

PEDALLING THROUGH THE  
— AFGHAN WILDS.

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BEING THE EXPERIENCES

OF

K. J. KHARAS

R. D. GHANDHI

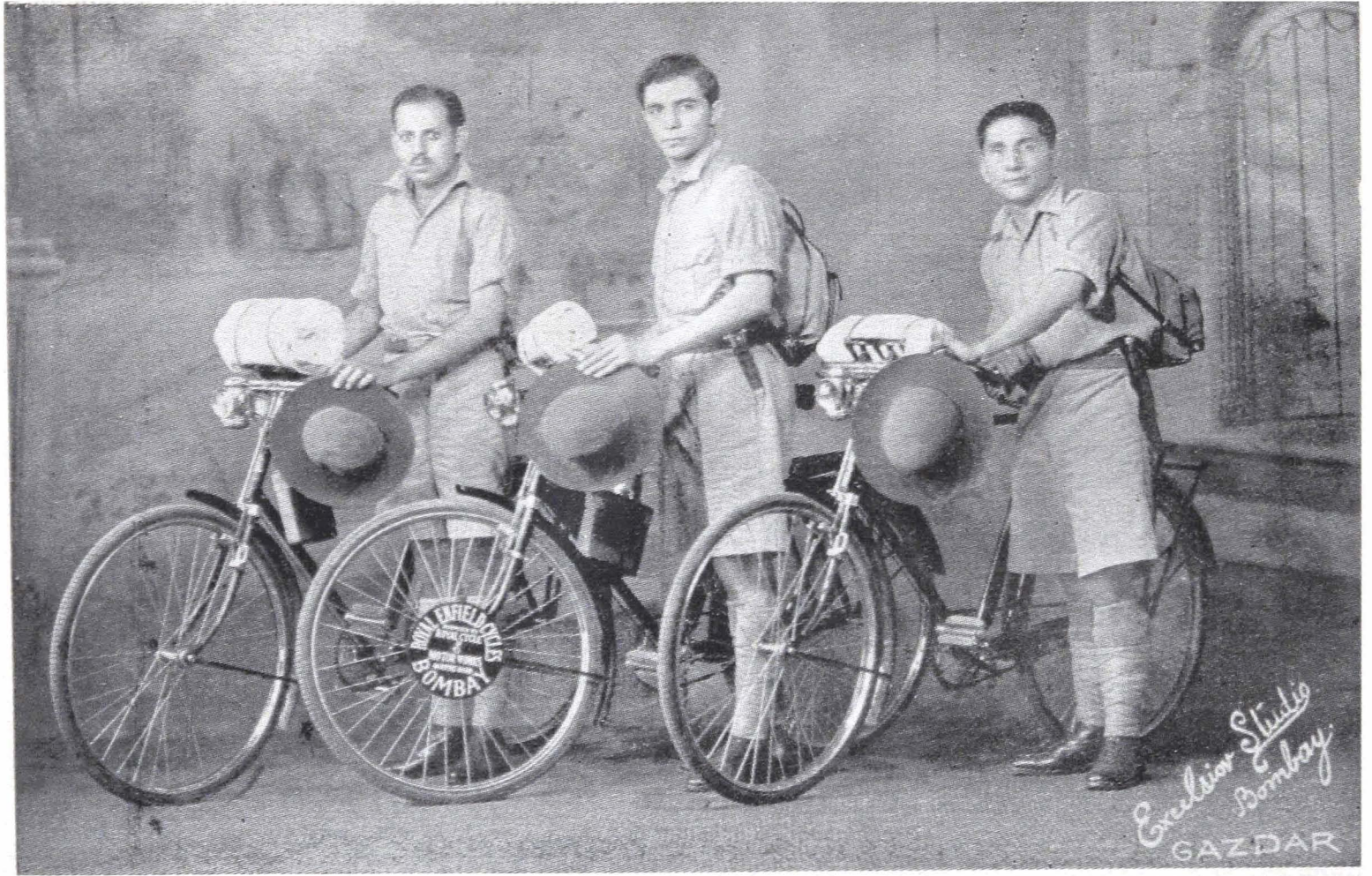
R. D. SHROFF

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1935 A. D.

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THE FIRST BICYCLE JOURNEY EVER VENTURED  
THROUGH MOUNTAINOUS AFGHANISTAN.



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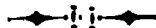
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# Introduction.



Little did we think when we left Bombay on the 30th April 1933 on our faithful Royal Enfield cycles that we would be so fortunate as to secure for ourselves the honour of being the first cyclists to go through the country of Afghanistan. Till the moment we reached Quetta we did not have a distant notion that our route would have to be very materially changed, which according to our original plan lay through Baluchistan into Persia.

It was solely due to the timely and kind help of Messrs. Kaikobad and Marker who succeeded, through great efforts, to obtain for us the necessary permit to cross through the Afghan Border. Up to now the Afghan Government had never once deigned to



bestow this privilege on any individual either on foot or on bike.

Our princely sojourn in the country extending over a period of two months and a half, the kind hospitality we received throughout the length and breadth of the country, from high and low, can all be ascribed to our patron, guide and friend Mr. Rustomji Dubash.

Being the first to cross this rugged country, having the first hand experience of its villages, people, their manners and customs, we take this opportunity of presenting a day-to-day record of our journey from Chaman, the first Afghan outpost, to Islam Kala, the last Afghan outpost, and we hope it will form interesting and novel reading.



# CHAPTER I.

## Taken for Spies.

The road from Quetta to Chaman is maintained principally for military purposes, and the Khojak Pass has a great military importance. Chaman, the farthest outpost of the British, is full of soldiers and barbed wire fencings. Every day during the fruit season, motor buses come and go from Chaman to Kandhar carrying baskets of fruits. From Chaman these baskets are sent to India by trains. Leaving Chaman, we felt, as if we were being thrown out into the streets from our homes. We had hardly gone a couple of miles when we came up to a notice-board prohibiting all persons other than those possessing Passports from going further. Here the British Indian Border ends, and beyond lies Afghanistan.

Having heard so much of cold blooded murders committed by the Afghan Tribes, we expected to see the muzzle of a gun pointed towards us any moment. The road grew from

bad to worse as we reached Killeh Jadid. Here the Afghan Customs outpost is situated, where the motor lorries full of fruit baskets were waiting for the authorities to allow them to pass. Our passports were examined; but the Customs officers did not call upon us to show our things. Being hungry, we ate some food in a dingy hotel and then proceeded further. All signs of a permanent road had vanished and the motor lorries could be seen going any way they liked. The lorries coming from Kandhar were brimful of fruit baskets, and as they slowly made their way through the many ditches, they rolled from one side to another to such an extent that we feared they would turn topsy turvy. On such bad roads lorry drivers travel by night, and it is strange that only a few accidents happen. Though the accidents are few, mechanical breakage and tyre troubles are numerous. In a short space of about thirty miles we saw nearly half a dozen motor lorries stranded. The carcasses of camels and donkeys in various

stages of decay with vultures sitting around them and emitting obnoxious smells gave a hideous aspect to this desolate country.

As the night approached, we looked for a suitable place where we could pass the night in safety. It not being safe to travel after dark, we made our way to a place which looked like a fort. As we approached, the sentry at the gate spoke to us something in Pashtu which we did not understand; and consequently we advanced. The attitude of the soldier became threatening and he took deliberate aim at us. This brought us to a standstill, and the soldier relaxed in his attitude. We asked in broken Persian if we could come into the fort and pass the night there. The man, however, did not know Persian—Pashtu being spoken in this part. The superior officer being consulted, gave his decision that we should not be allowed to enter the fort, but if we liked we could sleep outside just near the fort wall. As we were preparing to go to bed in the open, a man came out of the fort

bringing for us some dry chapatties and water to drink. This was the first time we received hospitality from the Afghans, and it was the fore-runner of the great kindness and consideration that we were to receive from these wrongly judged people as we went further interior. So our first day in Afghanistan came to an end.

The next morning as we went further and further towards Kandhar the road became better. From Takht-e-pul a new road is under construction. We took this road leaving the old motor track on the left of us. In this we committed a blunder, for after going a few miles the surface became soft and sandy and we had to push our cycles. Pushing cycles in a hot sun was a difficult job, which soon made us thirsty. As all the water in the flask was consumed, we had to stop at a wayside tent and ask the men to give us some water. Having been formerly in the British Indian Army the man could speak Hindustani. While we went into the tent to take some rest, one of them went to a nearby

village to get a few eggs for us. After going further a few miles we joined the old road again and were able to cycle to Kandhar where we reached by nightfall.

Round about Kandhar there are plenty of fruit gardens, and the bazaars at Kandhar are full of grapes, pomegranates, apples, peaches, water-melons and many other fruits. The chief export from here to India is grapes and peaches. So cheap is the fruit, that even the poorest beggar can afford to purchase it. The climate here is very malarious, and while we were there, the fever was raging. We therefore thought it advisable to leave the place as soon as possible. For two miles we had to go back on the road we came, and then took the left road which leads towards Kabul.

The road for the most part was level, but owing to broken-down bridges we were compelled to make many diversions. There is very little done to maintain roads and bridges. As the fruit season was at its full bloom, we were much troubled by flies. Here, there are

no mile-stones to guide the weary traveller. The distance is reckoned by 'Paravs.' At each Parav there is a government sarai (rest house). The distance between two sarais varies from ten to twelve miles. Most of these sarais with the advent of buses have fallen out of use, and are uninhabited. Water-melons are largely grown in this part and we enjoyed them to our hearts' content. As night came on, we looked for a village nearby to replenish our empty stomachs and to give rest to our weary limbs. But no such thing was in sight nearby and soon it became so dark that we could not see afar. A small fresh water stream nearby tempted us to camp there for the night. Acting upon the temptation we wrapped ourselves in warm blankets, ate a little food, and went to sleep. By morning, the wind was blowing very hard, and even our warm clothes could not keep us warm, and we felt glad when the sun came up and somewhat warmed us. Sleeping in the open had given us a cold and aching head; but we little

heeded it, as we were anxious to reach Kalat where we knew we would be able to get some food, and not water melons only, as we had nothing but these to eat for the last two days.

Luckily an Indian met us here, and invited us to lunch with him. We did not wait to be invited twice, but did ample justice to the chicken, which was cooked very nicely in Indian style. After satisfying our appetite, we went to the Hukomet, and asked his permission to wait for the night at the rest house. This place is newly built and furnished and was nice and clean. A hot water bath refreshed us. We did not wait long to go to bed, and gladly took advantage of comfortable beds, with clean sheets and blankets. Perhaps we were the first travellers to use them !

Generally in the morning at this time of the year a severe cold wind blows, so we were not in a hurry to leave our comfortable beds. As the day advanced we felt warm and hungry. We started again, and after going a few miles we purchased a hen and sat down in



the shade of a tree, and cooked it ourselves. As we advanced further, the scenery became more and more monotonous. Only in the evening the mountains appeared to be of a blue tint, and then the sight became enchanting. We did not wait till it grew dark to search for a resting place. Sighting a small wayside village we went there, and rested ourselves in a musjid. The people here seemed to be good folks for they brought us milk and bread; we made a hearty meal. During the night and in the early hours of the morning we heard the devout Muslims reciting their prayers, but they did not trouble us, and allowed us to sleep peacefully. We stopped for lunch at Muqqur, and then pushed on for Guyaind.

Here the sarai is occupied by the military and we created a sensation among the soldiers, who ran here and there for the guns whilst others challenged us to stop at once. Perhaps they took us for spies. While we waited, surrounded by soldiers, who kept on peering at us through the



**Tomb of Mohamed Gazni.**



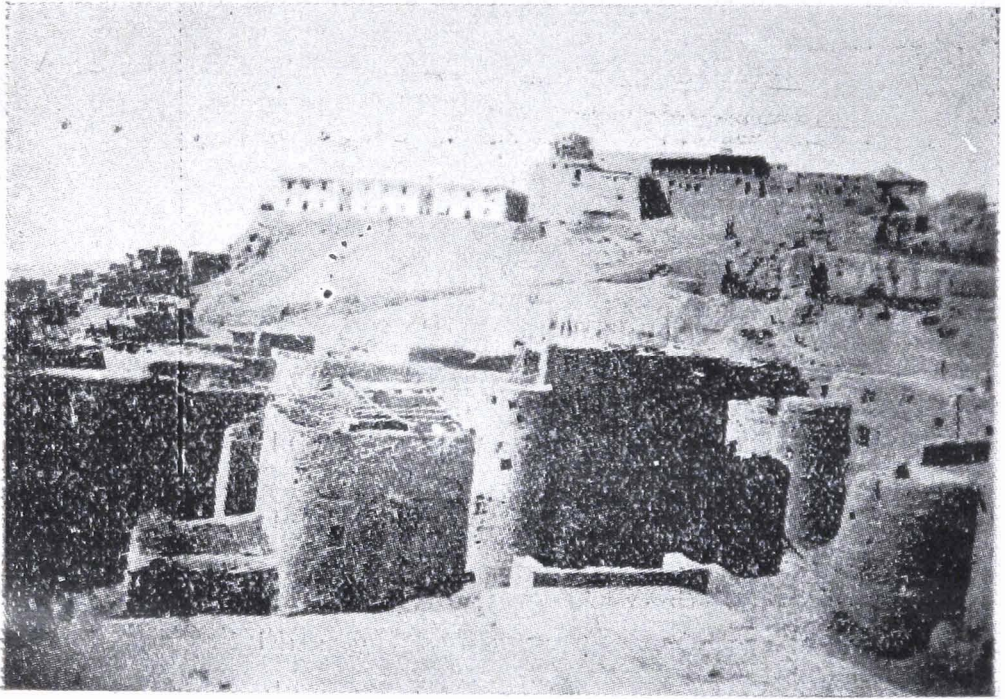
darkness, in all reality prisoners, the Colonel gave orders that we should be brought to his tent. We found this man reasonable and when he heard that we were only travellers going round the world on bicycles without any arms or ammunition, and that we were not robbers, he asked us to sit down and have tea with him. He also allowed us to occupy a room in the sarai and gave us dinner of rice and chicken. Next morning we were allowed to proceed on our journey without any let or hindrance.

As we came near Gazni the road became sandy and we had to dismount in many places and push our cycles. That night we slept in the Gazni rest-house. From here we telephoned to Kabul, and the Hakem was advised to give us all facilities on the way to the Capital. We stayed a day at Gazni, and visited the tomb of Mahomed Gazni, the man who invaded India so many times and returned with big plunder. The city of Gazni is situated on the side of a hill, and is surrounded by a wall. The old city

it is said, was buried some twenty-five years ago under heavy snow, and many of the inhabitants died. In winter this place is said to be the coldest region in Afghanistan. The Hakem Saheb told us how he manages his office affairs while we sat down to dinner with him.

Leaving Gazni we began ascending for about twelve miles, and aided by a favourable wind we did it in no time. Once the top was reached we had an easy journey down hill and at Sayadabad met the Hakem of the place. Our arrival was telephoned from Gazni, so we were pressed by the Hakem to come to his house. As the house was in the interior we had to go across many fields to reach it. Our last run that from Sayadabad to Kabul was over an indifferent road. This is due to the heavy traffic met with as the Capital draws near.

Few signs indicated that we were approaching the Capital. Only when we were well inside the city limits, did we feel that we had reached our destination. It was near Kabul that we met a few bullock-carts, most



**CITY OF GAZNI.**



probably imported from India. They were the only vehicles we saw between Kandhar and Kabul, the usual means of conveyence being camels and donkeys. The motor traffic is still in its infancy ; and though a few buses are seen now and then, the major portion of the work is still done by camels.

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## CHAPTER II.

### A Friend in Kabul.

On the 27th September, at about six o'clock in the evening we set foot in Kabul, the Capital of Afghanistan. As we had already exchanged telephonic messages with our patron, Mr. Rustomji Dubash, we made straight for his residence, and found it without any difficulty, as every soul in Kabul seemed to know this worthy gentleman. At his bungalow we received a hearty welcome from Mr. Rustomji and the members of his household, rendered all the more touching by the fact that we were once again in the midst of our co-religionists. After a few words of greetings and light refreshments, we were taken to the premier hotel in the city—Hotel-de-Kabul, where we were to stay as the guests of Mr. Rustomji.

The next day proved the luckiest day of our journey. Through the intercession of Mr. Rustomji, we were fortunate enough to secure the royal signature. His Majesty King

Nadir Shah was gracious enough to give his autograph. This was followed by the autograph of the Afghan Prime Minister, who also issued us a "Firman" calling upon every government official, to render us every possible facility as long as we were in Afghan territory. What untold blessings this "Firman" brought us will be seen in the following chapters. We cannot sufficiently thank both the Prime Minister and Mr. Rustomji for this "Firman". The same day, the leading paper of Kabul—Aslah announced our arrival in the city.

The next day Mr. Rustomji placed his car at our disposal, and we went round the city. We went to Pagman, 17 miles from Kabul, which is the summer resort of the Afghan Royalty. The place is superb, buried under the weight of flowers of various colours and a variety of shapes. The place also boasts of a Public Garden and a Public Hospital, built on the most up-to-date lines and maintained at Royal expense.

Next day was a day of interviews. Mr. Rustomji introduced us to Mr. Asphandiar, the Persian Consul who gave us a letter of introduction to Tehran. Then we saw the British Consul, who endorsed our Passports for Turkey and was kind enough to give his autograph. We must say that the charges for the endorsements and visas were borne by Mr. Rustomji—really a great heart.

The same evening we were the guests of Shah Mohamed, the Afghan Minister of War, at a Royal Tea Party, the first of its kind. The Shah was very gracious, gave us his autograph, and his blessing.

Mr. Rustomji also secured for us a letter of introduction to the Secretary to the President of Turkey, through the surgeon in waiting on Nadir Shah.

When all the business was attended to, we were once again free to admire the scenery of Kabul. We saw Gool-Baug—a charming garden, which makes one say if there is heaven on earth it is here. We

also visited Babar Baug, where they say the tomb of the first Mogul king Babar lies.

The last place we saw was Darul Aman, built on a strong road 6 miles long, by Amanullah. Planted on either side are trees bearing white flowers. At the end of the road a manzil is built, which Amanullah meant to use as his Secretariat. Had he been successful this sight would have added to the dignity of the city of Kabul.

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## CHAPTER III.

### The Afghan Mulla is not inhospitable.

At 10 A. M. on the 7th of October, we bade fond farewell to Kabul. We could not sufficiently thank those who helped us during our stay in Kabul, nor can we ever forget the kind reception given to us by the country at large. It was therefore with heavy hearts that we pushed forward on this day. We took the northerly direction and after making 20 miles arrived at Khoja Sarai. As everywhere else the Firman of the Prime Minister acted as a talisman. We were handsomely lodged for the afternoon, and were allowed free use of the government telephone. As we were still fresh, we pushed forward another 19 miles which brought us to Char-akka. In the latter half of this journey we had to climb a great ascent, and were thoroughly exhausted. Thanks to a telephonic message from Kabul, every possible arrangement was made for the night.

Next morning we had hardly gone a little distance, when we came to a bridge, where we were made to alight and pay a toll, one Guran equivalent to two annas. This was a sad reminder for us. We thought we had left the land of tolls when we said good-bye to India, and were not aware that other governments were also great believers in this form of tax. By noon we reached a village called Shiagard. Again we were the guests of the Hakem.

Another surprise awaited us here. We found a man looking exactly like an Afghan talking Gujarati. Later on we came to learn that he was a Sikh, who had spent some years in Gujarat, and the riddle was solved. Once again we got into our saddles and after another 17 miles reached Chardi. Here finding the Hakem was away, we went with our Firman to the Mulla.

We were very doubtful of our reception at his hands. After all he was a priest, and we were only Kaffirs. Great was our surprise, therefore, when he invited us to enter his abode, lodged us, fed us, and even

removed our plates with his own hands after we had finished eating. A Mulla would never condescend to touch a Kaffir. Why this particular individual showed us these marks of respect we could not tell. We only want to say, that the ignorant and the fanatic Mulla, we are made to imagine, does not, at any rate, exist in Afghanistan.

Next day we started and fully realised that Afghanistan was a mountainous country. Wherever we turned our eyes, we saw nothing but mountains. They looked like veritable walls. With great difficulty, halting every time to take breath, we managed to cover 18 miles which landed us at the village of Navi. All along our road to-day we came across many caravans. We found that these camels were loaded with asafoetida and tea. There is a great trade between Muzar-i-sharif and Kabul. They bring asafoetida from Muzar-i-sharif and in exchange take tea from Kabul. As the 'Ilakedar' of this place had been previously informed of our arrival, he came to receive

us, and we spent the night as his guests. We were quite tired doing an ascent of 18 miles, but had this consolation that we had seen the rugged side of Afghanistan. Of course, these mountains are not a bit like those we saw in Kashmere. They are dry and barren, still they have a dignity of their own and are very imposing. We spent the after dinner time showing card tricks to our hosts. This simply struck them dumb. To remove their doubt, that it was nothing but sleight of-hand, we explained a few of them, and received undue thanks in return.

As we were pushing ahead next morning, a few soldiers signalled us to stop, saying the Hakem wanted to speak to us. He was not far away, and when we came within speaking distance he greeted us in Hindustani, which put us at ease. This was not his province. He was there on inspection. He gave us tea, and later a "bumper" lunch. After this we set out again. After covering a few miles we reached the foot of a mountain called Kotal Sibar.



It was just 4 P. M. and we were given to understand that the ascent was only a mile and a half long, so we started climbing it. To the cost of our poor limbs and breath we discovered it was not a mile and a half, but six miles. It was nearly seven o'clock by the time we came to a little village on the summit. We believe that the Afghan Government is contemplating to do away with this ascent, and construct a new road in its place. We spent the night at a poor farmer's hut. We discovered that most of the people looked like Mongolians. On inquiry, we learnt that once upon a time this region was the centre of the Buddhist religion, and though it had been superseded by Islam, and the people at present are the believers of the Koran, they are very much like the Mongolians in their manners and customs. Like the cavemen they live in caves. We noticed a very queer custom among them. At meals the oldest male member of the party takes his food first, then the oldest female member, then the next old male, and so on, and the youngest has to wait till all of them finish.

Next day we started with light hearts as it was all down hill work; when to our utter disgust we were faced with continual puncture trouble. We could do only twelve miles till noon and reached Balola, and proceeded towards Bamiyan, about which we had heard a lot. Five miles from Balola we came to a junction of two roads, one leading to Doab, and the other to Bamiyan. We took the latter. By seven we were caught in a terrible storm. As we were pedalling, the wind blew with such force, that our front wheels turned, we took a somersault, and the next minute found ourselves kissing the ground. After this we tried hard to mount our machines, only to find that it was impossible and we had to drag them for the remaining miles till we reached Bamiyan. We were thoroughly exhausted, but the charming surroundings in which the Hakem lodged us—the mighty Hindukush mountain ranges emerging high in the sky, the friendly flow of hospitality soon made us forget our fatigue. We were lost in contemplation of Nature.

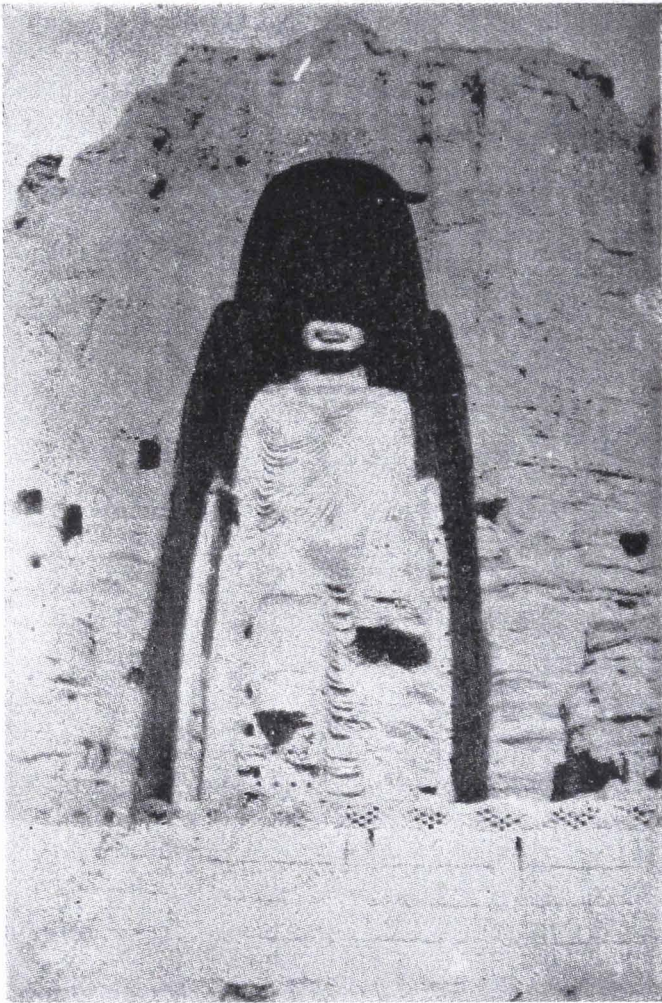
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## CHAPTER IV.

The forbidden (mythical) mountain  
where Zoak is chained.

We spent the next day going round the ruins of Bamiyan for which the place is deservedly famous. Once upon a time, the place was inhabited by the cavemen tribe practising the Buddhist religion. At present the people are mostly the followers of Mahomed. Those daring souls who still follow Buddha are put to many social inconveniences.

Here we saw two statues of Buddha—one measuring 90 feet, the other 60 feet. We can get an idea of their huge size if we remember that 20–25 people can easily be accomodated on each head. To reach these statues a special path is constructed. If one stands at the foot of the statue, it is with misgivings that one takes in the height and dares to look at the face. Many tourists come to visit this spot. European savants spend much time over these statues, in their attempts to unearth something more



### **The Statue of Buddha at Bamyan.**

This statue of Buddha is about 90 feet high. It is carved more than 20 feet deep in the mountain, and a way is made on the sides to go right up to the head. There are also other statues of Buddha, which are badly mutilated.



about the Buddhist age. There are many such statues in Bamiyan, but being in a dilapidated state they are forbidden to tourists.

Here we saw a mountain called Sheré Zoak, where the great Zoak is supposed to be held captive. It is written in the great Shahnama that the mighty Persian King Faridoon defeated Zoak, the monster giant, who had usurped the Persian throne. After defeating him he heavily chained Zoak on this mountain. It is said that on the day of resurrection, he will be relieved from his captivity. Upto now nobody has conquered this mountain. Whoever tries to climb it does not come back again.

A little further is 'Shere Gulgula' on the summit of another mountain. Here you find hardly anything worth seeing except the ruins. From here one gets a panoramic view of the whole of Bamiyan. This place was once a great stronghold of the Zoroastrians. There was nothing more to see, so we left the place after thanking the Hakem.

We had left 18 miles between us and the Main road, which we retraced very easily, and pushed ahead in the direction of Doab. Once again we found ourselves in mountainous Afghanistan. The surrounding ranges inspired a sense of awe and wonder in us. We could not see the sun here and just got a glimpse of it at noon, when it was over head. Thanks to the clemency of the weather, we came down a descent of 15 miles in a short time, and reached Doab by 7 p. m.

Here we were faced with a difficulty. There was a river in our way, unbridged. We had no idea of its depth. The swift running waters were icy cold. According to our views it was impossible to cross it. We resigned ourselves to the idea of spending the night in the open at the mercy of the cold. Suddenly we heard the tramp of horses' hoofs, and saw two riders coming towards us. We took out our Firman and showed it to them. It worked like magic. They alighted from their steeds and asked



### **GROTTOS AT BAMYAN.**

Long before we reached Bamyan, we found these Grottos along the road-side. They are still inhabited, and though the people no longer are Buddhists, they resemble the Buddhists and specially have flat noses.





us to mount them, and led us to the other bank. Then they returned and brought our machines and other belongings. This was no easy job, as the waters were shoulder deep. The head of the village was out, but his substitute did all in his power to make us comfortable. He got together other men of the village and gave us a decent meal. He put his hut at our disposal; and in spite of our repeated protests declared his intention of spending the night out in the cold. As we had covered fifty miles to-day we were soon fast asleep.

Early next morning we recrossed the river, and got on the main road. Now began the tiresome series of alternate ascent and descent, which lasted till evening, and brought us to Nek-pai. The place looked quite deserted but for two huts, we saw in the distance. Luckily we came across a man, who agreed to give us something like a meal, and pointed to an old broken hut, where we could spend the night. It had been a trying day for us, and we had covered only 32 miles.

Next morning we again got into our saddles, and by noon we came to a big climb. We were told it was only two miles long. Without any misgivings we started climbing. We covered two miles, and the ascent looked the same. Another two miles, no sign of the summit; two more miles, and still half way through. We were too tired to move, and we could not stay where we were. Besides the road was under repair, and here and there big boulders obstructed our progress. The only thing that pushed us on was the thought, that once we sighted the summit, we could leave our machines and have a good night's sleep. At about eight we reached the top after climbing five times two miles. Another disappointment was in store for us. The nearest village was 15 miles away. We pushed on more dead than alive. Soon we were forced to stop. At this height the cold was intense, and our limbs were becoming more stiff every minute. We were lost in the wide expanse. The only friend we could think of was our



### **A TURKOMAN'S HUT.**

These people who own large number of sheep go high up in the mountains in summer taking every thing with them. In winter they return to the plains and build temporary cane huts as shown in the picture. To protect themselves from cold they cover it up with numdas.



discarded tent. Upto now we had looked upon it as an intruder and a burden. To-day it proved a blessing. We took long, looking out for a patch of ground where we could pitch it. The night was biting cold, and to add to our troubles the tent which we took to be waterproof turned out to be anything but that.

After a sleepless night and benumbed limbs, we were far from fit to cycle. The pain in our limbs was so severe, we could hardly suppress our tears. By noon we finished the remaining ascent and reached the village at the summit called Kotle-Karvan. By good luck we found a small tea shop where we broke our two days' fast with walnuts and water-melons. Feeling refreshed and seeing a long descent in front, we were beginning to feel a bit cheerful, when we found that if climbing up was physically trying, going down was a test of nerves. The descent was so steep that riding our bikes was out of question, and we started dragging them behind us. We

had our doubts of going down safe. The descent was not only steep but was full of S and Z curves. It demanded concentration and nerves; One wrong move, and we would have found ourselves in the yawning valley below.

By seven we reached Dana-gori, and sought out the Hakem. This day we had covered only 30 miles. but we felt as if we had done 300, so thoroughly tired we were. When the Hakem came to learn of the road we had taken to reach this place, he was struck dumb with surprise, took us to be very daring persons, and treated us with the greatest respect. We were just thinking of spending a day here, to re-coup a bit, when the Hakem himself extended the invitation and we accepted it without much ado. It seems no soul in this place, had ever seen a cycle. From all sides we were greeted with the question "In-che-bala-ast"? What the devil is this? Like little children each one tried his luck at riding the machine. It was a funny sight

seeing these hefty fellows, awed by the very sight of a push bike.

The next day was spent in overhauling our cycles and fitting in some of the missing spokes. But our first thought was for a good hot-bath ; you must remember that for the last five days we could not afford this necessity, hence it was very welcome.

With the breaking of the dawn, we took leave of our kind host and pushed in the direction of Haibak. From this place we were faced with a steady climb, and we covered 24 miles by noon and came to a village called Ruba-tak. Here we were warned of another ascent leading to Kotle-Ruba-Tak ; about 8 miles in all. We were not disconcerted, as they also told us that on the way, we would meet the Road Engineer's tent. We reached this place by six in the evening, and put up for the night in the same tent.

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## CHAPTER V.

### Balkh the birth-place of Adam and Zoroaster.

The next morning, we covered the remaining miles to Haibak and reached the place by noon. Instead of being the Hakem's guests as we expected, the Road Engineer, who had put his tent at our disposal over night invited us to his bungalow. Here everything was in the modern style, as the engineer had travelled widely in Europe and had spent a long time in Germany.

The next morning we went to see the Hakem, who invited us for tea and asked us to stay there for a day as the Minister of Interior Affairs was expected at Haibak. We were introduced to the Minister when he arrived. The same night he invited us to dinner. According to his portfolio he has to see that law and order prevails in the country. He has great powers—he can nominate any person he thinks befitting, to the post of the District Governor, and also

has the power to dismiss any one from a government post. He conversed with us for a long time, in particular, about our Parsi community. He said it was a matter of regret that there were not many Parsis in Afghanistan.

Next morning, after taking a group photo with the Minister, we left for Taskorgan. After 43 miles of ups and downs we reached it by evening, and spent the night at the Hakem's place. Here we went to see Baghe Zanuma. This garden is beyond description. The effect is such that it roots one to the spot. Wherever your eyes rest, you see flowers of different colours; the whole garden seems to hang down with the bounteous weight of Nature's gift. The gardener made a bouquet for us, and would not accept anything for his trouble. This garden was built during Amanullah's regime and was used as guest house for the Royal personages. During Bacha-i-Sakka's rule of terror it was converted into a state prison.

On the 23rd October we left for Muzari-Sharif and reached it by evening. Muzari-Sharif is one of the big cities of Afghanistan. The Governor was away, so we put up in a hotel. Next day we had the good fortune to come across a government official, who willingly acted as our guide, and took us round the city. First we went to see the Blue Mosque, which is fully and completely built of blue tiles, and is supposed to be the tomb of Hazrate-Ali-Khalifa-i-Charum; and was built 500 years ago by Shah Hussein Mirza. In the first room we saw something like a vessel, measuring 30 feet round about the circumference, and 6 feet deep. We were told that this particular thing was used as drum in the time of Alexander the Great. It is a grand piece of architecture even from the inside. The tomb itself is 30 × 10 feet, and is surrounded by a costly screen of gold and silver, made at the order of King Nadir Khan.

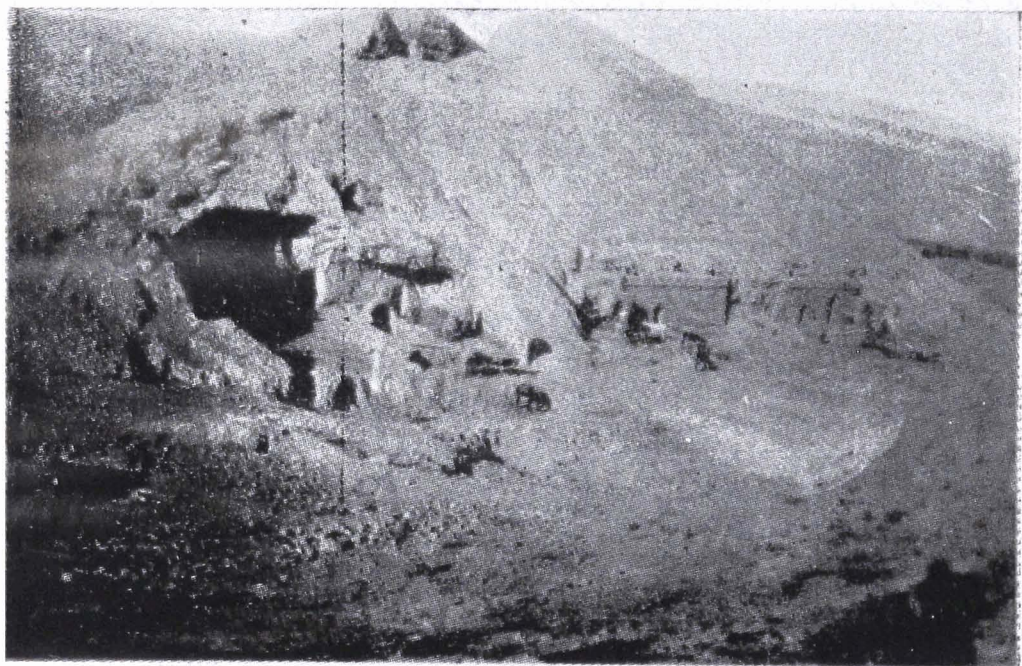
The road from *Muzari-i-Sharif* to Balkh is fairly good. It passes through Dehdadi,

the Afghan Military Head Quarters for the North. Entering the city of Balkh, the many ruins lying all round suggest that it must be an ancient city. It is said that Balkh is the oldest city in the world and that Adam and Eve were born in it. Besides this, it is said that Zoroaster too was born there. Among the ruins is Balesai or city built on the top of a hill. In this city there were once more than 300 humams or baths and schools. The frontage of a mosque and an ark in dilapidated condition, said to be built in the reign of Taimur Lung is worth visiting. The blue tile work has come out in many places, most of the tiles being taken out to build the monument over the tomb of *Hazrat-e-Ali Khalifa-e-charum* at Mazar-i-sharif.

Besides this one sees the Tope Rustom and the Takhte Rustom said to be built by the ancient Zoroastrians. The Tope Rustom is a pillar built of bricks and mud about three storeys high, on the top of which are three deep ditches. At the foot of the pillar from all directions, passages

are made which cross each other at the centre. These passages are now nearly filled in with mud and rubbish, and it is not possible to go from one end to the other. The place is full of snakes and other dangerous insects, and nobody ventures to go through those passages. This is said to be the worshipping place of the Zoroastrians ; fire being kindled at the foot in the centre, the flames of which go right up to the top and be visible all round. The Takhte Rustom is only a heap of walls built of bricks and suggests that it must have been used as living quarters. In olden times, when there were no steamers, the pious Muslims who wished to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca had to pass through Balkh. All the caravans from Afghanistan, China, India and other countries used to meet in Balkh and then in batches go to Mecca through Herat. Herat is, therefore, called the gateway to Mecca.

As one goes more towards the North the mountains are left behind and a great



### **Khane' Rustom at Haibak.**

These Grottos are said to be built by the ancient Zoroastrians. The two Grottos on the right with walled frontages are the Audience Hall and Fire Temple.



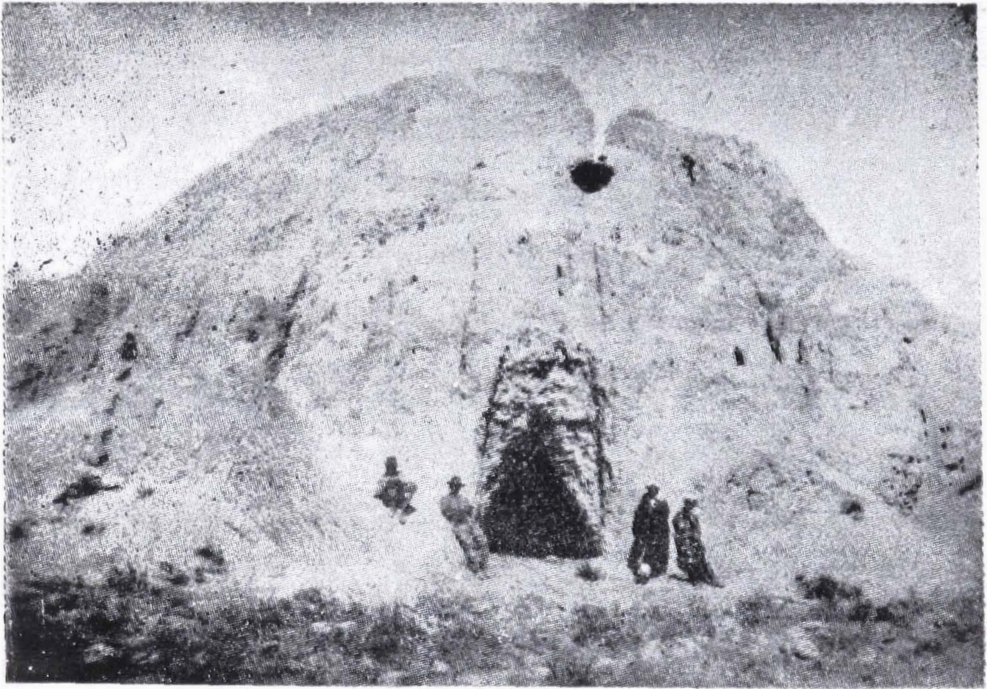
sandy plain lies ahead. Near the boundary of Russia and Afghanistan the place becomes very sandy and it is not possible to travel otherwise than on horseback. There is however, a motor road built from Muzar-i-Sharif to the Russian Frontier. We passed through many cotton fields, but were informed that cotton was not so largely grown, nor was it of a good quality. There are many sandy patches on the road and we had to dismount and push our way through them. Many of the camel drivers were returning to Muzar-i-Sharif without merchandise, while the Turco-men from Russian Turkestan were coming in hundreds with their families on horseback into Afghanistan. They were doing this in order to save themselves from the terrors and hardships inflicted upon them by the Bolshevik Russians.

Shibergeon is a fairly big place and the seat of the Governor. As the road between here and Ankhoi is very sandy,



we thought it advisable to fill up our flasks and take some dry fruits which would be useful to us on the road. There are many small bridges built over canals and the water is very muddy and salt and only good for cultivation. After Khoja de Ku knee deep tracks of sand were met with through which we passed with great difficulties. For motor cars this portion of the road is very bad and broken differentials, crown wheels and axles frequently occur. Fortunately it is sandy for a few miles only ; and after a dozen miles or so we were able to mount our cycles again and reached Ankhoi.

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### **ATESH-KADEH at BALKH.**

This we are told was the Fire Worshipper's place in Balkh. The entrance leads to a passage which comes out at the other end. There are similar entrances on the sides. The passages cross each other in the centre. A fire used to be kindled in the centre, the smoke of which came out from the big holes on the top.



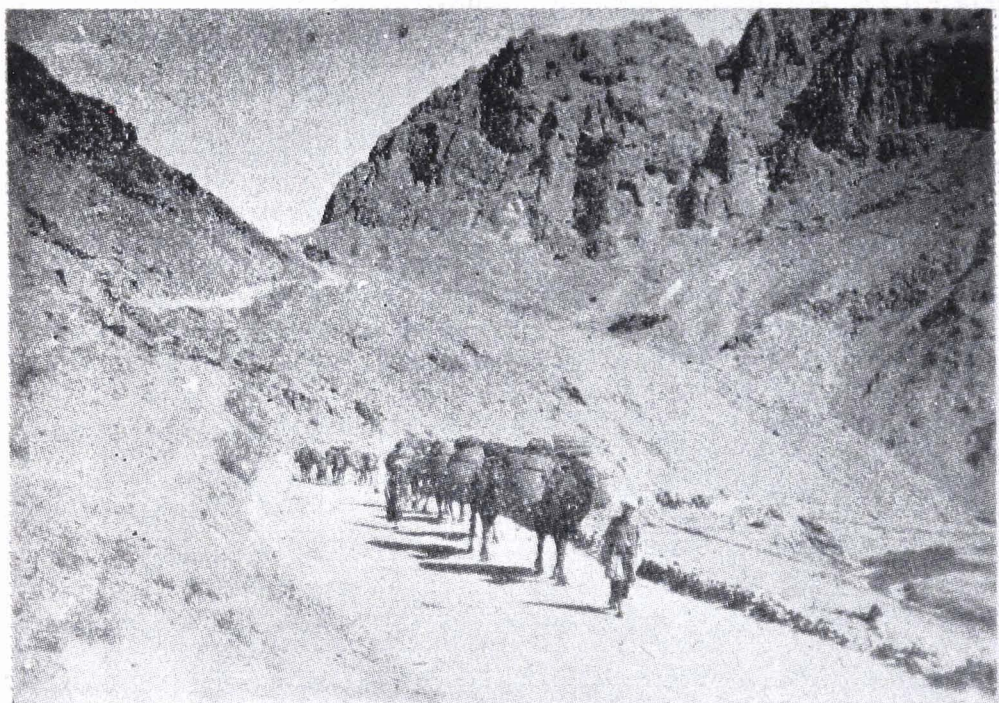
## CHAPTER VI.

### Bosh-Keshi : The Game of Death.

Ankhoi is a rapidly rising city and many improvements are in progress. A new motor garage with an hotel on top is under construction, and one can expect good boarding and lodging there. Besides mechanics can be had if one desires to attend to his motor car. Petrol which is obtainable only in a few places in Afghanistan can be had here. The city lacks one good thing and that is good drinking water. The scarcity of water increases during the hot months as all the water comes from Maimana by means of canals. In summer it is very hot here, while the winter is very severe.

The Oosbacks of this place are very fond of playing the game called Bosh-Keshi and they play it so violently that many are killed. Tall and strong horses are required to play this game; and for this reason special horses are trained and kept. It is played in the cold weather in open fields.

A goat is killed and thrown in the centre of the field in a ditch. Those who are to take part in the game mount their horses and collect at one end of the field. There are many competitors and at a given signal they all rush towards the goat. In the *mêlée* many are thrown from their horsebacks and are trampled to death by other competitors. Everybody tries to take possession of the goat, either by lifting it with his hands or the horses who are trained, lift up the goat in their mouths, throw it on their backs to their riders. After much haggling, pushing and pressing, one at least, gets possession of the goat, but before he can take it to the appointed place, he is surrounded by the others, who try to snatch it away from his hands. A tussle ensues between two riders, and as they gallop at full speed to the goal they let go the hold of their reins; and with both hands pull the goat with all their might. At last the stronger of the two gets posses-



### **On the Way to Mazar-I-Sharif.**

We passed every day long lines of Camels. These Camels are very big, strong and hairy, and travel with heavy loads for long distances every day.



sion of the goat and no sooner the goat is snatched from the opponent's hands, he regains his balance on the saddle, and victoriously takes the goat to the spot arranged and is declared the winner. They play the game with very high stakes while the horses fetch very high prices. This game is played in the whole of Turkestan by the Oosbacks who are Afghan Turks and learn to ride from a very young age.

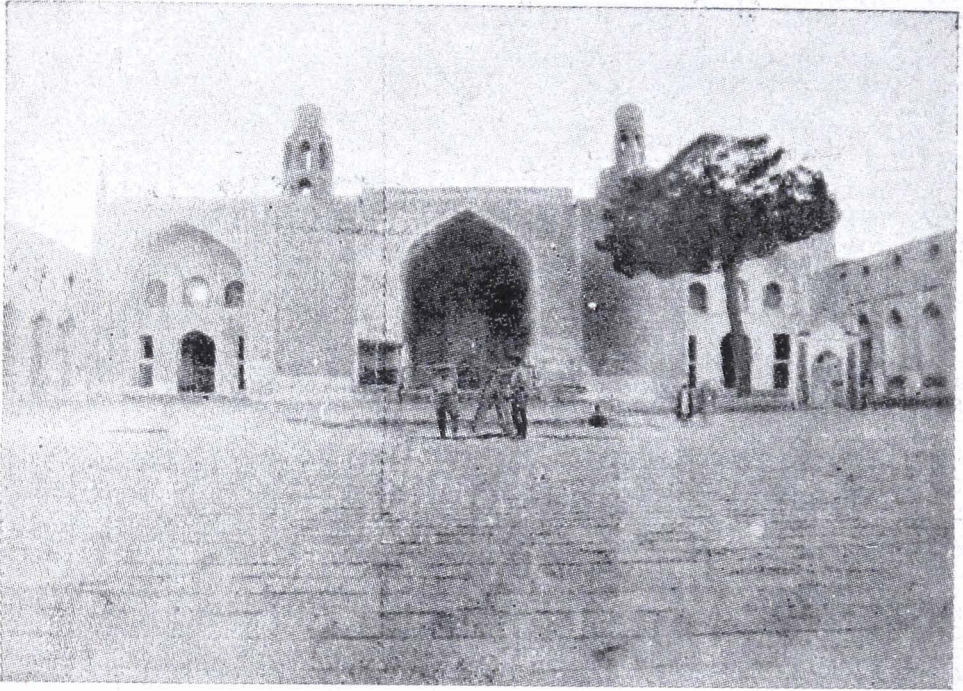
Getting out of Ankhoi is as difficult as getting into it; and both sides of the road are very sandy. Near Shirin Tagab we met a white Russian who had come all the way from Moscow. He had entered Afghanistan near Herat without a passport, and as he had no money with him to pay the motor fare, he was being taken to Muzar-i-Sharif walking. He spoke very little English and we gathered that he was bound for China. Things must be very sad in Russia, as the man had undertaken such a long journey in the hope of finding a better place than his mother country. He had fled from



Russia, though he knew that if he was caught and detected, he would be shot dead. Many like him have come to this country and settled here, renouncing Christianity for the Muslim faith.

On certain days of the week bazaars are held and people from the surrounding nearby small villages gather together bringing their saleable products. Till noon, the place throngs with all sorts of people, some haggling, some selling, while many of them exchange greetings with each other. The place puts on a lively appearance, but it is for a short time only; for a little after noon, the place is absolutely deserted, all shops closed and not a trace left of the throng who had gathered there.

The road from Shirin Tagab passes through a lovely green spot, with many trees and cultivation fields. After a stiff climb we coasted down to Maimana and entered the city through its bazaars. All along the road we had made it a habit to eat Afghan food. It differs from the Indian food principally in



### **MUSJID-e'-JAME at HERAT.**

The oldest and largest masjid in Afghanistan. It is said that this building was built at first by Zoroastrians as their fire worshipping place, then the Buddhists used it as their place of worship, and finally the Muslims converted it into a masjid.



two aspects : Firstly the Afghans use very little salt and secondly the food stuff is not hot ; spices being used in a very small quantity. They eat too much meat and very little vegetables. In many places potato is never heard of, while the onion is rarely eaten. The bread is mostly prepared from wheat flour and is baked in ovens without fat or ghee.

In Afghanistan, tea both Indian and Chinese are extensively used. The latter is used more than the former. Tea is served in small cups without milk. In the first cup of tea, sugar is added but the subsequent cups are taken without sugar. Tea will be served again and again, till the cup is turned upside down, which denotes that the guest has had enough. In the North, where water is bad, many take tea only, and there are men, who have not taken water for years.

It is good etiquette to wash one's hands before sitting down to dinner. In order to save the guest from going out to wash his hands, the servant brings a dish and a jug

of water to you where you are sitting. Rice is not eaten in the day time, but makes the principal dish at dinner, it being easily digestible. The Afghan lunch is poor and invariably consists of a bowl of soup with bread soaked in it, with a piece of meat thrown in. The dinner on the contrary is bumper: one or two plentiful dishes of vegetables and Pullao with meat or fowl cooked in fat and very tasty. The food is not served in separate plates. But out of the common dish, everybody eats with his fingers. The principal fruit of Afghanistan is khurbuja and this is eaten after dinner.

Leaving Maimana, the road passes through mountains and it is very annoying to climb to the top of the mountain, for every time the top is reached, down the road goes and another mountain has to be climbed. At last the village of Almar comes to view, in the plains; and as one passes higher and higher by it, the crumpled down buildings suggest that it must have seen better days. The plain soon ends and

the road gradually climbs up and up. One after another, steep mountains had to be climbed, till we sat down to give our aching backs some rest.

Narin is prettily situated among trees but we were disappointed when we reached it, for it contained no tea-shop. For a short distance, the road side was lined with trees, which one rarely finds in Afghanistan, the reason being that as soon as the trees grow up by the roadside, they are cut down, it being more convenient to carry these than those that grow in the interior, far from the road.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### Islam Kala and Farewell to Afghanistan.

Another climb, followed by a dry river bed, and we reached the village of Kaisar. Kaisar lies a couple of miles off the main road near the mountain side, and on account of this the air is very cold and winter very severe. After Kaisar, the road gradually descends and Charsambe was easily reached. From here we had to take horses to go to see Asabé Cuff which snuggles about half a dozen miles in the interior.

About 2000 years ago, six brothers fled from Russian Turkestan and came to this place. Here they went to sleep and lay asleep for about 400 years. One day, they awoke from their sleep, and feeling hungry one of them went to the bazaar to buy some food. The money that they offered for the food being out of date, the shop-keeper became suspicious and the authorities were informed. The brothers were questioned, as to where they had come from, and what

they were doing all these years. Finding that they had slept so long, the brothers asked God to make them sleep for ever. Their request was granted and they fell into an eternal sleep ; and to this day, they can be seen sleeping under a cloth, which covers them from head to foot.

At the place where they are sleeping, there is a cave made in the mountain side, on the first floor. The place is very dark, and we had to grope our way in the darkness up the wooden staircase. In the time of Hazrate' Sultan Saiyed Haji, a deer, a dog, and a bird came here to devour the dead bodies of the brothers, but no sooner they came near, they were turned into skeletons, which we were able to see. In order to protect the bodies from further attacks, a wooden case is built over them. Nobody exactly knows what lies underneath the cloth-covering, for no one is allowed to remove the pall. The place is held sacred by the people living nearby, and one can only approach it after the proper prayers are said and with a dim



oil lamp. On the ground floor, the walls bear many hand prints, but what they denote or why they were imprinted there cannot be made out. A subterranean passage is said to exist from here to Mecca but is now closed up.

From Charsambé to Bokand the road is extremely mountainous and in the short distance of about 30 miles there are about 18 mountains to be crossed. Many a time we went astray, but finding our mistakes we returned to the right path. It is not advisable to travel by night in these parts, for the road can be easily lost and once the right path is lost, death by thirst and starvation may result. Many a motor lorry has gone off the right path, with the result, that the occupants got lost in the desert and died.

Pushing our cycles up the steep hills was tiring work and our flasks were soon empty. We were feeling very thirsty and nobody was to be seen nearby. Still a dozen miles or more to be covered before

habitation could be reached. There was no alternative but to push on. When things were really looking very bad, deliverance came near at hand. A solitary mule, with his sleepy driver, came along. He had no water to give us himself but told us to go a little ahead, and we would meet with some shepherds, who might give us some water. We eagerly went forward and found in the valley the shepherds and the water. A few holes were dug into the ground to hold water, but thirsty as we were, we could only sip the water so bad a taste it had. Somewhat refreshed we pushed on to Bokand. The "Serai" being in a dilapidated condition with no one living in it, we had to go across the fields, behind a mountain side, to the village.

There are many ways in which divorces are given here, and here is one funny way. A Turkoman accompanied by a Mulla was brought before the Hukoomat. The Turkoman was charged with the crime of having

stolen the wife of another man, who was in Russia, and passed her off as his own wife. The Turkoman was asked to swear before the three white stones, in presence of the Mulla, so that the wife might be divorced; or else, he was threatened with imprisonment. A quick and cheap way to divorce one's wife, no doubt.

After Bokand the road becomes less mountainous and passes through many huts, built by the natives, who come down to the plains in winter from the mountains. These folks had never seen a bicycle before in their lives, so they came running in scores to see this new animal. The old men invoked the blessings of Allah while pretty looking girls forgot to pull their veils and gave us an opportunity to admire their beauty. When the huts of these natives lay far from the road they would climb the nearby mountain side to have a glimpse at us while those who were fortunate enough to have horses would come galloping to-

wards us, a yell of joy would escape from their throats and repeated would be their requests to us to mount our cycles and go fast.

Murgab is a fairly big place and its natural beauty is enhanced by the river that flows through the city. Leaving Murgab we were delayed, repairing a broken seat pillar. The sandy mountains were slowly left behind and their places were being taken by stoney ones. The road lay strewn with pebbles and some of the patches were very bad. The course of the Murgab river lies by the side of the road and the scenery in many places is enchanting. The spot where the old bridge crosses the river called Seré Pool, is an ideal place to camp in. The river here flows between two very high mountains, and if one so desires he can be sure of a good catch, as the waters are full of fish of various sizes. As we pedalled on, our hearts sang with joy as fleeting glimpses of beautiful scenery met our gaze. From

here onwards the river leaves the road and passes through the mountains.

After Murgab, Kile Nav is the next big place to stop in. Leaving Kile Nav, the road runs along the side of mountains and there is a gradual ascent. All along, this part of the road is dotted with temporary villages. The women folk of these villages are extremely fair and good looking and their numerous children very mischievous. These people own large numbers of sheep and do very little cultivation. A man possessing a thousand sheep can increase his number by five-hundred or more by new births every year. As soon as the young one is born the females are separated and allowed to live, while the male ones are killed after a day or two. Only a few of the male ones are allowed to live for reproduction purposes. The skins of these young ones are called Karakolis and fetch very high prices varying from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 50/- or more per skin, and are exported in large quantities to European countries.

These people are known as Maldars and many of them are very rich.

Laman is situated at the foot of a very high mountain called Bundé Soujak. The road, however, gradually rises so we had not great difficulty in pushing our cycles up. Near this mountain is another mountain called Zermak over which the old camel road goes. On the other side of the Bundé Soujak lies Karukh. It is prettily situated among trees and the land round about is well cultivated. The people in this part belong to the old Kyani tribe and still use the Zoroastrian names. Some miles from Karukh at a place called Kilé Rustom, the old ruins of Zoroastrian times can be seen.

From Karukh to Herat the going is easy and the road good. Herat ranks next in importance after Kabul and is a rapidly rising city. Its bazaars are very interesting and throughout the day the noise and bustle is great. A new Herat is rapidly springing up and after a short time it will

have a good hotel. The Jamé Masjid in Herat is said to be the largest Masjid in the whole of Afghanistan. Apart from it being a big Masjid it is a very old Masjid. Some say, that at first it was used by the Zoroastrians as their place of worship ; then the Budhists used it as their place of worship, and with the advent of the Moslem power in the land, it was turned into a mosque.

The Herat Meshed road is in a fairly good state. For a few miles from Herat the road does not run along side of the river and consequently there is very little habitation to be found near the road. A mile or two, however, from the road, big villages can be seen. Near Shabash, game is found in plenty and people from Herat motor down here for shooting.

Near Islam Kala the road becomes slightly mountainous and sandy. Islam Kala being situated at the boundary between Afghanistan and Persia our passports were examined there. Leaving Islam Kala meant

leaving Afghanistan, and with hearts full of gratitude and thanks we said farewell to this very hospitable country.

Eight miles from Islam Kala the first Persian Outpost is reached. Kariz is the first big village on the Persian Frontier and the Persian Customs is situated here.

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Miles,           **QUETTA to KABUL.—Mileage 461.**

- 0   Quetta.   Petrol, Railway Station, Post and  
          Telegraph Office.
- 51   Killeh (Fort) Abdulla. Road good  
      Khojak Tunnel (3½ miles in length)
- 26   Chaman.   British Customs. Road good.
- 2    British Boundary.

**AFGHANISTAN,**

- 5    Killeh (Fort) Jadid. Afghan Customs. From  
      here upto Killeh Mail, roads are very  
      bad, full of sand about 2 feet deep.  
      New road under construction.
- 26   Killeh (Fort) Mail.
- 37   Kandhar. (city) Petrol, Post and Telegraph  
      Office. Road from Killeh Mail to  
      Kandhar fairly good. 3500 feet height.
- 82   Kalat. Road fairly good. 5770 feet.
- 44   Sujuwi       ,,       ,,       6320 feet.
- 56   Gu-ya-ind   ,,       ,,       7100 feet.
- 41   Gazni   Government Rest House. Petrol cannot  
      be guaranteed. Ascent about 10 miles.  
      7730 feet.
- 39   Sayadabad. Road fairly good 7470 feet.
- 52   Kabul. Capital of Afghanistan. Petrol, Hotel,  
      Repair workshops. Post and Telegraph  
      Office. 6508 feet.

**KABUL to MUZAR-I-SHARIF.—Mileage 382.**

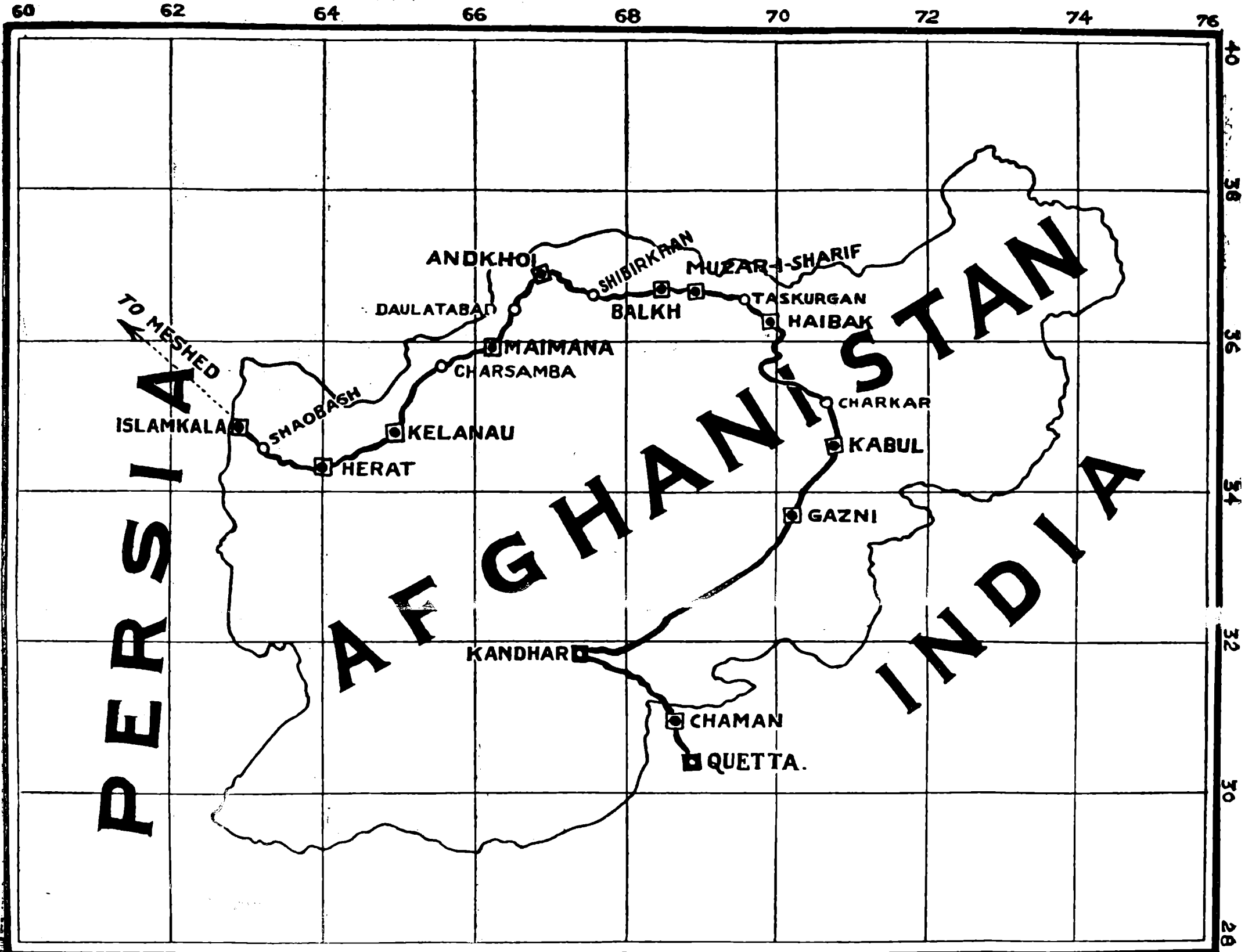
- 0 Kabul. Petrol etc.
- 20 Khoja Sarai. Road fairly good.
- 19 Char-akka. „ „ „  
Steep ascent.
- 29 Shiagard.
- 8 Chardi „ „ Mountainous Country.
- 18 Navi.
- 19 Kotal Shibar.
- 12 Belola.
- 2 Two Roads. One goes to Doab and other to  
Bamiyan 18 miles.  
In Bamiyan there are two statues  
of Prophet Buddha, height being  
90 and 60 feet respectively.  
A place worth visiting.
- 32 Doab. Village is on the other side of a river  
which is unbridged.
- 36 Nekpai. Steep ascents and descents. S and Z  
Curves.
- 55 Dana Gori.
- 29 Rubatak.
- 23 Haibak.
- 43 Tascorgan.
- 37 Muzar-I-Sharif. (City) Petrol. Post and Tele-  
graph Office, Hotel, motor  
repair shops.

From Kabul to Muzar-i-Sharif the road is mountainous. Many steep ascents and descents with hairpin curves are to be encountered.

**MUZAR-I-SHARIF—HERAT—ISLAMKALA.—**

**Mileage 583.**

- 0 Muzar-i-Sharif. Petrol, Hotel, repair shop etc.
- 7 Deh-da-di. Road fairly good. Telephone. Chaikh-  
ana (Tea House.)
- 11 Balkh.           "   "   "   "   "
- 12 Charbolak       "   "   "   "   "
- 15 Nasratabad     "   "   "   "   "
- 15 Hakchai. Road sandy and ditches in many places
- 18 Chiakchi. Road under repair, bad in many places.
- 15 Shibergeon. Road fairly good with many small  
bridges,
- 13 Khoja-de-kuh. A short distance from here the  
road becomes sandy for about  
six miles and becomes some-  
what difficult for motorists
- 30 Ankhoi. Petrol, Hotel, Repair shop. Roads  
fairly good, but after Ankhoi road  
becomes quite sandy for 3 miles.
- 26 Kilae Sheikhan. Roads sandy in many places.
- 19 Daulatabad. Roads fairly good.
- 8 Khairabad.       "   "   "   Steep hill.
- 10 Shirin Tagab   "   "   "   "   "
- 11 Dehe Nav.       "   "   "   "   "
- 16 Maimana. A steep climb and gradual incline.  
big village.
- 20 Almar. Many ups and downs all along the road.
- 13 Narin           Stiff and long climb.
- 7 Kaisar.         "   "   "   "
- 13 Chichaktu, Road good with slight incline.
- 7 Charsambe     "   "   "   "   "
- 13 Gormukh. Road mountainous and steep climb.  
No water.
- 17 Bokand.       "   "   "   "   "



THE ROUTE OF OUR AFGHAN JOURNEY.

- 20 Murgab. Road fairly good. Petrol. Telephone.  
 17 Sayedabad. " " " but mountainous.  
 23 Daria Boom. Road covered with loose stones.  
 16 Muqur " " " " "  
 14 Kela Nav. Road fairly good. Telephone  
 22 Laman. Road passes through mountains.  
 16 Masjid Chibi. Gradual gradient till the top of  
 Bunde Saizak about 10 miles from  
 Laman and descends till Masjid  
 Chubi.  
 13 Khojachsambe Road gradually descends.  
 5 Armarick Road fairly good.  
 18 Karukh " " "  
 28 HERAT, Petrol, Hotel, Garages, Tele-  
 phone, Post and Telegraph Office.  
 Road passes through many river  
 beds.  
 16 Sorkh.  
 19 Charakha. Roads good.  
 17 Shabash. Roads good.  
 23 Islam Kala. Roads good. Afghan Frontier.

Petrol can be found in Afghanistan at Kandhar, Kabul, Muzar-i-Sharif, Ankhoi, Murgab, (very limited quantity can be had from the Hakem's place), and Herat. It is possible for a motor car to travel in Afghanistan by the above route, but it is somewhat doubtful whether a motor cycle can get through: This is because the ground clearance of a motor cycle is very little and it would brake the crank case or chassis of the side car.