BIRD ISABELLA LUCY

JOURNEYS IN PERSIA AND KURDISTAN, VOLUME 2 (OF 2)

Isabella Bird

Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan, Volume 2 (of 2)

Bird I.

Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan, Volume 2 (of 2) / I. Bird — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan, Volume 2 (of 2) / Including a Summer in the Upper Karun Region and a Visit to the Nestorian Rayahs

LETTER XVI

Ali-kuh, June 12.

Two days before we left Chigakhor fierce heat set in, with a blue heat haze. Since then the mercury has reached 98° in the shade. The call to "Boot and Saddle" is at 3.45. Black flies, sand-flies, mosquitos, scorpions, and venomous spiders abound. There is no hope of change or clouds or showers until the autumn. Greenery is fast scorching up. "The heaven above is as brass, and the earth beneath is as iron." The sky is a merciless steely blue. The earth radiates heat far on into the night. "Man goeth forth to his work," not "till the evening," but in the evening. The Ilyats, with their great brown flocks, march all night. The pools are dry, and the lesser streams have disappeared. The wheat on the rain-lands is scorched before the ears are full, and when the stalks are only six inches long. This is a normal Persian summer in Lat. 32° N. The only way of fighting this heat is never to yield to it, to plod on persistently, and never have an idle moment, but I do often long for an Edinburgh east wind, for drifting clouds and rain, and even for a chilly London fog! This same country is said to be buried under seven or eight feet of snow in winter.

On leaving Chigakhor we crossed a low hill into the Seligun valley, so fair and solitary a month ago, now brown and dusty, and swarming with Ilyats and their flocks, and Lake Albolaki has shrunk into something little better than a swamp. A path at a great elevation above a stream and a short rocky ascent brought us to the top of the pass above Naghun, a wall of rock, with an altitude of 7320 feet, and a very stiff zigzag descent upon Isfandyar Khan's garden, where the heat made a long halt necessary. The view from the Naghun Pass of the great Ardal valley is a striking one, though not so striking as one would suppose from the altitude of the mountains, which, however, do not nearly reach the limit of perpetual snow, though the Kuh-i-Kaller, the Kuh-i-Sabz, the great mass of the Kuh-i-Gerra, the range of the Kuh-i-Dinar, and the Kuh-i-Zirreh are all from 11,000 to 13,000 feet in height. Even on the north side the range which we crossed by the Gardan-i-Zirreh exceeds 9000 feet. The Karun, especially where it escapes from the Ardal valley by the great Tang-i-Ardal, is a grand feature of the landscape from the Naghun Pass.

On leaving Naghun we were joined by Aziz Khan, a petty chief, a retainer of Isfandyar Khan, who has been deputed to attend on the Agha, and who may be useful in various ways.

Between Naghun and Ardal, in an elevated ravine, a species of *aristolochia*, which might well be mistaken for a pitcher-plant, was growing abundantly, and on the Ardal plain the "sweet sultan" and the *Ferula glauca* have taken the place of the *Centaurea alata*, which is all cut and stacked.

A hot and tedious march over the Ardal plateau, no longer green, and eaten up by the passage of Ilyat flocks, brought us to the village of Ardal, now deserted and melancholy, the great ibex horns which decorate the roof of the Ilkhani's barrack giving it a spectral look in its loneliness. The night was hot, and the perpetual passing of Ilyats, with much braying and bleating, and a stampede of mules breaking my tent ropes, forbade sleep. It was hot when we started the next morning, still following up the Ardal valley and the Karun to Kaj, a village on bare hummocks of gravel alongside of the Karun, a most unpromising-looking place, but higher up in a lateral valley there was a spring and a walled

orchard, full of luxuriant greenery, where we camped under difficulties, for the only entrance was by a little stream, leading to a low hole with a door of stone, such as the Afghans use for security, and through which the baggage could not be carried. The tents had to be thrown over the wall. There was little peace, for numbers of the Kaj men sat in rows steadily staring, and there were crowds of people for medicine, ushered in by the *ketchuda*.

Four miles above Ardal is a most picturesque scene, which, though I had ridden to it before, I appreciated far more on a second visit. This is the magnificent gorge of the Tang-i-Darkash Warkash, a gigantic gash or rift in the great range which bounds the Ardal and Kaj valleys on the north, and through which the river, on whose lawn-like margin the camps were pitched at Shamsabad, find its way to the Karun. A stone bridge of a single arch of wide span is thrown across the stream at its exit from the mountains. Above the bridge are great masses of naked rock, rising into tremendous precipices above the compressed water, with roses and vines hanging out of their clefts.

Below, the river suddenly expands, and there is a small village, now deserted, with orchards and wheatfields in the depression in which the Darkash Warkash finds its way across the Kaj valley, a region so sheltered from the fierce sweep of the east wind, and so desirable in other respects, that it bears the name of Bihishtabad, the *Mansion of Heaven*.

Geographically this *tang* has a great interest, for the water passing under the bridge is the united volume of the water system to which three out of the four districts known as the Chahar Mahals owe their fertility, and represents the drainage of 2500 square miles. It will be remembered that we entered the Chahar Mahals by the Kahva Rukh Pass, and crossed that portion of them lying between Kahva Rukh and the Zirreh Pass, which is politically, not geographically, a portion of the Bakhtiari country, and is partially Christian.

I started at five the next morning to follow the left bank of the Karun for nearly a whole march, sometimes riding close beside it among barley-fields, then rising to a considerable height above it. It is occasionally much compressed between walls of conglomerate, and boils along furiously, but even where it is stillest and broadest, it is always deep, full, and unfordable, bridged over, however, at a place where there are several mills. An ascent from it leads to the village of Rustam-i, where the people were very courteous and put me on the road to Ali-kuh, a village not far from the river, at the foot of a high range very much gashed by its affluents, one of which is very salt.

Ali-kuh is quite deserted, and every hovel door is open. There is nothing to tempt cupidity. The people, when they migrate to the high pastures, take all their goods with them. There was not a creature left behind who could tell me of a spring, and it was a tiresome search before I came, high upon the hillside, on a stream tumbling down under willows over red rock, in a maze of campanulas and roses. The first essential of a camping-ground is that there should be space to camp, and this is lacking; my servants sleep in the open, and my bed and chair are propped up by stones on the steep slope. Scorpions, "processional" caterpillars, earwigs, and flies abound. It is very pretty, but very uncomfortable. The stream is noisy, and a rude flour mill above has the power, which it has exercised, of turning it into another channel for irrigation purposes. There are some large Ilyat camps above, and from these and from Rustam-i the people have been crowding in.

The wild flowers about Ali-kuh are in great profusion just now, the most showy being hollyhocks – white, pink, and mauve, which affect the cultivated lands. Three parasitic plants are also abundant, one of them being the familiar dodder. Showy varieties of blue and white campanulas, a pink mallow, a large blue geranium, chicory, the blue cornflower, and the scarlet poppy all grow among the crops.

In the course of a day's expedition to the summit of the Ali-kuh Pass large Ilyat camps abounded, and the men were engaged in stacking the leaves and the blossoming stalks of the wild celery for fodder later in the season. These flower-stalks attain a height of over six feet. These, and the dried leaves of the *Centaurea alata*, which are laid in heaps weighted down with stones, are relied

upon by the nomads for the food of their flocks on the way down from the summer to the winter pastures, and much of their industry, such as it is, is spent in securing these "crops."

This Ali-kuh Pass, 9500 feet in altitude, is on the most direct route from Isfahan to the Bazuft river, but is scarcely used except by the Ilyats. It is in fact horribly steep on the Ali-kuh side. The great Bakhtiari ranges on its south-west side, and a deep valley below, closed by the great mass of Amin-i-lewa, are a contrast to the utterly shadeless and mostly waterless regions of Persia proper which lie eastwards, blazing and glaring in the summer sunshine. There is a little snow and some ice, and the snow patches are bordered by a small rosy primula, delicate white tulips, and the violet *penguicula* so common on our moorlands. Mares with mule foals were grazing at a height of over 9000 feet.

The Khan of Rustam-i, married to a daughter of the Ilkhani, "called." He is very intelligent, has some idea of conversation, and was very pleasant and communicative. He says the "Bakhtiaris love fighting, and if there's a fight can't help taking sides, and if they have not guns fight with stones," and that "one Bakhtiari can beat ten Persians"! I asked him if he thought there would be fighting at Chigakhor, and he said it was very likely, and he and his retainers would take the Ilkani's side. He showed me with great pleasure a bullet wound in his ankle, and another in his head, where a piece of the skull had been removed. He wishes that "the English" would send them a doctor. "We would gladly receive even a *Kafir*," he said. Mirza politely translated this word Christian. He says they "suffer so much in dying from want of knowledge." I explained to him the virtues of some of their own medicinal herbs, and he at once sent his servant to gather them, and having identified them he wrote down their uses and the modes of preparing them.

With the Khan was his prim little son, already, at ten years old, a bold rider and a good shot, the pale auburn-haired boy whom his grandmother, the Ilkhani's principal wife, offered me as a present if I would cure him of deafness, debility, and want of appetite! I gave him a large bottle of a clandestinely-made decoction of a very bitter wormwood, into which I put with much ceremony, after the most approved fashion of a charlatan, some tabloids of *nux vomica* and of permanganate of potash. When I saw him at the fort of Chigakhor he was not any better, but since, probably from leading a healthier life than in Ardal, he has greatly improved, and being strong is far less deaf, and consequently the virtues of wormwood have forced themselves on the Khan's attention.

The boy had suffered various things. He had been sewn up in raw sheepskins, his ears had been filled with fresh clotted blood, and he had been compelled to drink blood while warm, taken from behind the ear of a mare, and also water which had washed off a verse of the Koran from the inside of a bowl. It transpired that the Khan, who is a devout Moslem and a *mollah*, could not allow his son to take my medicine unless a piece of paper with a verse of the Koran upon it were soaked in the decoction.

I asked him why the Bakhtiaris like the English, and he replied, "Because they are brave and like fighting, and like going shooting on the hills with us, and don't cover their faces." He added after a pause, "and because they conquer all nations, and do them good after they have conquered them." I asked how they did them good, and he said, "They give them one law for rich and poor, and they make just laws about land, and their governors take the taxes, and no more, and if a man gets money he can keep it. Ah," he exclaimed earnestly, "why don't the English come and take this country? If you don't, Russia will, and we would rather have the English. We're tired of our lives. There's no rest or security."

It may well be believed that there are no schools, though some deference is paid to a *mollah*, which among the Bahktiaris means only a man who can write, and who can read the Koran. These rare accomplishments are usually hereditary. The chiefs' sons are taught to read and write by *munshis*. A few of the highest Khans send their sous to Tihran or Isfahan for education, or they attend school while their fathers are detained as hostages in the capital for the good behaviour of their clans. There they learn a few words of French and English, along with pure Persian and Arabic, and the few other branches of the education of a Persian noble. They are fine manly boys, and ride and shoot well from

an early age. But the worst of them is that they never are "boys." They are little men, with the stiffness and elaboration of manner which the more important Khans have copied from the Persians, and one can never fancy their abandoning themselves to "miscellaneous impulses."

Killa Bazuft, Bazuft Valley, June 18.– A few days ago we left the last village of the region behind, to enter upon a country not laid down in any maps. It is a wild land of precipitous mountain ranges, rising into summits from 11,000 to 13,000 feet high, enclosing valleys and gorges or cañons of immense depth, some of them only a few feet wide, a goodly land in part, watered by springs and streams, and green with herbage and young wheat, and in part naked, glaring, and horrible. It is very solitary, although at times we come upon Bakhtiaris in camp, or moving with their flocks, much darker in complexion and more uncivilised in appearance than those of Ardal and its neighbourhood. From these camps Aziz Khan procures guides, milk, and bread. The heat increases daily, and the hour of getting up is now 2.45. There are many forlorn burial-grounds, and their uncouth stone lions, more or less rudely carved, are the only permanent inhabitants of the region. Wheat and barley grow in nearly all the valleys, and clothe the hill-slopes, but where are the sowers and the reapers, and where are the barns? Cultivation without visible cultivators is singularly weird.

Although the Bakhtiaris expend great labour on irrigation, their methods of cultivation are most simple. They plough with a small plough with the share slightly shod with iron; make long straight furrows, and then cross them diagonally. They do not manure the soil, but prevent exhaustion by long fallows. After they come up to the mountains they weed their crops carefully, and they look remarkably clean. In reaping they leave a stubble five or six inches long. There is a good deal of spade husbandry in places where they have no oxen, or where the arable patches are steep. The spades are much longer than ours, and the upper corners of the sides are turned over for three inches.

A spade is worked by two men, one using his hands and one foot, and the other a rope placed where the handle enters the iron, with which he gives the implement a sharp jerk towards him.

In the higher valleys they grow wheat and barley only, but in the lower rice, cotton, melons, and cucumbers are produced, and opium for exportation. They plough and sow in the autumn, and reap on their return to their "yailaks" the following summer. Their rude water mills, and the hand mills worked by women, grind the wheat into the coarse flour used by them.

It appears from the statements of the *Mollah-i-Murtaza*, Aziz Khan, an intelligent son of Chiragh Ali Khan, and others, that the tenure of arable lands is very simple and well understood. "From long ago" certain of such lands have been occupied by certain tribes, and have been divided among families. Some of the tribes possess documents, supposed to secure these rights, granted by Ali Mardan Khan, the Bakhtiari King of Persia, in the anarchical period which followed the death of Nadīr Shah. Those of them who are without documents possess the lands by right of use. Nearly all the tribes have individual rights of tillage, and have expended much labour on their lands in irrigation and removing stones. A fee for the use of these lands is paid to the Ilkhani every year in money or cattle.

For pasturage there is only the right of "use and wont," and the grazing is free. For camping-grounds each tribe has its special "use and wont," subject to change by the order of the Ilkhani, but it was out of quarrels concerning these and the pasture lands that many of the feuds at present existing arose.

We left Ali-kuh in a westerly direction, followed and crossed the Karun, left it at its junction with the Duab, ascended this short affluent to its source, crossed the Gardan-i-Cherri at an elevation of 9200 feet, and descended 4000 feet into the Bazuft or Rudbar valley, where the camps now are. The road after leaving Ali-kuh, where the slopes were covered with pink and white hollyhocks, keeps along a height above the Karun, and then descends abruptly into a chasm formed of shelves of conglomerate, on the lowest of which there is just room for a loaded mule between the cliffs and the water at the narrowest part. Shadowed by shelf upon shelf of rock, the river shoots through a narrow passage, as though impatient for its liberation from an unnatural restraint, and there is what I hesitate to call –

a bridge. At all events there is a something by which men and beasts can cross the chasm – a rude narrow cradle of heavy branches, filled with stones, quite solid and safe, resting on projections of rock on either side. The Karun, where this Pul-i-Ali-kuh crosses it, is only nine feet six inches in width. I found the zigzag ascent on the right bank a very difficult one, and had sundry falls.

Two hours more brought us to the junction of the Karun and Duab ("two rivers") above which the former is lost to view in a tremendous ravine, the latter coming down a green valley among high and mostly bare mountains, on a gravelly slope of one of which we camped, for the purpose of ascending a spur of a lofty mountain which overhangs the Karun. On such occasions I take my mule, Suleiman, the most surefooted of his surefooted race, who brings me down precipitous declivities which I could not look at on my own feet. After crossing the Duab, a green, rapid willow-fringed river, by a ford so deep as to be half-way up the bodies of the mules, and zigzagging up a steep mountain side to a ridge of a spur of Kaisruh, so narrow that a giant might sit astride upon it, a view opened of singular grandeur.

On the southern side of the ridge, between mountains of barren rock, snow-slashed, and cleft by tremendous rifts, lying in shadows of cool gray, the deep, bright, winding Duab flows down the green valley which it blesses, among stretches of wheat and mounds where only the forgotten dead have their habitation, – a silver thread in the mellow light. On the northern side lies the huge Tang-i-Karun, formed by the magnificent mountain Kaisruh on its right bank, and on the left by mountains equally bold, huge rock-masses rising 3000 feet perpendicularly, and topped by battlements of terra-cotta rock, which took on vermilion colouring in the sunset glow. Through this mighty gorge the Karun finds its way, a green, rapid willow-fringed stream below the ridge, and visible higher up for miles here and there in bottle-green pools, everywhere making sharp turns in its stupendous bed, and disappearing from sight among huge piles of naked rock. Even on this splintered ridge, at a height of 8000 feet, there were tulips, celery in blossom, mullein, roses, legions of the *Fritillaria imperialis*, anemones, blue linum, and a wealth of alpine plants.

There also are found in abundance the great umbelliferous plants —*Ferula glauca*, *Ferula candelabra*, and the *Ferula asafœtida*. The latter I have never seen elsewhere, and was very much rejoiced to procure some of its "tears," though the odour will cling to my gloves till they are worn out. Hadji had heard that it is found in one or two places in the Bakhtiari country, but up to this time I had searched for it in vain. There also for the first time I found the *Astragalus verus*, the gum tragacanth of commerce. The ordinary tragacanth bush, the "goat's thorn," the *Astragalus tragacantha*, which is found everywhere on the arid hillsides, produces a gummy juice but no true gum, and its chief value is for kindling fires.

Following up the Duab, through brush of tamarisk, *Hippophae rhamnoides*, and Indian myrtle, above the cultivated lands, and passing burial mounds with their rude stone lions with their sculptured sides, we camped in a valley at the foot of the Gardan-i-Cherri and Kuh-i-Milli, close to the powerful spring in the hillside which is the source of the stream, where there was abundant level ground for three camps. The next evening Karim, the man who so nearly lost his arm some time ago, was carried past my tent fainting, having been severely kicked in the chest by the same horse that lacerated his arm. "I *am* unlucky," he murmured feebly, when he came to himself in severe pain.

I have crossed the Gardan-i-Cherri twice, and shall cross it a third time. It marks a great change in the scenery, and the first intimation of possible peril from the tribesmen. The ascent from the east, which is extremely rugged and steep, is one of 2000 feet in three and a half miles. Near the top were many Ilyats camping without their tents, a rough-looking set, with immense flocks, and on the summit the Agha, who was without his attendants, met some men who were threatening both in speech and gesture.

From the top there is a wonderful view into an unknown land. The ranges are heavily wooded, and much broken up into spurs and rounded peaks. Between the great range, crossed at a height of 9550 feet by the Cherri Pass, and a wall-like range of mighty mountains of white limestone with

snow on them hardly whiter than themselves, lies the Bazuft valley, 4000 feet below, and down upon it come sharp forest-covered spurs, often connected by sharp ridges of forest-covered rocks cleft by dark forest-filled ravines, with glimpses now and then of a winding peacock-green river, flowing at times through green lawns and slopes of grain, at others disappearing into gigantic cañons – great forest-skirted and snow-slashed mountains apparently blocking up the valley at its higher end. At the first crossing all lay glorified in a golden veil, with indigo shadows in the rifts and white lights on the heights.

The first part of the descent is fearfully rough, a succession of ledges of broken rock encumbered here and there with recently dead horses or mules, and the whole downward course of 4000 feet is without a break, the climate getting hotter and hotter as one descends. At 8000 feet the oak forests begin. This oak bears acorns nearly three inches long, which are ground and made into bread. All other vegetation is dried and scorched, and the trees rise out of dust. In this forest we came upon a number of Ilyats, some of whom were lying under a tree, ill of fever, and Aziz Khan insisted that then and there I should give them quinine.

At the bottom of this unalleviated descent there is a shady torrent, working a rude flour mill; a good deal of wheat speckled with hollyhocks, white campanulas, and large snapdragons; some very old tufa cones, and below them level lawns, eaten bare, fringed with oaks, with dry wood for the breaking; and below again the translucent, rapid, peacock-green, beautiful Bazuft. But not even the sound of the rush of its cool waters could make one forget the overpowering heat, 100°, even in the shade of a spreading tree.

I know not which is the more trying, the ascent or the descent of the 4000 feet of ledges and zigzags on the southern face of the Gardan-i-Cherri. The road is completely encumbered with stones, and is being allowed to fall into total disrepair, although it is the shortest route between Isfahan and Shuster. Things are undoubtedly deteriorating. The present Ilkhani is evidently not the man to get and keep a grip on these turbulent tribesmen. I notice a gradual weakening of his authority as the distance from Ardal increases.

When Hussein Kuli Khan, the murdered father of Isfandyar Khan, was Ilkhani, he not only built substantial bridges such as those over the Karun in the Tang-i-Ardal and at Dupulan, but by severe measures compelled every tribe using this road in its spring and autumn migrations to clear off the stones and repair it. As it is, nearly all our animals lost one or more of their shoes on the descent. The ascent and descent took eight hours.

Some of the cliffs on the right bank of the Bazuft are of gypsiferous rock, topped with pure white gypsum, resting on high, steep elevations of red and fawn coloured earths, with outcrops of gravel conglomerate.

Yesterday was spent in a very severe expedition of twenty-four miles from Mowaz to the lofty plateau of Gorab, mostly through oak forest, crossing great cañons 800 feet deep and more, with almost precipitous sides, descending upon the awful gorge through which the Bazuft passes before it turns round the base of the Kuh-i-Gerra, the monarch of this mass of mountains. The ascents and descents were endless and severe as we crossed the mountain spurs. It was a simple scramble up and down rock ledges, among great boulders, or up or down smooth slippery surfaces. Even my trusty mule slipped and fell several times. Often the animals had to jump up or down ledges nearly as high as their chests, and through rifts so narrow as only just to admit the riders. In some places it was absolutely necessary to walk, and in attempting to get down one bad place on my own feet I fell and hurt my knee badly – a serious misfortune just at present.

After twelve miles of a toilsome march the guide led us up among the boulders of a deep ravine to the treeless plateau of Gorab, an altitude of 8000 feet, where the air was fresh and cool. The scenery is on a gigantic scale, and the highly picturesque Bazuft is seen passing through magnificent cañons of nearly perpendicular rock, and making sharp turns round the bases of lofty spurs, till after a course of singular beauty it joins the Karun at Shalil. It is glorious scenery, full of magnificence and

mystery. This beautiful Ab-i-Bazuft, which for a long distance runs parallel with the Karun within fifteen or eighteen miles of it, is utterly unlike it, for the Karun is the most tortuous of streams and the Bazuft keeps a geographically straight course for a hundred miles. Springs bursting from the mountain sides keep it always full; it passes nearly ice-cold among lawns and woods, and its colour is everywhere a pure peacock-green of the most exquisite tint, contrasting with the deep blue-green of the Karun. Shuster is only seven marches off, and in the direction in which it lies scorched barren hills fill up the distance, sinking down upon yellow barren plains, softened by a yellow haze, in which the imagination sees those vast alluvial stretches which descend in an unbroken level to the Shat-el-Arab and the Persian Gulf. Many a lofty range is seen, but the eye can rest only on the huge Gerra mass, with the magnificent snowy peak of Dalonak towering above all, bathed in a heavenly blue.

The shelter-tent was pitched till the noonday heat moderated. Abbas Ali and Mehemet Ali were inside it, and I was reading *Ben Hur* aloud. Aziz Khan was lying half in and half out, with a quizzical look on his face, wondering at a woman knowing how to read. Not a creature had been seen, when as if by magic nine or ten Lurs appeared, established themselves just outside, and conversed with Aziz. I went on reading, and they went on talking, the talk growing disagreeably loud, and Aziz very much in earnest. Half an hour passed thus, the Agha, who understood their speech, apparently giving all his attention to *Ben Hur*.

I did not hear till the evening that the topic of the talk was our robbery, with possible murder, and that Aziz was spending all his energies on dissuading them, telling them that we are guests of the Ilkhani and under the protection of the Shah, and that they and their tribe would be destroyed if they carried out their intention. They discovered that his revolvers were not loaded – he had in fact forgotten his cartridges, and one said to the others, "Don't give him time to load."

While the tent was being packed, I sat on a stone watching the Lurs, dark, handsome savages, armed with loaded clubbed sticks, and the Agha was asking them about the country, when suddenly there was a *mêlée*, and the semblance of an attack on him with the clubs. He seemed to shake his assailants off, lounged towards his mule, took his revolver from the holster, fired it in the air, and with an unconcerned, smiling face, advanced towards the savages, and saying something like calling attention to the excellences of that sort of firearm, fired two bullets close over their heads. They dread our arms greatly, and fell back, and molested us no further. Till later I did not know that the whole thing was not a joke on both sides. Aziz says that if it had not been for the Agha's coolness, all our lives would have been sacrificed.

In returning, the Agha, walking along a lower track than we were riding upon, met some Lurs, who, thinking that he was alone, began to be insolent, and he heard them say to each other, "Strip him, kill him," when their intention was frustrated by our appearance just above. After crossing the Serba torrent with its delicious shade of fine plane trees, the heat of the atmosphere, with the radiation from rock and gravel, was overpowering. I found the mercury at 103° in my shady tent.

Aziz Khan now pays me a visit each evening, to give me such information as is attainable regarding the people and locality, and, though he despised me at first, after Moslem fashion, we are now very good friends. He is a brave man, and made no attempt to magnify the danger at Gorab, merely saying that he was devoutly thankful that we had escaped with our lives. He remonstrated with me for pitching my tent in such a lonely place, quite out of sight of the other camps, but it was then too dark to move it. He said that there was some risk, for the Lurs had declared they would "rob us yet," but he should watch all night. I knew he would, for the sake of his Arab mare!

This morning, soon after leaving Mowaz, the Sahib's guide galloped up, saying that his master had been robbed of "everything" the night before, and was without the means of boiling water. Orders were given for the camps to close up, for no servants to ride in advance of or behind the caravan, and that no Ilyats should hang about the tents.

Although the Bakhtiari Lurs are unified under one chief, who is responsible to the Shah for the security of the country, and though there has been a great improvement since Sir A. H. Layard's time,

the advance, I think, is chiefly external. The instincts and traditions of the tribes remain predatory. Possibly they may no longer attack large caravans, but undoubtedly they rob, when and where they can, and they have a horrid habit of stripping their victims, leaving them with but one under garment, if they do not kill them. They have a gesture, often used by Aziz Khan in his descriptions of raids, which means stripping a man to his shirt. The word used is skin, but they are not such savages as this implies. The gesture consists in putting a finger into the mouth, slowly withdrawing it, and holding it up with a look of infinite complacency. Aziz admits with some pride that with twenty men he fell upon a rich caravan near Shiraz, and robbed it of £600.

To-day's march has been mainly through very attractive scenery. We crossed the Ab-i-Mowaz, proceeded over slopes covered with wheat and flowers, and along a rocky path overhanging the exquisitely tinted Bazuft, forded the Ab-i-Nozi, at a place abounding in tamarisks bearing delicate, feathery pink blossoms, and ascended to upland lawns of great beauty, on which the oaks come down both in clumps and singly, as if planted. The views from this natural park are glorious. Besides the great ranges with which I have become familiar, the Safid-Kuh, or "white mount," on the right bank of the river, at present deserves its name, its snows descending nearly to the forests which clothe its lower heights. A deep chasm conceals the Tabarak stream up to the point of its foamy junction with the Bazuft, which emerges on the valley by an abrupt turn through a very fine cañon.

We crossed the pure green waters by a broad ford, and camped on the right bank on a gravel plateau above it, on which is Killa Bazuft, a large quadrangular stone fort with round towers at the corners, an arcaded front, a vaulted entrance, and rooms all round the quadrangle. It is now ruinous. Some irrigated land near it produces rice and mosquitos. The Sahib's camp is pitched here. He has been badly robbed, both of clothing and cooking-pots, and was left without the means of cooking any food.

Dima, June 26.– We retraced our steps as far as the source of the Duab, crossed into the Shamisiri valley, and by a low pass into the Karun valley, forded the Karun by a strong deep ford, crossed a low range into the Zarin valley, where are some of the sources of the Zainderud, from thence marched to the Tang-i-Ghezi, through which the Zainderud, there a vigorous river, passes into the Chahar Mahals, went up the Kherson valley, crossed Gargunak, and by a very steep and rugged descent reached this camp, a place of springs, forming the upper waters of the Zainderud. These days have been severe, the heat great, and the incidents few.

The ascent of the Gardan-i-Cherri was difficult. The guide misled us, and took us through a narrow rift in the crest of a ridge on broken ledges of rock. We camped at a height of 9000 feet in the vicinity of snow. The new arrangement, which is necessary for safety, does not increase comfort, for the Arab horses, noisy, quarrelsome fellows, are in camp, and the mules shake their bells and sneeze and bray at intervals all night.

The descent of 2000 feet into the Shamisiri valley, over bare gravel chiefly, was a very hot one. It is a wide, open valley with stony hills of no great height enclosing it, with much green sward along the river banks, above which, running to a great height on the hillsides, are stretches of irrigated wheat. So far as I have yet seen, the wheat is all "bearded." It is a most smiling valley; so cultivated, indeed, and so trim and free from weeds are the crops, that one naturally looks for neat farm-houses and barns. But one looks in vain, for except the ruins of some Armenian villages there are no traces of inhabitants, till night comes, when the glimmer of camp fires here and there high up on the hillsides shows the whereabouts of some migratory families.

I start so early as to get in to the camping-ground about nine now, and the caravan, two hours later, comes in with mules braying, bells ringing, horses squealing for a fight, servants shouting. Then the mules roll, the tent-pegs are hammered down, and in the blazing, furnace-like afternoons the men, who have been up since 2 a. m., take a prolonged siesta, and a solemn hush falls on the camp. After the Gorab affair I loaded my revolver, and now sleep with it under my pillow, carry it in my holster, and never have it out of my reach. I *think* I should only fire it in the air if I were attacked, but

the fact of being known to be armed with such a weapon is more likely than anything else to prevent attack. No halt is now made on the march.

The sick people who appeared at Shamisiri, from no one knows where, were difficult and suspicious, and so they have been since. The dialect of Persian has somewhat changed, and Aziz Khan now interprets the strange accounts of maladies to Mirza, and he interprets to me. When they crowd almost into the tent, Aziz, when appealed to, pelts them with stones and beats them with a stick, and they take it very merrily. He thinks that I have appliances in the "leather box" for the cure of all ills, and when he brings blind people, and I say that I cannot do anything for them, he loses his temper. No matter where we camp, dark, handsome men spring up as if by magic, and hang about the fires for the rest of the day. From among these the guides are usually selected.

Numbers of "patients" appear everywhere, and the well assemble with the sick round my tent. At Berigun the people were very ignorant and obstinate. After spending a whole hour on two men, and making medicines up for them, they said they would have the "Feringhi's ointment," but "nothing that goes down the throat." Another said (and he had several disciples) that he would not take the medicine "for fear it should make him a Christian." One man, who has fever, took away four quinine powders yesterday for four days, and came back to-day deaf and giddy, saying that I have killed him. He had taken them all at once!

It is very pleasant to see how very fond the men are of their children, and how tender and loving they are to their little girls. The small children are almost always pretty, but by three years old the grace and innocence of childhood are completely lost, and as in Persia there are no child faces; indeed, the charm of childhood scarcely survives the weaning-day. If they are sick the fathers carry them for miles on their backs for medicine, and handle them very gently, and take infinite pains to understand about the medicine and diet. Even if both father and mother come with a child, the man always carries it, holds it, is the spokesman, and takes the directions. Several men have offered me mares and cows if I will cure their children. All the "patients" ask finally, "What must I eat, and not eat?"

The Bakhtiaris have often asked me whether it is unwholesome to live so much as they do on cheese and sour milk. They attribute much of their dyspepsia to their diet. They live principally on *mast* or curdled milk, buttermilk, cheese, *roghan* or clarified butter, *nān*, a thin leavened cake, made of wheat or acorn flour, bannocks of barley meal, celery pickled in sour milk, *kabobs* occasionally, and broth flavoured with celery stalks and garlic frequently. They never use fresh milk. They eat all fruits, whether wild or cultivated, while they are quite unripe. Almonds are eaten green.

They hunt the ibex and shoot the francolin and the bustard, and make soup of them. They are always on the hills after game, and spare nothing that they see. I have seen them several times firing at red-legged partridges sitting on their nests. They use eggs considerably, boiling them hard. Alcohol in any form is unknown among them, and few, except the Khans, have learned the delights of tea and coffee. Buttermilk, pure water, and *sharbat*, when they can get lime-juice, are their innocent beverages. The few who drink tea use it chiefly to colour and flavour syrup. They eat twice in the day. Though their out-of-doors life is healthy and their diet simple, they rarely attain old age. A man of sixty is accounted very old indeed. The men are certainly not polite to their wives, and if they get in their way or mine they kick them aside, just as rough men kick dogs.

We have been marching through comparatively lowland scenery, like the Chahar Mahals, from which we are not far. At Shamisiri, except for the fine peak of Dilleh, there are no heights to arrest the eye. The hills on the north side are low, gravelly, and stony, with perpendicular outbreaks of rock near their summits. To the south they are of a different formation, with stratification much contorted. The next march was over low stony hills, with scanty herbage and much gum tragacanth, camel thorn, and the *Prosopis stephaniana*, down a steep descent into the Karun valley, where low green foot-hills, cultivated levels, and cultivation carried to a great altitude on the hillsides refresh the tired eyes. The Karun, liberated for a space from its imprisonment in the mountains, divides into several streams, each one a forcible river, winds sinuously among the grass, gleams like a mirror, and by its joyous,

rapid career gives animation to what even without it would be at this season a very smiling landscape. Crossing the first ford in advance of the guide, we got into very deep water, and *Screw* was carried off his feet, but scrambled bravely to a shingle bank, where we waited for a native, who took us by long and devious courses to the left bank. The current is strong and deep, and the crossing of the caravan was a very pretty sight.

We halted for Sunday at Berigun, an eminence on which are a ruinous fort, a graveyard with several lions rampant, and a grove of very fine white poplars, one of them eighteen feet in circumference six feet from the ground. A sea of wheat in ear, the Karun in a deep channel in the green plateau, some herbage-covered foot-hills, and opposite, in the south-west, the great rocky, precipitous mass of the Zard Kuh range, with its wild crests and great snow-fields, made up a pleasant landscape. The heat at this altitude of 8280 feet, and in the shade, was not excessive.

The next day's march was short and uninteresting, partly up the Karun valley, and partly over gravelly hills with very scanty herbage and no camps, from which we came down abruptly into the elevated plain of Cheshmeh Zarin (the Golden Fountain) at a height of 8500 feet, the plain being about five miles by two and a half. Receding hills with some herbage upon them border the plateau, and the Zard Kuh, though at some distance, apparently blocks up the western end. A powerful spring bursts from under a ridge of rock half-way down the plain, and becomes at once a clear gentle stream, fifty feet broad, which passes through the level green sward in a series of turns which are quite marvellous. Smooth sward, green barley, many yoke of big oxen ploughing up rich black soil, dark flocks of thousands of sheep and goats, asses, mares, mules, cows, all feeding, large villages of black tents, one of them surrounding the white pavilion of a Khan, saddle-horses tethered, flocks being led to and fro, others being watered, laden asses arriving and departing, butter being churned, and carpets being woven, form a scene of quiet but busy industry which makes one feel quite "in the world." This stream is one of the chief sources of the Zainderud.

From this cheerful camping-ground we marched over low hills, forded the Zainderud several times, and came upon several Ilyat camps on low, rich pasture lands. These nomads had no tents, but dwelt in booths without fronts, the roofs and backs being made of the tough yellow flowering stalks of the celery. The path follows the left bank of the river, there a full, broad stream, flowing through the Tang-i-Ghezi, through rounded hills, and scenery much like that of the Cheviots. At the Tang-i-Ghezi we camped, and this morning crossed a low hill into a heavily-grassed valley watered by the Kherson, ascended a shoulder of Gargunak, and halted at Aziz Khan's tents, where the women were very hospitable, bringing out cows' milk, and allowing themselves to be photographed.

An unpleasant *contretemps* occurred to me while we were marching through some very lonely hills. If Mirza rides as he should, behind me, his mule always falls out of sight, and he is useless, so lately I have put him in front. To-day I dropped a glove, and after calling and whistling to him vainly, got off and picked it up, for I am reduced to one pair, but attempt after attempt to get on again failed, for each time, as I put my hand on the saddle, *Screw* nimbly ran backwards, and in spite of my bad knee I had to lead him for an hour before I was missed, running a great risk of being robbed by passing Lurs. When Mirza did come back he left his mule in a ravine, exposed to robbers, and Aziz Khan was so infuriated that he threatened to "cut his throat." Aziz despises him as a "desk-bred" man for his want of "out-doorishness," and mimics the dreamy, helpless fashion in which he sits on his mule, but Mirza can never be provoked into any display of temper or discourtesy.

From Aziz's camp we had a very steep and rugged descent to this place, Cheshmeh Dima, where we have halted for two days. Three streams, the head-waters of the Zainderud, have their sources in this neighbourhood, and one of them, the Dima, rises as a powerful spring under a rock here, collects in a basin, and then flows away as a full-fledged river. The basin or pool has on one side a rocky hill, with the ruins of a fort upon it, and on the three others low stone walls of very rude construction. The Lurs, who soon came about us, say that the ruined fort was the pleasure palace of a great king who coined money here. The sides of the valley are dotted with camps. Opposite are the

large camp and white tent of Chiragh Ali Khan, a chief who has the reputation of being specially friendly in his views of England.

The heat yesterday was overpowering, and the crowds of Bakhtiari visitors and of sick people could hardly be received with benevolent equanimity. This great heat at an altitude of 7600 feet is most disappointing. These head-waters of the Zainderud, rising in and beautifying the Zarin, Kharba, and Dima valleys, unite before reaching the Tang-i-Ghezi, from which they pass to Isfahan, and are, as has been stated before, eventually lost in a swamp. This is the most watery region I have seen in Persia. Besides the gushing, powerful springs which form vigorous streams at the moment of their exit from the mountain sides, there are many moist, spongy places in the three valleys, regularly boggy, giving out a pleasant *squish* under a horse's tread, and abounding in plants associated in my ideas with Highland bogs, such as the *Drosera rotundifolia*, which seems to thrive on a small red fly unknown to me. These waters and swampy places occupy a small area, just within the Outer range, below the southern slopes of the Kuh-i-Rang.

From this place I made an expedition of thirty miles up a very fine valley, much of which is irrigated and cultivated, by an ascent of 2500 feet to the Gal-i-Bard-i-Jamal, a pass 10,500 feet in altitude, with a tremendous descent into an apparent abyss, from whose blue depths rise the imposing mass of the Kuh-i-Shahan, and among other heights Faidun, a striking peak of naked rock, superimposed on a rocky ridge. At this height the air was really cool, and it was an escape from the heat of Dima.

This region seems much disturbed. We heard of bloodshed two days ago, and to-day in the Kharba valley of fighting among the Kuh-i-Shahan mountains with the loss of twelve lives, and horsemen passed us armed with long guns and swords on their way to tribal war. I fear I shall have to return to Isfahan. Things are regarded as looking very precarious farther on, and every movement, retrograde or forward, is beset with difficulties.

I. L. B.

LETTER XVII

Camp Gal-i-Gav, Kuh-i-Rang, July 2.

From Dima we ascended to high tablelands, having the snowy Zard Kuh ever in sight, one nameless peak being at present pure white, and descended into and crossed the Shorab, a fertile valley, on one side of which is the famous cleft called Kar Kanun, an artificial gash across a spur of the Kuh-i-Rang of the same name. After winding among mountains we descended on the Karun, whose waters, clear, rapid, and peacock-green, fertilise a plain of fine flowery turf lying at the base of hills, with another branch of the Karun between them and the Zard Kuh.

It is a lovely plain, bright and smiling, contrasting with the savage magnificence of the Zard Kuh, which comes down upon it with its peaks, chasms, and precipices, and glittering fields of unbroken snow. It was given up to mares and foals, but green platforms high above, and little hollows in the foot-hills were spotted with Ilyat tents, and in the four days which we spent there the camps were never free from Ilyat visitors. The Sahib came in the first evening with one man badly hurt, and another apparently in the first stage of rheumatic fever. A small tent was rigged for this poor fellow, who was in intense pain and quite helpless, with a temperature of 104°, and every joint swollen. The usual remedies had no effect on him. I had had a present of a small quantity of *salol*, a newish drug, with directions for its use, and his master Hadji undertook to make him take it regularly, and hot tea when he fancied it, and at the end of twenty-two hours he was not only free from fever but from pain, and was able to mount a mule.[1]

There are two definite objects of interest close to the plain of Chaman Kushan, the reputed source of the Karun and the great artificial cleft of Kar Kanun. I visited the first on a misty day, which exaggerated the height of the mountains, and by filling their chasms with translucent blue atmosphere gave a rare loveliness to the whole, for it must be said that the beauties of Persian scenery are usually staring, hard, and unveiled. The fords of two or three rivers, including the Karun, some steep ascents and descents, a rough ride along a stony slope of the Zard Kuh, and the crossing of a very solid snow-bridge took us to the top of a cliff exactly opposite the powerful springs in which the Karun has its reputed origin.

Over this source towers the mighty range of the Zard Kuh, – a colossal mountain barrier, a mass of yellow and gray limestone, with stupendous snow-filled chasms, huge precipices, and vast snow-fields, treeless and destitute of herbage except where the tulip-studded grass runs up to meet the moisture from the snow-fields. It is the birthplace of innumerable torrents, but one alone finds its way to the sea.

These springs are in a lateral slit in a lofty limestone precipice below a snow-field, at one end of which, as if from a shaft, the most powerful of them wells up, and uniting with the others in a sort of grotto of ferns and mosses pours over a ledge in a sheet of foam, a powerful waterfall, and slides away, a vigorous river of a wonderful blue-green colour, under a snow-bridge, starting full fledged on its course. The surroundings of this spring are wild and magnificent. A few Bakhtiaris crept across the lower part of the face of rock, and perched themselves above it. The roar of the water, now loud, now subdued, made wild music, and the snow-bridges added to the impressiveness of the scene.

Of course the geographical interest of this region is engrossing.[2] This remarkable spring, called by the Bakhtiaris Sar-i-Cheshmeh-i-Kurang ("the head source of the Kurang"), and until this journey

[1] For the benefit of other travellers I add that the dose of *salol* was ten grains every three hours. I found it equally efficacious afterwards in several cases of acute rheumatism with fever. I hope that the general reader will excuse the medical and surgical notes given in these letters. I am anxious to show the great desire for European medical aid, and the wide sphere that is open to a medical missionary, at least for physical healing.

[2] A few geographical paragraphs which follow here and on p. 35 are later additions to the letter.

held to be the real source, is not, however, the actual birthplace of the Karun or Kurang, which was afterwards traced up to its headwaters in the magnificent Kuh-i-Rang.[3]

A few words on this, the one real river of which Persia can boast, and which seems destined to play an important part in her commercial future, will not be out of place. From its source it is a powerful and important stream, full, deep, and flowing with great velocity for much of its upper course between precipices varying in height from 1000 to 3000 feet. It is a perennial stream, fordable in very few places, and then only in its upper waters. Varying in width usually from fifty to a hundred yards, it is compressed at the Pul-i-Ali-kuh into a breadth of about nine feet.

The steepness and height of its banks make it in general useless for irrigation purposes, but some day it may be turned to account as a great "water power." Its windings, dictated by the singular formation of the mountain ranges (for I reject the idea of it having "carved" its channel), are almost phenomenal. After flowing south-east for a hundred miles from its source, it makes an acute bend, flows for fifty miles to the south-west, and then making another fantastic turn it flows in an exactly opposite direction to that of its earlier course, proceeding north-west to Shuster for a hundred miles.

It is calculated that the distance from the Kuh-i-Rang to Shuster as the crow flies is seventy-five miles, but the distance travelled by the waters of the Karun is 250 miles, with an aggregate fall of 9000 feet.

Besides being fed on its journey through the Bakhtiari country by many mountain-side fountain springs of pure fresh water, as well as by salt streams and springs, it receives various tributaries, among the most important of which are the Ab-i-Bazuft and a stream which, though known locally under various names, may be called from the Chigakhor basin in which it rises the Ab-i-Chigakhor, which makes a course of ninety miles to get over a distance of twenty; the Darkash Warkash flowing in from the Chahar Mahals near Ardal, the Dinarud rising in the fair valley of Gorab, and the Ab-i-Cherri or Duab.

This mountain range, the Zard Kuh, in whose steep side at a height of over 8000 feet the Sar-i-Cheshmeh-i-Kurang wells up so grandly, is rather a series of rock summits and precipices than a range of mountains. In late June its naked shelves and battlements upbore great snow-fields, and its huge rifts or passes – the Gil-i-Shah, nearly 11,700 feet in altitude, and the Pambakal, 11,400 – were full of snow. But even in four days it melted rapidly, and probably by August little remains except a few patches, in the highest and most sunless of the rifts. It is only on the north side that the snow lasts even into July.

The marked features of this range are its narrow wall-like character, its ruggedness on both sides, its absence of any peaks rising very remarkably above the ordinary jagged level of the barrier, its lack of prominent spurs, and its almost complete nakedness. It is grand, but only under rare atmospheric conditions can it be termed beautiful. Its length may be about thirty miles. It runs from north-west to south-east. Some of its highest summits attain an elevation of 13,000 feet. Its name is a corruption of Sard Kuh, "cold mountain."

After fording various snow streams and taking a break-neck goat track, we reached the great snow pass of Gil-i-Shah, by which the Bakhtiaris come up from the Shuster plains on the firm snow in spring, returning when the snow is soft in autumn by a very difficult track on the rocky ledges above. In the mist it looked the most magnificent and stupendous pass I had ever seen, always excepting the entrance to the Lachalang Pass in Lesser Tibet, and an atmospheric illusion raised the mountains which guard it up to the blue sky. I much wished to reach the summit, but in a very narrow chasm was fairly baffled by a wide rift in a sort of elevated snow-bridge which the mule could not cross, and camped there for some hours; but even there nomads crowded round my tent with more audacity in their curiosity than they usually show, and Mirza heard two of them planning an ingenious robbery.

[3] Although the correct name of this river is undoubtedly Kurang, I have throughout adopted the ordinary spelling *Karun*, under which it is commercially and politically known.

The heat was very great when I returned, 100° in the shade, but rest was impossible, for numbers of mares and horses were tethered near my tent, and their riders, men and women, to the number of forty, seized on me, clamouring for medicines and eye lotions. I often wonder at the quiet gravity of Mirza's face as he interprets their grotesque accounts of their ailments. A son of Chiragh Ali Khan came to tell me that the "Feringhi ointment" had cured a beautiful young woman of his tribe of an "abscess in her nose"! An instance of real benefit hardly consoles for many failures, and any cure increases the exhausting number of "patients." On one day on that plain there was no rest between eleven and five.

Small events occurred tending to show that the good order which the Ilkhani's government secures is chiefly round the centre of rule. Stories of tribal disputes with violence, and of fights arising out of blood feuds came in daily, and recent sword cuts and bullet wounds were brought to the *Hakīm*. One day there was a disturbance in camp owing to a man attacking Hassan for preventing a woman from entering my tent in my absence. I learned very soon after coming into this country that the Bakhtiaris are dangerously sensitive about their women, although the latter are unveiled and have an amount of latitude unusual in the East. I have more than once cautioned my servants on this point, for any supposed insult to a female relative of a Bakhtiari would have by custom to be wiped out in blood. This extreme sensitiveness has its good side, for even in the midst of the tribal wars and broils which are constantly occurring female honour is always secure, and a woman can travel safely alone through the wildest regions; a woman betraying her husband would, however, almost certainly be put to death. One night the camps were threatened by robbers, upon whom Aziz Khan fired.

Solitary as is now the general aspect of the surrounding country, it must have been crowded with workmen and their food providers within the last two centuries, for in the beginning of the seventeenth century Shah Abbas the Great, the greatest and most patriotic of modern Persian kings, in his anxiety to deliver Isfahan once for all from the risk of famine, formed and partly executed the design of turning to account the difference in level (about 300 feet) between the Karun and Zainderud, and by cleaving an intervening mountain spur to let the waters of the one pass into the other. The work of cleaving was carried on by his successors, but either the workmen failed to get through the flint which underlies the free-stone, or the downfall of the Sufari dynasty made an end of it, and nothing remains of what should have been a famous engineering enterprise but a huge cleft with tool marks upon it in the crest of the hill, "in length 300 yards, in breadth fifteen, and fifty feet deep."[4] Above it are great heaps of quarried stones and the remains of houses, possibly of overseers, and below are the remnants of the dam which was to have diverted the Karun water into the cleft.

On a cool, beautiful evening I came down from this somewhat mournful height to a very striking scene, where the peacock-blue branch from the Sar-i-Cheshmeh unites with the peacock-green stream from Kuh-i-Rang, the dark, high sides of their channels shutting out the mountains. Both rivers rush tumultuously above their union, but afterwards glide downwards in a smooth, silent volume of most exquisite colour, so deep as to be unfordable, and fringed with green strips of grass and innumerable flowers. On emerging from the ravine the noble mass of the Zard Kuh was seen rose-coloured in the sunset, its crests and spires of snow cleaving the blue sky, and the bright waters and flower-starred grass of the plain gave a smiling welcome home.

The next march was a very beautiful one, most of the way over the spurs and deeply-cleft ravines of the grand Kuh-i-Rang by sheep and goat tracks, and no tracks at all, a lonely and magnificent ride, shut in among mountains of great height, their spurs green with tamarisk, salvias, and euphorbias, their ravines noisy with torrents, bright springs bursting from their sides with lawn-like grass below, and their slopes patched with acres of deep snow, on whose margin purple crocuses, yellow ranunculuses, and white tulips were springing. But the grand feature of the march is not the mighty Kuh-i-Rang on the right, but the magnificent Zard Kuh on the left, uplifting its snow-fields and snow-crests into the

[4] *Six Months in Persia.*– Stack.

blue of heaven, on the other side of an ever-narrowing valley. At the pass of Gal-i-Gav, 11,150 (?) feet in altitude, where we have halted for two days, the Zard Kuh approaches the Kuh-i-Rang so closely as to leave only a very deeply cleft ravine between them. From this pass there is a very grand view, not only of these ranges, but of a tremendous depression into which the pass leads, beyond which is the fine definite mountain Kuh-i-Shahan. This pass is the watershed between the Karun and Ab-i-Diz, though, be it remembered, the latter eventually unites with the former at Band-i-Kir. All is treeless.

The Kuh-i-Rang is the only "real mountain" seen on the journey hitherto. It is unlike all others, not only in its huge bulk and gigantic and far-reaching spurs, but in being *clothed*. Its name means the "variegated mountain." It has much Devonshire red about it, but clad as it is now with greenery, its soil and rock ribs cannot be investigated.

It is a mountain rich in waters, both streams and springs. It is physically and geographically a centre, a sort of knot nearly uniting what have been happily termed the "Outer" and "Inner" ranges of the Bakhtiari mountains, and it manifestly divides the country into two regions, which, for convenience' sake, have been felicitously termed the Bakhtiari country and Upper Elam, the former lying to the south-east and the latter to the north-west of this most important group of peaks, only just under 13,000 feet, which passes under the general name Kuh-i-Rang.

A prominent geographical feature of this region is that from this point south-eastwards the valleys rim parallel with the great ranges, and are tolerably wide and level, carrying the drainage easily and smoothly, with plenty of room for the fairly easy tracks which usually run on both banks of the rivers.

The reader who has followed the geographical part of my narrative will, I hope, have perceived that the openings through the Outer and Inner ranges in the region previously traversed are few and remarkable, the Tang-i-Ghezi and the Tang-i-Darkash Warkash piercing the Outer, and the Tang-i-Dupulan the Inner range.

The Kuh-i-Rang is the definite water-parting and the originating cause of two drainage systems, and it may be seen from the map, as was beautifully obvious from the summit of one of the peaks over 11,000 feet in height, that it marks a singular change in the "lie of the land," inasmuch as the main drainage no longer runs parallel to the main ranges, but cuts them across, breaking up Upper Elam into a wild and confused sea of mountains, riven and gashed, without any attempt at uniformity.

This cutting through the ranges at right angles by rivers which somehow must reach the sea, probably through channels formed by some tremendous operations of nature, presents serious obstacles to the traveller, and must effectually prevent commerce flowing in that direction. The aspect of Upper Elam as seen from the Kuh-i-Rang is of huge walls of naked rock, occasionally opening out so as to give space for such a noble mountain as the Kuh-i-Shahan, with tremendous gorges or cañons among them, with sheer precipices 4000 and 5000 feet high, below which blue-green torrents, crystalline in their purity, rage and boom, thundering on their way to join the Ab-i-Diz. The valleys are short, and elevated from 6000 to 7000 feet, and the tracks dignified by the name of roads pass along them and at great altitudes on the sides of the main ranges, but are compelled continually to make dips and ascents of many thousand feet to reach and emerge from the fords of the rivers which dash through the magnificent rifts and cañons.

To the south-east of the Kuh-i-Rang the formation is orderly and intelligible; to the north-west all is confusion and disorder, but a sublime confusion. Two great passes to the north and south of this magnificent mountain are the only ways of communication between the region of Upper Elam and the Bakhtiari country. The northern pass was ascended from Dima. The Kharba, one of the head-streams of the Zainderud, rises on it and fertilises a beautiful valley about fourteen miles in length. That pass, the Gal-i-Bard-i-Jamal (the pass of Jamal's stone), the stone being a great detached rock near the summit, and the Gal-i-Gav (the Cattle Pass) on the southern side, are both over 10,000 feet in altitude. They are seldom traversed by the natives, and only in well-armed parties, as both are very dangerous.

The Kuh-i-Rang must now be regarded as the true birthplace of the Zainderud and the Karun, though their sources have hitherto been placed in the Zard Kuh. A tributary of the Ab-i-Diz, and locally considered as its head-water, rises also in the Kuh-i-Rang.

Aziz Khan, who had gone to his tents, has returned with a very nice young servant and another mare, and with him noise and "go." He has such a definite personality, and is so energetic in his movements, that the camps are dull without him. He is a fearful beggar. He asks me for something every day, and for things he can make no possible use of, simply out of acquisitiveness. He has got from me among many other things a new embroidered saddle-cloth, a double-bladed knife, an Indian *kamarband*, many yards of silk, a large pair of scissors, bracelets for his wife and daughter, and working materials, and now he has set his heart on a large combination knife, which is invaluable to me. "What use is that knife to a woman?" he asks daily. Now he says that I have given him many things but I have never given him money, and he must have a purse of money.

"Why can you do so much more than our women?" he often asks. His astonishment that I can read, and yet more that I can write, is most amusing. "Can many women in your country write?" he asked. "Can your Queen read and write? Can she embroider as you do?" At first he thought that I only pretended to write, but was convinced when I sent a letter to the Ilkhani.

He usually appears when a number of sick people come, interprets their dialect into good Persian for Mirza, and beats and pelts them with stones when they crowd too closely, but they do not care. Sometimes when I say that nothing that I have can do a sick person any good he begs "for my sake" that I will try, and when I still decline he goes away in a tantrum, cursing, and shaking his wide *shulwars* with an angry strut, but is soon back again with fresh demands.

He spreads his prayer-carpet and goes through his devotions thrice a day, but somehow "Aziz Khan praying" seems to suggest some ludicrous idea, even to his co-religionists. "Feringhis don't fear God," he said to me; "they never worship." I told him he was wrong, that many are very devout. He said, "Does – pray?" mentioning a European. I said "Most certainly," and he walked away with the sneering laugh of a fiend. He is a complete child of nature. He says what he thinks, and acts chiefly as he pleases, but withal there is a gentlemanliness and a considerable dignity about him. I think that his ruling religion is loyalty to Isfandyar Khan, and consequent hatred of the Ilkhani and all his other enemies. Going through a pantomimic firing of an English rifle he said, "I hope I may shoot the Shah with this one day!" "For what reason?" I asked. "Because he murdered Isfandyar Khan's father, and I hate him." I asked him if he liked shooting, and he replied, "I like shooting men!"

He has done a good deal of fighting, and has been shot through the lung, arm, and leg, besides getting sword cuts, and he takes some pride in showing his wounds. I think he is faithful. Mirza says that he has smoothed many difficulties, and has put many crooked things straight, without taking any credit to himself. His most apparent faults are greed and a sort of selfish cunning.

There are many camps about the Gal-i-Gav, and crowds, needing very careful watching, are always about the tents, wanting to see Feringhi things, most of the people never having seen a Feringhi. It is a novel sight in the evenings when long lines of brown sheep in single file cross the snow-fields, following the shepherds into camp.

This Gal-i-Gav on the Kuh-i-Rang marks a new departure on the journey, as well as the establishment of certain geographical facts. It will be impossible for the future to place the source of the Karun in the Zard Kuh range, for we followed the stream up to the Kuh-i-Rang, or to indulge in the supposition that the mountains which lie to the north-west are "covered with eternal snow," which in this latitude would imply heights from 17,000 to 20,000 feet.

It is indeed a disappointment that, look where one may over the great area filled up by huge rock barriers and vast mountains, from the softer ridges bounding the fiery Persian plains to the last hills in which the Inner range descends upon the great alluvial levels of Khuzistan, not a peak presents itself in the glittering snowy mantle which I have longed to see. Snow in forlorn patches or nearly hidden in sunless rifts, and the snow-fields of the Zard Kuh will remain for a time, but eternal snow

is – nowhere, and it does not appear that the highest of the peaks much exceeds 13,000 feet, either in Upper Elam or the Bakhtiari country.

Great difficulties are ahead, not only from tracks which are said to be impassable for laden animals, but from the disturbed state of the country. From what I hear from Aziz Khan and from the guides who have come up here, I gather that the power of the Ilkhani, shaky enough even nearer Ardal, all but dwindles away here, and is limited to the collection of the tribute, the petty Khans fighting among themselves, and doing mainly what is right in their own eyes.

It is somewhat of a satisfaction to me that it is impossible now to go back, and that a region absolutely unexplored lies ahead, doubtless full, as the previously untraversed regions have been, of surprises and interests.

I. L. B.

LETTER XVIII

Camp Gokun, July 6.

A descent of 5000 feet brought us into the grand and narrow gorge of the Sahid stream, with willow, walnut, oak, maple, pear, and crab along its banks, knotted together by sprays of pink roses, with oaks higher up, and above them again overhanging mountains of naked rock, scorched, and radiating heat.

Quite suddenly, after a steep ascent, there is a view of a steep slope below, where a lateral ravine comes down on the Sahid, green with crops of wheat and barley, poplars, willows, and a grove of fine walnuts, and more wonderful still, with an *imamzada* in good repair, and a village, also named Sahid, in which people live all the year. The glen is magnificent, and is the one spot that I have seen in Persia which suggests Switzerland.

It is a steep and difficult descent through a walnut grove to the village, and before I knew it I was on the roof of a house. The village is built in ten steps up the steep hillside, the posts which support one projecting roof resting on the back of the roof below.

The people were timid and suspicious, gave untrue replies to questions at first, said we were "doing talisman to take their country," and consulted in Aziz's and Mirza's hearing how they might rob us. It was even difficult to get them to bring fodder for the horses. They were fanatical and called us *Kafirs*. Some of the women have never been out of their romantic mountain-walled hole, in which they are shut up by snow for four months every winter. Ten families live there, each one possessing a step. They said they owned sixty-five goats and sheep, five cows, and seven asses; that they sell their wheat, and salt from a salt spring at the back of the hill, and that their food is chiefly acorn flour made into bread, curds, and wild celery.

This bread is made from the fruit of the *Quercus ballota*, which is often nearly three inches long. The acorns are not gathered, but picked up when they fall. The women bruise them between stones to expel the bitter juices. They are afterwards reduced to flour, which is well washed to remove the remaining bitterness, and dried in the sun. It is either made into thin cakes and baked, or is mixed into a paste with buttermilk and water and eaten raw. The baked cakes are not very unpalatable, but the paste is nauseous. Acorn flour is never used from choice.

The grain is exchanged for blue cottons and tobacco. It is not possible to imagine a more isolated life. Tihran and Isfahan are names barely known to these people, and the Shah is little more to them than the Czar.

Near the *imamzada* of Sahid is a burial-ground, rendered holy by the dust of a *pir* or saint who lies there. It has many headstones, and one very large gray stone lion, on whose sides are rude carvings of a gun, a sword, a dagger, a powder-flask, and a spear. On a few low headstones a peculiar comb is carved, denoting that the grave is that of a woman.

To several stones long locks of hair are attached, some black and shining, others dead-looking and discoloured. It is customary for the Bakhtiari women to sacrifice their locks to the memory of their husbands and other near male relatives.

I think that they have a great deal of conjugal and family affection, though their ways are rough, and that they mourn for their dead for a considerable time. On one grave a young woman was rocking herself to and fro, wailing with a sound like the Highland coronach, but longer and more despairing. She was also beating her uncovered bosom rhythmically, and had cut her face till the blood came. So apparently absorbed was she in her grief that she took no notice of a Feringhi and an Indian. She had been bereaved of her husband for a year, his life having been sacrificed in a tribal fight.

The next two days were occupied in what might well be called "mountaineering" on goat tracks; skirting great mountain spurs on shelving paths not always wide enough for a horse's two feet alongside

of each other, with precipitous declivities of 1000 or 2000 feet; ascending on ledges of rock to over 9000 feet, then by frightful tracks descending 2000 or 3000 but to climb again; and at every descent always seeing in front dizzy zigzags surmounting the crest of some ragged ridge, only, as one knows, to descend again. *Screw* nearly fell over backwards with me once and again, and came down a smooth face of rock as mules sometimes come down a snow slide in Switzerland. I was told that I should "break my neck" many times, that no Bakhtiari had ever ridden over these tracks, or ever would, but my hurt knee left me no choice. These tracks are simply worn by the annual passage of the nomads and their flocks. They are frightful beyond all description. The worst paths in Ladak and Nubra are nothing to them.

Occasionally we traversed deep ravines with noisy torrents where the shade was dense, and willows, ash, walnut, cherry, elm, plum, and oak were crowded together, with the *Juniperus excelsa* in rifts above. With a moist climate it would be a glorious land, but even where the scenery is finest there is always something lacking. There is no atmosphere. All is sharp, colourless, naked. Even many of the flowers are queer, and some are positively ugly. Many have thorns, some are leather-like, others woolly, a few sticky. Inconspicuous flowers and large leathery leaves are very common. The seed-vessels of some are far prettier than the flowers, and brighter in colour. In several the calyx grows after the corolla has withered, and becomes bright pink or orange, like a very gay but only partially-opened blossom. *Umbelliferæ* predominate this month. *Compositæ* too are numerous. All, even bulbs, send down their roots very deep.

After leaving camp yesterday and crossing a high pass we descended into the earth's interior, only to ascend a second pass by a steep zigzag. Suddenly a wall of rock appeared as if to bar progress, but on nearing it a narrow V-shaped slit was seen to afford a risky passage, offering no other foothold than smooth shelving rock on the inside for a number of yards, with a precipice above on the right and below on the left. Ledges of slippery rock led up to it, and *Screw* was jumping and scrambling up these when the guides howled to me to stop, and I was lifted off somehow. The white Arab was rolling and struggling in the V, *Screw* following lost his footing, and the two presented a confusion of hoofs and legs in the air and bodies struggling and rolling through the slit till they picked themselves up with cut legs. The guides tried vainly to find some way by which the caravans which followed much later might avoid this risk, and the Agha went down the pass which had been so laboriously ascended to give directions for its passage.

The *charvadars* on reaching the difficulty made attempts to turn it but failed; some loads were taken off and carried by men, and each mule struggled safely through with one man at his head, and one or two supporting him by his tail. The passage of the V took the caravan an hour, but meantime there was the enjoyment of the sight of a confused mass of mountains, whitish precipitous ranges, sun-lit, with tremendous ravines between them, lying in the cool blue shadows of early morning; mountains with long straight summits, mountains snow-covered and snow-slashed, great spires of naked rock, huge ranges buttressed by huge spurs herbage-covered, with outcrops of barren rock, – a mighty, solitary, impressive scene, an uplifted wilderness without a camp.

The descent of 4000 feet from this summit consists of any number of zigzag tracks on the narrow top of the narrow ridge of one of the huge rocky buttresses of Gartak, both sides being precipitous. Even on the horse I was dizzy, and he went down most unwillingly, not taking any responsibility as to finding the safest way, and depending solely on my eye and hand. Mirza, being hampered with the care of his own mule, was useless, and otherwise I was alone. These thready zigzags ended on what appeared to be a precipice, from the foot of which human voices came up, shouting to me to dismount. I did so, and got down, hanging on to *Screw's* bridle, and letting myself down over the ledges by my hands for another hour, having to be careful all the time to avoid being knocked down by his slips and jumps. I could hardly get him to face some of the smooth broken faces of rock. A slide of gravel, a snow-bridge, worn thin, over a torrent, and some slippery rock ledges to scramble over by its side led to a pathless ascent through grass and bushes. The guides and Aziz

roared to me from a valley below, by which roars I found my way down a steep hillside to the Gokun, a mountain river of a unique and most beautiful blue-green colour, abounding in deep pools from which it emerges in billows of cool foam.

I forded it by a broad ford where crystal-green water glides calmly over brown and red pebbles, with a willow-shaded margin, and as I crossed a flock of long-bearded goats swam and jumped from rock to rock from the other side, the whole scene an artist's dream. This valley has magnificent pasturage, hay not yet "sun cured," long grass, and abundant clover and vetches brightened by a profuse growth of a small *helianthus*.

The march over the Gokun Pass and down to the Gokun river is the worst I ever made. Had the track been in Ladak or Lahoul it would have been marked on the Government maps "impassable for laden animals." Yet Hadji's splendid mules, held at times by both head and tail, accomplished it, and only minor disasters occurred. One mule had his head gashed, Mirza had a bad fall, and broke my milk bottle, Hassan, leading his own horse, fell twenty feet with the animal and cut his arm, the ridge pole of my tent was broken, and is with difficulty bandaged so as to hold, and some of the other baggage was damaged. Hadji grumbles politely, and says that "in all time loaded mules were never taken over such tracks," and I believe him. Aziz says that I must be "tired of life," or I should never ride over them, and certainly *Screw* carried me at the peril of his life and mine.

The camps are pitched for Sunday at an altitude of 8000 feet, high above the river – mine under the befriending shade of a colossal natural sphinx, so remarkable that two photographs and a sketch by Mirza were taken of it. It confronted us in a startling way, a grand man's head with a flowing wig and a legal face, much resembling the photographs of Lord Chancellor Hatherley.

The mules have been poorly fed for the last few days, and it is pleasant to see them revelling in the abundant pasturage. After this tremendous nine hours' march they came in quite cheerily, Cock o' the Walk leading the caravan, with his fighting face on, shaking his grand mane, and stamping as if he had not walked a mile.

The Sunday has been a very quiet one, except for the fighting of the horses, which seem intent on murdering each other, the fussiness of Aziz about a cut which his mare got yesterday, and for which he expects my frequent attention, and the torment of the sand-flies, which revel in the heat which kills the mosquitos.

Kalahoma, July 11.– On Monday it was a pretty march from the shadow of the sphinx through a well-irrigated and cultivated valley with many camps, and by a high pass, to the neighbourhood of the Kuh-i-Shahan, on which I rested for some hours at a height of 12,010 feet, the actual summit being somewhat higher. On its north-east side the view was hideous, of scorched, rolling gravel hills and wide scorched valleys, with two winding streams, and some patches of wheat surrounding two scorched mud villages.

The descent to Camp Kamarun, a deep ravine with a rapid mountain stream, was blessed by a shower, which cooled the air, and resulted in the only grand, stormy, wild sunset that I have seen for months. This valley is blocked at the east end by Gargunaki, on the west by the Kala Kuh, and the rocky ranges of Faidun and the Kuh-i-Shahan close in its sides.

Long, long ago tradition says a certain great chief had eleven sons. They quarrelled and divided into hostile factions of four and seven, forming the still hostile groups of the Chahar Lang and the Haft Lang of to-day. For some time past the ruling dynasty has been of the Haft Lang division; Aziz also belongs to it, and we have been almost entirely among its tribes hitherto. This ancient feud, though modified in intensity, still exists. At this camp we were among tribes of the Chahar Lang, and there was reason to apprehend robbery and a night attack; so careful arrangements were made, and the men kept guard by turns.

The following day's march, which was also pretty, included a long descent through a cultivated valley, with willows, plums, and walnuts growing along a stream, and a steep ascent and descent to the two villages of Masir on well-cultivated slopes, belonging to Taimur Khan, the chief of the powerful

Magawe tribe, to whom the villagers pay what they call a moderate "rent" in sheep, goats, and grain. They are of the Chahar Lang, and deny that they are under the Ilkhani's rule. They had a fight with a tribe of the Haft Lang ten days ago, killed twelve men, had seven killed and wounded, and took some guns and horses. These, however, they have restored at the command of the Ilkhani, which contradicts their assertion.

They have a burial-ground with several very white lions rampant upon it, of most noble aspect, boldly carved, and with the usual bas-reliefs on their sides.

The camps were on a gravelly slope with a yellow glare, and the mercury reached 105°. The presence of villages in this country always indicates a comparatively warm climate, in which people can live throughout the winter. The Scripture phrase, "maketh the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice," has come to bear a clear and vivid meaning. In this country, in this fiery latitude, life is merely a struggle from the time the sun has been up for two hours until he sinks very low. "There is nothing hid from the heat thereof." One watches with dismay his flaming disc wheel into the cloudless sky, to blaze and scintillate mercilessly there for many terrible hours, scorching, withering, destroying, "turning a fruitful land into a desert," bringing eye diseases in his train. With sunset, but not much before, comes a respite, embittered by sand-flies, and life begins to be possible; then darkness comes with a stride and the day is done.

Among the many people who came to the *Hakīm* was a man who had received a severe sword cut in the recent fight. I disliked his expression, and remarked on it to Mirza. On the next day's march, though there were twelve men with the caravan, this man seized and made off with the handsome chestnut horse Karun, which was being led. The horse had a sore back and soon kicked off his rider and was recovered. On the same march Mujid was attacked, and under the threat of being stripped was obliged to give up all the money he had on his person. On the same day some women clamorously demanded bracelets, and when I did not give them two took hold of my bridle and one of my foot, and were dragging me off, when on Mirza coming up they let me go.

Marching among lower hills and broader valleys, irrigated and cultivated, with much wood along the streams and scattered on the lower slopes, we passed the inhabited villages of Tarsa and Sah Kala, surrounded by patches of buckwheat, vetches, and melons, and with much provision of *kiziks* for fuel on their roofs, and camped by the richly-wooded river Guwa, in a grove of fine trees, crossing its vigorous torrent the next morning by a wicker bridge, the Pul-i-Guwa. A long ascent among oaks, where the views of mountains and ravines were grand, an upland meadow where I found a white bee orchis, and a steep ascent among stones, brought us to the top of a pass 9650 feet in altitude. On its south-west side there is a very striking view of gorges of immense depth and steepness, through which the Guwa finds its way. To the north-east the prospect is of a very feeble country, which we entered by a tiresome gravelly descent, very open, composed of low hills with outcrops of rock at their summits, irrigated rolling valleys and plains, with deep rifts indicative of streams, and some Magawe villages.

Our route lay across the most scorched and gravelly part of the upper slopes of a wide valley, scantily sprinkled with blue *eryngiums* and a woolly species of *artemisia*, a very repulsive region, where herds of camels, kept for breeding purposes, were grazing. On the other side of this valley a spur of the fine mountain Jalanda projects, and on it are the two villages and fort of Kalahoma, the residence of Taimur Khan.

We halted below the hill while a spring was being searched for, and I was sitting on horseback eating my lunch, a biscuit in one hand and a cup in the other. I have mentioned the savagery of the horses, and especially of *Hakīm*, who has become like a wild beast. He was standing fully four horse-lengths away from me, with his tail towards me, and the guide had let go his bridle, when there was a roar or squeal, and a momentary vision of glaring wild-beast eyes, streaming mane, and open mouth rushing down upon me and towering above *Screw's* head, and the next thing I remember is finding myself on the ground with my foot in the stirrup and three men lifting me up.

I was a good deal shaken, and cut my arm badly, but mounted again, and though falling on my head has given me a sickish headache for two days, I have not absolutely required rest, and in camp there is no use in "making a fuss" – if indeed there ever is.

I shall not have pleasant memories of this camp. The tents were scarcely pitched before crowds assembled for medicine. I could get no rest, for if I shut the tent the heat was unbearable, and if I opened it there was the crowd, row behind row, the hindmost pushing the foremost in, so that it was 8 p. m. before I got any food. Yesterday morning at six I was awakened by people all round the tent, some shaking the curtains and calling "*Hakīm! Hakīm!*" and though I kept it shut till eleven, and raised the mercury to 115° by doing so, there was no rest.

From eleven o'clock till 9 p. m., except for one hour, when I was away at the Khan's, I was "seeing patients," wishing I were a real instead of a spurious *Hakīm*, for there was so much suffering, and some of it I knew not how to relieve. However, I was able (thanks to St. Mary's Hospital, London) to open three whitlows and two abscesses, and it was delightful to see the immediate relief of the sufferers. "God is great," they all exclaimed, and the bystanders echoed, "God is great." I dressed five neglected bullet wounds, and sewed up a gash of doubtful origin, and with a little help from Mirza prepared eye-lotions and medicines for seventy-three people. I asked one badly-wounded man in what quarrel he had been shot, and he replied that he didn't know, his Khan had told him to go and fight.

In the afternoon several very distressed people were brought from an Armenian village ten miles off, and were laid by those who brought them at the tent door. At five the crowd was very great and the hubbub inconceivable, and Mirza failed to keep order in the absence of Aziz Khan, who had gone on a pilgrimage to a neighbouring *imamzada*. The mercury had never fallen below 100°. I had been standing or kneeling for six hours, and had a racking headache, so I reluctantly shut up my medicine chest and went by invitation to call on the Khan's wives, but the whole crowd surrounded and followed me, swelling as it moved along, a man with a mare with bad eyes, which had been brought ten miles for eye-lotion, increasing the clamour by his urgency. "Khanum! Khanum!" (lady) "Chashma!" (eyes) "Shikam!" (stomach) were shouted on all sides, with "*Hakīm! Hakīm!*" The people even clutched my clothing, and hands were raised to heaven to implore blessings on me if I would attend to them.

The whole village of Kalahoma was out, thronging, pressing, and almost suffocating me, and the Khan's servants who came to meet me did not or could not disperse the people, though every man holds his life at the Khan's disposal. These villages, which are surrounded by opium fields, are composed of the rudest of human habitations, built of rough stones, the walls being only five feet high. There is much subterranean room for cattle. The stacks of such winter fodder as celery and *Centaurea alata*, and those of *kiziks* for fuel, are larger than the dwellings. The latter are of conical form, and many of them are built on the house roofs.

Taimur Khan's fort and *serai* are in the midst of all this, and are very poor and ruinous, but the walls are high, and they have a *balakhana*. As I approached the ladies came out to meet me, veiled in white cotton *chadars*. The principal wife took my hand and led me through a hole in the wall, not to be called a doorway, into a courtyard littered with offal and piled with stacked animal fuel, and up some high dilapidated steps, into a small dark room, outside of which are a very small "lobby" and a blackened ladder against the wall, leading to the roof, on which the ladies sleep in the hot weather. Some poor rugs covered the floor, and there were besides some poor cotton-covered bolsters. Everything, even the dress of the ladies, indicated poverty. The dark hot room was immediately packed with a crowd of women, children, and babies, all appallingly dirty. It was a relief when the Khan was announced in the distance, and they cleared out like frightened sheep, leaving only the four wives, who stood up at his approach, and remained standing till he was seated.

No "well-bred" Khan would pay me a visit in his *andarun* without sending first with his "homage" to know if I would receive him, nor did Taimur Khan violate this rule or the other of remaining standing until I asked him to be seated. He is a tall, very melancholy-looking man, with a Turkish cast of face, and is dressed in the usual Persian style. After a few ordinary commonplaces he

talked politics and tribal affairs, *apparently* frankly, but who can say if truthfully? He knows that I have letters from the Prime Minister, and he hoped that I might do him some good at Tihran. As soon as important subjects superseded trifles, the wives relapsed into complete indifference, and stared into vacancy.

His tribe, the Magawe, is estimated at 500 families, and has been powerful. Taimur Khan is a staunch adherent of the Ilkhani, but at this point there is a change as to the tribute, half of which is paid to the Ilkhani and half to the Governor of Burujird. He has many grievances, and complains most bitterly that he and his tribe are being ground into poverty by exactions which, he asserts, have this year raised the tribute from 700 to 4000 *tumans*.

He asks me to do something to help him, adding that his house is in ruins, and that he is so oppressed that he cannot build a new one, or have any surroundings suitable to his rank. I said that I could only send his statements to the British "Vakil" in Tihran, and he at once asked how many horses he should present him with. I replied that the "Vakil" would not accept anything, and that he had lately declined a superb diamond setting in which the Shah desired to send him his picture. The Khan raised his hands, with the exclamation "God is great!"

Isfandyar Khan and Taimur Khan were at war some years ago, and fought from mountain to mountain, and Taimur Khan was eventually captured, taken to Burujird, and sent to Isfahan, where he was kept in irons for some years, the redoubtable Aziz Khan being one of his captors. This accounts for the disappearance of Aziz on "pilgrimage" to a neighbouring *imamzada*, and the consequent dulness of the camp.

Among a people at once simple and revengeful, it is not unlikely that such severities may bear their legitimate fruit if an occasion presents itself, such as the embroilment of Persia with any other power. Another Khan who was thrown into prison and irons by the Zil-es-Sultan expressed himself strongly on the subject. "Five years," he said, holding out his muscular wrists, on which the marks of fetters are still visible, "I wore the chains. Can I forget?" The Bakhtiaris do not love the Persians, and are held, I think, by a brittle thread.

I have written of the extreme poverty of the surroundings of the Khaja Taimur or Taimur Khan. It is not a solitary instance. Throughout this journey I am painfully impressed with the poverty of the tribesmen. As compared with the wealth of those farther south when visited by Sir A. H. Layard and the Baron de Bode, their condition is one of destitution. The Ilkhani and Ilbegi have fine studs, but few of the Khans have any horses worth looking at, and for some time past none at all have been seen except a few belonging to the chiefs, and the men either walk or ride very small asses.

Their cattle are few and small and their flocks insignificant when compared with those of the Arab tribes west of the Tigris. Their tents and furnishings are likewise extremely poor, and they live poorly, many of them only able to procure acorn flour for bread, and this though they grow a great deal of grain, and every yard of land is cultivated if water is procurable.

The hospitality which those two travellers mention as a feature of the character of the more southerly Bakhtiaris does not exist among these people. They have, in fact, little to be hospitable with. They all speak of better days in the times of their fathers, when they had brood mares and horses to ride, much pastoral wealth and plenty of *roghan*, and when their women could wear jewels and strings of coins.

On this point I believe them, though there may possibly be exaggeration in Taimur Khan's statements. Persia has undoubtedly tightened her grip upon them, and she is sucking their life-blood out of them. This becomes very evident now that we have reached a point where the government of Burujird comes in, with the infinite unrighteousness of Persian provincial governors. It is not the tribute fixed by the Amin-es-Sultan which these Khans complain of, but the rapacious exactions of the local governors.

There is a "blood feud" between Taimur Khan and Aslam Khan, the chief of the Zalaki tribe, on whose territory we shall enter to-day. A nephew of Taimur killed a relation of Aslam, and afterwards

Taimur sheltered him from legitimate vengeance. Just now the feud is very active, and cattle-lifting and other reprisals are going on. "Blood feuds" are of three degrees, according to the nature of the offence. In the first a man of the one tribe can kill a man of the other wherever he finds him. In the second he harries his cattle and goods. In the third he simply "boycotts" him and refuses him a passage through his territory. The Bakhtiaris have often been called "bloodthirsty." I doubt whether they are so, though life is of little account, and they are reckless about spilling blood.

They have a great deal of family devotion, which in lesser degree extends to the members of their tribe, and a Bakhtiari often spares the life of a man who has aggrieved him owing to his fear of creating a blood feud, which must be transmitted from father to son, and which must affect the whole tribe. As a deterrent from acts of violence it acts powerfully, and may account for the singular bloodlessness of some of the tribal fights. Few men, unless carried away by a whirlwind of fury, care to involve a tribe in the far-reaching consequences alluded to, and bad as the custom of blood feuds is, I think there can be no doubt that it acts as a curb upon the passions of these wild tribesmen. "There is blood between us and them," is a phrase often heard.

Punishments are simple and deterrent, well suited to a simple people. When a homicide is captured he is handed over to the relatives of the slain man, who may kill him, banish him, fine him, or pardon him. In point of fact, "blood-money" is paid to the family of the deceased person, and to save his life from their vengeance a homicide frequently becomes a mendicant on the other side of the mountains till he can gain the required sum. Moslem charity responds freely to a claim for alms to wipe out a blood stain. The Ilkhani has a right to fine a homicide. "Blood for blood" is a maxim very early inculcated.

The present feud between the Magawe and the Zalaki tribes is of the first degree. It is undoubtedly a part of the truly Oriental policy of Persia to foment tribal quarrels, and keep them going, with the object of weakening the power of the clans, which, though less so than formerly, is a standing menace to the central government.

On reaching camp after this visit I found a greater crowd than ever, and as "divers of them came from far," I tried to help them till nine o'clock, and as Aziz had returned the crowding was not so severe. He said, "You're very tired, send these people away, you've done enough." I answered that one had never done enough so long as one could do more, and he made a remark which led me to ask him if he thought a *Kafir* could reach Paradise? He answered "Oh no!" very hastily, but after a moment's thought said, "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."

I. L. B.

LETTER XVIII (*Continued*)[5]

Camp Kala Kuh, July 16.

The call to "Boot and Saddle" was at three, and I was nearly too tired to pack in the sultry morning air. The heat is overpowering. Khaja Taimur no doubt had reasons for a difficulty in providing guides, which caused delay. The track lay through pretty country, with abounding herbage, to the village and *imamzada* of Makhedi. There the guide said he dared not go any farther for fear of being killed, and after some time another was procured. During this delay a crowd of handsome but hardship-aged women gathered round me, many of them touching the handkerchiefs on their heads and then tapping the palms of their hands, a significant sign, which throughout Persia, being interpreted, means, "Give me some money."

The Agha is in the habit of gathering the little girls about him and giving them *krans* as from his own children, a most popular proceeding usually; but here the people were not friendly, and very suspicious. Even the men asked me clamorously, "Why does he give them money? It's poisoned, it's cursed, it's to make them blind." However, avarice prevailed over fear. The people rarely see money, and it is not used as a medium of exchange, but they value it highly for paying the tribute and as ornaments for the women. Barter is the custom, and with regard to "tradesmen," whether in camps or villages, it is usual for each family to pay so much grain annually to the blacksmith, the carpenter, the shoemaker —*i. e.* the man who makes compressed rag or leather soles for *ghevas* and unites the cotton webbing ("upper") to the sole – and the *hammam* keeper, in the rare cases where there is one. They were cutting wheat on July 12 there at an altitude of 7000 feet. Where there are only camps the oxen tread it out at once on the hard soil of the fields, but where there is a village the sheaves are brought in on donkeys' backs to a house roof of sun-dried clay, and are there trodden out, the roofs being usually accessible from the slope above.

We descended to a deep ford, crossed the river Ab-i-Baznoi (locally known as Kakulistan, or "the curl," from its singular windings), there about sixty feet wide, with clear rapid water of a sky-blue tint, very strong, and up to the guide's waist, and entered a steep-sided stony valley, where the heat was simply sickening. There the second guide left us, saying he should be killed if he went any farther, but another was willing to succeed him. After a steep ascent we emerged on a broad rolling upland valley, deeply gashed by a stream, with the grand range of the Kala Kuh on the south side, and low bare hills on the north. It is now populous, the valley and hillsides are spotted with large camps, and the question at once arose, "Hostile or Friendly?"

I was riding as usual with Mirza behind me, when a man with a gun rushed frantically towards me from an adjacent camp, waving his gun and shouting, "Who are you? Why are you in our country? You're friends of Khaja Taimur, you've given him presents, we'll rob you"! With these and many similar words he pursued us, and men started up as by magic, with long guns, running alongside, the low spurs became covered with people in no time, and there was much signalling from hill to hill, "A-hoy-hoy-hoy-hoy," and sending of messengers. Mirza pacified them by saying that we are friends of Isfandyar Khan, and that I have presents for Aslam Khan, their chief; but soon the shout of "Feringhis" was raised, and from group to group along the knolls swelled the cry of "Feringhis! Feringhis!" mixed with a few shouts of *Kafir*; but without actual molestation we reached a steep and uncomfortable camping-ground, Padshah-i-Zalaki, at an altitude of 7800 feet, with an extensive view of the broad green valley.

---

[5] From Kalahoma for the rest of the route the predatory character of the tribes, the growing weakness of the Ilkhani's authority, the "blood feuds" and other inter-tribal quarrels, and the unsettled state of the Feili Lurs, produced a general insecurity and continual peril for travellers, which rendered constant vigilance and precautions necessary, as well as an alteration of arrangements.

Before we halted Aslam Khan, a very fine-looking man, and others met us, and performed feats of horsemanship, wheeling their horses in small circles at a gallop, and firing pantomimically over their left shoulders and right flanks. The Sahib came in later, so that our party was a tolerably strong one.

The first thing the people did was to crowd into the shelter-tent and lie down, staring fixedly, a thing which never happened before, and groups steadily occupied the tops of the adjacent spurs. After my tent was pitched the people assembled round it in such numbers, ostensibly desiring medicine, that the Khan sent two *tufangchis* to keep order among them, and Karim, whose arm is now well, was added as a protection. The Agha ordered that the people should sit in rows at the sides and take their turn, one at a time, to come into the verandah, but no sooner were he and Aziz Khan out of sight than they began to crowd, to shout, and to become unmanageable, scuffling and pushing, the *tufangchis* pretending to beat them with the barrels of their guns, but really encouraging them, and at length going away, saying they could not manage them. Karim begged me to stop giving medicine, for he was overpowered, and if he opposed them any more there would be a fight. They had said that if he "spoke another word they would kill him." They were perfectly good-humoured all the time, but acted like complete savages, getting under the *flys*, tugging at the tent ropes, and trying to pull my blankets off the bed, etc. At last the hindmost gave a sudden push, sending the foremost tumbling into the tent and over me, upsetting a large open packet of sulphate of zinc, just arrived from Julfa, which was on my lap.

I left the tent to avoid further mischief, but was nearly suffocated by their crowding and tugging my dress, shouting "*Hakīm! Hakīm!*" The Sahib, who came to the rescue, and urged them in Persian to depart, was quite powerless. In the midst of the confusion the Khan's wives and daughter came to visit me, but I could only show them the crowd and walk, followed by it, in the opposite direction from the tent, till I met the Agha, whose presence restored order. That night nearly all Hadji's *juls* or mule blankets and a donkey were stolen.

The Zalakis are a large and powerful tribe, predatory by habit and tradition. Aslam Khan himself directed certain thefts from which we suffered, and quoted a passage from the Koran not only to extenuate but to warrant depredations on the goods of "infidels."

Sunday was spent in the hubbub of a crowd. I was suffering somewhat from a fall, and yet more from the fatigues of Kalahoma, and longed for rest, but the temperature of the tent when closed was 106°, and when open the people crowded at the entrance, ostensibly for medicine, but many from a pardonable and scarcely disguised curiosity to see the "Feringhi *Hakīm*," and hear her speak.

In the afternoon, with Mirza and Karim as a guard, I went somewhat reluctantly to the Khan's camp to return the abortive visit of the ladies. This camp consists of a number of black tents arranged in a circle, the Khan's tents only distinguishable from the rest by their larger size. Mares, dogs, sheep, goats, and fireholes were in the centre, and some good-looking horses were tethered outside.

The Khan's mother, a fine, buxom, but coarse-looking woman, met me, and took me to an open tent, fully forty feet long, the back of which was banked up by handsome saddle-bags. Bolsters and rugs were laid in the middle, on which the four legitimate wives and several inferior ones, with a quantity of babies and children crawling about them, were seated. Among them was a very handsome Jewish-looking girl of eighteen, the Khan's daughter, pleasing in expression and graceful in manner. She is married to a son of Taimur Khan, but he does not care for her, and has practically discarded her, which adds insult to the "blood feud" previously existing.

After I entered the tent the whole camp population, male and female, crowded in, pressing upon us with clamour indescribable. The Khan's mother slapped the wives if they attempted to speak and conducted herself like a ruling virago, occasionally shrieking at the crowd, while a *tufangchi* with a heavy stick belaboured all within his reach, and those not belaboured yelled with laughter.

The senior lady beckoned Mirza to lean towards her, and told him in a whisper that her handsome granddaughter is hated and despised by her husband, and has been sent back with a baby a

year old, he having taken another wife, and that she wanted me to give her a "love philtre" that would answer the double purpose of giving her back his love and making her rival hateful in his eyes. During this whispered conference as many as could reach leant close to the speakers, like the "savages" that they are. I replied that I knew of no such philtres, that if the girl's beauty and sweetness could not retain her husband's love there was no remedy. She said she knew I had them, and that I kept them, as well as potions for making favourite wives ugly and odious to their husbands, in a leather box with a gold key! Then many headaches and sore eyes were brought, and a *samovar* and tea, and I distributed presents in a Babel in which anything but the most staccato style of conversation was impossible. When I left the crowd surged after me, and a sharp stone was thrown, which cut through my cloak.

Later, Aslam Khan, his brothers, and the usual train of retainers called. He is a very fine-looking man, six feet high, with a most sinister expression, and a look at times which inspired me with the deepest distrust of him. His robber tribe numbers 3500 souls, and he says that he can bring 540 armed horsemen into the field. He too asked for medicine for headache. Not only is there a blood feud between him and Khaja Taimur, but between him and Mirab Khan, through whose valley we must pass. In the evening the Khan's mother returned with several women, bent on getting the "love philtre." At night Hadji, who was watching, said that men were prowling round the tents at all hours, and a few things were taken.

On Monday morning early all was ready, for the three caravans from that day were to march together, and I was sitting on my horse talking with the Sahib, waiting for the Agha to return from the Khan's camp, when he rushed down the slope exclaiming, "There's mischief!" and I crossed the stream and watched it. About twenty men with loaded sticks had surrounded Mujid, and were beating him and finally got him down. I leapt back to my own camp, where Hassan and Karim were taking a parting smoke, and ordered them to the rescue. The soldier rushed into the *mêlée*, armed with only a cane, which was broken at once, and the Bakhtiaris got him by his thick hair, and all but forced him down; but he fought like a bulldog, and so did Hassan, who was unarmed and got two bad cuts. Dashed too into the fray Hadji Hussein, who fought like a bull, followed by his muleteers and by Abbas Ali, who, being early knocked down, hung on to a man's arm with his teeth. The Sahib, who was endeavouring to make peace, was untouched, possibly because of his lineage and faith, and he yelled to Mirza (who in a fight is of no account) to run for the Agha, whose presence is worth fifty men.

Meanwhile a number of Zalakis, armed, two with guns and the rest with loaded sticks, crowded round me, using menacing gestures and calling me a *Kafir*, on which I took my revolver out of the holster, and very slowly examined the chambers, though I knew well that all were loaded. This had an excellent effect. They fell back, and were just dispersing when over the crest of the hill cantered Aziz Khan, followed by the Agha, who, galloping down the slope, fired a revolver twice over the head of a man who was running away, who, having stolen a sheep, and being caught in the act by Mujid, had begun the fray. Aslam Khan followed, and, the men say, gave the order to fire, but recalled it on finding that one of his tribesmen had been the aggressor. I thought he took the matter very coolly, and he almost immediately told Mirza to ask me for a penknife!

After this we started, the orders being for the caravans to keep well together, and if we were absolutely attacked to "fire." After ascending a spur of the Kala Kuh we left the track for an Ilyat camp on a steep hill among oaks and pears, where I had promised to see a young creature very ill of fever.

Among the trees was a small booth of four poles, roofed with celery stalks, but without sides or ends, and in this, on a sheepskin, was a heap out of which protruded two white wasted arms. I uncovered the back of a head which turned slowly, and revealed, in a setting of masses of heavy shining hair, the white face of a young girl, with large brilliant eyes and very beautiful teeth. Her pulse was fluttering feebly, and I told the crowd that death was very near, for fear they should think I had poisoned her with the few drops of stimulant that she was able to swallow. Even here the death penalty sometimes follows the joy of maternity. She died in the evening, and now nothing remains

of the camp but a heap of ashes, for these people always at once leave the camping-ground where a death has occurred.

Meanwhile the Agha was making friends with the people, and giving *krans* to the children, as is his habit. Scarcely had we left when he found that he had been robbed of a fine pair of binocular glasses, almost a necessity under the circumstances. English rifles, binoculars, and watches are all coveted by the Bakhtiaris. Aziz Khan became very grave, and full of dismal prophecies regarding the remainder of the journey.

After this divergence the scenery was magnificent. The Kala Kuh range is certainly finer than the Zard Kuh. It is more broken up into peaks of definite outline, and is more deeply cut by gorges, many of them the beds of torrents, densely wooded. In fact it is less of a *range* and more of a *group*. The route lay among huge steep mountains of naked rock, cut up by narrow, deep, and gigantic clefts, from whose depths rise spires of rock and stupendous, almost perpendicular cliffs. Green torrents flecked with foam boom through the shadows, or flash in the sunlight, margined wherever it is possible by walnuts, oaks, lilacs, roses, the *Lastrea dilatata*, and an entanglement of greenery revelling in spray.

A steep zigzag descent through oak and pear trees brought us to the vigorous torrent Ab-i-Sefid (white water), one of many of the same name, crossed by a natural bridge of shelving rock, slippery from much use. One of the Arabs so nearly fell on this that I dismounted, and just as I did so Abbas Ali's mule fell on his side, and *Screw* following did the same, breaking several things in the holster.

After crossing a deep ravine Abbas Ali sprang back down the steep to it, and the Sahib, who was behind, also ran down with three men to what was evidently a disaster. Mirza's mule had fallen over twenty feet, rolling over him three times with its load, hurting his knee badly. The Sahib said he never saw so narrow an escape from a broken neck. The loss of a bottle containing a quart of milk was the chief damage. A little farther up three men were tugging *Hakīm* up to the track by the tail. It was a very steep ascent by stony broken zigzags and ledges to the fairly level top of a spur of the Kala Kuh range, with a high battlemented hill behind, at the back of which dwell robber hordes, and many Seyyids, who pay no tribute, and are generally feared.

At this open, breezy height of 9200 feet the camps have been pitched for three days, and of the many camping-grounds which we have hitherto occupied I like it the best, so lofty is it, so lonely, so mysterious and unexplored. It has a glorious view of tremendous wooded ravines, down which green waters glide or tumble, of small lawn-like plateaux among woods, and of green peaks in the foreground, and on the other side of the narrow, sinuous valley, several thousand feet below, there is a confused mass of mountains, among which the snow-slashed southern faces of the peaks of the Zard Kuh and the grand bulk of a mountain of the Faidun range, are the most prominent.

Five thousand feet below, reached by a remarkable track, is Basnoi, a lonely depth, with successive terraces of figs, pomegranates, and walnuts, dense woods, and a luxuriant undergrowth of long grass and ferns. Among them are the remains of an ancient road of good width and construction, and of a very fine bridge of small blocks of carefully-dressed stone, with three arches, now ruined, with fine piers and stone abutments, the centre arch having a span of sixty feet. The roadway of the bridge is gone, and a crazy wicker framework is suspended in its place. The Bakhtiaris attribute these relics of an extinct civilisation to Shapur, one of the three kings of that name who reigned in the third and fourth centuries. All these green waters fall into the Ab-i-Diz.

Before sunset heads of men and barrels of guns were seen over the rocky cliff behind us. We had been warned against the outlaw tribes of that region, and had been told that they were preparing to rob the camp that night with thirty men, and had declared that if they failed they would dog us till they succeeded. This news was brought by Aslam Khan's brother in the afternoon. I asked Aziz with how much I should reach Burujird, and he answered, "It's well if you take your life there."

This and a whole crop of other rumours, magnified as they passed from man to man, produced a novel excitement in the lonely camps. Hadji buried his money, of which he had a large sum, and lay down upon it. Rifles and revolvers were cleaned and loaded, swords and knives sharpened, voices were

loud and ceaseless, and those who were slightly hurt in the morning's fray recounted their adventures over and over again. All dispositions for safety were carefully made before night. Hassan, who has a horse, and large property in good clothes, wanted a revolver, but was wisely refused, on the ground that to arm undisciplined men indiscriminately would be to run a great risk of being ourselves shot in any confusion. There were then four men with rifles, five with revolvers, and Aslam Khan's brother and two *tufangchis* with guns.

About eight the Bakhtiari signal-call was several times repeated, and I wondered if it were foe or friend, till Aziz's answering signal rang out loud and clear, announcing that it was "friends of Isfandyar Khan." Shortly I heard, "the plot thickens," and the "friends" turned out to be another brother of Aslam Khan, with four *tufangchis* and a promise of eight more, who never arrived. According to these men reliable information had been received that Khaja Taimur, our friend of Kalahoma, was sending forty men to rob us on Aslam Khan's territory in order to get him into trouble.

This arrival increased the excitement among the men, who piled tamarisk and the gum tragacanth bush on the fires most recklessly, the wild, hooded *tufangchis* and their long guns being picturesque in the firelight. I am all but positively sure that the rumour was invented by Aslam Khan, in order to show his vigilant care of guests, and secure from their gratitude the much-coveted possession of an English rifle. Hadji came to my tent, telling me "not to be the least afraid, for they would not harm a lady." The Agha has a resource for every emergency, the Sahib is cool and brave, and besides that, I strongly suspected the whole thing to be a ruse of Aslam Khan, whom I distrust thoroughly. At all events I was asleep very early, and was only disturbed twice by Aziz calling to know if my servants were watching, and was only awakened at five by the Sahib and the Agha going past my tent, giving orders that any stranger approaching the camp was to be warned off, and was to be fired upon if he disregarded the warning.

A blissfully quiet day followed the excitement of the night before. The men slept after their long watch, and the fighting horses were at a distance. The Agha did not return, and for a day and night I was the only European in camp. Aziz Khan, with an English rifle, a hundred cartridges, and two revolvers in his belt, kept faithful watch, and to "make assurance doubly sure" I walked through the camp twice during the night to see that the men on guard were awake.

Before midnight there was a frightful "row" for two hours, which sounded as if fifty men were taking part in it. I have often wondered at the idiotic things that Hassan does, and at the hopelessly dazed way in which he sometimes stands. Now it has come out that he is smoking more and more opium, and has been supplying Karim with it.

Mujid, who was formerly the Agha's cook, has been promoted to be *major-domo*, rules the caravan on the march, heads it on a fine horse, keeps accounts, and is generally "confidential." Karim resents all this. He lately bought a horse because he could not bear to ride a baggage mule when the other man was well mounted, and being that night mad with opium, and being armed both with rifle and revolver, with which he threatened to kill Mujid, it was only by the united and long-continued efforts of all the men that bloodshed was prevented. The next day Hassan destroyed his opium pipe, and is trying to cure himself of the habit with the aid of morphia, but he complains of "agony in the waist," which is just the fearful craving which the disuse of the drug causes.

The Agha encountered very predatory Lurs in the lower regions. A mule was stolen by two Lurs, then robbed from them by three, who in their turn were obliged to surrender it to some passing Ilyats, from whom he recovered it. While he was resting at night he was awakened by hearing some Lurs who had joined them discussing the practicability of robbing him, but when one told the others that he had found out that "the Feringhi has six shots," they gave it up. At this camp we are only a few days' march from classic ground, the ancient Elam with its capital of Susa, and the remains of so fine a bridge, with the unusual feature, still to be distinctly traced, of level approaches, the adjacent ruins, and the tradition of an old-world route, a broad road having followed the river-bed to the plains of Lower Elam, all point to an earlier and higher civilisation. Overlooking the bridge on the left bank of

the Ab-i-Basnoi a large square enclosure, with large stone slabs inside, was found, which had probably been used for a cistern, and outside there were distinct traces of an aqueduct.

The "Sang Niwishta" (inscribed stone), which has been talked about for a hundred miles, and promised to be a great discovery, was investigated by a most laborious march, and turned out a great disappointment. It was to be hoped, indeed it might have been expected, that a journey through these, till now unexplored, regions would have resulted in the discovery of additional records of the past carved in stone, but such is not the case.

Still, it is something to have learned that even here there was once a higher civilisation, and that in its day there was great traffic along the Basnoi road, and that every route through this Upper Elam, whether from north, west, or east, from the Persian highlands to the plains of Arabistan, and the then populous banks of the Kerkhah, must have passed through the great gap below Pul-i-Kul.

The Gokun, Sahid, Guwa, and any number of other streams fall into this Ab-i-Basnoi, which is the channel for the drainage of far-off Faraidan, and after a full-watered course joins the Ab-i-Burujird, which drains the plain of Silakhor, the two forming the Ab-i-Diz, on which the now famous town of Dizful (lit. Pul-i-Diz or Bridge of Diz) is situated.

Gardan-i-Gunak, July 20.– On July 17 we retraced our steps to Padshah-i-Zalaki, and camped on a height above Aslam Khan's tents on ground so steep that the tent floor had to be cut into steps with a spade. Aslam Khan and others came to meet us, again performing feats of horsemanship. No sooner were the tents pitched than the crowd assembled, and it was another noisy and fagging day. Among the things taken from my tent were an umbrella, knife, scissors, and most of my slender stock of underclothing. The scissors and cotton were taken by a young sister-in-law of the Khan, while I was attending to a terrible hurt outside. It turns out that Aslam Khan has got the Agha's binocular, and that he told his men to acquire a small but very powerful telescope which he coveted. My milk bottle in a leather sling-case has a likeness to it, and this morning as I was giving a woman some eye-lotion her son withdrew this, almost under my eyes!

The Khan's face is a most faithful reproduction of that of Judas in Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper." He is so fine-looking that one is surprised that he should condescend to do small mean things. I sent him the knife he asked for, and soon he called and asked for a bigger one. He passed off his handsome daughter, the wife of Taimur Khan's son, as his wife, in order to get, through her, a travelling-clock which he coveted.

They brought a woman to me who might have been produced from a London slum, ophthalmia in one eye, the other closed up and black, and behind it and through her nose a deep wound, gaping fully an inch, blood caked thick and black all over her face and matting her hair, her upper lip cut through, and two teeth knocked out – a regular hospital case. Her brother, they said, had quarrelled with her and had thrown stones at her only the day before, but they had already filled up the wounds with some horrible paste. I asked Sardah Khan why the Khan did not have the man thrashed for such a brutality, and he replied that no one would touch him, as he had killed three men last winter.

I spent two hours upon the poor creature, and the relief was so great that her gratitude was profuse, and the blessings invoked manifold. It was a great pleasure to me. But many things were taken out of the tent while I sat outside attending to her. The Khan's brothers, *tufangchis* with their long guns, Seyyids with their green turbans and contemptuous scowl, women, and children were all pressing upon me, hindering and suffocating me in a temperature of nearly 100°. They seem to have no feeling for pain or shrinking from painful spectacles, and rather to enjoy the groans of the sufferer. Each time a piece of stone was taken out of the wounds they exclaimed "God is great!" Occasionally, when the crush interfered with what I was doing, a man beat them with his gun, or Aziz Khan threw stones at them, but it was useless.

The people tell our men that *Kafirs* have never before entered their valley, and that if we were not under the Shah's protection they would take all that we have. I imagine that the difficulties are far greater than I know, for the Agha, who minimises all danger, remarked last night that this is a

most anxious time, and that he should be most thankful to get every one out of the country, for it was impossible to say what a day might bring forth. All idea of my returning to Julfa is now abandoned. Bad as it is it is safer to go on.

As the welcome darkness fell the hillsides near and far blazed with fires, and Aslam Khan's camp immediately below was a very picturesque sight, its thirty-one tents forming a circle, with the Khan's two tents in the middle, each having a fire in front. Supper was prepared in large pots; the men ate first, then the women, children, and dogs. The noise suggested pandemonium. The sheep and goats bleated, the big dogs barked, the men and women shouted and shrieked all together, at the top of their voices, rude musical instruments brayed and clanged, – it sounded diabolical. Doubtless the inroad of the Feringhis was the topic of talk. Savage life does not bear a near view. Its total lack of privacy, its rough brutality, its dirt, its undisguised greed, its unconcealed jealousies and hatreds, its falseness, its pure selfishness, and its treachery are all painful on a close inspection.

The following morning early we came up to the Gunak, the narrow top of a pass in the Kala Kuh range with an altitude of 10,200 feet, crossing on the way a steep and difficult snow-slide, and have halted here for two days. Marching with the caravan is a necessary precaution, but a most tedious and fatiguing arrangement. No more galloping, only a crawl at "caravan pace," about two and a half miles an hour for five, six, or seven hours, and though one is up at 2.45 it is fully five before the mules are under way, and meantime one is the centre of that everlasting crowd which, on some pretext or other, asks for medicine. If no ailment can be produced at present, then the request is, "Give me something from the leather box, I've a cough in the winter," or an uncovered copper bowl is brought, the contents of which would evaporate in a fortnight in this climate, with the plaint, "I've a brother," or some other relative, "who has sore eyes in spring, please give me some eye-lotion." Nothing is appreciated made from their own valuable medicinal herbs. "Feringhi medicine" is all they care for, and in their eyes every Feringhi is a *Hakīm*.

I have often wondered that the Moslem contempt for women does not prevent even the highest chiefs from seeking a woman's medical help, but their own *Hakīms*, of whom there are a few, though I have never seen any, are mostly women, and the profession is hereditary. The men, they say, are too unsettled to be *Hakīms*. Some of these women are renowned for their skill as bullet extractors. If a father happens to have any medical knowledge he communicates it to his daughter rather than to his son. Aziz's grandmother learned medicine from a native Indian doctor in Fars, and his mother had a repute as a bullet extractor. A woman extracted the three bullets by which he has been wounded. The "fees" are very high, but depend entirely on the cure. A poor man pays for the extraction of a bullet and the cure of the wound from fifteen to twenty *tumans* (from £5 to £6:10s.), a rich man from forty to sixty. In all cases they only give medicine so long as they think there is hope of recovery, and have no knowledge of any treatment which can alleviate the sufferings of the dying. When death seems inevitable they stuff the nose with a paste made of aromatic herbs.

They dress wounds with an astringent paste made from a very small gall-nut found on one species of oak. For dyspeptic pains and "bad blood" they eat bitumen. For snake-bite, which is common, they keep the bitten person moving about and apply the back part of live hens to the wound till the hens cease to be affected, or else the intestines of a goat newly killed. For rheumatism, headache, and debility they have no remedies, but for fever they use an infusion of willow bark, which is not efficacious. They have great faith in amulets and charms, and in chewing and swallowing verses of the Koran in case of illness. They are rigid "abstainers," and *arak* is not to be procured in the Bakhtiari country. This partly accounts for the extreme and almost startling rapidity of the healing of surgical wounds.

Ophthalmia, glaucoma, bulging eyeballs, inflamed eyes and eyelids, eczema, rheumatism, dyspepsia, and coughs are the prevailing maladies, and among men, bad headaches, which they describe as periodical and incapacitating, are common. The skin maladies and some of the eye maladies come from dirt, and the parasites which are its offspring. Among the common people the

clothes are only washed once a year, and then in cold water, with the root of a very sticky soap wort. They attribute all ailments but those of the skin and eyes to "wind." Rheumatism doubtless comes from sleeping in cotton clothing, and little enough of it, on the damp ground.

There are no *sages femmes*. Every woman is supposed to be able to help her neighbour in her hour of need. Maternity is easy. The mother is often at work the day after the birth of her child, and in less than a week regains her usual strength.

Possession by bad spirits is believed in, and cowardice is attributed to possession. In the latter case medicine is not resorted to, but a *mollah* writes a text from the Koran and binds the paper on the coward's arm. If this does not cure him 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.

This pass gives a little rest. It is solitary, cold (the mercury 48° at 10 p. m.), and very windy. I appreciate the comparatively low temperature all the more because the scenery beyond the Zalaki valley, in which scorched valleys and reddish rocky ranges are repeated *ad nauseam*, lies under a blazing sun and in a hot dust haze like that of the Indian plains. The ridge is only just wide enough for the camps, and falls down in abrupt descents to the source of the Ab-i-Sefid. Tremendous precipices and the naked peaks of the Kala Kuh surround us, and to the east the Zard Kuh and the long straight-topped range of the Kuh-i-Gokun (or Kainu?), deeply cleft, to allow of the exit of the Ab-i-Gokun, wall in the magnificent prospect, woods and streams and blue and violet depths suggesting moisture and coolness. The ridge has a remarkably rich alpine flora.

Life is now only a "struggle for existence" on the lower altitudes, with their heat and hubbub; there is no comfort or pleasure in occupation under 9000 feet. Here there are only the sick people of the camps to attend to. The guides and guards all need eye-lotion, one bad wound needs dressing, and the Khan's brother has had fever severely, which is cured, and he offers me as a present a boy of five years old. Aslam Khan's face of Judas is not for nothing, but his brother is beautiful, and has the face of St. John.

I. L. B.

LETTER XIX

Camp Shuturun, July 25.

After that uplifted halt, which refreshed the Europeans but did not suit the health of the attendants, we descended, crossed the Zalaki valley and a low ridge, with populous camps, into the valley of the Mauri Zarin, where the nomads were busy harvesting, forded the river, and proceeded up its left bank to a dusty level on which a deep ravine opens, *apparently* blocked up by a castellated and nearly inaccessible rock of great height. At this place, where the Badush joins the Mauri Zarin, we were obliged to camp close to some Ilyat tents, which involved crowds, many demands, much noise, and much vigilance.

We were then in the territory of Mirab Khan, the chief of the Isawand tribe, between whom and Aslam Khan there is a blood feud, with most deadly enmity. He sent word that he was not well, and asked the Agha to go to see him, which he did, telling him that the *Hakīm* would also visit him. Later, taking Mirza and two guides, I forded and followed up the Ab-i-Arjanak for two miles by a most remarkable cañon. The lower part of its sides is steep and rocky, though not too steep for the growth of tamarisk scrub and much herbage, but above are prodigious conglomerate cliffs, and below, the river, which narrows to a stream, is concealed by enormous masses of conglomerate rock. This cleft must be fully 800 feet below the heights which surround it. A ridge runs across it at Arjanak, and the river passes underground.

The village and "Diz"[6] of Mirab Khan are reached by a frightfully steep ascent. Arjanak has been built for security on some narrow ledges below these colossal walls. It is a mere eyrie, a collection of rude stone hovels, one above the other, among which the Khan's house is distinguishable only by its *balakhana* and larger size. The paths on the dusty hillside are so narrow and shelving that I needed a helping hand as well as a stick to enable me to reach a small, oblong, rug-covered platform under some willow trees, where Mirab Khan received me, with a very repulsive-looking Seyyid scribe seated by him in front of a *samovar* and tea equipage, from which he produced delicious tea, flavoured with lime-juice. The Khan was courteous, *i. e.* he rose, and did not sit down till I did.

He is a most deplorable-looking man, very tall and thin, with faded, lustreless gray eyes, hollow, sallow cheeks, and a very lank, ugly, straight-haired beard, light brown in the middle. He and Khaja Taimur look more like decayed merchants than chiefs of "tribes of armed horsemen." I was very sorry for him, for he evidently suffers much, but then and afterwards he impressed me unfavourably, and I much doubt his good faith. He said he heard I should spend two or three days at Arjanak, and all he had was mine. He was not "like some people," he said, "who professed great friendship for people and then forgot all about them. When I make a friendship," he said, "it is for ever." I asked him if his tribe was at peace. "Peace," he replied sententiously, "is a word unknown to the Bakhtiaris." In fact he has more than one blood feud on hand. He complained bitterly of the exactions of Persia, and added the conjecture, expressed by many others, that England would shortly occupy Luristan, and give them equity and security. Another Khan of some power said to me that if England were to occupy south-west Persia, he would help her with 400 horsemen, and added, "An English fleet at Basrah, with an English army on board, would be the best sight which Bakhtiari eyes could see."[7]

I had to hear the long story of the Khan's complicated maladies, to look at many bad eyes, and at the wounds of a poor fellow suffering from snake-bite, who was carried on another man's back,

[6] A "Diz" is a natural fort believed to be impregnable.

[7] To English people the Bakhtiaris profess great friendliness for England, and the opinion has been expressed by some well-informed writers that, in the event of an English occupation of the country, their light horse, drilled by English officers, would prove valuable auxiliaries. I am inclined, however, to believe that if a collision were to occur in south-west Persia between two powers which shall be nameless, the Bakhtiari horsemen would be sold to the highest bidder.

and to promise to bring up my medicine chest the following day, the fame of the "leather box" having reached Arjanak.

On my way I had called at the *haram*, and the ladies accompanied me to the *durbar*, conduct which I think was not approved of, as they told me the next morning that they must not go there. After the Agha returned, the three wives and many other women clustered timidly round me. Two of them are very bright and pretty, and one, a Persian, very affectionate in her manner. She held my hand all the time. There was also a handsome daughter, with a baby, the discarded wife of a son of the next Khan. In winter, they said, they amuse themselves by singing, and playing with their children, and by making a few clothes, and the Persian embroiders boys' caps.

Aziz Khan has been irrepressible lately. His Arab mare is his idol, not because she is a lovable animal and carries him well, but because she is valuable property. He fusses about her ceaselessly, and if he were allowed would arrange the marches and the camping-grounds with reference solely to her well-being. She is washed from her nose to the tip of her tail every evening, clothed, and kept by the camp-fire. She is a dainty, heartless, frivolous creature, very graceful and pretty, and in character much like a selfish, spoilt woman.

Unfortunately, in one of the many attempted fights among the horses, *Screw* kicked her on the chest and fore-leg a few days ago, which has made a quarrel between Hadji, *Screw's* owner, and Aziz. Now Aziz is making me a slave to his animal. That night, after a tiring day, I was sleeping soundly when I was awakened by Aziz saying I must come to his mare or he would stay behind with her the next day. This is his daily threat. So I had to bring her inside my tent, and sleepily make a poultice and bandage the hurt. I have very little vaseline, and after putting it twice on the slight graze on her chest, which it cured, I said, when he asked for it a third time, that I must keep the rest for men. "Oh," he said, "she's of more value than ten men." Lately he said, "I don't like you at all, you give me many things, but you don't give me money; and I don't like the Agha, he doesn't give me half enough. I'm going back to-morrow, and then you'll be robbed of all your things, and you'll wish you had given them to me."

When I do anything, such as opening a whitlow, which he thinks clever, he exclaims, "May God forgive your sins!" This, and "May God forgive the sins of your father and mother!" are ejaculations of gratitude or surprise. One day when I had been attending to sick people for four hours, I asked him which was the more "meritorious" act, attending to the sick or going on pilgrimage? He replied, "For a *Kafir* no act is good," but soon added, "*Of a truth God doesn't think as we do*, I don't know."

Yesterday he came for plaster, and while I cut it he saw a padlock pincushion with a mirror front on my bed, and said, "You've given me nothing to-day, you must give me that because my mare kicked me." But I like him. He is a brave fellow, and with a large amount of the mingled simplicity and cunning of a savage has a great deal of thought, information, and ability, and a talk with him is worth having.

Mirab Khan had promised that not only guides but his son would accompany the Agha, but when I arrived at his eyrie the next morning it was evident that something was wrong, for the Agha looked gloomy, and Mirab Khan uncomfortable, and as I was dressing the wound of the snake-bitten man, the former said, "So far as I can see, we are in a perfect hornets' nest." Neither son nor guides were forthcoming. It was necessary to use very decided language, after which the Khan professed that he had withheld them in order to compel us to be his guests, and eventually they were produced.

I called again on the ladies, who received me in a sort of open stable, horses on one side and women on the other, in a crowd and noise so overpowering that I was obliged to leave them, but not before I had been asked for needles, scissors, love philtres, etc. Polygamy, besides being an atrocious system, is very hard on a traveller's resources. I had brought presents for four legitimate wives, but not for the crowd of women who asked for them. Each wife wanted to get her present unknown to the others. Later they returned my visit, and were most importunate in their requests.

When I went to say farewell to the Khan I found him on his knees, bowing his forehead to the earth upon a Mecca prayer-stone, and he concluded his prayers before he spoke – not like many of us, who would jump up ashamed and try to seem as if we never demeaned ourselves by an act of devotion. His village, Diz Arjanak, has a Diz, or stronghold, with a limited supply of water. It is the *raison d'être* of his residence there. This Diz consists of a few shelves or cavities, chiefly artificial, scooped out in the face of the perpendicular cliff above the village. They are only attainable by a very difficult climb, have no internal communication, and would not hold more than 150 people. In one cavity there is a small perennial spring. The largest recess is said to be twelve feet deep by about twenty long, and has a loop-holed breastwork across the entrance. In case of attack the Khan and the people provision this hiding-place, and retire to it, believing it impregnable.

Mirab Khan on this and a later occasion complained, and apparently with good reason, of grinding exactions on the part of Persia. The Isawands, like the Magawes and Zalakis, pay their tribute partly to Burujird and partly to the Ilkhani. The sum formerly fixed and paid was 150 *tumans*. It was raised to 300, which was paid for two years. Now, he says, this year's demand (1890) is for 500.

We left Diz Arjanak rather late in the afternoon, ascended a valley which opens out beyond it, forded the green bright waters of the Mauri Zarin, and crossed beautiful open hillsides and elevated plateaux on its right bank till we lost it in a highly picturesque gorge. Some miles of very pleasant riding brought us to a rocky and dangerous path along the side of a precipice above the river Badush, so narrow as to involve the unloading of several mules, and a bad slip and narrow escape on the part of mine. The scenery is singularly wild and severe. Crossing the Badush, and ascending a narrow ravine through which it flows, we camped at its source at the junction of two wild gullies, where the Sahib, after sundry serious risks, had already arrived. We did not see a single camp after leaving Arjanak, and were quite unmolested during a halt of two nights; but it is an atmosphere of danger and possible treachery.

Camp Badush, at a height of 9100 feet, though shut in by high mountains, was cool – a barren, rocky, treeless spot. A great deal of bituminous shale was lying about, which burned in the camp-fires fairly well, but with a black heavy smoke and a strong smell.

The limestone fragments which lay about, on being split, emitted a powerful odour of bitumen. Farther up the gully there is a chalybeate spring, and the broken fragments of the adjacent rocks are much stained with iron. After a restful halt we retraced our route by a low path which avoided the difficult precipices above the Badush, forded it several times, crossed a low pass, descended to the valley of the Mauri Zarin, forded the river, and marched for some miles along its left bank, till the valley opened on great grassy slopes, the skirts of the rocky spurs which buttress the grand mountain Shuturun, the "Camel Mountain," so called from its shape. It was a very uninteresting march, through formless gravelly hills, with their herbage all eaten down, nothing remaining but tamarisk scrub and a coarse yellow salvia. There were neither camps nor travellers; indeed, one need never look for camps where there is no herbage.

This is a charming camping-ground covered with fine turf, damp, I fear, and some of the men are "down" with fever and rheumatism. There is space to see who comes and who goes, and though the altitude is only 8400 feet, last night was quite cool. Ischaryar, Aziz Khan's devoted young servant, the gentlest and kindest Bakhtiari I have seen, became quite ill of acute rheumatism with fever, and felt so very ill and weak that he thought he was going to die. I sent some medicine to him, but he would not take it, saying that his master had spoken unkindly to him, and he had no wish to live. However, this morbid frame of mind was overcome by firm dealing, and Aziz attended to him all night, and salol, etc., are curing him.

He is the one grateful creature that I have seen among these Orientals, and his gratitude is in return for a mere trifle. We were fording a stream one hot day, and seeing him scooping up water with difficulty in his hands, I took out my mug for him. Ever since he has done anything that he can for me. He brings tasteful little bouquets of flowers, gathers wild cherries, and shows the little courtesies

which spring from a kindly nature. He said several times to Mirza, "It isn't only that the *Khanum* gave me the cup, but she took trouble for me." It may be imagined what a desert as to grateful and kindly feeling I am living in when this trifle appears like an oasis. Hard, cunning, unblushing greed is as painful a characteristic of the Bakhtiaris as it is of the Persians.

Hassan is now "down with fever" and the opium craving, and one of the *charvadars* with fever. The cold winds of Gunak were too much for them. All day shots have been heard among the near mountains. The Hajwands, a powerful tribe, and the Abdulwands are fighting about a recent cutting off of a cow's tail, but the actual cause of the feud is deeper, and dates farther back. Aziz Khan wants us to return to Diz Arjanak, fearing that we may become implicated, and the Agha is calling him a coward, and telling him to ride back alone. Bang! Bang! The firing is now close and frequent, and the dropping shots are varied by straggling volleys. With the glasses I can see the tribesmen loading and firing on the crests of the near hills. A great number are engaged. One tribe has put up a stone breastwork at our end of the valley, but the enemy is attacking the other.

3 p. m. – An hour ago Mirab Khan arrived with a number of armed horse and footmen. Before he left he spent, I may say wasted, nearly an hour of my time again on his maladies, and again wrote down the directions for his medicines. Volleys fired very near startled him into departing, and he rode hastily back to Arjanak, fearing, as he said, an attack. Nominally, he armed the guides and the men he left behind, but one of the guns has neither caps nor powder, and another has only three caps. All the animals have been driven in.

4 p. m. – A man with grimy arms bare to the elbow has just run down to the Agha's camp from the conflict. He says that his people, who are greatly inferior to the Hajwands in numbers, thought it was the camp of the Shah's revenue collector, and sent him to ask him to mediate. The Agha expressed his willingness to become a mediator on certain conditions. There is much excitement in camp, all the men who are well crowding round this envoy, who is guilty of saying that fifty men are to attack our camps to-night.

7.30 p. m. – The Agha, with the Sahib and Aziz Khan, three brave men mounted and armed with rifles and revolvers, went to mediate. I went to a knoll in the valley with some of our men, above which on either side were hills occupied by the combatants, and a large number of tribesmen crowned the crest of a hill lying across the ravine higher up. The firing was frequent, but at long range, and I was near enough to see that only one man fell.

Our party rode on till they reached the top of a low ridge, where they dismounted, reconnoitred, and then passed out of sight, being fired on by both parties. The tribesmen kept on firing irregularly from the hill crests, occasionally running down the slopes, firing and running into cover. The Sahib's *tufangchi*, who is of Cheragh Ali's tribe, asked me, "Is this the way they fight in your country," I asked him if he would not like to be fighting? and he replied, "Yes, if it were my quarrel." The sun was very bright, the sky very blue, and the smoke very white as it drifted over the lonely ravine and burst in clouds from the hill-tops. I saw the combatants distinctly without a glass, and heard their wild war-shouts. What a matter for regret is this useless tribal fighting, with its dreary consequences of wailing women and fatherless children! "Why don't the English come and take us? Why don't the English come and give us peace?" are surely the utterances of a tired race.

After sunset the Agha returned, having so far succeeded in his mission that the headmen have promised to suspend hostilities for to-morrow, but still shots are fired now and then.

I. L. B.

LETTER XX

Lake Irene, July 27.

Yesterday we marched through narrow defiles and along hillsides to this lake, without seeing a tent, a man, or even a sheep or goat, following a stream which bears several names and receives several torrents which burst, full grown, from powerful springs in the mountain sides – a frequent phenomenon in this country – from its source till its entrance into this lake. Its two sides differ remarkably. On the right bank rise the magnificent ranges which form Shuturun, broken up into precipices, deep ravines, and peaks, all rocky and shapely, and absolutely denuded of soil. The mountains on the left bank are great shapeless masses of bare gravel rising into the high but blunt summit of the Sefid Kuh, with only occasional outcrops of rock; here and there among the crevices of the rocky spurs of Shuturun the *Juniperus excelsa* plants itself; otherwise, on the sun-scorched gravel only low tamarisk bushes, yellow salvias, a few belated campanulas, and a very lovely blue *Trichodesma mollis* remain.

On reaching the top of a very long ascent there was a unique surprise, for below, walled in by precipitous mountain sides, lies a lake of wonderful beauty, owing to its indescribable colour. Wild, fierce, and rocky are the high mountains in which this gem is set, and now verdureless, except that in some places where their steep sides enter the water willows and hawthorns find scanty roothold. Where the river enters the lake there is a thicket of small willows, and where it leaves it its bright waters ripple through a wood of cherry, pear, plum, and hawthorn. A broad high bank of gravel lies across a part of its lower end, and all seemed so safe and solitary that I pitched my camp here for Sunday at an unusual distance from the other camps.

"Things are not what they seem." Two armed Hajwands visited the camps, shots were heard at intervals this morning, and in the night some of the watch said they saw a number of men advancing towards us from under the bushes. I heard the sharp crack of our own rifles twice, and the Agha and Sahib calling on every one to be on the alert; the mules were driven in, and a great fire was made, but nothing came of it. To-night Mirab Khan's guides, who have been with us for some days, have gone back, journeying at night and hiding in caves by day for fear of being attacked.

This lovely lake, having no native name, will be known henceforward geographically as Lake Irene. Its waters lie in depths of sapphire blue, with streaks and shallows of green, but what a green! Surely without a rival on earth! Were a pea transparent, vivid, full of points and flashes of interior light, that would be the nearest approach to the colour, which changes never, while through the blazing hours the blue of the great depths in the centre has altered from sapphire to turquoise, and from turquoise to lapis-lazuli, one end and one side being permanently bordered round the margin with liquid emerald. The mountains have changed from rose to blue, from blue to gray, from gray to yellow, and are now flushing into pink. It is a carnival of colour, before the dusty browns and dusty grays which are to come.

Camp Sarawand, July 29.– To-day's march has been a change from the grand scenery of the Bakhtiari mountains to low passes and gravelly spurs, which sink down upon a plain. A blazing hillside; a mountain of gravel among others of similar ugliness, sprinkled with camel thorn and thistles; a steep and long descent to a stream; ripe wheat on some irrigated slopes; above these the hundred hovels of the village of Sarawand clinging one above another to the hillside, their white clay roofs intolerable in the fierce light; more scorched gravel hills breaking off abruptly, and then a blazing plain, in a mist of dust and heat, and low hills on the farther side seen through a brown haze, make up the view from my tent. The plain is Silakhor in Persia proper, and, *nolens volens*, that heat and dust must shortly be encountered in the hottest month of the year. Meanwhile the mercury is at 105° in the tent.

Outside is a noisy crowd of a mixed race, more Persian than Lur, row behind row. The *ketchuda* said if I would stand outside and show myself the people would be pacified, but the desired result was not attained, and the crushing and pushing were fearful – not that the people here or elsewhere are ever rude, it is simply that their curiosity is not restrained by those rules which govern ours. The Agha tried to create a diversion by putting a large musical box at a little distance, but they did not care for it. I attempted to give each woman a card of china buttons, which they like for sewing on the caps of their children, but the crush was so overpowering that I was obliged to leave it to Aziz. Then came the sick people with their many woes and wants, and though now at sunset they have all gone, Aziz comes in every few minutes with the laugh of a lost spirit, bringing a fresh copper bowl for eye lotion, quite pleased to think of my annoyance at being constantly dragged up from my writing.

Camp Parwez, July 31.– We left early in the morning, *en route* for the fort of Yahya Khan, the powerful chief of the Pulawand tribe, with a tall, well-dressed, and very respectable-looking man, Bagha Khan, one of his many fathers-in-law, the father of the present "reigning favourite," as guide. It was a very pretty track, pursuing sheep-paths over steep spurs of Parwez, and along the narrow crests of ridges, always with fine views. On reaching an alpine valley, rich in flowers, we halted till the caravan approached, and then rode on, the "we" that day being the guide on foot, and the Agha, the Sahib, Aziz Khan, Mirza, and myself on horseback in single file. Three men looked over the crest of a ridge to the left and disappeared abruptly, and I remarked to Mirza that this was the most suspicious circumstance we had yet seen. There was one man on the hill to the right, with whom the guide exchanged some sentences in patois.

The valley opened out on the stony side of a hill, which had to be crossed. As we climbed it was crested with a number of men with long guns. Presently a number of shots were fired at us, and the reloading of the guns was distinctly seen. The order was given to "scatter" and proceed slowly. When the first shot was fired Bagha Khan, who must have been well known to all his tribesmen, dodged under a rock. Then came an irregular volley from a number of guns, and the whistle and thud of bullets over and among us showed that the tribesmen, whatever were their intentions, were in earnest. To this volley the Agha replied by a rifle shot which passed close over their heads, but again they reloaded rapidly. We halted, and Aziz Khan was sent up to parley with them. No one could doubt his courage after that solitary ascent in the very face of the guns.

Karim cantered up, anxious to fight, Mujid and Hassan, much excited, dashed up, and we rode on slowly, Hadji and his *charvadars* bringing up the caravan as steadily as if there were no danger ahead. Not a man showed the "white feather," though most, like myself, were "under fire" for the first time. When we reached the crest of the pass such a wild lot crowded about us, their guns yet hot from firing upon us. Such queer arms they had – one gun with a flint lock a century old, with the "Tower mark" upon it, loaded sticks, and long knives. With much talking and excitement they accompanied us to this camping-ground.[8]

The men varied considerably in their stories. They were frightened, they said, and fired because they thought we were come to harm them. At first I was sorry for them, and regarded them as merely defending their "hearths and homes," for in the alpine valley behind the hill are their black tents, their families, their flocks and herds – their world, in fact. But they told another story, and said they took us for a party of Hajwands. This was untenable, and the Agha told them that they knew that Hajwands do not ride on English saddles, and carry white umbrellas, and march with big caravans of

[8] This untoward affair ended well, but had there been bloodshed on either side, had any one of us been killed, which easily might have been, the world would never have believed but that some offence had been given, and that some high-handed action had been the cause of the attack. I am in a position to say, not only that no offence was given, but that here and everywhere the utmost care was taken not to violate Bakhtiari etiquette, or wound religious or national susceptibilities; all supplies were paid for above their value; the servants, always under our own eyes, were friendly but reserved; and in all dealings with the people kindness and justice were the rule. I make these remarks in the hope of modifying any harsh judgments which may be passed upon any travellers who have died unwitnessed deaths at the hands of natives. There are, as in our case, absolutely unprovoked attacks.

mules. To me, when they desired my services, they said that had they known that one of the party was a *Hakīm* they never would have fired.

Later, from Hadji and others I have heard what I think may be the true version of the affair. They knew that the party was a small one – only three rifles; that on the fifteen baggage-animals there were things which they specially covet, the value of which rumour had doubtless magnified a hundredfold; and that we had no escort. Behind were a number of the Sarawand men, and the Pulawands purposed, if we turned back or showed the "white feather" in any way, to double us up between the two parties and rob the caravan at discretion. The Agha was obliged to speak very severely to them, telling them that firing on travellers is a grave offence, and deserves as such to be represented to the Governor of Burujird. I cannot acquit the demure-looking guide of complicity in this transaction.

At this height of 9400 feet there is a pleasant plain, on which our assailants are camped, and our camps are on platforms in a gully near the top of Parwez. It is all very destitute of springs or streams, and we have only snow-water, and that only during the hot hours of the day, for ourselves and the animals.

The tribes among which we are now are powerful and very predatory in their habits. Their loyalty to the Ilkhani is shadowy, and their allegiance to the Shah consists in the payment of tribute, which cannot in all cases be exacted. Indeed, I think that both in Tihran and Isfahan there is only imperfect information as to the attitude of the Bakhtiari Lurs. Their unification under the rule of the Ilkhani grows more and more incomplete as the distance from Isfahan increases, and these tribes, which are under the government of Burujird nominally, are practically not under the Ilkhani at all. Blood feuds, predatory raids, Khans at war with each other, tribal disputes and hostilities, are nearly universal. It is not for the interest of Persia to produce by her misrule and intrigues such a chronic state of insecurity as makes the tribes desire any foreign interference which will give them security and rest, and relieve them from the oppressive exactions of the Persian governors.

On a recent march I was riding alone in advance of the caravan when I met two men, one mounted, the other on foot. The pedestrian could not have been passed anywhere unnoticed. He looked like a Sicilian brigand, very handsome and well dressed, walked with a long elastic stride, and was armed with a double-barrelled gun and two revolvers. He looked hard at me, with a jolly but not unfriendly look, and then seeing the caravan, passed on. This was Jiji, a great robber Khan of the Hajwand tribe, whose name inspires much fear. Afterwards he met Aziz Khan, and sent this picturesque message: "Sorry to have missed you in my own country, as I should have liked to have left you standing in your skins."

I went up the Kuh-i-Parwez with Bagha Khan, the guide of whom I have such grave suspicions, in the early morning, when the cool blue shadows were still lying in the ravines. Parwez, which on this side is an uninteresting mountain of herbage-covered gravelly slopes, falls down 4300 feet to the Holiwar valley on the other in a series of tremendous battlemented precipices of dark conglomerate rock.

The level summit of Parwez, though about 11,000 feet in altitude, is as uninteresting as the shapeless slopes by which we ascended it, but this dip on the southern side is wonderful, and is carried on to the gap of Bahrain, where it has a perpendicular scarp from its summit to the river of 5000 feet, and as it grandly terminates the Outer range, it looks like a glorious headland abutting on the Silakhor plain.

As a panoramic view it is the finest I have had from any mountain, taking in the great Shuturun range – the wide cultivated plain of Silakhor, with its many villages; the winding Ab-i-Diz, its yellow crops, hardly distinguishable from the yellow soil and hazy yellow hills whose many spurs descend upon the plain – all merged in a haze of dust and heat. The eye is not tempted to linger long upon that specimen of a Persian summer landscape, but turns with relief to the other side of the ridge, to a confused mass of mountains of great height, built up of precipices of solid rock, dark gray, weathered

into black and denuded of soil, a mystery of chasms, rifts, and river-beds, sheltering and feeding predatory tribes, but unknown to the rest of the world.

The chaos of mountain summits, chasms, and precipices is very remarkable, merging into lower and less definite ranges, with alpine meadows at great heights, and ravines much wooded, where charcoal is burned and carried to Burujird and Hamadan. Among the salient points of this singular landscape are the mighty Shuturun range, the peak of Kuh-i-Kargun on the other side of the Silakhor plain, the river which comes down from Lake Irene, the Holiwar, with the fantastic range of the Kuh-i-Haft-Kuh (seven peaks) on its left bank, descending abruptly to the Ab-i-Zaz, beyond which again rises the equally precipitous range of the Kuh-i-Ruhbar. Near the Holiwar valley is a mountain formed by a singular arrangement of rocky buttresses, surmounted by a tooth-like rock, the Tuk-i-Karu, of which the guide told the legend that in "ancient times" a merchant did a large trade in a tent at the top of it, and before he died buried his treasure underneath it.

A very striking object from the top is the gorge or cañon, the Tang-i-Bahrain, by which the Ab-i-Burujird leaves the plain of Silakhor and enters upon its rough and fretted passage through ravines, for the most part inaccessible except to practised Ilyat mountaineers.

"Had I come up to dig for the hidden treasure of Tuk-i-Karu?" the guide asked. "Was I seeking gold? Or was I searching for medicine plants to sell in Feringhistan?"

The three days here have been rather lively. The information concerning routes has been singularly contradictory. There is a path which descends over 4000 feet to the Holiwar valley, through which, for certain reasons, it is desirable to pass. Some say it is absolutely impassable for laden mules, others that it can be traversed with precautions, others again that they would not take even their asses down; that there are shelving rocks, and that if a mule slipped it would go down to – . Hadji with much force urges that we should descend to the plain, and go by a comparatively safe route to Khuramabad, leave the heavy baggage there, and get a strong escort of *sowars* from the Governor for the country of the Pulawands. There is much that is plausible in this plan, the Sahib approves of it, and the Agha, with whom the decision rests, has taken it into very careful consideration, but I am thoroughly averse to it, though I say nothing.

Hadji says he cannot risk his mules on the path down to the Holiwar valley. I could have filled pages with the difficulties which have been grappled with during the last few weeks of the journey as to guides, routes, perils, etc., two or three hours of every day being occupied in the attempt to elicit truth from men who, from either inherent vagueness and inaccuracy or from a deliberate intention to deceive, contradict both themselves and each other, but on this occasion the difficulties have been greater than ever; the order of march has been changed five times, and we have been obliged to remain here because the Agha has not considered that the information he has obtained has warranted him in coming to a decision.

Yesterday evening the balance of opinion was definitely against the Holiwar route, and Hadji was so vehemently against it that he shook a man who said it was passable. This morning the Sahib with a guide and Abbas Ali examined the road. The Sahib thought it was passable. Abbas Ali said that the mules would slip off the shelving rocks. All day long there have been Lur visitors, some saying one thing, and some another, but a dream last night reconciled Hadji to take the route, and the Agha after carefully weighing the risks all round has decided upon it.

All these pros and cons have been very interesting, and there have been various little incidents. I have had many visitors and "patients" from the neighbouring camp, and among them three of the men who fired upon us.

The trifle of greatest magnitude was the illness of Aziz's mare, the result of a kick from *Screw*. She had an enormous swelling from knee to shoulder, could not sleep, and could hardly eat, and as she belongs partly to Isfandyar Khan, Aziz Khan has been distracted about her, and has distracted me by constant appeals to me to open what seemed an abscess. I had not the courage for this, but it was done, and the cut bled so profusely that a pad, a stone, and a bandage had to be applied. Unfortunately

there was no relief from this venture, and Aziz "worrited" me out of my tent three times in the night to look at the creature. Besides that, he had about twenty ailing people outside the tent at 6 a. m., always sending to me to "come at once."

He was told to wash the wound, but he would do nothing till I went out with my appliances, very grudgingly, I admit. The sweet animal was indeed suffering, and the swelling was much increased. A number of men were standing round her, and when I told Aziz to remove the clot from the wound, they insisted that she would bleed to death, and so the pros and cons went on till Aziz said, "The *Khanum* shall do it, these Feringhi *Hakīms* know everything." To be regarded as a *Hakīm* on the slenderest possible foundation is distressing, but to be regarded as a "vet" without any foundation at all is far worse.

However, the clot was removed, and though the wound was three inches long there was still no relief, and Aziz said solemnly, "Now do what you think best." Very gradual pressure at the back of the leg brought out a black solid mass weighing fully a pound. "God is great!" exclaimed the bystanders. "May God forgive your sins!" cried Aziz, and fell at my feet with a genuine impulse of gratitude. He insists that "a pound of flesh" came out of the swelling. The wound is now syringed every few hours, and Aziz is learning how to do this, and to dress it. The mare can both eat and sleep, and will soon be well.

This evening Aziz said that fifteen *tumans* would be the charge for curing his mare, and that, he says, is my present to him. He told me he wanted me to consider something very thoroughly, and not to answer hastily. He said, "We're a poor people, we have no money, but we have plenty of food. We have women who take out bullets, but in all our nation there is no *Hakīm* who knows the wisdom of the Feringhis. Your medicines are good, and have healed many of our people, and though a *Kafir* we like you well and will do your bidding. The Agha speaks of sending a *Hakīm* among us next year, but you are here, and though you are old you can ride, and eat our food, and you love our people. You have your tent, Isfandyar Khan will give you a horse of pure pedigree, dwell among us till you are very old, and be our *Hakīm*, and teach us the wisdom of the Feringhis." Then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he added, "And you can cure mules and mares, and get much money, and when you go back to Feringhistan you'll be very rich."

In nearly every camp I have an evening "gossip" with the guides and others of the tribesmen, and, in the absence of news from the larger world, have become intensely interested in Bakhtiari life as it is pictured for me in their simple narratives of recent forays, of growing tribal feuds and their causes, of blood feuds, and of bloody fights, arising out of trivial disputes regarding camping-grounds, right of pasture, right to a wounded bird, and things more trivial still. They are savages at heart. They take a pride in bloodshed, though they say they are tired of it and would like to live at peace, and there would be more killing than there is were it not for the aversion which some of them feel to the creation of a blood feud. When they do fight, "the life of a man is as the life of a sheep," as the Persian proverb runs. Mirza says that among themselves their talk is chiefly of guns and fighting. The affairs of the mountains are very interesting, and so is the keen antagonism between the adherents of the Ilkani and those of Isfandyar Khan.

Sometimes the conversation takes a religious turn. I think I wronged Aziz Khan in an earlier letter. He is in his way much more religious than I thought him. A day or two ago I was asking him his beliefs regarding a future state, which he explained at much length, and which involve progressive beatitudes of the spirit through a course of one hundred years. He laid down times and seasons very definitely, and was obviously in earnest, when two Magawe men who were standing by broke in indignantly, saying, "Aziz Khan, how dare 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."

Apparently they have no idea generally of a future except that the spirit goes either to heaven or hell, according to its works in the flesh. Some say that they are told that there is an intermediate

place called *Barjakh*, known as the place of evil spirits, in which those who have died in sin undergo a probation with the possibility of beneficent results.

On asking what is meant by sin the replies all have the same tendency, – cowardice, breaches of the seventh commandment (which, however, seem to be so rare as scarcely to be taken into account, possibly because of the death penalty attaching to them), disobedience to a chief when he calls on them to go to war, fraternising with Sunnis, who are "accursed," betraying to an enemy a man of their own tribe, and compassing the death of another by poison or evil machinations.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.