anything they swallowed "would make Christians of them." The distribution of eye-lotions and medicines was beset with difficulties. Of course they had no medicine-bottles, and very often a copper jug holding one or two gallons was brought for an ounce of eye-lotion, while the very poor with much complacency produced egg-shells for the same purpose. I generally felt convinced that the eye-lotions would be swallowed, and that the medicines would be put into the eyes. Some would not take medicine from a *Kafir's* hand without purifying the cup first by rinsing it with water in which a verse from the Koran was steeped.

The Bakhtiaris are a very healthy people. None of the dreadful diseases common among the Persians afflict them, and consumption seems unknown. Their chief maladies are dyspepsia, rheumatism (wind in the bones), headaches (wind in the head), epilepsy, of which they have no horror, ophthalmia and its results, and a few simple skin-diseases, the result of want of cleanliness. Nevertheless, longevity, as we understand it, seems unknown, and a man of sixty is "very old indeed."

They know nearly nothing of the virtues of their medicinal herbs, though for wounds they use an astringent paste, made of a small gall-nut powdered. To snake bites they apply the intestines of a newly killed goat, and keep the bitten person moving about. For dyspepsia and rheumatism they sew the sufferer up in the warm skin of a newly killed sheep; for deafness the ears are filled with warm blood, or the deaf person drinks warm blood taken from behind the ear of a mare; and they fill the nostrils of the dying with a paste made of moist mud and a powdered aromatic herb. I did not see any Bakhtiari doctors, so the "leather box" was not the cause of any unpleasant rivalries.

At Chigakhor a chief of Janniki tribe came to my tent to ask me to go with him a three days' journey, to cure his wife's eyes. He had brought baggage and saddle-horses, a tent and escort, and said that I should have neither expense nor risk if I would go. He was greatly disappointed when I told him that from his description of the symptoms his wife's eyes were far beyond my simple remedies. A question he asked led to Christ the Healer being mentioned, on which he became very thoughtful, and after a time said, "You call him Master and Lord: He was a great prophet, *send us a hakim in His likeness*,"—the briefest and best description of a true medical missionary which was ever given.

The Bakhtiaris, though they speak a dialect of Persian, disclaim Persian origin, and assert that they came from Syria. Physically they are a very fine race. In the course of a summer, I never saw among them a dwarfish, deformed, or idiotic person. The height of the men is from 5 ft. 6 in. to 5 ft. 10 in., of the women from 5 ft. 2 in. to 5 ft. 6 in. The measurements of forty adult male heads, taken at random, give an average circumference of  $20\frac{8}{10}$  in. and over the arc from ear to ear of  $11\frac{1}{10}$  in. The complexions are not darker than those of the nations of central Italy. The eyebrows and noses are straight, the eyes and hair dark, the mouths wide, the lips thin, and the chins long. The foreheads are broad and well developed, the ears are small, the teeth small, white, and regular, the men's beards are full, and the hair of both sexes is straight and abundant. The men are fairly good-looking, and there are few women who have not narrowly escaped being handsome. All are well made, and walk with a firm elastic stride.

The male costume is that of the Persians. The women wear full trousers drawn in at the ankles, short loose jackets, and handkerchiefs pinned to their hair, which is usually jet-black, and well cared for, the application of a paste of powdered henna leaves, succeeded by one of indigo every twenty days, replacing the natural tint by a blue-black tinge. Both sexes are civilised enough to be clothed in Manchester cottons.

The Bakhtiaris are polygamists, and both Negro and Persian women

are found in their households. Among the peasantry of Persia and Turkey poverty brings with it the blessing of monogamy; but among these pastoral tribes the labour of women is essential, and as it is "contrary to Bakhtiari custom" to employ female servants who are not wives, a man, however poor, is usually the husband of three or four women.

The higher chiefs, who have been in Tihran, follow Persian custom and seclude their women so far as is possible; but the wives of the ordinary tribesmen are neither secluded nor veiled, and have a good deal of "say" in the camps. They perform the harder and larger part of the work. The men beat them when they are angry with them, and when they got in their way or mine they kicked them out of it as unscrupulously as rough men kick their dogs under similar circumstances; but otherwise they are not badly treated, and the birth of a girl, though not the occasion of festivities, is cordially welcomed. Infanticide is unknown, and the rate of infant mortality appears to be very low. The Bakhtiaris have strong parental affections, and tenderness to their children is among their best points.

The women pitch and strike the tents, milk the sheep, goats, and cows, churn, clarify butter, attend to the young of the flocks and herds, cook, draw water, and weave rugs and cloth of goat's hair. It is to the credit of these nomads that a woman can traverse their country unattended, and is always and everywhere safe even during the fiercest inter-tribal conflicts.

Their tents are usually mere open-sided canopies, in which privacy is unknown. They are pitched in groups, rows, circles, semi-circles, and streets, according to the size of the camp. Bakhtiari wealth is pastoral; the intermittent agricultural pursuits are of recent origin. The Bakhtiaris live on the produce of their flocks and herds, with the addition of leavened cakes made of wheat and acorn flour, and the huge underground stems of the wild celery, both fresh and pickled in sour milk.

They not only sow and harvest crops, but, nomadic and semi-savage as they are, they weave carpets of dyed wool in artistic patterns, and make goat's-hair tent-cloth, rugs, horse furniture, and socks of intricate designs, and understand to some extent the advantages of trade, exporting not only colts, mules, and sheep, but manna, gall-nuts, charcoal, clarified butter, and cherry sticks for pipes. But on the whole they appeared very poor, and under the tightening grip of Persia, which means to them increasing exactions and misrule, they seem to be growing poorer every year.

The legitimate tribute paid through the *Ilkhani* to the Shah probably averages 15 shillings per tent annually, but all the Khans complained that the life is being crushed out of the people by the merciless exactions of the provincial authorities. They agreed in stating that when they decline to pay more than the sum fixed by the *Amin-es-Sultan*, troops are sent among them, who drive off the mares, flocks, and herds, to the extent of many times the sum demanded. A tribute insurrection on a larger or smaller scale is a recurring autumnal event. The tribesmen complain to some extent of the exactions of their chiefs, and the statements of the Khans may be true in part only; but a report to the Foreign Office presented to

Parliament in the spring of 1891 gives an official stamp to accounts of precisely the same extortions practised upon the Feili Lurs. The infamies of Turkish administration are undoubtedly repeated by Persia in her western provinces, and, under a system which in plain English is execrable, the Bakhtiari Lurs and the Persian peasantry occupy much the same unenviable position. They are alike the ultimate sponge to be squeezed by all above them. Every official squeezes the man below him, and the highest are squeezed by the Crown.

The various Bakhtiari tribes are ruled by hereditary Khans, who are supreme within certain limits, and beneath them are the headmen of camps, who are or ought to be elective. Some years ago the Khans, for mutual protection, agreed to become united under one head, the *Ilkhani*, who is appointed by the Shah, and who is responsible for the tribute and for the good order of the region. This arrangement sounds well, but it must be a strong man indeed who could coerce these wild armed clans. The recent *Ilkhanis* have not been strong men, and the tribes are in a constant state of embroilment. Certain of them are predatory by tradition and habit, and probably there are few among the Bakhtiaris who would hesitate to deprive a Kafir of his goods if a favourable opportunity presented itself.

Justice is in a rudimentary state, and is executed by the *Ilkhani* and the Khans. Punishments are retributive and deterrent. Robbery from a guest of the *Ilkhani* is punishable by branding or by cutting off a hand; a man-killer under certain circumstances is handed over to the relations of the slain person, who may kill him, pardon him, or exact blood-money; and a faithless wife is punishable with death.

The Bakhtiari Country is pre-eminently a country of "blood-feuds," and they create one of the difficulties of travelling, for at critical moments the guides decline to proceed further, saying that they have reached the boundaries of another tribe between which and theirs "there is blood." These feuds are created in various ways, and are of three kinds. In the first, if there is blood between one tribe and another, it is lawful for a man of the one to kill a man of the other wherever he finds him; in the second, the foemen only drive off each other's cattle and harry each other's goods; in the third, "boycotting" is resorted to—that is, supplies and passage through the territory are refused to men of the other tribe, who, to quote a famous phrase, are let "severely alone." These feuds are a heritage which descends from generation to generation, and involve annually a considerable sacrifice of life.

The men are expert horsemen and capital marksmen, though they are armed only with Persian smooth-bore guns, very long, some of them being matchlocks of an antique pattern. A few of the Khans possess British rifles, and carry revolvers in addition, but many of their followers fight with long knives and clubs or loaded sticks only. The Bakhtiaris love war; their talk is of guns and warlike exploits, and intertribal fighting is continually going on. We came into contact with it more than once after passing the Kuh-i-Rang. Among the spurs of the Shuturun-Kuh I witnessed parts of a battle between two tribes, which lasted the whole of a long summer day; but though considerable

bodies of men were engaged, and the firing was incessant, and the war yells gave the impression of extreme ferocity, only a few men were seen to fall. There was scarcely a camping-ground in which bullet-wounds were not brought to me in my capacity of *hakim*, and I was not a little surprised at the readiness with which men sought the aid of so inferior a being as a woman, till I learned that almost the only doctors among the Bakhtiaris are women, some of whom have great repute as bullet extractors.

The desire for the acquisition of European fire-arms, and the general readiness with which the tribesmen use their own, brought us into serious peril, and on two occasions we narrowly escaped with our lives. On the second, we were riding up a slope of the Kuh-i-Parwez, with the caravan a short distance in the rear, when, after some suspicious circumstances, a crowd of tribesmen crowned the crest of a low pass which we had to cross, and fired upon us. Seeing our assailants re-loading hurriedly, we scattered a little to the right and left, but continued to ride slowly forwards. Then there was a second volley—so well directed that some of the bullets whistled over us and struck the ground among us. A bullet from an English rifle, fired over the heads of the Polarwands made them pause, and Haidar Khan, our sole attendant, rode slowly up the hill under the muzzles of thirty guns to parley with them.

The affair ended well, but had blood been shed on either side, and had one of us been killed, it would always have been supposed that some provocation had been given on our side. Some of the men who fired on us came to my tent in the evening for eye lotion, and when I asked them what they meant by the attack, they first said that they thought we were going to assail their camps. To another they said that they took us for Hadjwands (a hostile tribe); but when it was demonstrated to them that Hadjwands do not ride on English saddles, or carry white umbrellas, or travel with Persian muleteers, they changed their ground again, and to me said that if they had known that I was a *hakim* they would not have fired. I believe that the truth was, that if we had turned, or had shown the white feather in any way, as they expected, they were prepared to double up our caravan between two parties, and rob it at leisure of the fire-arms and ammunition which it was supposed to contain.

I must now content myself with a hasty glance at their religion, though their marriage and funeral rites, and some of their other customs, present peculiarities of an interesting kind. On the subject of religion the Bakhtiaris were on the whole tolerably communicative, except when the women said, "We have no religion, for we shall not live again," or when a man would stalk contemptuously away, saying, "What can a Kafir know of God?" I asked an intelligent man if he thought a *Kafir* could reach Paradise. He replied, "Oh no!" very hastily, but after a minute's thought, added, "I don't know; God knows. He doesn't think as we do. He may be more merciful than we think. If *Kafirs* fear God, they may have some Paradise to themselves; we don't know;" but on another day the same Khan asserted dogmatically that "it is impossible for a *Kafir* to perform a good action."

The Bakhtiaris are nominally Moslems of the Shiah sect, and though not *Ali-Ilahis* like their neighbours, the Feili Lurs, they regard Ali as second to Mohammed, if not absolutely his equal. They hold the unity of God, that Mohammed is his prophet, and Ali his lieutenant. They are grossly ignorant and fanatical, and their religion really appears to be a combination of a few of the tenets of Islam with relics of a rude Nature-worship.

They regard as sins cowardice, conjugal infidelity, disobedience to a chief, disrespect to a parent, betraying a man of their own tribe to an enemy, or compassing the death of a fellow-tribesman by poison.

Cowardice, the greatest crime which can be committed, is regarded as the result of possession by evil spirits. Medicine is not resorted to, but a *mollah* writes a verse from the Koran and binds the paper on the coward's arm. If this proves unsuccessful, he must visit a graveyard on the night of the full moon, and pass seven times under the body of one of the sculptured lions on the graves, repeating an Arabic prayer. They regard as virtues courage, revenge, chastity, charity to the poor, readiness to fight in a tribal quarrel, and undying hatred of the Khalif Omar, and of all Sunnis and *Kafirs*.

Their idea of a future state is that the soul goes to heaven or hell, or into an intermediate state known as *Bardjeskh*, where those who have died in sin undergo a probation with a possibility of a fortunate result. They think that death in battle ensures an immediate entrance into Paradise, and thus they dance the *chapi*, their national dance, round a fighting-man's grave, and rejoice with music and songs. A few of them professed beliefs regarding the future of the spirit, which involve progressive beatitudes during a period of a century. Haidar Khan was explaining these to me in detail one day, when a Magawe man broke into the conversation indignantly, saying: "Haidar Khan, how can you speak thus? These things belong to God, the judge. He knows—we don't. We see the spirit fly away to judgment, and we know no more. God is great. He alone knows."

The Bakhtiaris regard certain places as possibly haunted by spirits, always evil, and never those of departed persons, but this opinion is not influential enough to produce fear. They look upon certain trees, stones, and hill-tops as sacred, but the ideas attached to them are absolutely indefinite. I am inclined to think that they regard them as the abodes of *genii*, always malignant, and requiring to be propitiated. In passing such places they use the formula, "May God avert evil!" and it is customary to hang pieces of rag on such trees or rocks apparently as offerings to the *genius loci*. They have implicit faith in astrology, and certain omens, denoting lucky days or the reverse, and rely on charms and amulets, and on the efficacy, in some maladies, of swallowing verses of the Koran, but they have no belief in witchcraft.

They concern themselves about the requirements of religion and the future of the soul as little as is possible. They have no mosques in their few villages, and rarely observe the hours of prayer, except in the case of Hadjis, who repeat some of the Arabic prayers with which as pilgrims they circled the *Kaaba*, one or two of which, with a single omission, we



as Christians might reverently use, such as the following:—"O God, shade me with Thy shadow in that day when there shall be no shade but Thy shadow, and give me to drink a draught from that cup (of Thine apostle Mohammed; may God bless and preserve him!), after which there shall be no thirst for all eternity."

They regard God chiefly as a personification of Fate, to which they must bow, and as a judge to whom in some mysterious way they must account after death. On being asked if they thought that anything could affect the decision of the judge in case it should go against them, they usually replied in the negative; but a few said that Ali, the lieutenant of God, would intercede for them, and that his intercession would be successful. Of God as a moral Being, or as an object of love, they have no conception. In a vague way they attribute both omnipotence and omniscience to the Creator, but of moral requirements on his part, or of sin as the violation of any laws which he has laid down, they know nothing. Death, except in battle, is an object of dread to them; none enter the dark valley in which the footfall of the king of terrors drowns the familiar sounds of earth, without anxiety, and a camp removes instantly from the ground where a death has occurred.

And thus they pass away, generation after generation, to sleep under rude stone lions carved with the instruments of war, in ignorance of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man—of that love to God and man in which alone lies "the fulfilling of the law," and of that light which He who is the resurrection and the life has shed on the destiny of the human spirit.

Savage or semi-savage life is only enchanting when seen from a distance; and the life of the Bakhtiari Lurs, little raised as it is above the necessities of animal existence, with its total want of privacy, its fearful noise, its dirt, its rivalries, jealousies, and bloody feuds, and its greed and cunning, is not an exception to the rule. But I prefer to think of their savage virtues rather than of their savage vices, of their free and breezy life, of their family affection and tribal loyalty, of their tenderness for infancy, and their reverence for age, and to forget their treachery and double-dealing in the remembrance of Haidar Khan, unflinching in his courage and unswerving in his fidelity, from whom, after months of difficulties and risks, I parted with real regret at Burujird.